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PRESS & DAKOTAN

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Nebraska Community Remembers Its Incorporation With A Full Day Of Events

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FORDYCE, Neb. — In this town of 130 residents, the Pony Express will ride again.

The modern version of the 1860s mail delivery — complete with real “horse power” — will pull into Fordyce on Saturday for the Cedar County, Neb., town’s centennial parade.

Residents invite one and all to help celebrate their day-long party of the century.

State Sen. Tyson Larson of O’Neill, Neb., sponsored the Legislature’s proclamation for Fordyce’s 100th anniversary, according to centennial committee member Ruthie Wiebelhaus.

“It will be read on the Cedar County courthouse steps in Hartington on Saturday morning, then taken to Fordyce by horse,” she said.

“The ride from Hartington to Fordyce is about 10 miles, and they will hand off the proclamation to a different pony and rider every half-mile until they reach Fordyce.”

At that point, the proclamation will receive the grand entrance befitting a once-in-a-lifetime event, Wiebelhaus said.

“The idea is that (the Pony Express) will meet up as a group and ride into town for the end of the parade,” she said. “Tyson (Larson) plans to be part of the horse ride and with the group that joins the parade and reads the proclamation in the middle of Main Street.”

The Fordyce committee decided to create a shorter version of Hartington’s horse ride five years ago, Wiebelhaus said.

“Hartington did the Pony Express run for its 125th anniversary (in 2008), but they ran it all the way from the state capitol in Lincoln,” she said. “We didn’t want that long of a ride, so we’re doing it from Hartington on the day of the parade. Tim Burbach organized (the Pony Express) for us.”

The parade begins at 11 a.m., starting at St. John the Baptist Church’s rectory. The three-block route runs down to Main Street.

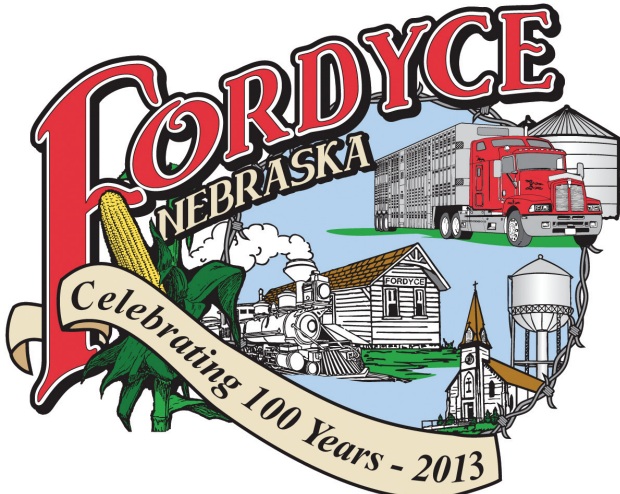
As of earlier this week, the parade had registered 55 participants. Entries will be accepted until the start of Saturday’s parade. The entrants currently include tractors, a horseback rider and the Cedar Catholic Junior-Senior High School band from Hartington. The committee welcomes any entries but is looking particularly for more cars and floats.

So far, the out-of-town entries include Yankton’s Riverboat Days Captain and Belle, Gary and Velma Kuchta.

Besides Wiebelhaus, the Fordyce centennial committee consists of John Pinkelman,

Amanda Potts, Jeanne Kaiser, Jennifer Eickhoff, Charlie Becker and Casidy Potts.

The committee has learned Saturday’s celebration should draw visitors from across the nation, Becker said. Those visitors have relatives currently living in Fordyce or ancestors who once resided in the community, she said.



The Fordyce committee has also learned many Cedar Catholic High School graduates plan to attend the Fordyce celebration while in Hartington for this weekend’s CCHS alumni reunion.

A Century In The Making

Fordyce, which has the motto “A Small Town With A Big Heart,” was established in 1907 as a stop when the railroad was extended from Hartington to Crofton, Neb. Fordyce was named after William F. Fordyce, a railroad official.

Fordyce is located on 80 acres in northern Cedar County. In terms of business and population, the town was reportedly its largest during its earliest years.

A typical railroad town, Fordyce had a complete nucleus of businesses by 1910. In addition to the depot, there were two elevators to handle the volume of grain, a bank, hotel, hardware, grocery, meat market, clothing store, blacksmith and a post office. Soon, a lumberyard, pool hall, garage, drug store and hospital were added.

While established in 1907, Fordyce didn’t become incorporated until Aug. 4, 1913. The current celebration is held earlier than the anniversary date because of the availability of the dance band and because of the start of school and other activities in August.

A major event, even before the town’s official birth, was a 1912 fire. With no water pressure with which to fight fires, a blaze destroyed the hardware and clothing stores. The town’s citizens took steps to establish a water system, which was finally installed in 1915.

Because of early fire, Fordyce constructed an elevated water tower as a defense against other blazes. The water tower contin-

ues to remain visible from a distance and to provide a symbol of the town.

Entertainment originally took place on Main Street, but with the construction of a dance hall in 1922, the focus was moved one block west.

The first business was the elevator. A number of current businesses have been passed down from generation to generation, some for about 60 years, the centennial committee said. The bank has operated at three different locations during its history. In addition, the bank has changed names from Fordyce State Bank to the Co-op and Credit Association and, finally, to the current Cedar Security Bank.

Expansion to the northwest part of town was completed in 1983 with the construction of a large park with a playground and space for picnics. A meeting room and new fire hall were added to the dance hall in 1984.

Fordyce consists mainly of German Catholics, and much of everyday life focuses on the church and parochial school.

St. John the Baptist Church, with its 18-foot steeple built in 1901, towers above the community. The original rectory, built before 1909, was replaced in 1954. A parish center was built in 1980, and the church was renovated in 1987.

Education has also played a major role in the life of the community. A two-room schoolhouse was built soon after the town’s founding. The public school included grades K-10 until it closed in 1966. Students then commuted to Crofton or Hartington schools to attend classes.

A parochial elementary school was built in 1920. In 1968, schools in Fordyce, Menominee and Constance were combined because of financial considerations to form West Catholic. Grades 1-5 were sent to Fordyce, and grades 6-8 were held in Menominee.

Economic hardships and declining enrollments led to the closing of the Menominee branch of West Catholic in 1995. West Catholic continues to operate grades 1-6 in Fordyce.

As for its business district, the Fordyce post office, bank and about a dozen shops and services meet the daily needs of residents and neighboring farm families.

One tradition has changed but remains alive in Fordyce. The town’s siren blares at noon and 6 p.m., signaling lunchtime and the end of the workday. The twice-daily siren represents a paring back from the original times of 7 a.m., noon, 1 p.m. and 6 p.m.



RANDY DOCKENDORF/P&D

ABOVE: Members of the Fordyce centennial committee include (front) John Pinkelman; (middle row, from left) Ruthie Wiebelhaus, Jennifer Eickhoff, Charlie Becker and Casidy Potts; and (back, left to right) Amanda Potts and Jeanne Kaiser. The celebration will be held all day Saturday.

TOP: The Fordyce community water tower rises above the horizon as the sun sets for the day. Fordyce first established a water system in 1915, two years after its incorporation and three years after a fire destroyed several businesses. The tower continues to remain a symbol for the “Small Town With A Big Heart.”

Saturday’s celebration in Fordyce offers a packed schedule of events, all held on or near Main Street.

The day opens with registration for the 5K run/walk at 7 a.m. Pre-registration can be completed by emailing fordycencentennial@yahoo.com.

The morning also features a breakfast booth, a baseball game between Fordyce and Bow Valley at the baseball diamond, a tractor show in front of the West Catholic elementary school and St. John the Baptist rectory, and remote control car demonstrations and races at Brett’s Body Shop.

A historical and quilt display

begins at 10 a.m. and runs until 5 p.m. at the village hall.

The parade begins at 11 a.m., with line-up starting at 9:30 a.m. Pre-registration for the parade can be completed by emailing fordycencentennial@yahoo.com. Prizes will be given in various categories.

A vendor blender will open at 11 a.m. and run until 5 p.m. at the fire department’s truck bay.

The afternoon features a horseshoe tournament at the village park, old timer’s game, scavenger hunt, bingo at Menford Electric’s shop building, pedal pull (an official state-qualifying competition) and Taekwondo.

Kids’ games will open after

the parade. The events feature face painting, bounce house, ring toss, dunk tank, fish pond, mini-golf, corn hole, football toss, paddle wheel and other activities.

The beer garden opens at 1 p.m. and remains open until 1 a.m.

Also during the afternoon, the polka band “Bumble Bees” will perform from 2-5 p.m. at the St. John’s parish center, with pie and coffee available in the air-conditioned hall.

St. John’s Church tours will be conducted from 2-4 p.m. Mass will be celebrated at 5:30 p.m. in

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*Thank you,
Debra Bodenstedt, Branch Manager*

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