



Outdoor track season finally gets underway.
See **SPORTS** Section C

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Sheldon bank robber's trial June 5

Sutton charged with June 3, 2021, holdup after investigation by FBI

BY JUSTIN RUST
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SHELDON—It took more than a year and a half, but the suspect in a Sheldon bank robbery is in custody awaiting a federal trial.

The June 5 trial date will be nearly two years from when 38-year-old Leon Sutton allegedly robbed Iowa State Bank.

Sutton was arrested Feb. 7 in Calumet City, Ill., which

is a suburb south of Chicago.

He was charged with one count of bank robbery by force or violence and one count of violent crime/drugs/machine gun by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, according to documents filed with the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Iowa based in Sioux City. The FBI took over the case from the Sheldon Police Department the day of the bank robbery.

The criminal complaint filed by FBI special agent Samuel Roberts in federal court outlined the case:

At about noon Thursday, June 3, 2021, a black male

See **ROBBERY** on page A8



Excavators install PVC pipe between Beresford, SD, and Sioux Center in 2020. The pipeline has been completed, and water from the Lewis & Clark Rural Water System started flowing to Sioux Center on Tuesday. Photo submitted

Water finally flows into Sioux Center

Town waited 33 years for Lewis & Clark H2O

REGIONAL—Water from the Lewis & Clark Rural Water System finally started flowing to Sioux Center on Tuesday and to Hull on Wednesday.

The communities are the 16th and 17th members to be connected to the tristate system.

"This is a huge milestone for both communities to finally be connected," said Sioux Center Utilities manager

Murray Hulstein, who also chairs the Lewis & Clark board of directors.

Lewis & Clark's articles of incorporation were signed on Jan. 29, 1990, so Sioux Center waited 12,119 days to get water and one day more for Hull.

"It took far longer than anyone imagined when the project was started, but it is well worth the wait," Hulstein said. "The water will ensure continued future growth and expanded economic development

See **WATER** on page A12



A screening of "The Truth Behind Our Neighbors' Door," a documentary about the regional housing crisis, took place at the Sioux Center Public Library on Feb. 28. Crime victims are among those who face barriers to housing access in N'West Iowa. Photo by Aleisa Schat

PART 4 OF A SERIES

HOMELESSNESS & HOUSING

BY ALEISA SCHAT ASCHAT@NWESTIOWA.COM

This is the fourth 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.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS HAVE FEW PLACES TO GO

REGIONAL—Amy, who requested her real name not be used to protect her identity, recently fled from a violent situation in her home. With her three young children in tow, and nowhere else to go, she moved into a hotel room in Sheldon.

"The kids and I stayed at the hotel — he wouldn't let me take anything but a basket of my laundry and some of the kids' stuff. That

was it," she said.

Amy is still married, but only her husband's name is on the deed of their home.

"I called the police and asked them if I could go there — to get my stuff and get things for the kids, and they said, 'Well, if he says, 'No,' to anything, you'd have to go to court and get

See **HOMELESS** on page A7

West Lyon wins second straight state jazz title

Okoboji second again in Class 2A competition

BY ALEISA SCHAT
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AMES—Six N'West Iowa high school jazz bands performed at the Iowa Jazz Championships on Tuesday in Ames, and three of them claimed a top-two finish.

West Lyon won the Class 2A title, the highest finish of the three.

"The students went out there and had fun," said first-year West Lyon director Jade Bolin. "We had been working on improvisation solos for the past couple of weeks, and during prelims, they had their best solos I had ever heard. You could really tell that they were playing with their hearts and not worried about winning."

The Iowa Jazz Championships are divided into preliminary and final rounds, with the top two bands in each class advancing to the finals.

This year's top finish represents back-to-back wins for the West Lyon High School jazz band, which took home first last year, too, under the direction of the band's previous director, Drew Balta.

See **JAZZ** on page A9



West Lyon High School junior baritone sax player Miguel Hernandez tears up a jazz solo during a performance at the Iowa Jazz Championships in Ames on Tuesday. Photo submitted

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INSIDE:

Church B4 People..... B5-6
Classifieds... B7-11 Sports..... C1-8
Opinion..... A10-11 TV..... C9

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NEWS

Victims of domestic violence face housing crisis

HOMELESS

Continued from page A1

your stuff.' And it's like, 'OK, well, I don't have the money for that.' So, it's just difficult."

Amy, who has variable work hours, makes \$300-\$500 a week.

Her children are 1, 3 and 11 years old — her eldest is from a previous relationship — and at the end of last year, the four of them moved into the tiny space. Together, they tried to create the rhythms of home in a room with a coffeepot and one bed.

"It was a king bed, but you know, it was very stressful," Amy said. "I was losing my mind."

"You were juggling a lot of stuff in that small hotel room," Pastor Deb Rensink said.

Rensink is the founder of Sioux Center-based Whispers of Love, Hope & Joy, a faith-based ministry and nonprofit that comes alongside victims and survivors of domestic violence from across the region to support them in a variety of ways — many of them abundantly practical.

Amy, unsure where to turn when she fled with her kids, turned to Rensink, who came alongside her to help her navigate the obstacles to establishing a new and stable home of her own.

Domestic violence

Amy is among the more than 10 million adults who experience intimate partner violence every year, according to a statistic reported by the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Along with physical violence, Amy has been subject to verbal violence, controlling behavior and emotional manipulation, and like many domestic violence victims, she also was the victim of financial abuse, a method used by many perpetrators to control their victims.

"I was on his phone plan, and he'd shut it off," she said. "I didn't have a car at the time — my car was not working — so then I was dependent on his car. And then, you know, he would get mad, and I can't use his car."

Even though Amy was her family's primary earner, she did not have control of her finances, and without access to savings or any other assets, living in a hotel proved to be unsustainable. With no other viable options, Amy and her two younger children returned to live with her husband. Her eldest is living elsewhere temporarily.

The primary catalyst for her return, Amy said, was simple — she had nowhere else to go.

Given her relatively low wages, monthly rents in Sheldon are too high for Amy to afford. When she applied for low-income housing, she discovered an eviction filing on her record that she was not aware of.

"That was one of the barriers that came up for you," Rensink said.

According to Rensink, barriers related to housing are chief among the obstacles faced by crime victims, a disproportionate number of whom are women.

Five years ago, Amy had been living with a roommate, and unbeknownst to her, an eviction filing identified her as a tenant responsible for nonpayment. Amy said she did not fail to pay rent to her roommate, but due to the filing on her record, Amy's application was denied.

The 24-unit income-based apartment complex, which has a playground on site, is not an option for her and her children.

"I didn't have any idea that went on my record five years ago, and it's going to be like two years until it's off," Amy said.

An eviction — fair or not — stays on a person's record for up to seven years, unless it is contested and removed, making it difficult, and in many cases impossible, to obtain a lease on a rental property.

According to Stefanie Behrens, housing and economic development



Interim executive director Jessica Rohrs and housing and economic coordinator Stefanie Behrens stand in the office of Family Crisis Centers in Sioux Center. The organization provides homelessness and housing services to 10 Iowa counties and crime victims services to 17 counties. Photo by Aleisa Schat

NEXT IN THE SERIES:

In Sioux Center and other N'West Iowa communities, the situation faced by crime victims is complex, and it is often dire.

However, a regional constellation of entities exists to address needs related to housing and homelessness, including public agencies and nonprofit organizations equipped to intervene when housing issues intersect with victimhood and crime.

In many cases, those entities work together in partnership, or through a system of referrals, to address the complex situations presented by each person seeking services.

The fifth and final installment of this series will explore the multifaceted — and often innovative — strategies a handful of regional organizations are using to address the housing crisis faced by many crime victims who are living in the region.

coordinator for Family Crisis Centers based in Sioux Center, the record of a past eviction can trap families in a cycle of economic hardship — and it can keep victims from escaping violent situations.

Along with making it more difficult for victims to leave for good, evictions are sometimes caused by domestic violence in the first place — a survivor may be unable to continue to pay the rent for an apartment they've left to escape a violent situation, Behrens said.

Legislative efforts

"If somebody was given eviction notice, and they went to court, and that eviction was cleared, it still is on their record that their landlord took them to court for an eviction status," Behrens said.

Once a record is tainted by an eviction filing, it is difficult to find a landlord willing to accept that prospective renter's application.

Inflexible lease agreements pose another problem for crime victims, making it difficult to leave without penalty.

Recently, two bills designed to alleviate housing-related hurdles for crime victims advanced with bipartisan support in the Iowa Legislature, only to fail to survive the second round on March 31. As of last week, House files 548 and 547 are effectively dead in their respective committees.

House File 548, a proposed eviction expungement bill, was designed to seal eviction filings if a tenant is found to be not guilty. It also would have allowed a tenant evicted for nonpayment of rent to petition for the court to seal the record if the tenant has no more evictions for nonpayment of rent on record for five years.

"Sometimes, we have our clients that we're working with, and they're seeking new rentals, and that would be on their record. We're trying to get that expunged from their record, because it does disproportionately impact victims of violence and their chance at getting to safety," Behrens said.

House File 547, an early lease termination bill, passed unanimously

in the Iowa House (94-0) and moved on to the Iowa Senate. However, that bill also died in committee. House File 547 would have made provisions for violent crime victims to terminate a lease early if they provided their landlords written notice and documentation of harm.

Sometimes, Behrens said, she works with crime victims who need to get out of a lease early because their life or safety is at risk, and early lease termination would allow them to escape without continuing to pay rent until the lease expires.

"Because now their home is not safe — their abuser is stalking, harassing, and they need to get out of a lease," she said.

If they are not able to get out of their lease, the financial burden of paying for two rentals is likely to prove insurmountable.

"And it leads to an eviction," Behrens said.

And just like that, the housing-barrier cycle continues.

Multiple barriers

For victims of intimate partner violence, the barriers to leaving are multiple, and many victims experience them as immovable — at least at first, according to interim Family Crisis Centers executive director Jessica Rohrs. Along with the practical obstacles to leaving, there are emotional and psychological barriers, too, which are endemic to many abusive relationships.

"There were like three times I left and then crawled back," Amy said.

While she was able to identify clear patterns of abuse, in the next breath, Amy continued to question whether she might be partly to blame for the abuse she has experienced.

"He also made me feel like it was my fault, and sometimes I still struggle with that," she said.

Rohrs said many women choose not to leave their abusers because the obstacles are simply too overwhelming.

"Whether those obstacles can be overcome or not," Rohrs said. "Sometimes, it's just because they've been told that by their abuser, day in and day out, multiple times a day. If your abuser isn't allowing you to have a

job or really get out of the home, you don't really have anyone who's counteracting that and saying, 'No, it's possible. Help is here for you.'"

In many cases, a perpetrator alternates between violent and controlling behavior and apologetic pleas and promises to change, a strategy of manipulation that can disorient victims, appealing to the love and empathy they continue to feel for their abusers.

"This time, I left for three months before I moved back," Amy said. "So, it was longer than the other times. The first time, it was two weeks or three weeks. The second time was like a month. And now this time, it was three months."

When a victim does leave, Rohrs said, the situation doesn't necessarily get better, and often, that is when the abuse escalates.

"Especially if people have children with each other, domestic violence doesn't just stop the minute somebody leaves. Potentially, it even gets worse once they leave," Rohrs said. "That's a misconception that I think a lot of people have. 'Well, you got out. So, now it's over.'"

At that point, securing safe and stable housing is crucial.

Safe, affordable housing

Once a victim decides to leave an abusive situation, one of the most significant hurdles to overcome is securing safe and affordable housing. At that point, financial barriers and eviction records come into play, but the difficulty only is amplified by the regional housing shortage, according to Behrens.

Securing safe and affordable housing in N'West Iowa is no easy feat.

"There is nothing" — that is the phrase we hear so often," Behrens said during a panel discussion about issues related to housing that took place at the Sioux Center Public Library in late February.

"It should be easier," she added.

Behrens was joined by a group of local panelists, including two city officials, who took questions from the crowd following a screening of the documentary featured in a previous installment in this series, "The Truth Behind Our Neighbors' Door." That is true of Amy's experience — for her, the affordable housing shortage is no small barrier.

On top of the financial barriers she faces, and the eviction filing on her record, Amy, like many victims, is caught in the cycle of leaving and returning.

Still, despite her ambivalence, Amy is quick to reply when asked, "If someone said, 'Here is a pleasant, spacious apartment that you can afford, would you leave right now, and take your kids?'"

"Yes," she said. "Change is scary — but mostly, it's the housing situation. If I would have been able to find a place, I would have probably not

been back."

Housing shortage

In N'West Iowa, a broad survey of city and county administrators, community development directors and directors of social service agencies conducted by The REVIEW confirmed Behrens' assessment: There is a regionwide housing shortage, with the highest level of need concentrated in the "affordable" category.

"The biggest crisis is there's no room," Julie De Ruyter said.

De Ruyter is the executive director of the Rock Rapids Municipal Housing Agency, and she oversees 36 income-based units on behalf of the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

"We just don't have any room for them. I have no open units," she said. "That's probably the biggest challenge there is."

When it comes to situations that involve domestic violence, a lack of available housing can be a life-or-death situation.

"It is the victims who leave the situation," Rensink said. "They are the ones that become homeless because they are the ones who are fleeing — and the perp gets to stay."

Homelessness in N'West Iowa is less visible than it is in many urban areas.

"Let's say that the victim flees and gets out. Sometimes, they live in their car. Sometimes, they hop couches — they find a family member and/or a friend," Rensink said.

Often, they have their young children along with them, exacerbating the stress of an unstable situation.

"Homelessness keeps the victim in a violent situation — in danger, in emotional distress, in continual crisis and continual need to feel like, 'I need to survive.' So, it's not healthy," Rensink said.

Victims of domestic abuse or assault, in part because of their situation, often have low credit scores and a lack of savings, and even when rental assistance is available, whether through a public housing authority or an organization like Family Crisis Centers, the cost of renting an apartment — especially in a market like Sioux Center's — still puts many apartments out of reach.

"It's wonderful we have new apartment complexes coming up, but affordable they are not," Behrens said during the February panel discussion.

Many Sioux Center rentals run more than \$400 a month, before factoring in the cost of utilities, and for crime victims, many of whom are single parents, that is not financially feasible.

"Often, they have to find something out of Sioux Center or Sioux County," Behrens said during the panel discussion. "It can be a 12-month wait or more to get something in Sioux Center."

LAW & ORDER

THREE ARRESTED AFTER SHELDON DRUG SEARCH

SHELDON—Three Sheldon residents were arrested on drug-related charges following the execution of a search warrant by the Sheldon Police Department about 8:50 a.m. Tuesday, April 4, at an apartment at 215 Eighth St.

Thirty-five-year-old David Nok Wallinga was charged with first-offense possession of a controlled substance — methamphetamine, first-offense possession of a controlled substance — marijuana, possession of drug paraphernalia, gathering where controlled substances are used and unlawful possession of prescription drugs.

Forty-one-year-old Sarah Lynn Goodwin was charged with first-offense possession of a controlled substance — methamphetamine, first-offense possession of a controlled substance — marijuana, possession of drug paraphernalia, gathering where controlled substances are used.

Twenty-eight-year-old Thomas James Stephens was charged

first-offense possession of a controlled substance — marijuana, possession of drug paraphernalia and gathering where controlled substances are used.

The search warrant stemmed from a report of the smell of burning marijuana at the apartment the previous day, according to court documents.

Among the items found during the search were methamphetamine, marijuana, a THC wax container, pipes, vaping devices, a tooter straw, and gabapentin prescription pills wrapped in a plastic bag.

SANBORN TEEN JAILED FOR PARAPHERNALIA

SANBORN—A Sanborn resident was arrested about 8 p.m. Tuesday, April 4, the day of his 18th birthday, on a charge of possession of drug paraphernalia.

The arrest of Jesse Taylor Eldridge stemmed from him being found in possession of drug paraphernalia at his residence at 501 Sibley St. in Sanborn, accord-

ing to the O'Brien County Sheriff's Office.

BOYDEN TEEN CHARGED FOR THEFT AT WALMART

SIOUX CENTER—An 18-year-old Boyden resident was arrested Sunday, April 2, on a charge of second-degree theft.

The arrest of Sharon Cristal Tello Garcia stemmed from incidents at Walmart in Sioux Center, according to the Sioux Center Police Department.

Tello Garcia was witnessed by Walmart asset protection employees, and caught on video, under-ringing and not scanning merchandise while she shopped several times Jan. 23-March 11 at the store.

Asset protection employees provided receipts totaling about \$1,965 worth of stolen merchandise.

Asset protection employees reported they stopped looking at receipts prior to 2023 but think Tello Garcia also stole merchandise in 2022.

The asset protection employees provided a written statement from Tello Garcia in which she admitted she took things from the store without paying for them.

She estimated she took \$5,000-\$6,000 worth of merchandise, according to the criminal complaint filed in Sioux County District Court.

WORTHINGTON DRIVER JAILED ON OWI CHARGE

ROCK RAPIDS—A 37-year-old Worthington, MN, man was arrested about 11:30 p.m. Saturday, April 1, in Rock Rapids on a charge of first-offense operating while under the influence.

The arrest of Miguel Angel Rivera stemmed from the stop of an eastbound 2009 Chevrolet Silverado traveling down the middle of Highway 9, according to the Iowa State Patrol.

Rivera had bloodshot/watery eyes, impaired balance and the odor of an alcoholic beverage and failed field sobriety tests.

He admitted to drinking four

beers, according to the incident report.

PRIDE RESIDENT JAILED FOR HITTING ANOTHER

PRINGHAR—A resident of the Pride Group facility east of Pringhar was arrested about 4:15 p.m. Monday, April 3, on a charge of assault causing bodily injury or mental illness.

The arrest of 26-year-old William Matthew Parker stemmed from him striking another male resident with his fist on three separate occasions, according to the O'Brien County Sheriff's Office.

The first strike hit the other man in the ear, causing bleeding and pain.

Parker walked off and then returned to strike the man in the face on the cheekbone, causing near immediate bruising.

Parker left again and then came back again to strike the man a third time in the face.

The other man was transported by private vehicle to MercyOne Pringhar Medical Center for his

injuries.

Parker admitted to striking the other man due to his anger and a comment the other man stated about past crimes the man may have committed, according to the incident report.

SIOUX CITY MAN JAILED ON THIRD OWI CHARGE

SHELDON—A 34-year-old Sioux City man was arrested about 2:35 a.m. Tuesday, April 4, in Sheldon on charges of third-offense operating while under the influence, operating a motor vehicle without a required ignition interlock device and no valid driver's license.

The arrest of Jesse Alan Boger stemmed from the stop of a 1997 Chevrolet Lumina on Highway 18 near 100 Crossroads Drive in Sheldon, according to the O'Brien County Sheriff's Office.

Boger had bloodshot/watery eyes, impaired balance, slurred speech and the odor of an alcoholic beverage, according to the incident report.