

Neb. School To Graduate First Senior Class

OMAHA, Neb. (AP)—Six students will become the first seniors to graduate from an eastern Nebraska school this month.

The Cornerstone Christian School in Bellevue will hold a graduation ceremony for its small senior class on May 24, the *Omaha World-Herald* reported.

The school, which was established in 1984, isn't tied to a specific church — its staff and students represent more than 65 churches in the area. The school expanded from its K-8 roots by adding a freshman class in 2011.

Over the past nine years, the school has seen its enrollment grow from 86 to 270 students.

Starting a high school has meant creating from scratch everything that makes a high school, said Cornerstone's administrator, Teri Lynn Schrag.

"Absolutely everything in high school is brand new," she said. "Every piece has been specifically crafted, from curricula to when to add athletic programs, to establish a culture and to establish a tradition."

Last weekend, the school held its first prom.

The senior class compares their experience with being the oldest child in the family.

One of the graduates, Marcus Hilding, joked that their class is the "guinea pig" and the ones who set examples for students in lower grades.

"It's like one big family," he said. "We love each other. We get annoyed with each other. Then we make up and we love each other again."

Hilding plans to attend Judson University in Illinois with an eye toward a career in the music industry. Others are planning to stay in-state by attending Nebraska colleges while one student is headed for the Marine Corps.

2 Men Found Slain In Northeast Omaha

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Police say two men whose bodies were found at a northeast Omaha residence were victims of homicide.

Officers were sent to investigate the shooting a little after 4:30 a.m. Tuesday. Both men were declared dead at the scene.

Police identified the men as Lafayette Antonia Reed and Diondre Mitchell. Both were 27 years old.

No arrests have been reported.

Man Pleads Not Guilty On Child's Death

STURGIS (AP) — A Rapid City man has pleaded not guilty to killing his girlfriend's 21-month-old son in Black Hawk last month.

Twenty-eight-year-old Thomas Pentecost was arraigned Monday. KOTA-TV reports charges against him include second-degree murder, and he could face up to life in prison if he's convicted.

Authorities say the boy suffered head trauma while Pentecost cared for him with his mother away. The toddler was declared brain dead, and he was taken off life support two days later.

Pentecost has said the boy fell and hit his head.

Joseph Kosel, the attorney representing Pentecost, told The Associated Press that he asks "the process be allowed to take place without a rush to judgment."

Dry Weather Worsens SD Soil Moisture

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — Another week of dry weather is putting even more stress on soil moisture in South Dakota.

The Agriculture Department says in its weekly crop progress report that subsoil moisture supplies statewide are rated 70 percent short or very short, and topsoil moisture supplies are 74 percent short or very short. That's up from 67 percent and 69 percent last week.

More than one-third of the state's winter wheat crop is rated in poor or very poor condition. Stock water supplies are rated 42 percent short or very short. Both percentages have worsened over the week.

The dry weather has enabled farmers to make progress on spring planting. Seeding of all crops in South Dakota is ahead of the average pace over the past five years.

Holzwarth

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Now 39 years old, Holzwarth's path to PA school was set in motion by his teenage experiences dealing with injuries.

"On the day before my 14th birthday, I was in an accident with my motorcycle dirt bike," he said. "I was injured, and it required that I receive physical therapy."

He was unable to play football during his freshman and sophomore years but returned to the gridiron for his final two years of high school. He also played baseball during that time.

Besides receiving his own treatment, Holzwarth further considered athletic training after shadowing a family friend who worked in physical therapy.

Holzwarth attended Northern State University in Aberdeen for a year, then took a year off from college. He enrolled at Dakota Wesleyan University in Mitchell and graduated with a bachelor's degree in sports medicine and athletic training.

A BRUSH WITH TRAGEDY

While at DWU, Holzwarth played baseball and worked as a student athletic trainer for the football and women's basketball teams. As part of his degree, he was required to complete 1,500 hours of training room experience including internship hours.

Holzwarth could live with his aunt in Denver during an internship, so he focused his search efforts on the Mile High City during fall 1998. He was accepted for an internship with HealthSouth system and prepared for the 12-week internship in the Denver area.

He received his assignment starting in January 1999 – at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. He would miss getting caught in one of the largest mass school shootings in U.S. history three months later.

"Columbine and Littleton were both huge," he said. "When I arrived, the kids were still on Christmas break, so there were no classes, just the athletes. It was very nice and welcoming. And at Columbine, I worked with sports I hadn't seen at DWU, like soccer and lacrosse. That's been my only experience with lacrosse, and it was different."

Holzwarth worked under an athletic trainer, handling various sports and duties. He normally arrived at the school around 1 or 2 p.m. because he worked afternoon practices and night events.

However, his experience at the school was tragically cut short. "My last day of the internship was the day of the shooting (on April 20)," he said.

Holzwarth shudders at the thought of how he was nearly caught in the crossfire that day. "I had planned to go early for lunch at Columbine (when the shootings occurred). I was lucky that I didn't have a vehicle, and my aunt (who was sharing a ride) was running late," he said.

He scrapped plans for lunch at Columbine. He didn't see television news during the morning, and on the radio he learned of a bomb threat, which he said wasn't uncommon.

Then he received calls from back home in South Dakota. Parents and others were watching the Columbine drama unfold on network television and were frantic that Holzwarth was trapped – or worse – in the mass murder.

Holzwarth arrived at Columbine stunned at the scene.

"The police set up a two-mile perimeter," he said. "People were freaking out. There were RVs, police bomb squads and news RVs all over."

Holzwarth returned to his aunt's home and later learned the Columbine fatalities included a friend, Dave Saunders.

"Dave was a coach that I knew really well," he said. "Dave Saunders was the last person I talked to at the school before the shootings."

Holzwarth attended Saunders' funeral before returning to the DWU campus in Mitchell. He noted the Columbine school's resilience even amidst its grief as the girls soccer team qualified for the state tournament a month after the shootings.

Holzwarth graduated from DWU in spring 1999, took off a year and then earned his master's degree in exercise science from USD in spring 2002. During that time, he served as a graduate assistant for the USD athletic department and as an athletic trainer for Vermillion High School.

The Mount Marty athletic trainer and instructor position opened the summer after his USD graduation.

He applied, received the job and started at MMC in August 2002.

Holzwarth kept the Columbine incident to himself, finally feeling comfortable enough to talk about it during a noon forum at Mount Marty.

MMC history professor Rich Lofthus attended the forum and said the impact of Holzwarth's talk was felt in the room.

"The level of respect he commanded among our student athletes was reflected by the number of students in attendance that day — the room was packed," Lofthus said.

"Andy explained that the perpetrators of that tragedy had become alienated from the Columbine community. (Holzwarth's) advice to all of us was to make sure that we, as well as those around us, become integrated into the academic community of Mount Marty College."

"His message resonated with the audience because it was coming from such a credible source. I will always remember this as one of the most remarkable 'teaching moments' I have experienced at Mount Marty College."

LANCER DUTIES

At MMC, Holzwarth teaches the prevention and care of athletic injuries, introduction to athletic training, and strength and conditioning. He also teaches fitness/wellness courses and serves as an advisor, recruiter and internship coordinator.

He attends practices and home contests for all sports, occasionally attending road games of shorter distances. "The (Great Plains Athletic) conference rules say we have to have an athletic trainer at contests. If we have two contests going on at the same time, we may need to hire an athletic trainer," he said.

Over the years, Holzwarth has taken on more work with the care and prevention of injuries, as well as strength conditioning. He also works with college athletes during the summer.

"We saw a need for kids to perform better," he said. "They can become bigger, faster and stronger if they do it the right way."

Holzwarth has developed professional relationships that enable him to share ideas and research. Recently, he has worked more with postural restorative philosophy, which looks at the entire body.

He has also accompanied his MMC athletes on medical visits to

share information and to ask and answer questions about the students' condition and plan of treatment.

In turn, he can help athletes better understand their situation and also keep coaches and parents informed, if needed.

It was during one of those visits that Holzwarth heard the comment that planted the seed for becoming a physician assistant. "There was the realization that I'm an athletic trainer, so what's the next step?" he said.

He considered trying to make the staff of a major league baseball team, but he said it could take years for him to move up the ladder in the minor leagues.

CHOOSING A PATH

He decided to expend his energy on becoming a physician assistant. He admitted it was a bit unnerving to take on the career and life change more than a decade after he left the classroom as a student. However, he has taught in a college classroom and has built 12 years of hands-on experience as an athletic trainer.

In addition, he believes his communication skills with athletes, coaches, parents and medical providers will serve him well as a physician assistant.

He chose the USD program because of its cost, length of training and his status as an alumnus. He also likes the idea of remaining in South Dakota. The process was extremely competitive, with USD accepting about 20-25 students out of the approximately 450 applicants, he added.

"I interviewed Nov. 22 and learned I got into PA school in December," he said. "When I get done with school, I still need to pass my boards, but USD has a high rate of passage. In the end, I can do everything but surgery."

In the midst of preparing for PA school, Holzwarth was hit with a personal setback. His family members' homes were destroyed during last year's tornado in Wessington Springs.

"No one was allowed in or out of Wessington Springs. You saw the National Guard trucks all over town. The carnage was unbelievable," he said, noting some residents are still recovering a year later. "We had planned a celebration for my grandma's 90th birthday and went ahead with it. It was a very different way to celebrate. But then again,

everyone was fine after the tornado and we did have some things to celebrate."

Holzwarth will enjoy a short breather this summer. In June, he and his brothers and cousins are going on their annual major league baseball trip, this year to Texas. In July, he attends his PA orientation before jumping into classes. He plans to maintain his athletic training license.

MMC athletic director Chuck Iverson said the college is working on a job description for the athletic trainer vacancy and hasn't yet selected Holzwarth's replacement. Iverson recognized Holzwarth with a certificate and a gift during Sunday's Lancer athletic recognition event.

Iverson told the *Press & Dakotan* he appreciates Holzwarth's service to the college.

"I am very happy for Andrew. To pursue his dream is great, and there is no doubt he will be a great PA," the athletic director said. "While we'll miss him, we're also excited for him and just grateful that we were able to (have his service) these past years."

Holzwarth dedicated himself to many roles at MMC, Iverson said.

"He was an immense asset to the athletic department, but he was also such an asset to the college and community as well," Iverson said. "He was always available to help wherever he could, whether that was actually part of his duties or not. The best interest of the student-athlete was always the priority."

Holzwarth showed a commitment to athletes' welfare, Lofthus said.

"During most of this time, I served as the Faculty Athletic Representative and I always considered Andy an ally in the quest to do what was best for our student athletes," the history professor said. "I'll miss the many road trips we took to away games."

In turn, Holzwarth said he will miss his MMC ties, even though he's just down the road in Vermillion.

"I'll miss the (Benedictine) Sisters, faculty, staff and students, but I'm only a half-hour away," he said. "This (career change) was something that had to be done. The opportunity came to move forward. Who knows what's going to happen? But I'm excited for it."

The best may yet be to come, Holzwarth said.

"People ask if my dream has come true," he said. "I tell them that I'm still dreaming."

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AAA Rating: What Does It Mean For South Dakota?

BY JAMES NORD
Associated Press

PIERRE — With an upgrade from Standard & Poor's in hand, South Dakota is pursuing new credit ratings from other major agencies to match.

The move this week bumping South Dakota's issuer credit rating from "AA+" to "AAA" by New York-based S&P will likely save the state money by letting it borrow at lower interest costs, and similar action from Moody's Investors Service and Fitch Ratings would compound that effect, said Jason Dilges, the Bureau of Finance and Management commissioner.

What's unclear for South Dakota, experts say, is exactly how much those savings will be. Another wrinkle is a constitutional provision that largely blocks the state from directly incurring debt, which means it must use methods at "arms-length" from the state, Dilges said.

South Dakota joins 15 other states

that have S&P's highest rating. Dilges cited the upgrade as a testament to the state's fiscal strength and said it's a signal to financial markets that South Dakota debt is a safe bet. Credit ratings give potential bond purchasers a measurement of state performance and credit worthiness.

"We're not done yet," Dilges said. "We ... will keep on working to get the other two."

Members of Gov. Dennis Daugaard's administration have met with ratings agencies, and the governor has pushed for policies to help secure the upgrade. Some of those efforts include timelier financial reporting and longer-term budget and capital spending forecasts.

"When one rating agency takes a rating action, it's very likely that the other rating agencies might follow," said Richard Larkin, a senior vice president and director of credit analysis at Herbert J. Sims & Co. Inc., a financial firm.

Dilges said the bump is akin to a credit score improvement for a South

Dakota resident: A higher score would mean a lower interest rate on a car or home loan, which would translate to savings over the life of the loan.

For the South Dakota Building Authority, one of several entities that issues bonds in the state, the upgrade will save money, but it's unclear how much, said executive secretary Don Templeton.

The authority is preparing to offer \$11.5 million in bonds to pay for improvements at Custer State Park. But the debt can't be offered at the "AAA" status because the bonds aren't backed by the state's "ultimate guarantee," Dilges said, so it will be offered at a lower rating.

S&P credit analyst Sussan Corson said she doesn't anticipate a change in the state's rating in the next two years. Corson said North Dakota's "AAA" outlook is also stable, even if oil prices remain low, as long as the state adjusts its budget accordingly.

Tax Credits For Nebraska Wind Energy Stalled By Filibuster

BY GRANT SCHULTE
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — An effort to attract more wind farms to Nebraska failed on Tuesday after senators derailed a bill that would have provided \$75 million in production tax credits for renewable energy.

Conservative senators mounted a filibuster to block the proposal, arguing that the state shouldn't subsidize wind energy.

The bill by Sen. Jeremy Nordquist of Omaha would have provided up to \$75 million in tax credits over a decade for wind farms. Nordquist agreed to the cap and a December 2021 sunset date for the program to try to win support for the legislation.

Currently, companies that participate in the state's community-based energy development program have to spend at least 25 percent of their total investment on goods and services in Nebraska.

Nordquist said the wind farms would also generate property tax revenue for counties and lease payments for landowners who allow them. Wind farms would only receive the credit when they produce electricity.

Sen. Ken Schilz of Ogallala said energy tax credits have benefited Nebraska in the past. He pointed to the state's ethanol industry, buoyed by federal and state subsidies.



METRO GRAPHICS

"We need to be careful that when things are changing, we don't just stick our heads in the sand," Schilz said. "Change brings opportunity."

Senators voted 30-12 to bring the bill to a vote, but supporters needed 33 to overcome the filibuster.

Sen. Mike Groene of North Platte led the filibuster, arguing that the turbines are an eyesore and government shouldn't subsidize them.

"This is unnecessary, this is feel-good legislation, and it needs to stop," Groene said.

Sen. Paul Schumacher of Columbus said Nebraska should look to invest in other potential energy sources, including new, experimental forms of nuclear energy. Schumacher said Nebraska is already "way behind the power curve" with its wind policy, and could take a lead in

renewable energy by looking at more speculative options.

"We could be a player there, and \$75 million could put us in the game," Schumacher said. Investing in small-scale wind farms "will not make Nebraska a leader or even a competitor or even a player in the renewable energy wind game."

The bill could also apply to producers of solar, biomass and other renewable energies. It would allow companies a 1-cent tax credit for every kilowatt-hour generated for the first two years. The credit would shrink to 0.6 cents per kilowatt-hour over 10 years, after which it would end.

Wind-energy companies could also turn down that option in favor of a one-time tax credit totaling 30 percent of their construction costs, up to \$2 million.

Senators Approve Controversial State Patrol Leader

BY ANNA GRONEWOLD
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — Senators have approved Gov. Pete Ricketts' choice to lead the Nebraska State Patrol despite concerns about his involvement in a gender discrimination lawsuit 10 years ago.

The Legislature voted 32-7 Tuesday to approve Bradley Rice of Elkhorn.

Opponents said they were most concerned about Rice's testimony refuting remarks he reportedly made about women in law enforcement.

In 2004 and 2005, Rice was part of an interview panel that denied several promotions to a female sergeant. Carla Schreiber said the rejections were based on gender rather than her qualifications. She was awarded damages and the rank of lieutenant in 2007.

During the lawsuit, another trooper testified that Rice said women were not qualified to be in law enforcement, an opinion Rice initially denied.

But Sen. Burke Harr of Omaha said that was inconsistent with Rice's appointment hearing last month, when he acknowledged he made the comment but said it was taken out of context.