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Rural Sioux County couple renovates one-room schoolhouse to serve as specialty vacation spot. See ACCENT

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# REVIEW

VOL. 50 NO. 18

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2022

www.nwestiowa.com

BY ALEISA SCHAT ASCHAT@NWESTIOWA.COM

## DESIRE FOR MORE DAYCARE

**S**IOUX CENTER—When Rock Valley resident Carrie Vande Kamp couldn't find adequate child care for her two young children, she took an unprecedented step — she opened her own day care.

Vande Kamp and her husband, who are both 29, have two young children, 3-year-old Adeline and 1-year-old Boston. They are also expecting a baby in January.

Last December, the Vande Kamps pulled their two children from an in-home day care in Rock Valley because they had concerns about their children's safety and well-being. The two parents work full time, and they searched high and low, but they were unable to find another provider.

"We just couldn't get in anywhere," Vande Kamp said. "We have been on waiting lists in centers for years — since I was pregnant with Adeline, and she's 3 now."

### Child care deserts

The Vande Kamps are not alone. Twenty three percent of Iowans live in a child care desert, according to Gov. Kim Reynolds' 2022 Child Care Task Force Report. For rural Iowans, the rate jumps to 35 percent.

An area is considered a child care desert when there are more than three times as

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Kamp Wonder owner Carrie Vande Kamp sits in the playroom with her daughter, Adeline, her son, Boston, and Dexter Rens, all children who attend the new Sioux Center day care. Photo by Aleisa Schat

GREAT NEED FOR MORE ACCESS IN N'WEST IOWA TO VITAL SERVICE



Eldon Hoekstra of Sheldon speaks against carbon dioxide pipelines with Sibley farmer Jim Janssen on Sept. 13 outside the Ninth Street Centre in Sibley. The threat of eminent domain has been a top sticking point for many landowners against proposed CO2 pipelines in the Midwest. Photo by Elijah Helton

## N'West Iowa's pipeline fight spans full year

Timeline: Science, bill, lawsuits, more

BY ELIJAH HELTON  
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REGIONAL—It's been more than a year since the pipeline plots landed in N'West Iowa.

A local legislator tried and failed to get his own party on board. Farmers got a big-city law firm ready for legal action.

Environmentalists and libertarians joined the increasingly strange group of bedfellows. The motley movement against carbon dioxide pipelines is underway.

This is the story so far.

### Genesis

Climate change and its effect on the fuel market is the

See PIPELINE on A7

## Court rules against Sibley-Ocheyedan

District teacher wins case of wrongful termination

BY MARK MAHONEY  
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SIBLEY—The Iowa Supreme Court has ruled a teacher who was terminated from her job at Sibley-Ocheyedan High School in Sibley must be reinstated to

her former position.

According to a 14-page order issued on Oct. 21, the state Supreme Court reversed the Sibley-Ocheyedan School District Board of Education's decision to fire teacher Danna Braaksma.

The Iowa Supreme Court also affirmed the state Court of Appeals' Dec. 15 ruling to reverse the Osceola County District Court's ruling in favor of Sibley-Ocheye-

dan's firing of Braaksma.

In addition, the state Supreme Court's ruling ordered the reinstatement of Braaksma to her former position under the terms of her teaching contract and returned the case to the district court for further proceedings consistent with the high court's ruling.

See RULING on page A14



Anne Wilson is one of the newest acts announced for RiseFest 2023 on June 9-10 in Sheldon. The 20-year-old Christian singer and songwriter recently won New Artist of the Year at the Dove Awards and she has a hit single "My Jesus." Photo submitted

## Anne Wilson added to RiseFest set list

'My Jesus' singer a rising star in genre

BY JUSTIN RUST  
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SHELDON—One of the biggest up-and-coming Christian singers will be making performing at RiseFest 2023.

Anne Wilson, fresh off earning one of the bigger Dove Awards, is one of two acts announced for the two-day

Christian music festival on June 9-10 in Sheldon. Ben Fuller is the other singer announced, bringing the number of acts for RiseFest 2023 to four.

"RiseFest 2023 just keeps getting better and better. Having Ben and Anne join us excites me so much," said Rob Roozeboom, the founder and president of Rise Ministries,

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### WEEKEND WEATHER:

**SATURDAY** HIGH: 68 LOW: 33  
**SUNDAY** HIGH: 64 LOW: 31

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Sioux Center Health  
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## NEWS

# Sioux Center starts new day care amid provider shortage

## DAY CARE

Continued from page A1

many children as licensed or registered child care slots available. In some parts of N'West Iowa, the number is much higher. In 2018, for instance, in one part of Osceola County, there were 18.5 children for every available slot, according to an analysis of U.S. Census and Iowa Department of Human Services data conducted by the Center for American Progress.

Out of options, the Vande Kamps embarked on a tenuous arrangement, taking turns with the kids at home and relying on the help of Carrie's parents.

"My husband was working at the jail in Sioux County at the time, so he was working evenings and overnights," Carrie said. "I would have some days that he was home with the kids, and then the days he couldn't cover and my parents couldn't cover, I would just work from home or bring my kids to the office."

At the time, Carrie was the center coordinator at Behavior Care Specialists in Rock Valley, which provides behavioral therapy services for people on the autism spectrum. She is currently in the process of beginning her own practice, Rise ABA, set to open in Rock Valley next week.

Unlike many Iowans, who do shift work or who do not have the option of flexible work hours or working remotely, Carrie was grateful to have an employer willing to work with her during the period her family lacked child care.

"I told my work, 'I'm sorry, but I'm not going to risk my kids' safety for this job,' and then they were flexible with me, thank God," she said.

At one point during their child care drought, the Vande Kamps received word that Rock Valley's largest day care center, Project Youth day care Center G2, had an open slot for their son, Boston — but there wasn't space for Adeline.

"I asked, 'Well, how long do you think the wait would be?'" Carrie said. "And they said, 'Honestly we probably can't get him in until he's 5.'"

The Vande Kamps were at an impasse. Their existing arrangement wasn't sustainable, and there was little hope of finding care for both their children.

"I said, 'OK, we'll open our own then,'" Carrie said.

### New day care

Early this year, Carrie started looking into the process of becoming a registered provider — a long, paperwork-heavy process overseen by the state. Around that time, Carrie noticed a post on the City of Sioux Center Facebook page.

The city had received a \$88,000

grant from the State of Iowa Future Ready Program, and in partnership with the Sioux Center Day Care Task Force, it planned to use the funds to remodel a city-owned building and make it available to a private operator as a registered in-home day care facility.

"One of the barriers we were hearing from people was that they want to operate a day care, but they don't want to do it in their home," Sioux Center Chamber of Commerce CEO and task force leader Barb Den Herder said.

The decision to prepare a city-owned space for an in-home day care — as opposed to a day care center, which is typically larger and must satisfy more requirements to become licensed — is an innovative one.

"It's a very creative idea," Den Herder said. "I don't think it's been done across the state. It's not the solution — but it's a piece of the solution."

The city was seeking applicants to run the facility, which is located at 419 1st Ave. NE, adjacent to Central Park, and Carrie submitted a business plan and a profit-and-loss statement to the city.

"This was basically my only option — stay at home with them, or just open my own and try to help out some other families, too," Carrie said.

This spring, Carrie found out she had been selected by the city to open the new facility, which once fully operational would have the capacity for two providers and add 16 new child care slots in the community.

### Renovations

The city put Carrie in touch with Iowa Child Care Resource & Referral, which provides support to licensed day care centers and registered in-home providers. She also worked closely with the city to realize her vision for the space during the renovation process.

"They basically let me choose everything, which was super nice," she said.

Remodelling began in June, and along with new flooring and new paint, a number of structural changes were made in the two-level facility, including the removal of walls in the basement, which is now an open playroom.

"When the winters are long and they can't go outside and run, they can just run freely down here," she said, referring to the lower level, a bright space lined with well windows.

Before renovations, the facility had been vacant for some time, according to Sioux Center economic development director Dennis Dokter. Most recently, its basement served as a laboratory for a small biotech business. Originally, however, the building, built in 1989, housed a preschool and day care.



Donna Brown feeds a bottle to 6-month-old Watson in the upstairs playroom of Kamp Wonder, the new day care in Sioux Center created through a partnership between the city and owner Carrie Vande Kamp. Photo by Aleisa Schat



Kamp Wonder, Sioux Center's newest day care, is located near Central Park. It's registered as an in-home day care and it helps fill a need in the town, which has a scarcity of providers for young children. Photo by Aleisa Schat

"So, it's kind of come back full circle," Dokter said.

### Grant funding

The grant money that funded the renovations was awarded through the State of Iowa's Child Care Challenge Fund, which supports regional and community projects to establish local child care facilities and increase the availability of quality, affordable child care for working Iowans.

The first round of Child Care Challenge Fund awards was announced in January, and more than \$35 million in grants were allocated to 108 projects across the state. Along with the City of Sioux Center, Hull Bright Start, Inc. in Hull was awarded funding through the program, and it plans to expand its center to open an additional 46 slots. The center in Hull currently has 99 families on its waitlist.

In Sioux Center, renovations of the city's building were completed just in time for Kamp Wonder's soft opening in early September. Kamp Wonder — the name is a nod to the Vande Kamps' surname — is not yet fully operational, and Carrie is still waiting for the facility's formal approval from the state. For now, Kamp Wonder has one full-time provider, supervisor Donna Brown, who has more than two decades of early childhood experience, and a handful of children, including the Vande Kamps' two kids.

### Staffing challenges

Along with the trials of registration, Carrie said, staffing is the major hurdle. Carrie oversees the back-end of the business, including hiring, and in facing staffing shortages, Kamp Wonder is not alone. Across the country, day care employees have been leaving the profession in record numbers.

"Staffing is the biggest thing — it's so hard to find somebody who's passionate like Donna, somebody who cares," Carrie said.

A national exodus of day care workers was already underway before the pandemic, but the loss of workers accelerated in 2020. By now, most other sectors in the economy have fully rebounded, but the child care sector has lagged behind — only 76 percent of child care service jobs

have been recovered, compared to more than 100 percent of jobs that had been lost in the private sector at large, according to the Center for American Progress.

The reasons for that are complicated, but one major factor is pay.

Along with employees in other care-work professions — historically filled mostly by women — child care workers are some of the lowest-paid workers in the United States. They also are less likely than other workers to have access to benefits through their employer. In a tight labor market, when workers have been asserting their power to demand higher wages and better working conditions, wages for child care workers remain low, and many former members of the profession have been drawn to other jobs.

In response to these challenges, Carrie said she hopes to draw at least one more full-time employee and a couple of part-time employees by offering competitive wages and benefit packages.

"From what I've seen, we pay a little bit more than any of the other local day cares around, so we try to be competitive with that," she said.

Carrie is also committed to creating a healthy work culture for her employees.

"Treating staff well is my big passion — I want to show them they're appreciated, and I want to encourage them to take time off. But you can't show them a good work environment or how they'll be treated until they're actually here," she said, emphasizing that recruitment will continue to be a challenge.

### High demand

Once word got out that a new day care would be opening in town, people started calling the Sioux Center Chamber of Commerce to see if they could get their children on a waitlist.

Den Herder directed callers to Carrie, who added the families to her list, which grew by dozens within weeks.

"I had a lot of people reaching out immediately, and that was without any advertising," Carrie said.

Early this month, Kamp Wonder already had 80 families on its waitlist. When it comes to demand for more child care options, Sioux Center represents a statewide problem in miniature.

According to the governor's office, Iowa has lost 33 percent of its child care businesses in the last five years, costing Iowa close to a billion dollars each year in lost tax revenues and employee absences. Den Herder said the Sioux Center Day Care Task Force has been working to address demand for child care in Sioux Center by encouraging collaboration among local businesses, day care providers and city leaders who are invested in finding creative solutions.

"We had a lot of businesses coming to us saying, 'We're hiring someone, and they accept the position, and then they end up turning it down because they can't find child care,'" Den Herder said.

The task force also heard from business owners with employees who were scrambling to find care for their children because their providers had quit. Sometimes, those employees are unable to find a new

provider, and they are forced to quit their jobs, Den Herder said.

### Sioux Center

To address these concerns, Sioux Center's day care task force was formed in 2019 — a year before the coronavirus pandemic would exacerbate the shortage. The group was appointed after the city administered a survey to assess housing and child care needs in the community.

"We were all talking about the need for more child care options, but there was nobody bringing pieces together," Den Herder said. "We started bringing different players to the table in 2019, and through this conversation, we identified three main things in our community: cost was a barrier, capacity was a barrier and collaboration was a barrier."

Along with issues illuminated by survey data, the work of the task force brought to light situations faced by community members who faced challenges that were not represented in survey responses.

For example, when a representative from Community Health Partners, providers of Sioux County's public-health service, met with the task force, the health worker informed the task force of the plight of third-shift workers, many of them immigrants, who have no option other than to leave their children alone at home unattended overnight.

"We just got a lot of these stories, which I thought was really important as a foundation," Den Herder said. "We knew child care was an issue in our community, but we probably didn't often think about the third shift. How do those children get to school in the mornings?"

### Creative solutions

The day care task force continues to pursue creative solutions to the child care needs in the community, and city manager Scott Wynja said the work of addressing the issue is ongoing. In conversations with local business owners, Wynja has discussed a number of possibilities, including the formation of partnerships between businesses and local child care providers that would create a certain number of guaranteed child care slots for new employees.

"It's a new normal — it's a different business model than we're used to," Wynja said, explaining businesses may have to rethink their traditional benefits packages, which in the future might include incentives related to housing and child care.

"We're seeing a lot of new integrations like this in the workforce," he added.

The largest day care center in town, Apple Tree Early Child Center, is also pioneering a couple of creative solutions to child care issues in the region.

The day care center, originally owned by Sioux Center Health, transitioned to new ownership this summer, and it is affiliated with several other regional providers through the investment group Aftershock Ventures.

One of Apple Tree's new initiatives is offering free child care to its new and current full-time employees who have children.

"We believe we can accomplish two things with this benefit," human resources director Matt Flattery said. "We can offer an incentive to our employees that is truly beneficial, as well as allow many parents to return to work without the added stress of child care costs."

He said more staff members will also open up more child care slots for other members of the community.

Apple Tree also recently began advertising positions for grandparents and other community members to become "paid volunteers," who can sign up to provide care for a few hours or more at the center.

"Whether it's a couple hours a week or twenty hours — we will work with your schedule," the Facebook post reads.

For her part, Carrie hopes to be in a position to open more day care facilities in N'West Iowa in the future.

"As a mom, I just want to help as many families as I can," she said.



Barb Den Herder, CEO of the Sioux Center Chamber of Commerce, leads a city-appointed day-care task force that was formed in 2019 to address child care needs in the county's most populous community. Photo submitted



The kitchen and dining area of Sioux Center's newest day care, Kamp Wonder, is adjacent to the upper-level playroom, where there are toys, educational activities, costumes and a space for kids to play. Photo by Aleisa Schat