

Schools, Government Team Up In S.E. Minn.

STILLWATER, Minn. (AP) — In a sign that schools are looking for even more ways to shave expenses, Stillwater Area Schools, the city of Stillwater and Washington County are in three-way talks to share services and equipment.

The *St. Paul Pioneer Press* reports preliminary ideas include coordinating repaving projects to get a better price on asphalt and sharing information technology specialists.

Scott Croonquist, of the Association of Metropolitan School Districts, says that while it's not uncommon for school districts to partner with each other, more district are now reaching out to cities and counties.

Stillwater Superintendent Corey Lunn says in these tight budget times, you have to do things differently to give taxpayers the best value for their money.

Area At Neb. State Fair To Teach About Water

GRAND ISLAND, Neb. (AP) — Construction has started on an outdoor learning area at the Nebraska State Fair that's designed to teach children about groundwater use.

The nonprofit Groundwater Guardians raised almost \$50,000 for the half-acre learning area. It will include a prairie maze, tree fort, rain garden and other features to teach children about how and why groundwater is used.

The learning area is expected to be open for next year's fair. Groundwater Guardians says it will also be accessible year-round for education activities.

Voters In Columbus Weigh School Bond

COLUMBUS, Neb. (AP) — Voters will be asked to approve a bond that would make way for construction of a new middle school in Columbus.

The *Columbus Telegram* reports that Columbus Public School's proposes a new, \$28.5 million school to replace its current one.

The bond issue goes before voters on Tuesday. If approved, residents of the district will pay an extra \$87.50 in taxes on a \$100,000 home.

Critics of the bond say taxes will be too high, the new school will cause traffic congestion and there's no plan for the future of the existing middle school. Supporters say the current school doesn't have enough space.

Iowa Tree Bearing Eagle Nest Illegally Removed

KEOKUK, Iowa (AP) — A tree bearing a bald eagle nest has been cut down near the Iowa-Missouri border in violation of federal law.

Iowa conservation officer Joe Fourdyce told the *Daily Gate City* that the tree on the Iowa side of the U.S. Highway 136 bridge between Keokuk and Alexandria, Mo., was felled Sept. 9 or 10.

Fourdyce says there are some suspects in the case, and the investigation is in the hands of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He says charges are likely.

Cutting down a tree with a bald eagle nest violates a federal protection act. Such violations can lead to prison time or fines.

Neb. Dems To Meet With AG Over Records

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Representatives of the Nebraska Democratic Party will meet with Attorney General Job Bruning's staff to discuss a series of open-records request submitted to his office.

The *Lincoln Journal Star* reports the two sides will meet Tuesday to discuss ways to narrow the 10 requests to make them more manageable for Bruning's staff. Among the requests are records of every legal settlement since 2003 and Bruning's travel expenses.

Assistant attorney general Dale Comer says fulfilling the requests would require thousands of hours of attorney review and effectively shut down the office for months.

Bruning, a Republican, is running for U.S. Senate in the 2012 election.

Munitions Detonated On Pine Ridge Reservation

PINE RIDGE INDIAN RESERVATION (AP) — The U.S. Air Force said it has detonated the last known explosives on a former bombing range on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.

The *Rapid City Journal* that contractors with the 28th Civil Engineering Squadron and Native American Engineering blew up the final four bombs known to exist on the 2,486-acre bombing range on Oct. 3.

The range dates to World War II, when it was used to train bomber pilots starting in 1942.

Unexploded munitions on the bombing range have left the land dangerous to use.

The Oglala Sioux Tribe signed an agreement with the 28th Bomb Wing at Ellsworth Air Force Base in 2008 to begin removing the explosives.

More People In SD Earning Advanced Degrees

SIoux FALLS (AP) — Census data shows more South Dakotans are obtaining advanced degrees.

The 2010 Census American Community Survey shows 8 percent of South Dakota residents 25 years old and older have a degree beyond a bachelor's. That's up from 6 percent in 2000 and 5 percent in 1990.

Part of the attraction in getting an advanced degree is financial.

The *Argus Leader* reports that Census numbers show the median income for those with an advanced degree is double that of a South Dakotan with only a high school education.

Still, 32 percent of 25-year-old residents and older in the state have only a high school education.

S.D. Ghost Town's Future Unknown

BY AMBER HUNT
Associated Press

SCENIC — The saloon is long empty. The roadside jail cells, rusted and worn. Even the swing sets peek from behind knee-high brush after decades of neglect.

This tiny exclave just west of South Dakota's badlands is officially an old ghost town. But its future is shrouded in new mystery.

"We don't know what's coming," said Kathy Jobgen, 50, the only employee remaining at the only business still in town: the U.S. Post Office.

The town of Scenic — once a popular stop for people traveling to Rapid City from the badlands to the east or Pine Ridge Reservation to the south — was recently purchased by an unusual buyer for less than \$800,000. The Iglesia ni Cristo church, established in the Philippines in 1914, bought the town and surrounding acreage from longtime resident and area rodeo legend Twila Merrill, who had gathered the land bit by bit over several decades.

The church isn't divulging its plans for the property. A person answering the phone at its offices in Daly City, Calif., said he couldn't share any information, as did staffers of church spokesman Bienvenido Santos.

"They've got a non-disclosure agreement, and I'm a signatory to that," said David Olsen, the real-estate agent who represented Merrill's family in the sale.

He was only comfortable offering bits of detail — the saloon and other boarded-up buildings still standing along Main Street will stay, he said — but he said he couldn't give specifics.

"The gas station will be open for business again soon enough," said Olsen, of Coldwell Banker in Rapid City. The church purchasers are "interested in it being a benefit to the community."

The church, which translates in the language Tagalog to Church of Christ, has been steadily spreading west since it was founded in the Philippines by Felix Manalo, a former minister of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church who experienced what he claimed to be a call similar to those of ancient prophets. He died in 1963.

Often described as one of the fastest-spreading international religions, its foothold in the Philippines grew from about 1.4 million followers in 1990 to 1.7 million in 2000, according to the 2011 figures released by the National Statistics Office in Manila.

Iglesia ni Cristo rejects the Christian doctrine of trinity and believes Christ is one of several prophets. The church is focused on the end times, believes Manalo is a prophet and considers the Catholic Church apostate.

It has a divisive reputation. The church's backing has been viewed as crucial in Filipino presidential elections, and it has been accused of organizing bloc voting in that country. It also is known for its secrecy, rarely commenting on its activities.

So far, there has been no church activity in Scenic to hint at what's to come — no construction permits sought or development plans presented to the county. The lack of information surrounding the sale has some neighbors uneasy and rumors are circulating among the scattering of residents.

"They bought it sight unseen," said Shirley Kudrna, whose father-in-law was born on a ranch about seven miles east of Scenic in 1916.

"Some people say maybe they're a cult," said her father-in-law, Tony Kudrna, 95, who has lived on the ranch nearly his whole life.

The church has expanded to more than 5,000 congregations in the Philippines, and more than 600 abroad in more than 60 countries and territories, according to the Manila Times. It has held neighborhood events to praise the hospitality of the communities where it has purchased land to build homes and churches, including Los Angeles, Orlando, and Union County, N.J.

Other congregations are established nationwide in more than 40 states, according to the church's website. Dozens are listed in California, 10 in Washington, 12 in Texas and seven in New York.

Jobgen said she's hopeful the church will make for a good neighbor.

"I'm excited about the possibilities," said Jobgen, who also runs the Jobgen Ranch with her husband.

The intersection of flourishing religion and foundering town is perplexing: In 1915, the state Highway 44 pit stop of Scenic en-

joyed its largest population of 155 residents, according to records kept by the South Dakota State Historical Society.

At its peak, the town that's pure Old West had two restaurants, three gas stations, two bulk filling stations, a hotel, a school, a bank and a post office. Tony Kudrna's sister worked at one of the restaurants, he recalled. To travel from his homestead to the comparatively bustling town, he went by horse-drawn wagon.

The remnants still dot the 12 acres that qualify as deserted town. The buildings that remain are padlocked closed and have plywood over their windows and doors, but the flavor of the time is still very much present: The sign above the Longhorn Saloon is lined with aged cattle skulls and emblazoned with the structure's year of construction — 1906.

The wooden general store is adorned with rusted wagon wheels and a carved sign that reads: "ASHES TO ASHES — DUST TO DUST — IF WE DON'T HAVE IT — IT ISN'T A MUST."

Merrill, a rancher and rodeo regular, began buying Scenic property in 1963. Olsen said her health began to fail about two years ago, and as cancer took hold, Merrill was forced to put the land — 46 acres in total — on the market.

It languished for two years with a \$3 million price tag. In July, Olsen stepped in and dropped the cost to \$799,000.

Suddenly, prospective buyers stepped forward from all over the world, said Olsen, estimating that he took more than 500 phone calls and 200 emails about the property. He appeared on television programs in Australia, London, Montreal, Chicago and Atlanta, he said.

The offer from the Filipino church was one of several.

"It was Twila's decision as to who she chose," Olsen said. "She seems to be real happy with it."

What happens next is not known publicly. Olsen said the property will be cleaned of dilapidated buildings and overgrown brush, but he said the buildings at the town's heart will remain. Not even Merrill and her family know more than that, he said.

"They do not know the plans," he said. "They're as eager as everybody else."

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Corps To Hold Meetings On Missouri River Plan

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is likely to get an earful when it holds public meetings on its plan for managing the Missouri River next year because many people have criticized the way the agency handled this year's record flooding.

Several hundred thousand acres of land were swamped and hundreds of homes had to be evacuated. The fact that the flooding started in the spring and continued into fall only made matters worse.

The corps manages the more than 2,300-mile-long river, which flows from Montana through North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, Nebraska, Kansas, Iowa and Missouri. Corps officials say they had to release massive amounts of water from the dams along the river to deal with unexpectedly heavy spring rains and melt from an above-average snowpack.

"The amount of runoff that came into the system this year was the highest level we have seen in 114 years of detailed record keeping," said Jody Farhat, chief of the corps' Missouri River water management division.

The floodwaters began retreating only in the past few weeks, and it may be mid-to-late October before the flooding ends.

The corps will hold eight public meetings in cities along the river between Oct. 24 and Nov. 3. Each of the events will include an afternoon open house where

people can meet one-on-one with corps officials and an evening presentation and question-and-answer session.

The draft plan the corps developed for the river next year calls for drawing the reservoirs down enough to get rid of the floodwater collected this year, but the corps decided not to clear out any additional flood-storage space in the reservoirs beyond the usual 16.3 million acre feet of water.

The corps says that typical amount of flood storage has proven sufficient most years. Plus, officials wanted to reduce the amount of water in the river so levee repairs can be made before winter.

Many people who live along the river and the governors of seven river states have questioned the way the river was managed this year. Signs declaring "This flood brought to you by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers" were a common sight along the river.

So, the corps is expecting a lot of interest in these public meetings.

"We know there are lots of questions and viewpoints about how the corps operated the Missouri River mainstem system through this flood event," Farhat said.

The corps will record public comments made during the meeting. People also can submit written comments through Nov. 25 via email to Missouri.Water.Management(at)nwd02.usace.army.mil.

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