

# THOMAS COUNTY Herald

Your Source Of News In The Sandhills

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NO. 11

## Celebrating The Opening of Mormon Canal Bridge



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Gov. Ricketts (podium), NDOT Director Kyle Schneweis (left) and Niobrara Village Board Member Jody Stark (right) at the ceremony to celebrate the opening of the permanent bridge over the Mormon Canal.

Governor Pete Ricketts, the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT), and Niobrara-area community members gathered September 1 to celebrate the opening of the Mormon Canal Bridge at Niobrara. Through the collaborative efforts of NDOT and its partners, the permanent bridge is opening two months ahead of schedule.

"The opening of the Mormon Canal Bridge showcases the resilience and grit of Nebraskans that has helped our state recover from historic flooding in 2019," said Gov. Ricketts. "It took commitment, innovation, and teamwork to rebuild the bridge quickly and to get our Nebraska communities on the road again." The opening of the bridge marks a major milestone since the March 2019 flood event caused significant damage to the approach and girders of the bridge over the Niobrara and completely washed out the bridge over the Mormon Canal. The temporary and permanent reconstruction of Highway 12 is one of the most complex flood recovery projects in the state.

"The community is thankful for the partnerships that made it possible to open both the temporary and the permanent bridge ahead of schedule," said Jody Stark, Niobrara Village Board Member. "Every time we talked, you could tell NDOT and Hawkins were motivated by the

community and actively working to get this bridge open for the people. It was inspiring."

"Teamwork is the theme of the day," said Chris Hawkins, Chief Operating Officer of Hawkins Construction Company. "The trust between NDOT, Hawkins, and our subcontractors allowed us to stay focused, united, and safe throughout the build process."

"Today is an emotional day," said NDOT Director Kyle Schneweis. "We often talk about the importance of partnerships, but opening this bridge two months early is a result of a strong integration of the entire build team and the motivation they felt from the community. Our team, Hawkins, and Benesch wanted to deliver for Nebraska and on an unprecedented project they challenged themselves every day. This partnership, and the support of Joe Werning and the Nebraska Division of the Federal Highway Administration, made it all possible."

On March 13, 2019, the bridge over the Mormon Canal was completely washed out by the historic floods. Less than five months later, on the evening of August 9, 2019, a temporary bridge over the Mormon Canal was opened to traffic.

With the operational temporary bridge and repairs made to the main bridge, NDOT was able to reestablish mobility on Highway 12 over the Niobrara six days ahead of schedule. For the last

year, the single lane temporary bridge and the bridge over the Niobrara were open to one-lane traffic controlled by a traffic signal.

NDOT worked closely with Alfred Benesch & Company to expedite the design of the reconstruction. Hawkins Construction served as the lead contractor on the project. The awarded contract was for \$44,170,911, which covers the Mormon Canal temporary bridge, repairs to the bridge over the Niobrara and roadway, as well as a permanent bridge over the canal.

Several other subcontractors also played a role including:

- United Contractors, Inc., of Johnston, Iowa, temporary bridge installation
- Ames Construction, Inc., of Burnsville, Minnesota, grading contractor
- Contractor Services, Inc., of North Platte, Nebraska, traffic control
- D-K Contracting Corporation, of Beatrice, Nebraska, concrete pavement patching
- Gross Seed Company, of Johnstown, Nebraska, erosion control and seeding
- Iron Works, Inc. of Nebraska City, Nebraska, reinforcing steel installation
- JMN Construction, LLC, of Valley, Nebraska, bridge repair
- Longfellow Foundations, Inc., of Hutchinson, Kansas, installation of

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## Firehall Arboretum Project To Be Completed This Fall

It has been over a year ago since an idea to take a barren section of ground, around the Thedford Fire Hall, and create an aesthetically pleasing, conservation minded space was conceived. The space would provide an educational landscape with trees, shrubs, grasses and wildflowers. To help make the idea a reality, Upper Loup NRD Natural Resources Technician Shane Young, applied for a "Greener Towns" grant and it was awarded in September of 2019. Partners on this project include the Thedford Rural Fire Department, the Village of Thedford, the

Upper Loup NRD, the Nebraska Forest Service, the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum and the Nebraska Environmental Trust.

The second phase, or fall planting, is scheduled for Tuesday September 15th. Upper Loup employees, Green Team members and Forestry employees from the Bessy Nursery will be on hand to plant 30 plus trees, some shrubs and 50 plus pollinator plants. Once the plants are in and mulched, the area will be reseeded with a native grass mix.

If you would like to help with the project it is not

too late! Our open house is tentatively scheduled for the first week in October and we would really like to have most of the hardscape materials in by then. You can help us by either donating or providing monies for any of the following "wish list" items. Bird, bat, or pollinator houses, cement bird baths or heavy outdoor furniture such as benches or picnic tables. If you make a donation or purchase hardscape materials valuing \$200 dollars or more the NRD will provide an engraved sign with either your name, in memory of, or in recognition of.

## Farm Site Security

Smile – You're on Camera!

By: UNMC, Central States Center for Agricultural Safety & Health, Omaha, NE

Emerging technologies such as mapping and artificial intelligence potentially give trespassers and culprits remote access to rural farm sites. If use of these systems results in physical trespass, property and livestock owners can help protect themselves by using camera security systems to capture information and/or alert property owners to unusual activity any time of the day or night.

In recent years, some 75% of farmers have reported trespass or burglary on their property.

Video surveillance is commonly used for remote monitoring, facility protection loss prevention and vandalism deterrence. Some camera systems don't require internet access or power cords.

South Dakota State University Extension Livestock Stewardship Field Specialist and Beef Quality Assurance Coordinator, Heidi Carroll, says a camera system can serve both as a security tool and be used for managing overall farm activities.

"Having motion-activated cameras set up around a barn, entryways to the property or other sites where regular activity occurs can help monitor suspicious or criminal activity," Carroll says. "It can also help identify needs for employee training or the necessity to assist with events such as calving. A simple motion-activated game camera can capture a lot of data. Cameras can be located anywhere on the property where there's regular traffic, animals being transported in or out, or in an area where sick animals can be monitored."

In selecting an appropriate camera system, considerations include reviewing brands especially designed for use in an agricultural setting, whether footage storage is available or necessary, and whether or not a technician is required to install the system. Some brands are capable of monitoring a wide range of the farm site, which saves on purchase costs.

Wireless camera systems are also an option as well as camera systems designed to carry out a specific action if a threat is detected. Some systems



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can be set up to use with an SD (secure digital) card and other systems can be powered with a cellular battery that doesn't require use of the internet or electric power.

Keep in mind that new hires may pose a threat to farm site security. Important hiring practices include thoroughly reviewing applicant materials and taking time to at least briefly research applicants using Internet searches and contacting references. Existing employees may be able to recommend potential hires. Implementing strict supervision and/or on-the-job training for new hires over a set period of time can also help reduce potential for security issues.

Once security measures are in place, it's helpful to discuss the security plan and policies with all family members and employees. Signs posted at entrances can help inform visitors about various policies including biosecurity, visitor and no-trespass policy. All family members and employees should have the direct phone number of managers/owners so they can quickly report any security concerns. They should help keep offices and cabinets locked throughout the farm. Additionally, all family members and employees should assist with maintaining and/or increasing lighting around facilities to help deter intruders.

If engagement with angry or aggressive people is required, be polite. If a protest should occur on your property, do not engage with people. Remain calm and immediately call local authorities. "One way to help main-

tain security is to be aware of what farm information is available electronically on public platforms and monitor social media pages for potential threats," Carroll says. "The goal is to remain transparent about the high-quality care animals receive while being raised for food. Not everyone with interest in where their food comes from can physically visit your farm or ranch. Social media platforms can help provide that information."

Because each farm and ranch site has unique characteristics and needs, an effective security strategy will vary with each individual operation and the tasks they desire to accomplish through use of the equipment. Exploring security options can help identify appropriate equipment for a specific site.

"The Animal Agriculture Alliance offers crisis training, emergency planning and other management resources," Carroll says. "Reaching out to this organization to ask about security measures will be beneficial. Additional resources and training may also be available from state or local livestock associations."

The Animal Agriculture Alliance website: <https://animalagalliance.org>.

Funding for this educational article comes from the Central States Center for Agricultural Safety and Health and the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

## Governor Ricketts, Treasurer Murante Celebrate College Savings Month

Recently, State Treasurer John Murante thanked Governor Pete Ricketts for issuing a proclamation declaring September 'College Savings Month' in Nebraska.

Studies have shown that planning early and having a dedicated savings plan - such as Nebraska's NEST529 account - can dramatically increase a child's chances of achieving the dream of higher education.

The declaration reads, in part, "We recognize the challenges ahead as we strive to make sure that our children have the education, knowledge, and skills needed to excel and to become contributing members of our state's strong, vibrant work-

force."

The declaration continues that it "is in the best interest of the State of Nebraska that access to post-secondary education, including community colleges and technical schools, be available for all our children. Encouraging parents to save for their children's education promotes the public purpose."

"Choice in education helps empower the next generation of Nebraskans to achieve their dreams," said Gov. Ricketts. "College Savings Month highlights the importance of saving and planning ahead, which will help give your kids more options as they pursue the

education or vocational training program of their choice."

"This College Savings Month, as students embark on the next step of their educational journey, we are reminded that their bright futures in higher education are right around the corner and it is wonderful that people are still thinking about their children's future. I am proud to work alongside Governor Ricketts to continually raise awareness and ensure that Nebraska students understand the value of higher education and are encouraged to look for creative and responsible ways to save," Murante said.

## Obituary

• Matthew Schaeffer