

Omaha Has First Homicide Of 2015

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Omaha Police say a 52-year-old man became the city's first homicide victim of 2015 after he was found with a gunshot wound in a park Saturday.
Police said Tommie Harden was found around 10:15 a.m. Saturday.
A woman who lives near Adams Park in northeast Omaha called police after Harden was found lying in the park.
Harden was bleeding from a gunshot wound in his chest when he was found. He was taken to an Omaha hospital where he died.
Police did not announce any arrests immediately, and they asked anyone with information on the death to contact investigators.

Man Gets 13 Years For Sexual Contact

PIERRE (AP) — A South Dakota man accused of sexually abusing two women has been sentenced to 13 years in federal prison.
U.S. District Judge Roberto Lange has also ordered 31-year-old James Pesicka to five years of supervised release for his conviction of two counts of sexual contact by force and threat.
Prosecutors say Pesicka sexually assaulted a young woman between July 2008 and February 2012. They say the Dupree man also engaged in "sexual contact by fear" with another young woman between March 2012 and May 2013.
Pesicka is in custody of the U.S. Marshal's Service.

Linstrom To Speak At Heritage Center

PIERRE (AP) — A South Dakota native and author of two historical fictional novels will be speaking at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre this month.
Steve Linstrom will address the process he followed to write "The Last Ram" and "The Murder Trial of the Last Lakota Warrior" during a presentation scheduled for Jan. 13. Both novels are set in South Dakota and are based in varying degrees on real-life events.
"The Last Ram" is set in 1903 in the Badlands, while "The Murder Trial of the Last Lakota Warrior" tells the story of a young Lakota warrior who stood trial for shooting an Army lieutenant in the aftermath of the Wounded Knee massacre.
Linstrom worked in state government for several years before becoming a full-time writer.

Deadwood Building Inspector Retiring

DEADWOOD (AP) — After overseeing roughly \$300 million in construction projects that transformed Deadwood since legalized gaming was introduced, the city's building inspector is retiring.
The 67-year-old Keith Umentum is putting down his clipboard after 25 years of service. The Rapid City Journal reports Umentum took on the job in February 1990 just months after Deadwood became the third locale in the U.S. to offer legalized gaming.
Umentum says that the biggest challenge he faced at that time was "ensuring people didn't tear down historic buildings." A quarter century later, he says, his biggest success has been the city's historic preservation.
City officials have hired Umentum's replacement. Deadwood resident Trent Mohr will take over the building inspector duties Jan. 12.

Winter-Related Activities Planned In SD

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — Several indoor and outdoor winter-related activities for people of all ages have been scheduled in Sioux Falls.
The events include free skate rental, \$5 tubing, fireworks at Falls Park, as well as a holiday lights tour for seniors. The activities will begin Friday and run through Sunday.
An ice fishing derby is planned for 10 a.m. Saturday. Ice fishing poles will be loaned out on a first-come, first-served basis, but registration and a South Dakota fishing license is required.
All-age ski races are also scheduled for 1 p.m. at Great Bear Recreation Park.

Deadwood Hosting Snowmobile Rally

DEADWOOD (AP) — Snowmobile riders from the West and Midwest will hit the Black Hills trails and have the chance to meet some professional racers later this month.
The first Deadwood Snowmobile Rally is Jan. 29 to Feb. 1 in conjunction with the International Series of Champions (ISOC) Deadwood SnoCross Shootout at the Days of '76 Rodeo grounds.
KOTA-TV reports that people who take part in the rally will be able to attend a number of events, including meet-and-greet party with the ISOC racers, a display of antique snowmobiles on Main Street and a Deadwood-style tailgate party for football fans.

Ice Fishing Clinics Set For January

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission is hosting ice fishing clinics in January, as long as conditions are deemed safe.
The events are scheduled for Saturday at Eugene T. Mahoney State Park's CenturyLink Lake, and Jan. 17 at Kearney's Yanney Heritage Park Lake. Both events are expected to run from 1 to 4 p.m.
Organizers say they'll post a notice if ice conditions are deemed unsafe. The free clinics will only be offered if the ice at both lakes is at least 6 inches thick.
Ice conditions will be determined by Wednesday for the Mahoney event and Jan. 14 for the Kearney clinic. If necessary, a cancellation notice will be posted by 2 p.m. on those days at OutdoorNebraska.org. If canceled, the events will not be rescheduled.

Large Sinkhole Opens Up In Omaha

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — A large sinkhole swallowed up an entire section of a street near downtown Omaha this week.
The sinkhole, which consumed the width of the two-lane street, was reported New Year's Day near 20th and Pierce streets.
Lesley Mosley, a resident in the area, told Omaha television station KETV that she heard a loud noise and thought it was a car accident.
The sinkhole is about 25 feet in diameter and about 15 deep, officials said. No injuries or property damage was reported.
"This cave-in is on a much bigger scale than we usually see," Craig Christians, manager of Omaha's sewer maintenance division, told the Omaha World-Herald.
The city had blocked off that section of the street on Christmas Day after someone noticed the street sagging,

Neb. Lawmakers Prepare For A Busy 2015 Session

BY GRANT SCHULTE
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — Following the election of a new Republican governor and a deeply conservative group of freshman legislators, the Nebraska Legislature will get started this week with an expected focus on property taxes and prison reform.
The 90-day session that starts Wednesday will usher in 18 new senators — more than one-third of the Legislature — who are replacing term-limited lawmakers and one who resigned.
Gov-elect Pete Ricketts has promised to push for property and income tax reductions. Lawmakers also must pass a two-year budget, and have pledged to overhaul the state's scandal-plagued prison system.
"I think this next (session) is going to be a big one for the Legislature, and a big one for our state," said Sen. Beau McCoy, of Omaha. "There will be a lot of new faces, and a lot of new ideas on how best to lead our state forward."
McCoy said he expects lawmakers will focus not on whether to cut taxes, but how to do it.
Some senators are working on legislation designed to spur job growth in the rural economy. Lawmakers are likely to see bills on gambling, health care reform, cigar bars and driver's licenses for young immigrants who qualify for President Barack Obama's deferred-action program. McCoy said he also anticipates new debates on issues that have gone dormant in the last few years, including abortion and a Republican-backed voter identification bill that was last debated in the full Legislature in 2012.
The new, officially nonpartisan Legislature will have an expanded GOP majority. Republicans will hold 35 seats once the freshman senators are sworn

into office and Democrats will have 13, nearly all from Omaha and Lincoln. Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha is an independent.
Despite the GOP gains, several Republican and Democratic senators said the partisanship they initially sensed among incoming lawmakers has softened now that the election has passed.
"Nebraskans elected a very bright, hardworking group," said Sen. Colby Coash of Lincoln, a Republican who is running for speaker. "I don't see a strong partisan divide. Some issues will probably fall down on an urban-rural divide, and people are where they are on things like Medicaid expansion. But I think now that the election is over, they all have ideas on how to move the state forward, and they realize they can't do it alone."
Ricketts has said property taxes are his top priority, and some lawmakers have started work on measures that would allow local governments to lower them.
Sen. Tyson Larson of O'Neill said he expects a strong push to lower property taxes beyond what lawmakers have already done in recent years. Larson said the discussion could include cutting expenses elsewhere or the legalization of certain forms of gambling.
"The political will is definitely there," Larson said.
Prison reform will also receive top billing given the scandal involving miscalculated prison sentences and the case of Nikko Jenkins, who claimed to be mentally ill and killed four people in Omaha after he was released. A legislative report released in December cited prison overcrowding, inmate segregation and a lack of mental health services as major problems that have threatened public safety.
Sen. Les Seiler of Hastings, who is running for Judiciary Committee chair-

man, said he believes lawmakers can enact many of the report's recommendations within the next two years. Senators may also discuss the elimination of mandatory-minimum prison sentences to ease crowding.
Seiler said the shape of many prison-related bills this year will depend on the makeup of the Judiciary Committee and the money that's available in the state budget. The committee is losing half of its eight members because of term limits, and others are looking to move to different roles in the Legislature.
Even so, Seiler said lawmakers are under pressure to ease crowding from federal officials and interest groups, such as the American Civil Liberties Union. At the end of November, Nebraska's prisons housed more than 5,200 inmates — nearly 160 percent of what the state facilities were designed to hold.
"Prison overcrowding has to take a priority to a certain degree because we have both the feds and the ACLU looking over our shoulder," Seiler said. "If we slow up our progress, we'll get hit with a lawsuit."
Sen. Jeremy Nordquist of Omaha said he expects debates over property taxes and K-12 education funding, which is generated through a combination of state, federal and local tax dollars. Some lawmakers have argued a lack of state K-12 education funding has led to higher property taxes, because it forces districts to generate revenue from local home- and landowners.
"We basically tell our schools to go out and levy property taxes to fund their operations," Nordquist said. "I certainly think that if we put more money into K-12, and make sure every district receives some support, it would result in direct property tax relief."

Watertown Man Shares His Dad's Prisoner-Of-War Journal From WWII

WATERTOWN (AP) — A Watertown man has gifted family members and friends with copies of a journal his father wrote in as a prisoner of war during World War II.
With the help of the Codrington County Historical Society, Terry Peschl was able to copy, reproduce and distribute the wartime journal among siblings, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and family friends. Duplicating the journal allows him to share this piece of family history without the risk of damaging or losing the heirloom, he said.
"Christmas is a time that's all about family,"

Peschl said. "And this year, I'm sharing Dad's gift with the rest of mine."
The log book distributed by the War Prisoners Aid details the months his father, Fred, spent imprisoned in a German-run camp in Pomerania.
The soldier and several other Allied troops were captured by German soldiers in June 1944, shortly after D-Day, and taken to a prisoner-of-war camp near the Baltic Sea. The prisoners were able to send brief letters to loved ones back in the U.S., but they weren't able to complain or disclose information about their location. Many of

the letters sent to the prisoners were confiscated.
"Mom wrote to him every day," said Terry Peschl. "But after he got home, she found out he only received a half dozen or so of the letters."
The journal was Fred Peschl's way of creating a connection with the infant son he had not yet met, the Public Opinion in Watertown reported. The soldier taped a photograph of Terry and a letter he had written to his son on the first page.
To keep the journal out of German hands, he passed it back and forth with other American soldiers. Each of them contributed artwork, a

poem, passage or prayer.
The camp was liberated in April 1945, nearly a year after Fred Peschl became a POW. He returned home two months later and finally met his son, Terry, who was 18 months old.
"Dad wouldn't talk about the war for years after he got back," Terry said. "He would once in a while tell little bits of it here and there, but it wasn't really until he got much older that he finally would tell the whole story."
Terry Peschl said the journal has been his most prized possession for his entire life.

Material From Lincoln's Old Arena To Be Auctioned

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Anyone who wants a souvenir, or maybe a walk-in freezer, from Lincoln's idle Pershing Center will soon be able to buy it.
The *Lincoln Journal Star* reports that the city is getting ready to sell nearly everything it can from the old arena, which closed last fall after hosting sporting events, concerts and other large gatherings for nearly six decades.
Fred McCoy is closing down the building where he's worked for 36 years. He said nearly everything will be for sale at bigiron.com starting in mid-January.
The sale includes the basketball court that was installed in 1983 where countless high school playoff games were played. The video board is also for sale,

as are the desks and chairs from offices, about 2,000 folding chairs and the arena seats.
The city hopes to sell as many of the seats as possible, but the fact that they are secured from the back instead of the floor could make that harder. "You have to have a wall to attach them to," he said.
One of the few exceptions is the grand piano, which will move to the new Pinnacle Bank Arena.
The sale closes Feb. 11, but buyers have to pick up whatever they buy themselves. The arena will be open on Feb. 9 and Feb. 10 so buyers can inspect items.
But until the auction wraps up, the city is trying to save money by setting the boilers to 40 degrees and keeping the lights off.

Brookings Fire Dept. To Begin Using Drone

BROOKINGS (AP) — A fire department in eastern South Dakota has gone high-tech with a new custom-built drone.
The unmanned aircraft will provide Brookings firefighters a panoramic view of structure fires, wildfires and gas leaks. The F450 quadcopter can even be used to search areas in missing person cases or to locate vehicles that have gone underwater, Fire Chief Darrell Hartmann said.
"We can tilt the camera so it looks directly down into the water," he said. "From that angle, you can see underwater objects much better. While our divers are getting prepared to go in, we can launch this and get a visual of what's going on, what we have."
The drone was built for free by Arend Schuurman, an Elkton resident who

works as a quality control technician at 3M in Brookings, the Brookings Register reported. He outfitted the quadcopter frame with long-life batteries, a memory card and a GoPro video camera.
"Arend came in on his own time and actually put it together for us," Hartmann said. "Really, the neat thing is that Arend kind of went above and beyond. He actually purchased the same basic unit for himself to try it out to make sure it would work before he directed us on what to buy."
Hartmann and deputy chief Pete Bolzer are the only fire officials currently qualified to operate the drone. The department will begin using the drone in emergency situations this spring after more firefighters have been trained.

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