

Nebraska Innovation Campus To Open, But Challenges Remain

BY GRANT SCHULTE
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — The University of Nebraska's new research park will open to the public Friday, with promises that it will foster new partnerships between businesses and university researchers.

But challenges remain for the Nebraska Innovation Campus, which has struggled to attract private tenants and has faced questions from lawmakers who were asked this year to approve more money for the project after a \$25 million investment four years ago. The new campus on the old state fairgrounds was unveiled Thursday at a private ribbon-cutting ceremony with Gov. Pete Ricketts, Lincoln Mayor Chris Beutler, University of Nebraska President Hank Bouslog and other dignitaries. The event celebrated the completion of the project's first phase, including a state-of-the-art greenhouse and food science center designed to fill a research niche for food, water and fuel.

"This is what Nebraskans expect their university to do: to leverage our research for their greater benefit," Bouslog said in a speech to an audience that included university officials, donors and elected officials.

Ricketts said the new campus will help propel the state's economic growth and encourage new research in a variety of fields.

"It's incredibly exciting for the University of Nebraska," he said.

University officials say the research park will provide space for creative and entrepreneurial projects. The project is intended to capitalize on the work of the school's researchers in a variety of scientific areas.

The campus has attracted local and international businesses, from Hastings HVAC in central Nebraska to Suji's Cuisine, a Korean food processor with restaurants in South Korea and Japan.

The park will also house several University of Nebraska-Lincoln programs, including the Food Science and Technology Department and the Global Water for Food Institute. Dan Duncan, the campus' executive director, said the new lab space and equipment will "position Nebraska as a global front-runner for all things food."

University officials announced last month that the campus had won a competitive \$750,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration. The university will match the grant to pro-

vide lab space and equipment that will be leased to startups.

Still, the research park has encountered major obstacles. Plans for a U.S. Department of Agriculture research center — a major draw for private firms — collapsed after federal funding for the project disappeared because of a 2011 ban on congressional earmarks.

The Innovation Campus has also been forced to compete with Lincoln's Historic Haymarket District, a fast-growing area for startups, and Omaha, where rent is more affordable.

Business leaders with ties to the University of Nebraska Foundation proposed the campus in 2006. Two years later, lawmakers agreed to move the Nebraska State Fair from Lincoln to Grand Island so the project could occupy the old fairgrounds.

Nebraska lawmakers and then-Gov. Dave Heineman approved \$25 million for Innovation Campus construction in 2011, but university officials returned this year to request an additional \$25 million, plus \$6 million over two years for operating expenses.

Lawmakers rejected the new request, saying they first wanted more answers about the project. University of Nebraska-Lincoln Chancellor Harvey Perlman has defended the project's pace and cost,

noting it's expected to take 20 years or longer to complete the full project, which will eventually occupy 2.2 million square feet. The current facilities fill about 380,000 square feet of space.

University officials will meet with the Legislature's Appropriations Committee on Friday as part of a study to help lawmakers learn more about the project.

Because of term limits, only three of the nine current committee members were in office when the university made its first funding request in 2011 — and none were in the Legislature at the project's outset. Some senators questioned the project's pace earlier this year when the university requested an additional \$25 million.

"There was some healthy skepticism with regard to where the Innovation Campus stands and what the plan was for moving forward," said Sen. Heath Mello of Omaha, the committee chairman. "It's our hope that this interim study is going to help answer some of those questions."

Mello said lawmakers want to know more about the project's history and whether a strategic plan exists to ensure and measure its success. They also plan to look at what other states have done to assist major research parks.

Board Names Interim Business Manager

PLATTE (AP) — Education officials have selected a business manager to replace a staff member at an educational services organization who police suspect killed his family in a murder-suicide.

Platte-based Mid-Central Educational Cooperative's board on Thursday held its first regular meeting since the deaths.

The board conducted routine business before entering a lengthy private session. Members voted afterward to appoint Stephanie Hubers as the interim replacement for former employee Scott Westerhuis.

Attorney Scott Swier declined to provide details about the private discussions. He says the board is making prudent decisions about "moving forward after the tragedy."

Authorities believe Westerhuis killed his wife, their four children and himself hours after the state informed Mid-Central it wouldn't renew a contract for managing a federal grant. The board authorized an in-depth audit at a special September meeting after the deaths.

Doctor Falsely Reported Expenses To IRS

ABERDEEN (AP) — A pain management physician who practiced in South Dakota for several years has been indicted after authorities accused her of falsely reporting at least \$56,000 of wedding-related and other expenses as business costs.

An indictment filed in U.S. District Court in South Dakota charges Heloise Westbrook with impeding the administration of the Internal Revenue laws.

Authorities accuse Westbrook of filing corporate income tax returns with many entries identified as business expenses that were actually related to personal expenses to pay for her wedding.

The indictment states the IRS began auditing Westbrook in 2008.

Westbrook worked in Aberdeen for more than a decade before she moved to Kentucky to work at a Greenville hospital in 2014.

Westbrook didn't immediately respond to a request for comment left at her office.

Woman Used Selfie Stick In Assault

SIoux FALLS (AP) — A Sioux Falls woman is accused of assaulting her boyfriend with a selfie stick.

Police allege that 22-year-old Tyshauna Lyons on Tuesday night first cut the man's head with a knife and then struck him on the shoulder with the selfie stick. The man was not seriously hurt.

Lyons faces assault charges. It wasn't immediately clear if she has an attorney, and a home telephone listing for her could not be found.

Officials Make Changes For Businesses

GRAND ISLAND, Neb. (AP) — Hall County officials voted unanimously Wednesday night to advance a new set of regulations that would expand opportunities for adult-oriented businesses in the county.

New regulations moved forward Wednesday by the county's regional planning commission include expanding zoning for strip clubs, cabarets, pornographic book and video stores and other such businesses from 300 acres to nearly 9,000 acres.

The *Grand Island Independent* reports changes will be considered by the county board at an Oct. 20 meeting.

Proposed changes also specify that alcohol isn't allowed at adult-oriented businesses, and that they must be 1,000 feet from houses, churches, schools, parks and recreational facilities. The businesses would have to be closed from midnight to 6 a.m. and full nudity wouldn't be allowed.

Commissioner Les Ruge said the regulations are "needed and justified based on the need to regulate the secondary effects of adult establishments." He said they're also consistent with the county's land use plan.

The proposal comes amid a pending federal lawsuit against Hall County by Lincoln businessman Shane Harrington, who wants to open a strip club. The lawsuit claims county zoning is too restrictive in how much space is set aside for adult entertainment.

The commission had a 10-minute closed-door meeting to discuss pending litigation against the county.

Man Cited For Working Without License

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Police say a California man disbarred in the late 1980s has been cited on suspicion of practicing law in Nebraska without a license after offering his services in an online ad.

The *Lincoln Journal Star* reports that a man contacted 81-year-old Burton Berman after seeing his ad and paid Berman \$250 to help him file for divorce.

Lincoln Police spokeswoman, Officer Katie Flood, says police began investigating Berman on Sept. 3 at the request of the Lancaster County Attorney's Office. Flood says Berman was disbarred in California for being involved in a money-laundering scheme.

A working telephone number for Berman could not be found Thursday.

Dodge County Names New Assessor

FREMONT, Neb. (AP) — The Dodge County Board of Supervisors has appointed a new county assessor because the previous one resigned and now faces theft charges.

The board appointed Debbie Churchill as the new assessor Wednesday, the *Fremont Tribune* reported. Churchill plans to start Tuesday.

"I can't wait to get it running like it should be and get it out of the news," Churchill said of the assessor's office.

She previously served as county assessor from 2004 until 2011, when the office was operated through the state.

Churchill's appointment came a day after former assessor Brittany King made her first court appearance on charges that she stole from the county. King resigned last month during a contentious meeting where county board members accused her of mismanaging the office she had led since 2012.

Board members said King's office had missed several filing deadlines and that she was often out of the office. Soon after her resignation on Sept. 2, she was arrested on suspicion of theft.

King, 26, faces two misdemeanor charges of theft and two misdemeanor counts of unauthorized use of a financial transaction device. Court records say King is accused of using a county-issued credit card on two occasions to purchase fuel for her personal vehicle.

A local attorney, Adam Tripp, was appointed to represent her. Tripp was unavailable for comment Thursday, though his receptionist said he has not yet had a chance to meet with King and does not know how she will plead to the charges.

If convicted, King faces up to six months in jail. Her next court appearance is set for Oct. 20.

Students Would Be Subject To Debt-Recovery Penalties Under New Campus Policy

BY BOB MERCER
State Capitol Bureau

ABERDEEN — Student debts owed to a state university of \$500 or more would be turned over to state government's new obligation recovery center and be subject to the center's surcharge and sanctions, under a change that received preliminary approval Thursday from the South Dakota Board of Regents.

All debts sent to the center are to carry an additional 20 percent surcharge as a collection fee.

Debtors while listed on the center's system also can't obtain or renew driver licenses, vehicle registrations, hunting or fishing licenses or state park and camping permits.

The Legislature at the suggestion of Gov. Dennis Daugaard authorized establishment of the recovery center this year.

Officials in the governor's Bureau of Administration have been working to get it set up.

The new law gives to state universities

the option of using the recovery center. The regents' \$500 policy would be a major change of policy in support of the governor and the center.

The regents currently have a two-level policy in place with \$100 as the threshold amount.

The current policy allows university officials to decide whether to turn uncollected debts of less than \$100 over to private collection agencies.

For debts of \$100 or more, the current policy calls for the universities to use collection agencies.

Under the proposed new policy with \$500 as the threshold, the regents would give broader leeway.

They want universities to be able to continue referring debts of less than \$500 to collectors rather than the recovery center.

"That remains to be seen," said Monte Kramer. He is vice for finance and administration for the regents.

He told the board that the majority of uncollected debts run in the range of \$400 to \$500 and frequently result from

students walking away from a course after the withdrawal deadline has passed.

The universities already have an enforcement mechanism for debts of \$50 or more. They place a hold on student activities such as enrolling for a new semester and getting transcripts.

The recovery center debts would be for money owed directly to a state university. Student-loan debts wouldn't be covered.

Regent John Bastian of Belle Fourche said he's not a fan of the new sanctions in the recover-center law.

Bastian, a retired circuit judge, said people need their driver licenses to get to work and school. The law doesn't provide for work and school permits.

He said it is especially punitive because of the lack of public transportation in much of South Dakota.

Bastian wondered whether the regents could get more leeway.

"I think we're stuck," he said. "If we can raise it to \$500, maybe we can raise it to \$1,000."

Napa

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Progressive Growth (YAPG), told the *Press & Dakotan* that they're still awaiting a final answer from Dakota Plains officials on whether they'll pursue the grain terminal at that location.

"Land acquisition, setting the district up and getting a long agreement with a short-line railroad company to manage the Napa-Platte rail line — all of these things had to be in place in order for Dakota Plains Ag. to make a decision," Kramer said. "We're waiting for that decision."

Kramer said a decision is expected within the next two

weeks.

He added that the plan is to upgrade Deer Boulevard between Highway 50 and Napa Junction from gravel to an industrial grade road.

"The interstate highways and certain state highways or U.S. highways are what's referred to as 'industrial grade' that they can take very heavy weights," he said. "If you drive around the county and see a lot of roads that have been pounded a lot, a lot of it is because they were never designed for the semis that are on them now."

Woods said this has been a positive development, not only toward getting an anchor tenant at the rail park, but also encouraging other businesses to look at it as well.

"I think it's a great step forward," he said. "I think what's fantastic with this, as well, is it promotes other businesses to get built out there, because if that happens, Dakota Plains will have less of a burden to pay on that repayment if everything goes through as we have planned. It promotes growth out there."

Woods hopes to have the developer's agreement by the end of the year.

Kramer said there would still be a lot of work to be done, even if Dakota Plains commits to the site.

"If this thing moves forward and Dakota Plains announces, then we want to do a feasibility study," he said. "Is this truly a great location for a rail industrial

park? And if it is, then, what are the type of companies that would consider it regionally, nationally and internationally? What else do we have to build on that site to make it more competitive? ... All of this information will be brought back, we hope, in five to six months. Then we'd do a layout of how it would look — is it a 50-acre development, a 200- or a 2,000-acre development that should be developed?"

Other considerations will include the opinions of the current landowners among other steps.

Kramer said he expects to see development on the site as early as next spring.

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office since 1995. He was a violent crime prosecutor until 2009, when he was named first assistant U.S. attorney and tribal liaison. Previously, he was also an assistant U.S. attorney, and he spent 14 years prosecuting violent crime offenses in Indian Country and other areas throughout the state.

South Dakota's senior U.S. senator, John Thune, said he looks "forward to reviewing his nomination and hearing about what he plans to accomplish

should he be confirmed."

Seiler grew up in Herreid and served in the U.S. Air Force, which included a year-long tour in Vietnam. He worked in private practice in Mobridge before becoming a prosecutor and has also served as a member of the Fort Pierre city council.

He graduated from the University of South Dakota School of Law and received a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Nebraska.

tic Bluffs Campus on West 11th Street.

"It will be like a bucket brigade," said Jay Gravholt, director of Media Relations for Avera.

Ekeren added: "The staff is doing a great job in keeping the residents informed of the move."

He noted there is some anxiety, expectations and excitement, but for the most part, the residents are excited. They will go from shared rooms to private rooms.

But it's not only residents and staff who are moving. The current facility houses, a dog, two cats and a fish aquarium. These will add to the two dogs, a cat and three fish tanks at Avera Sister James Care Center.

"The animals are an impor-

tant part of the facility," said Nathan Johnson, Avera communications coordinator.

Avera Sister James Care Center and Avera Yankton Care Center both received the Excellence in Action Award from My Innerview, a national research corporation — the sixth consecutive year.

Tony Erickson, executive director of Senior Services for Avera Sacred Heart, said it demonstrates the quality of care provided to residents by the staff.

When the move is completed, Avera Sister James Care Center will become the largest skilled nursing center in South Dakota and, considering its track record, will continue to be an excellent long-term care facility.

MMC

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ing we have a great, new asset at our disposal."

As an added note, both the hospital and MMC were founded by the Benedictine Sisters at Sacred Heart Monastery in Yankton.

The residents and staff of the 74-bed, Avera Yankton Care Center tentatively plan to move into two neighborhoods that are currently under construction at the Avera Sister James Care Center (Majestic Bluffs Campus).

Ekeren explains that the nursing care services have changed since the hospital purchased the facility in 2000.

"The building has served the 75 employees and residents well over the years, but it has some limitations," he said. "We are responding to family requests and staff input."

Increase skilled nursing, medical equipment, and private rooms are a few areas the new care center will provide.

Ekeren continued, "Based on what I've heard from the staff, the residents are anxious to see the new facility. They have seen the pictures, and some have driven past it."

The move will occur in one day — tentatively set for Dec 1. If you're on the west side of town on the first Tuesday in December, you may see a lot of movement from the current facility on West 8th Street to the Majes-



Lanphear-Peterson

Randee Dell Lanphear and Landon Peterson announce their engagement and upcoming marriage.

The bride-elect is a 2007 graduate of Yankton High School and 2012 graduate of the University of South Dakota with a bachelors of arts. She is currently employed at Mike Durfree State Prison in Springfield, SD.

The groom-elect is a 2005 graduate of Canton High School and is currently employed at Dakota Riggers & Tool Supply, Inc. in Sioux Falls, SD.

The couple is planning a January 29, 2016, wedding in Scottsdale, Arizona. A reception will be held in Yankton on February 13, 2016.