

The Kougars Column Kadoka Area Students

This week, the excitement in the student body is ramping up as we get to host a home playoff football game on Thursday at the Jackson County Stadium in Kadoka. We are proud of our boys' effort, who played a demanding schedule and were rewarded with a tie-breaker; they received a home game in the first round because of the schedule they played. Not only are these boys doing well on the field, but in the classroom, as part of the insistence of our exceptional football coaching staff, they are regular attenders at our Friday tutoring and afterschool tutoring to get their grades up. Every important for any student-athlete is the ability to manage their time and keep their grades acceptable. These athletes have done that and have been rewarded with a run at the playoffs. Congrats boys on your great

work!
Many other high school activities are also going on. The volleyball team will be taking part in a home triangular on Tuesday, one of their last weeks of regular season play. Our girls improved so much this year and have been great role models for all the students and continue to impress as they push to get back to the SoDak 16 and make a bid for the state tournament. Additionally, the next seven days will be the start of a new activity for the Kougars, Oral Interpretation! This year, Mr. Nemecek will head up Kadoka's team as we push to expand the Fine Arts options for our students even more than previously.
Last but not least, we want to recognize the end of our fall middle school sports and activity season. This past week, Mrs. Mansfield's drama class per-

formed their fall play, and what a thespian endeavor it was! Additionally, the Kougars Middle School football team will be finishing their season Tuesday, and the Volleyball team finished their games the past weekend. Thank you to all for the hard work of the students and coaches who make these seasons possible. I very much appreciate the support all activities give to our academic pursuits. Research shows that kids who are active in school extra-curriculars graduate at a higher rate and do better on college entrance exams. We owe these points to the coaches, teachers, and parents that make it possible for the events to exist. As always, thank you for your support of the Kougars.

Robert Lukens
MS/HS Principal
Kadoka Area School

Public Works...

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ties, noting those that violate City ordinances. CES contacts the property owners in effort to resolve the issue and proceeds with enforcement if those efforts fail. The Council requested the CES provide an update each month to the Council at the monthly meetings.

Nathan Riggins, water and sewer department superintendent, provided the departmental report to the Council. He informed the Councils of emergency repairs to fix a broken water line, assessment of the structural integrity of a City water tower and the inspection of the sewer lagoons. He informed the Council of the need to repair sewer lines on Cedar Street. Willert suggested contacting civil engineers Schmucker, Paul, Nohr and Associates, utilized by the City in other water and sewer projects, to determine if a temporary repair would sustain the sewer service until next year. Riggins also noted plans to contact the South Dakota Association of Rural Water Systems for any recommendations or assistance for the City.

In matters relating to streets, Patrick Solon, public works department, informed the Council of the need for gravel on various streets in addition to a gravel stockpile. He noted that some culverts through town have been flushed while others have been replaced. Solon also noted the need for more culverts to replace de-

pleted supplies. Other departmental plans include replacing more stop signs and installing school cross walk signs at various points near the school.

Grillo noted that the City transfer station and rubble site needs an employee to occasionally cover shifts. The City approached Susan Davidson and offered her the position. She declined the paid position but kindly offered to volunteer for her community. Buchholz noted that she requested information from the City's insurance carrier to ensure that Davidson would be protected by insurance in the event of injury.

Jackie Stillwell, Kadoka City bar manager, reported the start of the fall and winter poker games. Plans include a party for Halloween and hopes for a more inclusive hometown Christmas for the community as COVID adversely affected plans for last year.

The newly hired Kadoka Chief of Police, Robert "Rob" Book, addressed the Council, providing the public safety report. He informed the Council that the new office in the annex of the Kadoka city auditorium will be "outstanding." He noted the need to secure some structural aspects of the former City finance office such as replacing hollow core doors with solid ones and the need to acquire a fireproof safe to securely house weapons. Book requested the City provide a laptop computer for the patrol car and update the antiquated office computer and printer, allowing him to access the

state system and other applications utilized by law enforcement agencies. Book asked the Council if they would approve of him approaching the Kadoka Area School to hold a competition to design the departmental patch. Book requested signage for the exterior of the office to which Willert noted the students in vocational classes at the school could create the signage for the exterior. Huffman commented, "that is a great idea." The Council advised Book to contact the KAS to coordinate the competition for the patch and possibly creating the exterior signage. Weller asked Book how he was adjusting to the new position to which Book responded, "it is a steep learning curve."

In closing items on the agenda, Weller provided the Mayor's report and informed the Council that he attended the fall Municipal League conference in Spearfish. He commented, "the bottom line of when you want to do something comes down to where is the money?" Weller concluded, "it comes down to grants and what you want to spend." Recently, the Council voted to adopt ordinances related to planning and zoning, a requirement for most federal grants.

The Council will conduct its monthly meeting at the Kadoka city finance office on Nov. 8 at 7 p.m. The public is invited and encouraged to attend the meetings.

Please refer to the legal notice sections of the classified section of the Kadoka Press for a complete copy of the Kadoka City Council meeting minutes.

Labor Shortage...

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short-handed is putting severe pressure on existing employees and making it hard to retain them, further worsening the labor shortage, said Ryan Brinkerhoff, administrator of the Five Counties Nursing Home in Lemmon, S.D.

"They're tired and getting burned out; their quality of life is being affected," Brinkerhoff said. "I see it in their body language, and just looking at them, you can see the stress because they're always here and they don't get to recharge their batteries like they used to."

The position of evening nurse has been open for nearly a year at Five Counties, a publicly run nursing home with 45 beds that has five open positions in its workforce of about 45 employees.

Brinkerhoff has had to hire temporary nurses from a traveling nursing agency to maintain quality of care. A traveling nurse costs 50% more than a permanent employee and that expense has limited his ability to pay for some needs within the facility.

Brinkerhoff said he worries that the level of care of elderly or ill residents may have already decreased, or will soon, due to the labor shortage. But like other administrators, he has great praise for his staff and is in wonder at how hard they have worked in a crisis to keep residents safe and happy.

"I think in general, patient care has probably suffered," Brinkerhoff said. "But here it hasn't because my staff members are amazing and have stepped up and sacrificed a lot."

The recent pay hikes were needed to compete for workers, but that expense and an increase in overtime and incentive payments to new and existing employees came at a time when fewer people were entering long-term care facilities, according to the state healthcare association.

Some prospective residents found other options as long-term care facilities endured significant COVID-19 outbreaks among residents and staff, while some facilities turned away new residents due to staffing shortages. Facility spending increased to accommodate 192 new patient safety regulations added during the pandemic, according to the South Dakota Association of Healthcare Organizations.

In rural areas, long-term care facilities have a limited pool of available workers and are also facing strong wage and benefit competition from other employers, Brinkerhoff said.

"If you want a job in Lemmon, you can have one tomorrow if you want, including here," he said. "If we have to continually pay higher wages to compete with the local gas station, if they up their wage to \$20 an hour to start, I'll have to compete with that but I'm just not sure how we could."

Openings abundant; workers hard to attract

Jobs in the long-term care industry are available almost anywhere across the state and nation and at every skill level.

"You would be hard-pressed to find a nursing home or assisted-living center in South Dakota that isn't experiencing significant

workforce challenges," wrote Mark B. Deak, executive director of the South Dakota Health Care Association, in an email to News Watch. "Workforce has long been a challenge in long term care, but it is more urgent and severe than ever, as our profession continues to be highly vigilant in protecting our vulnerable residents against COVID."

EmPres Healthcare Management, a Washington state-based firm that operates 82 properties in nine states, is one of many ownership groups offering signing bonuses of up to several thousand dollars for new hires, especially nurses.

On its website, the company lists 80 open jobs at its seven South Dakota facilities, including six openings in Flandreau, seven in Sturgis, nine in Britton, 11 in Mitchell, 13 in Woonsocket, 15 in Rapid City and 19 in Garretson. Jobs range from nursing to cooks to janitorial.

A national survey of long-term care providers, conducted by the American Health Care Association in September, revealed that nursing homes and assisted-living facilities are facing a crisis due to a lack of workforce.

The survey of nearly 1,200 facilities found that 99% of nursing homes and 96% of assisted-care providers were facing a staffing shortage, and that more than half of nursing homes are turning away new residents because they cannot hire enough workers.

The survey also showed that the shortage of workers had gotten worse in the past three months.

Almost every facility surveyed is asking existing employees to work overtime and about two-thirds of the facilities said they feared they could ultimately close if more workers don't apply or accept positions working in long-term care facilities.

The survey revealed that a lack of interest in working in the assisted-living field and pandemic-related extended unemployment benefits were the top two reasons people are not applying to work in the field. Lack of competitive wages, fear of catching COVID-19 and vaccination requirements of employers were other reasons people are not entering the field, the survey revealed.

"The survey reveals the severe workforce challenges long-term care providers are facing due to the COVID-19 pandemic," AHCA CEO Mark Parkinson said in a news release. "Too many facilities are struggling to hire and retain staff that are needed to serve millions of vulnerable residents."

At a daylong hiring event held across the Good Samaritan system on Sept. 15, administrators were able to fill about 110 job openings within the system that includes about 1,100 employees at 19 facilities in South Dakota, Schema said.

"Our approach has been that we want to roll out the red carpet for folks," he said. "We want people to have an awesome experience the moment they touch our website or interact with any Good Samaritan or Sanford employee, and we want them to see this as more of a calling."

The recruiters also highlighted

the fact that 90% of Good Samaritan residents and about 80% of employees are vaccinated, Schema said, further pointing out that Sanford Health will require all employees to be vaccinated by Nov. 1. "There's still a percentage of employees or people out there who are just nervous about covid in general," Schema said. "But we're one of the safest occupations you could have right now."

Schema praised the level of commitment of existing employees in the long-term care industry.

"I'm just so proud of the resiliency and courage our staff has shown," Schema said. "To say it has been a grind is an absolute understatement about what team members have been through these past 18 months. I'm incredibly humbled to have served with them."

Funding model not sustainable for future

Long-term care facilities in South Dakota and across the country run on lean budgets that are funded by a mix of private-pay residents, residents with long-term care insurance and residents on government funding, mainly Medicaid.

South Dakota has a long history of funding the Medicaid program at a low rate compared with almost all other states. Long-term care consumes about 20% of the state's overall Medicaid expenditures, roughly \$185 million a year. The state has made some upward adjustments in recent years in how much it pays long-term care facilities for each Medicaid patient housed each day, yet the state Medicaid reimbursement rate does not come close to covering the cost of housing each Medicaid patient.

According to the state association of health-care organizations, the money long-term care facilities lose each day for each Medicaid patient housed has increased in the past three years, from \$47.14 lost per day in 2019 to \$51.95 lost per day in Fiscal Year 2020-2021.

South Dakota pays long-term care facilities about \$158 per day for each Medicaid patient; for comparison, the rate is \$174 per day in Iowa, \$187 in Wyoming, \$203 in Nebraska, \$211 in Montana and \$270 in Minnesota, according to the association.

In South Dakota in 2020, about 54% of patients in long-term care facilities were on Medicaid, according to state Department of Social Services data.

"We must continue to increase our low Medicaid reimbursement rates to allow for more competitive compensation for caregivers," Deak said.

With limits on how much each individual resident can pay, health-care providers and association officials are increasingly worried about how, or where, elderly South Dakotans will be housed if the state and federal governments do not find a way to provide more financial support to the long-term care industry.

"In order to continue providing the quality care that our elderly and disabled residents expect and deserve, we must provide the necessary resources to our caregivers doing this important work," Deak said.

USDA Now Accepting Grant Applications for Wood Products, Energy

Deputy Agriculture Secretary Dr. Jewel Bronaugh announced today approximately \$13 million in new funding opportunities to support market innovation in wood products and wood energy. The announcement came during a "Leaders for the Built Environment" virtual event and kicks off National Forest Products Week as proclaimed by President Biden. Organized by the Forest Service, Dovetail Partners, WoodWorks and the Softwood Lumber Board, the event aimed to challenge senior leaders from companies in attendance - like Walmart and Microsoft - to explore how mass timber construction can support their climate and sustainability goals.

The USDA Forest Service is now accepting applications for these funds through the 2022 Wood Inno-

ventions Grant Program and the 2022 Community Wood Grant Program. These grants are designed to develop and expand the use of wood products and strengthen emerging wood energy markets that support sustainable forest management/

"The Wood Innovations Grant program has a long track record of success and strengthens and accelerates emerging markets for innovative wood products like mass timber and cross-laminated timber," said Deputy Secretary Bronaugh. "Healthy and productive markets for wood products and wood energy are integral to supporting sustainable forest management and improving the condition of our national forests."

The Community Wood Grant Program helps fund the costs of installing wood energy systems or

building innovative wood product facilities.

The application period for both grant programs closes on Wednesday, January 19, 2022.

Since 2015, the Community Wood and Wood Innovation grant programs have provided more than \$62 million to 288 recipients to support wood products and wood energy projects.

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