

East Campus celebrates four-legged friend, Jonas

By Kristina Jackson | University Communication and Marketing

A beloved member of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's School of Natural Resources celebrated his birthday Feb. 20. Jonas, a certified therapy dog, marked his fourth birthday with a party at Hardin Hall that included balloons — one of his favorite toys — and treats, like his favorite bananas and Nutter Butter cookies.

Kenneth Pyle, student success coach in the School of Natural Resources, and Jonas, his 85-pound labradoodle, joined the department about two years ago, and friends Jonas has made in that time stopped by his party to give him treats or pets. Pyle said he sees every day how Jonas brings some fun and comfort to East Campus.

"It is fun to see people's faces light up," Pyle said.

Jonas came into Pyle's life during the earlier days of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time, Pyle was a seventh-grade science teacher and saw how other therapy dogs benefited students and the community, especially during that stressful time, so he explored getting one himself. Jonas completed therapy dog training through Do-

mesti-Pups.

"Education is what I love, and this was another piece of the puzzle to me," Pyle said.

Jonas is one of three therapy dogs on campus on a regular basis. Pyle takes Jonas to student visits, into the halls of Hardin Hall on test days, and orientation days. Sometimes they visit Big Red Pawp-Up, a monthly event where certified therapy dogs visit Love Library and the Dinsdale Family Learning Commons. Jonas has even visited classes and helped students learn about behavior modifications like learning commands. He is trained to press a button in Pyle's office that says "outside."

Pyle understands that some people aren't comfortable around dogs, especially large dogs like Jonas, and he tries to be aware of that, but many people like just having Jonas in the room, Pyle said. If a new student misses their dog back home or recently lost a pet, they can spend time with Jonas. Some will ask for Jonas to sit next to them outside Pyle's office.

"People talk to each other because he's around," Pyle said. "It brings down barriers in people just to have something to discuss. Some-



Certified therapy dog Jonas attempts to hit a balloon during his fourth birthday party inside Hardin Hall Feb. 20.

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times it takes a while to build a relationship and just having him close really helps."

Pyle said he does have to teach some people the best ways to interact with Jonas. For example, Jonas loves to be chased, but Pyle said he has to be careful that Jonas will then still engage with a person instead of run-

ning away from them.

"People will want to play fetch with him, but he's not really a fetch dog," Pyle said. "His favorite is playing with a balloon like a volleyball. We've had probably 10 to 12 people in here in a circle."

During his time at the University, Jonas has developed lots of friend-

ships on campus, Pyle said. Sometimes he will hear or smell people and want to go greet them. When he sees his favorite people, Jonas' excited response is a kind of "bunny hop." Some students will stop by Pyle's office just to see Jonas.

"They're not here to see me, they're here to see Jonas," Pyle said. "I know

that, and that's great with me."

Dennis Ferraro, a conservation biologist/herpetologist and professor of practice in the School of Natural Resources, is one of Jonas' favorite people on campus and has the same birthday as Jonas.

"He would go home with Dennis in a heartbeat," Pyle said.

Ferraro often shares beef jerky from his lunch with Jonas and sometimes takes Jonas for walks in the Hardin Hall prairie when Pyle is busy. Jonas surprised Ferraro on one of these walks when the normally well-behaved dog chased after a rabbit, pulling Ferraro with him.

"In retrospect, this gave me an improved appreciation for Jonas as a canine, indicating that some of his ancestral wolf DNA still influences his behavior," he said.

Ferraro said Jonas fits perfectly in the School of Natural Resources, where faculty and students embrace relationships with animals and nature.

"It is a very tranquil encounter especially during stressful situations and times," Ferraro said. "For a domesticated canine, Jonas adds a 'natural/wildlife' relief from an indoor human-centric atmosphere."

Truck Thief Apprehended In Thomas County

The Thomas County Sheriff's Office received notification around 7:00 a.m. Wednesday, February 19, of a reported stolen vehicle headed north on HWY-83. Law enforcement officers with the Thomas County Sheriff's Office and Nebraska State Patrol were able to locate the truck near Thedford and make the arrest of Justice White Horse, 22, of Mission, South Dakota. The arrest was made in -19 degree temperatures.

Law enforcement also found a butcher knife with an 8-inch blade in

the truck. White Horse was charged with felony level retaining stolen property greater than \$5,000.00; possession of a deadly weapon during the commission of a felony; and possession of a deadly weapon by a felon. He is currently in the Lincoln County jail with charges in both Thomas County and Lincoln County. Bond was set at \$125,000.

Logan County Sheriff Sean Carson said he had also been notified that the man was heading north on Highway 83 and passed by Stapleton.

White Horse was just out of the state penitentiary in Tecumseh and stole two trucks at the I-80 travel centers east of North Platte in frigid temperatures.

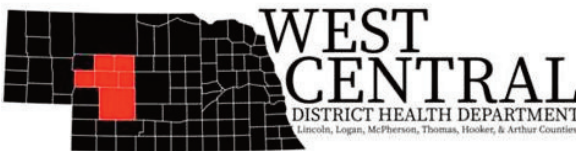
Love's Travel Center called in at 6:00 a.m. to report a 2009 Ford F150 had been stolen as the owner had parked it in front of Subway. The pickup was gone when the owner came out. Police found the pickup across the street parked on the back side of the Flying J Travel Center between two semi-trailers and the keys were missing. A second truck,

a box truck was reported stolen by K & M Tires on the east side of Flying J. Officers used a GPS attached to the box to locate the truck and it was discovered to be northbound on Highway 83.

White Horse had been released from the Tecumseh State Correction Institute on February 17 and had been hitchhiking back to Mission, SD.

Personal items belonging to the first theft victim were recovered.

White Horse had served six months for a burglary in Cherry County.



SAVE THE DATE

Immunization Team Coming To Thomas County

West Central District Health District's immunization team is coming to Thomas County in March.

The team will be at the Thomas County Courthouse in Thedford, Tuesday, March 18, from 12:30 to 2:00 p.m. CT.

Appointments are preferred. You may call 308-221-6831 for more information.

Free radon kits are also available. Services available include:

- Influenza (Flu) Vaccines
- COVID-19 Vaccina-

tions

- Pediatric Immunizations

- Adult Immunizations

- Travel Immunizations

(available upon request)

- Blood Pressure Checks

WCDHD participates in the Vaccines for Adults Program (VFA) and the Vaccines for Children (VFC) programs for those uninsured or underinsured.

Parent/legal guardian must be present for children 18 and younger. Legal guardians must show proof of guardianship.

Village discusses building debris disposal

The Village of Thedford met for a regular monthly meeting Monday, March 3, and topics of discussion included the purchase of the trash truck, and accepting the third readings and adopting Ordinances 2025-1 and 2025-2.

Ordinance 2025-1 is the sexual predator ordinance and Ordinance 2025-2 set water and sewer trash rates.

The board discussed building debris disposal. There is signage at the transfer section directing people to call the maintenance person before disposing of bulk trash.

Robert Mills, maintenance, verified he had not been called about disposal of bulk trash at the transfer station and the clerk verified she had not been notified of the need to dispose of the bulk trash found at the transfer station.

Clerk Ronda Haumann said she had an inquiry about bulk trash disposal in February and she had

informed the caller it would be best for them to get a roll-off for the amount of debris they would have and the person did so.

Patrons are reminded the monthly household trash fee is for household trash only and she reported the owner of the house the bulk building debris came from had not notified her about purchasing the house and an account had not been set up.

Village board members discussed there were 10 of the 11 dumpsters at the transfer station filled with building material. Robert Mills had watched the camera footage and had recordings of trash being dumped and who was dumping it. The owner of the house will be billed \$850.00 for the building debris in the dumpsters at the transfer station.

Full board proceedings of the village's March meeting may be found on page 10 of this issue.

Informational Prescribed Burn Meeting in Stapleton

An informational Prescribed Burn Association meeting has been scheduled for Thursday, March 27 at 6:30 p.m. at the Stapleton Community Center. A meal will be served.

Everyone is welcome to attend and if there is enough interest in forming a prescribed burn as-

sociation in the Stapleton area.

- Prescribed burns help preserve our grasslands by controlling woody encroachment of eastern red cedar and sumac while also providing better forage for cattle.
- Prescribed fire im-

proves wildlife habitat for both game and non-game species, especially when patches of unburned areas are left for nesting and cover.

- Fire encourages the new growth of vegetation, increases the biodiversity of plant species,

can agriculture.

More and more people in our country are becoming disassociated with food production and the process of bringing it from rural farms and ranches to grocery stores and to their tables.

This week our publications salute those involved in not only production agriculture, but the numerous career opportunities involving agriculture in the villages, towns, and cities across our great state.

Included in this issue you will find our annual

'Salute To Agriculture' supplement made possible by area advertisers. We thank them for making this edition possible each year and getting the word out about our number one industry.

Why is it important? The market value of agricultural products sold in 2024 totaled \$29.4 billion. The number of farms in Nebraska has decreased by 4% since 2017, however, there are still nearly 44 million acres of farm land in Nebraska, and the state's average farm size is 989 acres.

National Ag Day: March 18, 2025

National Ag Day's theme "Agriculture: Together We Grow," reminds us the role agriculture plays in not only our state, but in our local communities.

As the world population soars, there is even greater demand for the food, fiber and renewable resources produced in the United States.

That is why it is so important every American understands how food, fiber and renewable resource products are produced and to value the essential role of agricul-

ture in maintaining a strong economy.

Ag Day is one of the ways we can stop and appreciate the role agriculture plays in providing safe, abundant and affordable products.

A few generations ago, most Americans were directly involved in - or had relatives of friends - involved in agricultural-related endeavors.

Today, that is no longer the case. That is why it is so important to join together at the community level and carry the message to promote Ameri-