

Careless Smoking Blamed For Apartment Fire

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Officials say careless smoking caused a fire that destroyed a Lincoln apartment building.

KOLN/KGIN-TV in Lincoln reports that the fire started on the deck of a third-story apartment Thursday afternoon at Southwood Village.

Authorities call it a total loss. The building is worth nearly \$300,000, and the repair costs would likely exceed that amount.

Residents say the building had 18 apartments, 17 of which were occupied.

Authorities say there were no civilian injuries. One firefighter was taken to the hospital with minor injuries after the roof where he was working collapsed under his feet.

All of the building's residents will need to move to different apartments.

Women Fight During Black Friday Shopping

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Police say two women got into a fight during Black Friday shopping at a Lincoln mall.

KOLN/KGIN-TV in Lincoln reports that police were called to a Younkers store at Gateway Mall on Friday morning. A 30-year-old woman told police that she'd been punched in the left eye, shattering her glasses.

The woman who allegedly punched her told police the two had gotten into a shoving match after the victim started ducking under tables and cutting in line to get bargains.

Neither shopper was arrested. Police didn't see any major injuries.

A representative for the store declined to comment.

Company Intensifying Gold Hunt In Keystone

KEYSTONE (AP) — A Canadian company is intensifying its hunt for gold in the Keystone area.

The *Rapid City Journal* reports that Mineral Mountain Resources in the coming weeks will release initial results from its exploratory drilling. That could lead to the development of an underground gold mine near Keystone.

The Vancouver, British Columbia-based company is putting together a \$4.5 million financial package to fund exploration in the area over the next 12 to 18 months.

People in the Keystone area are already well aware of the work, which goes on 24 hours a day in areas outside town but less frequently in spots nearby.

DENR officials are monitoring the progress and making periodic visits to the site. The exploration drilling follows state stipulations designed to protect water and other natural resources.

Panhandle Bank Robbery Suspect Arrested

SCOTTSBLUFF, Neb. (AP) — Authorities say they've arrested a suspect in the robbery of a Nebraska Panhandle bank branch.

Scottsbluff police say 42-year-old Michael Scott was arrested early Friday morning at a mobile home in Scottsbluff.

He's suspected of robbing a Valley Bank branch in Scottsbluff on Wednesday afternoon. The robber didn't show a weapon and no injuries were reported.

Authorities say Scott also is a suspect in other theft and fraud cases.

Scott remains in Scotts Bluff County Jail. Online court records don't list the name of his attorney.

Water Mystery Deepens In S.D. Town

HECLA (AP) — The northeastern South Dakota town of Hecla is still trying to solve a mystery involving disappearing water.

The amount of water reaching residents is less than what the city is buying from a rural water system, but so far officials have been unable to find a leak. Finance Officer Gayle Lloyd tells the *Aberdeen News* that the town lost 280,000 gallons of water last month.

The problem goes back several years but has been getting progressively worse. Between January and June, more than 4 million gallons of water was lost, costing the city of about 225 people \$6,150.

Lloyd says with winter approaching the town likely will have to wait until spring to find the source of the leak.

Police Deny Any Gunfire At Omaha Mall

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Police officers responding to reports of gunfire at an Omaha mall where nine people were killed in a shooting five years ago said no shots were fired early Friday.

Employees and Black Friday shoppers at the Westroads Mall called police to say they heard gunfire and officers arrived around 1 a.m. Others called media outlets to say they were hiding in bathrooms and panicking because they'd lost touch with their kids or other shopping companions.

Omaha Officer James Shade said there had been a fight between shoppers but that no shots were fired. He said people heard the sound of trash cans or standing signs being knocked over — not gunfire.

One person was arrested for disorderly conduct.

Nineteen-year-old Robert Hawkins fatally shot eight people and himself at the mall's Von Maul store on Dec. 5, 2007.

Officers also checked on reports of a shooting at Oak View Mall in southwest Omaha but found no signs that shots had been fired. No shoppers were injured at the mall in a shopping-related melee, but a shoplifting suspect detained by mall security officers had loudly and vigorously resisted being taken into custody and had used pepper spray on the officers and a store employee, police said in a news release.

1926 S.D. Theater Nears Reopening

BY DIRK LAMMERS
Associated Press

SIoux FALLS — Downtown Sioux Falls in its heyday was home to seven movie theaters, but filmgoers since the early 1990s have been heading to the malls to sit in front of a big screen.

Those longing for the old days will get their chance to go retro next year with the long-awaited reopening of the State Theatre, a circa-1926 vaudeville and silent movie house that for the past decade has been undergoing a slow but steady multimillion-dollar renovation.

"It's a landmark," said 91-year-old Sylvia Henkin, whose family donated \$500,000 to the project. "Every kid that had a dime would go down there and see a cartoon or a movie, and they brought first-class, first-run shows there."

Crews are working to transform the newly renamed Sylvia R. Henkin State Theatre into a "historically preserved theater with all the modern amenities," said executive director Stephen Williamson.

While visitors will be sitting in an auditorium restored to the crimson-and-gold Beaux-Arts look from 1926, they'll be looking at a high-definition, digital projection surrounded by thundering high-fidelity sound.

The facade's facelift is complete, the marquee illuminates South Phillips Avenue each evening and the reconstructed lobby is ready for concessionaires. Crews have upgraded the heating, air conditioning and plumbing throughout the three-story concrete and steel building, which is as structurally sound as a bomb shelter.

The theater will return in 2013 with just the main level open, seating about 400 people. The 350-seat balcony will likely open sometime in 2014, and there's no target date for reconstruction of the theater's original Mighty Wurlitzer organ, Williamson said.

A complete restoration of the detailed stenciling that adorns the walls and ornamentation around the towering organ pipe chambers will take more time. Much of the stenciling was either covered with paint or drilled out to attach aesthetically displeasing acoustic tile, but artists will have original photos from which to work.

"The stencil work alone will take years to redo," Williamson said.

The State will screen first-run films during the summer and holiday seasons, when blockbusters are typically released, but focus on art house and indie films the rest of the year while hosting an occasional small-venue concert.

Williams said the State has a relatively small stage, so it will leave plays to Sioux Falls' other arts venues — the Orpheum Theatre on the north end of Phillips Avenue and the city's main performing arts center, the Washington Pavilion.

Such a historical centerpiece can anchor a small Midwestern city's downtown, said Emily Beck, executive director of North Dakota's Fargo Theatre, a sister cinema that opened in 1926 just 13 days after the State.

"I think it's incredibly important for the artistic identity of a community to have a theater like this that they can call their own — that isn't just some sort of big-box, corporate theater showing the next 'Twilight' film," Beck said.

Though the Fargo Theatre sports an Art Deco style that harkens back to how it looked in 1937, it and the State share much in common. Both were designed by St. Paul, Minn., architects Buechner and Orth for the firm of Finkelstein and Ruben, which operated nearly 90 theaters in North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.

The theaters' Wurlitzer organs, which in that era provided the soundtrack and sound effects for silent films, are just one serial number apart.

Fargo's downtown gem, however, was closed for just eight months in the late 1990s while it underwent its \$2.6 million renovation.

Residents of Sioux Falls who were seeing businesses flee downtown in favor of newer retail centers wondered if their historic theater would ever reopen.

"Downtown Sioux Falls was dead — moribund — and rigor mortis had set in," Henkin said. "The multiplexes came out to the malls and that took the place. I'm sure television had a lot to do with it, too."

After the State closed around 1990, the building was bought by private owners who held onto it for about a decade. The Sioux

Falls Film Society bought the property in 2001 and sunk more than \$400,000 into the beginning stages of restoration.

"They put a new roof on it, which really saved the facility," said Stacy Newcomb-Weiland, board president of the nonprofit Sioux Falls State Theatre Co.

The organization, which took over ownership in 2007, raised enough money to fix the facade at a cost of \$250,000, but that just restored the structure as an historic building.

"They were looking at selling the building to a business that was going to tear the theater part of it out," Newcomb-Weiland said. "I decided to try to form a group of people to turn it into a theater again."

Downtown's Phillips Avenue is once again a bustling strip, and the nonprofit since 2007 has raised about \$2.5 million, putting about \$1.5 million of it into reconstruction. The lobby's completion last fall has helped donors see progress, which is bringing in more donations.

Among the State's more interesting features is a heavy steel stage door that sits on the back wall at railcar height. It once allowed vaudeville acts to pull up by train, unload their stuff on stage to perform and then load back up before heading to the next town.

Another mysterious door on the lower level opens to a cinder-blocked wall, but it once served as a gateway to a downtown tunnel system. The tunnels allowed stars to sneak between their hotels and the theater under the radar of fans and untouched by the Upper Midwest's harsh winter weather.

An upstairs apartment that sits behind the balcony just under the project room once housed the theater manager, but it will soon be turned into a beer and wine lounge, Williamson said.

Henkin, who watched "Gone With the Wind" at the State, said she can't wait to help out at the popcorn stand when the reg theater makes its second debut.

"It was just criminal to see that thing closed," she said. "Now, that is going to make the whole downtown come even more alive than it was."

Neb. Man Can't Remember Train Hitting Tractor

BY PETER SALTER
Lincoln Journal Star

PAUL, Neb. (AP) — He was driving his grandfather's smaller tractor after a full day working a field.

"The big one, you can hear everything; the little one, you can't hear," said Jeremy Baker, 19. "You can have the music on full blast and you can barely hear it."

He was nearly back to his grandfather's farm, and his pickup, and the end of his workday. Just a few miles to go — and most of it a straight shot north on Otoe County Road 60 toward Nebraska City, the 55-horse Case IH diesel reaching a top speed of 15 mph, pulling a disc behind it.

He'd made this six-mile trip many times since he started helping his grandfather five years ago. He hoped to make it many more; he's enrolled to study farming at Southeast Community College and plans, one day, to take over for his grandfather.

There was still some daylight Nov. 8 when he reached the rail crossing just north of Paul. His memory is splintered now, but he's sure he remembers stopping, waiting for a train to cross

"You can see the tractor approach the intersection over a pretty fair distance, and the tractor didn't stop."

MIKE HOLLAND

before easing off the clutch.

"I start to go ahead, and I look over and see the other one. And I don't remember anything after that."

The other one was powered by three locomotives. It was hauling 110 empty grain hoppers from Texas to Iowa. Top speed in that area: 50 mph.

Mike Holland got there first. The Otoe County chief deputy found the disc still attached to the rear of the tractor. But the rear of the tractor was no longer attached to the front of the tractor; the Case IH had been sliced in half, just behind the cab.

And the teen farmer was on his feet, leaning against what remained of his grandfather's tractor.

"He was conscious and alert," Holland said, "and in a pretty fair amount of pain."

Baker is still not sure what it's like to be hit by a train, because so much of it was knocked from

his memory.

He remembers rolling past Paul, its old corner bar, the few remaining residents. He remembers coming to the crossing about a quarter-mile north of there, stopping for a train, moving forward.

But authorities have seen video of the collision — captured by the locomotive's digital recorder — and they didn't see another train.

Union Pacific investigators checked the video and found no evidence of a train immediately ahead of the locomotive that hit the teen, said spokesman Mark Davis.

Holland watched the video, too.

"You can see the tractor approach the intersection over a pretty fair distance, and the tractor didn't stop," Holland said.

The young farmer's memory returns far down the track from the crossing, after he'd pushed

himself out of the ripped-open rear of the tractor.

"I vaguely remember it being kind of dark out and crawling out and seeing the conductor and seeing the train cars. And then there were emergency cars. It's kind of flashbacks."

An ambulance carried him to Nebraska City. A helicopter flew him to Lincoln. He had a slight skull fracture, a pair of broken ribs and a sore back.

And a matter-of-fact attitude, 10 days later, as he walked the tracks and pointed out the scarred and splintered railroad ties, the shattered windshield glass, the pieces of the tractor the cleanup crew missed.

But his grandmother, Diane Reese, said her grandson was noticeably shaken when they visited the crash site and saw the wreckage. The force of the impact, the violence of the crash and his fortune, all sinking in.

He kept a pair of souvenirs: part of the tractor's three-point hitch and a railroad spike he found next to the tracks.

"We're pretty confident there was something on his shoulder," Reese said. "We know what we'll be thankful for this year."



Pictured: The Avera Sacred Heart Hospital Home Care and Hospice Team.

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