



Egg prices have us *SCRAMBLING*

Avian flu not sole reason for skyrocketing costs. See Herds & Plowshares

VOL. 50 NO. 35

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2023

www.nwestiowa.com

Greenhouse, green light for Feenstra Agriculture Tour

Congressman making visits in Farm Bill year

BY ELIJAH HELTON
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SIoux CITY—The Feenstra Agriculture Tour planted its first step Wednesday as N'West Iowa's congressman prepares for this year's Farm Bill.

U.S. Rep. Randy Feenstra visited the Morningside University agriculture department in Sioux City to announce the tour.

"I want meetings like this because I want to know from you what we need in the Farm Bill to unlock trade, conservation and a whole bunch of other issues," Feenstra said.

The Feenstra Agriculture Tour

will have the Republican from Hull travel around Iowa's 4th District, meeting with farmers, producers and other agribusinesses. He said he wants to hear from constituents in his ag-heavy district to inform what industry policy will look like for the next five years.

The Farm Bill is reauthorized. See FEENSTRA on page A5



U.S. Rep. Randy Feenstra tours the Lags Greenhouse on Wednesday at Morningside University in Sioux City. The Republican from Hull spoke about the upcoming Farm Bill and launched the Feenstra Agriculture Tour. Photo by Elijah Helton

HOMELESSNESS & HOUSING

PART 3 OF A SERIES

BY ALEISA SCHAT
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This is the third part in a series of articles about homelessness and housing issues in N'West Iowa. Adequate housing — housing that is accessible, safe and affordable — is more than simply a matter of physical shelter. It is a matter of safety and stability. It also is an important measure of the health of a community.

A broad coalition of nonprofit organizations, social services agencies and city governments in N'West Iowa are working to address issues related to housing and homelessness in the region's communities. This series is highlighting that work — as well as the work that remains to be done.



DOCUMENTARY TO SHED LIGHT ON RENTAL ISSUES

REGIONAL—Maria, a 33-year-old Sioux Center resident who requested she be identified by her first name only, lives in a small basement apartment with her son, who is in elementary school.

The space is spare, but it has the touches of home — toys arranged in cubbies along the wall, colorful crayon drawings and a small kitchen filled with the scent of handmade tortillas.

However, there also are problems. The drop ceiling is caving in at places and shows signs of significant water damage. Despite the two-bedroom apartment's tidiness, Maria has continued to battle cockroaches, and she has ongoing issues with plumbing. After multiple requests to her landlord to address the issue, there is no functioning shower.

"That is how it has been since I moved in," she said through a Spanish-to-English interpreter.

Maria's biggest concern, however, is mold. Her small laundry room regularly floods when the laundry facilities are used in the apartment above, and the sitting water and humidity results in a stench, damage to the floor and the development of mold.

"I am most worried about the mold — because it is not good for my child," she said.

Maria, who moved to Sioux Center See RENTALS on page A6



Maria, a Sioux Center resident originally from Guatemala, warms handmade tortillas on the stove in her kitchen. She has concerns about the conditions in her rental unit. Photos by Aleisa Schat

Culpepper delivers faith, politics talk

About threat of Christian nationalism to country

BY ALEISA SCHAT
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SIoux COUNTY—According to historian Scott Culpepper, one of the greatest threats to American democracy is not an enemy outside the United States, but a movement gaining momentum within.

"Christian nationalism is not a new thing, necessarily, although it is being expressed in some new and very aggressive sorts of ways in recent years that should concern everyone who cares about the future of both freedom and of

faith," he said. Christian nationalism is the belief that the United States is defined by Christianity, and that the government should take active steps to keep it that way.

"This is something that not only threatens our democracy," Culpepper said, "but it poses a threat to the state of the church and spirituality in America."

Culpepper, a professor of history at Dordt University in Sioux Center, was the Feb. 16 featured speaker of the Plain



Culpepper

Conversation series, an educational forum sponsored by the Sioux County Democrats. During the hourlong Facebook Live event, Culpepper delivered a talk titled "Faith and Freedom: A Discussion of Christian Nationalism," which was followed by a question-and-answer session.

"We look for timely topics for our Plain Conversation series, and Christian nationalism has been in the news a lot lately," said Anita Cirulis, chair of the Sioux County Democratic Central Committee. "It was great to have a history professor's perspective on the subject."

See FAITH on page A7



Brenda Blankers blows snow Thursday at her home in Hospers. The week's blizzard added to what is already one of the snowiest winters on record for N'West Iowa. Photo by Elijah Helton

Snowstorm blasts N'West Iowa again

Winter set up to be second snowiest

BY ELIJAH HELTON
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REGIONAL—A historically vengeful winter struck N'West Iowa again Wednesday.

The blizzard, officially named Winter Storm Olive, dumped heaps of snow along with howling winds that gusted over 40 miles per hour,

according to the National Weather Service.

The storm hit N'West Iowa Wednesday morning and continued all the way through the next morning.

Sibley received 11 inches, the most snowfall in the state.

Other cities with specific NWS measurements as of Thursday morning included Rock Rapids with 8 inches;

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WEEKEND WEATHER:

SATURDAY HIGH: 32 LOW: 14
SUNDAY HIGH: 40 LOW: 33

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NEWS

Wednesday snow piles onto winter's historic numbers

STORM

Continued from page A1

Hull, 6; Sheldon, 5; and Orange City 4.5.

Area schools shuttered Wednesday and Thursday, with several having delayed starts Friday, adding to the lengthy number of days missed this year.

Districts already have stretched their academic years past their original calendars given the several snowstorms earlier in the season. The Sibley-Ocheyedan and Sheldon school districts, for example, have eschewed early-out Wednesdays for the rest of the year in addition to adding extra days. The West Sioux School District added 15 minutes to the school days to make up the snow

days.

It is one of the snowiest winters on record.

Through Thursday, the 2022-23 snowfall is tied with 1961-62 for third most. The NWS regional office in Sioux Falls, SD, has recorded 56.4 inches in this season so far.

This winter is all but certain to pass second-place 2009-10, which received 56.6 inches, and stay well behind the record 84.1 inches, set in 1968-69.

Winter Storm Olive canceled or postponed numerous events such as Wednesday postseason games in high school girls basketball, featuring Sibley-Ocheyedan and Central Lyon, which were pushed to Friday.

The Iowa Department of Transportation kept no-travel advisories on



Rodolfo Regalado scoops his driveway Thursday afternoon in Orange City after another major snowstorm came through N'West Iowa the day before. The 2022-23 season will likely finish the snowiest winter on record with 56.4 inches already recorded at the National Weather Service regional office in Sioux Falls, SD. Photo by Elijah Helton

many highways through Thursday morning while state and county authorities pulled snowplows off the roadways until the blizzard died down.

The unusual high snowfall was foreseen by weather experts. In Octo-

ber, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, NWS's parent agency, identified La Nina as the main contributor to a brutal winter. La Nina is marked by cooler waters in the Pacific Ocean and makes for more precipitation across much of

North America.

N'West Iowa did not get a respite from the harsh conditions after the storm as temperatures plunged below zero Thursday evening and remained submerged until midday Friday.

Cultural disconnect leads to misunderstanding with landlords

RENTALS

Continued from page A1

from California in 2014, pays \$725 a month in rent, and her utility bill in the winter often approaches \$300. She works full time, but she said monthly housing costs are difficult for her to afford on her small salary. Along with her son, she supports her 13-year-old daughter living in Guatemala.

There is a sign posted outside Maria's multi-unit property directing Spanish-speaking tenants to call the number of a bilingual go-between, who often communicates directly with the property owner on tenants' behalf. Maria said she has tried unsuccessfully to get her landlord to address these concerns.

"He will say, 'OK, that sounds good,' and then maybe he'll come within a week or two weeks or not at all," she said.

Maria is not alone.

"I do a lot of home visits in Sioux Center and around the county," Orange City resident Kelly Reyes said. "Maria's house and her situation is not an isolated situation. It's unfortunately all too common."

Reyes is a bilingual family support specialist at Community Health Partners, the public health agency of Sioux County. She said some renters in the region pay market-level rent for rentals that are in poor or unsafe condition, and safety issues sometimes go long unaddressed by property owners.

Vulnerable population

Sara Nessa, a special education teacher at MOC-Floyd Valley High School in Orange City, recently co-produced a documentary about poor housing conditions in Sioux County, including the obstacles faced by the county's most vulnerable populations in securing safe and affordable housing.

Nessa has accompanied Reyes on several home visits, and she has seen evidence of poor conditions and safety concerns in the homes of immigrant families.

"They're taking whatever they can find, whatever they can afford. With the conditions and the amount of money that they pay for it — that piece just blew my mind," Nessa said. "I don't know that



Amber Thies and Sara Nessa meet at Brad's Breads and Bakery in Orange City. Thies and Nessa co-produced a documentary "The Truth Behind Our Neighbors' Doors" which discusses poor housing conditions in Sioux County. Photos by Aleisa Schat

"I do a lot of home visits in Sioux Center and around the county.

Maria's house and her situation is not an isolated situation. It's unfortunately all too common.

Kelly Reyes ORANGE CITY RESIDENT

any of the families have ever said this to me, but I very much feel like they're taken advantage of."

"The Truth Behind Our Neighbors' Door" was first screened last November to a crowd of nearly 150 at Trinity Reformed Church in Orange City. Nessa partnered with three social work majors at Northwestern College in Orange City, including senior Amber Thies of Hospers, to produce it.

Maria said she knows she is taking a risk in speaking publicly about her experiences. However, she hopes to raise public awareness about housing issues faced by many N'West Iowa families.

"I live with fear — many people are living with fear," she said. "I don't want to ask too much of the landlord

because I know that if I do, I might be evicted, and in reality, I don't know where else I would go."

Housing conditions

The last article in this series highlighted the issue of unaccompanied migrant children living in the region, facing a variety of interrelated challenges, including housing instability. Unaccompanied children are one example of the way immigration and housing issues intersect in N'West Iowa, but a regional shortage of housing that is high-quality, affordable and safe affects the region's newcomers in particular ways.

Among the four counties in The REVIEW's coverage region, Sioux County saw the sharpest uptick in residents who self-identified as Hispan-

ic/Latino between 2010 and 2020, according to U.S. Census data. Demographic shifts in the county have been the catalyst for a variety of efforts to support new arrivals through lawmaking, newcomer programs in schools and a complex array of social services attuned to the nuances of a new immigrant's situation.

Sioux Center resident Martha Draayer is director of intercultural development at Northwestern College, and she is the founder of Partners in Education, Community Outreach & Embracing Diversity, or PIECE.

PIECE was granted nonprofit status in October, and the organization is exploring the possibility of partnering with the Rev. Deb Rensink, founder of Whispers of Love, Hope & Joy, another regional nonprofit, on a transitional housing project. One vision for the project includes a community of tiny homes for newcomers, victims of domestic violence and others at risk of homelessness. Instead of simply providing temporary or long-term shelter, the community would connect those who live there with necessary services, other members of the community and one another.

"If an immigrant comes to our county, where's the Welcome Wagon? Where do they first land?" Draayer said.

Many new immigrants to the region are grafted into an existing community of other, more established newcomers. Others, like Maria, find themselves living on the margins. Maria has lived in Sioux Center for nearly a decade, and while her son is thriving in the public school, which provides opportunities for social connection and access to important resources, Maria is living in a place where she knows almost no one. Language and cultural barriers — and concerns related to citizenship status — further limit her ability to become part of the social fabric.

"I feel very isolated," she said.

Schools and health agencies provide one crucial point of contact for new arrivals, Draayer said, but securing

adequate housing is a significant obstacle. New arrivals face a tight housing and rental market, where affordable options are scarce. When new immigrants, including unaccompanied children, do find temporary housing with a relative or stranger, those arrangements may be tenuous or provisional. Along with the shortage of available housing units in the region, cultural and language barriers add an extra layer of difficulty.

Draayer has seen the effects of the region's housing crisis up close. In her former role as a bilingual early childhood special education teacher and consultant for the Northwest Area Education Agency, Draayer made regular home visits throughout the region.

"A lot of the houses that we have in the county are in pretty poor shape and pretty poor condition," she said. "I've been into several houses that have had termites and bedbugs and cockroaches, or fridges not working."

"I've been to a house where there's literally a hole in their bathroom floor, and they have little kids. There are leaky roofs, mold — mold is a huge problem."

Misunderstanding

While Nessa and Reyes have seen evidence of ongoing issues going unaddressed by landlords in the county, Draayer said many issues are simply a problem of cultural misunderstanding. On a few occasions, when she has served as a go-between for landlords and Spanish-speaking tenants, the landlords have expressed concern about their tenants' needs, but also frustration about tenants' disregard for some requests, including requests related to the number of people who can safely live in a rental.

"I feel like a lot of it is just cultural and linguistic barriers — that neither party is understanding one another, or where they're coming from," Draayer said.

Differing cultural expectations about where it is appropriate to park a car or how many occupants should fill a single residence can lead to

AT A GLANCE:

What: Screening of "The Truths Behind Our Neighbors' Doors," documentary about housing issues in the region, followed by panel discussion.

When: 7 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 28

Where: Sioux Center Public Library

Admission: Free

tensions between property owners and tenants.

Angela Kroeze-Visser, a former community health planner at Community Health Partners who now is employed as a grant writer at Dordt University in Sioux Center, was part of a group of regional health care providers who administered a Sioux County Community Health Needs Assessment in 2018.

The survey determined that housing needs affected people across the income spectrum, but one priority rose to the top: the need for clear communication between landlords and Spanish-speaking tenants. The group produced a short video intended to help landlords better navigate the cross-cultural dimensions of renting.

"The video seemed like a feasible next step — to say maybe we don't understand each other very well, or understand what the expectations are," Kroeze-Visser said.

Another measure taken by two Sioux County communities — Sioux Center and Orange City — is a rental inspection ordinance. According to the ordinance, landlords, with few exceptions, are required to register with the city, and units are subject to inspection at least every three years. Tenants can request more regular inspections if basic safety concerns go unresolved, and noncompliance leads to a fine for the property owners, who must take steps to rectify problems. The ordinance is enforced by building code official Joel Gonzalez-Sandoval.

"Our building official is bilingual, and that's been really fantastic for us — that has really bridged a little gap and barrier," Sioux Center city manager Scott Wynja said.

Orange City's rental inspection ordinance is still on the books, but it has been subject to ongoing litigation brought by several area renters and landlords who claim the ordinance constitutes a violation of privacy rights.

Kroeze-Visser said addressing housing-related issues systematically — as a community — is the only way to address the acute housing needs faced by many N'West Iowa residents.

"Community need is something that impacts the overall health of the community," she said. "It does have individual impacts, but it also impacts the ability of a community to flourish and to take care of one another."

"We have communities that really do care deeply about being communities that work together. I think that's a value of our communities — and that's the thing that gives me hope."



Maria, a Sioux Center resident originally from Guatemala, goes over some of the problems with her two-bedroom apartment in Sioux Center. Despite many requests to her landlord, her apartment, which she lives in with her son, doesn't have a working shower.