

UNPACKING THE RISE OF ACADEMIC STRESS

IN TODAY'S STUDENTS

"WE NEED TO FOCUS ON EDUCATING YOUNG PEOPLE WITH KINGDOM PURPOSE" SEE SECTION F

THE N'WEST IOWA

REVIEW

VOL. 50 NO. 42

SATURDAY, APRIL 15, 2023

www.nwestiowa.com



An architect's rendering shows what the new Fareway grocery store in Hull will look like. Fareway Stores announced plans to construct an approximately 10,600-square-foot building at the southwest corner of Highway 18 and Division Street. The store has a tentative opening date of spring 2024. Image submitted

Fareway unveils plan for Hull supermarket

Town has been without grocery store since 2021

HULL—Fareway Stores announced plans this week to construct an approximately 10,600-square-foot store at the southwest corner of Highway 18 and Division Street in Hull.

Construction is planned to begin in late summer, with a tentative opening in the spring of 2024.

"Communities depend on a local grocer to offer high quality products and unmatched service and help keep communities vibrant," said Fareway CEO Reynolds Cramer. "We look forward to serving area residents of Hull and want to thank city staff and community leaders for helping make this project possible."

The new store will provide for "only the best in fresh, highest quality meat; a

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HOMELESSNESS & HOUSING

PART 5 OF A SERIES

BY ALEISA SCHAT ASCHAT@NWESTIOWA.COM



This is the fifth 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.

REGIONAL—Betty, who requested her last name not be used to protect her identity, was 84 years old when she finally left. Her husband had threatened to take her phone and her keys, but she got in her car and drove away from the Sheldon home where she had spent more than 60 years of a 66-year marriage and raised six children. Betty is now 87, and she is forging a new life on her own. However, the day she left in August of 2020, she had only the clothes she was wearing and her

phone. She drove straight to Sanford Sheldon Medical Center. "I was told by the doctors and all the people that work there that hospitals are safe places — they're safe places you can go and something is going on," Betty said. "That's why I went." She experienced decades of emotional and financial abuse, and those patterns only worsened over time. Still, she stayed.

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Pastor Deb Rensink stands at the new entrance to Shop Church, a worship service for domestic violence survivors and others that takes place at the Sandy Hollow Clubhouse. The church outgrew its original machine shed. Photo by Aleisa Schat



AREA SERVICES TRY TO PROVIDE SAFETY, STABILITY AND HEALING

Osceola system feels 'singled out'

Faces restriction after river was dry

BY JARED STRONG IOWA CAPITAL DISPATCH

MAY CITY—A rural water utility in N'West Iowa wants to relax its state-mandated reporting requirements despite regulators' finding it contributed to a river running dry last year.

"We're done being bullied,"

said Doug Westerman, general manager of the Osceola County Rural Water System. "We're done being pushed around."

A two-mile segment of the Ocheyedan River had no water near May City starting in September. Melting snow has since recharged it.

The fall dryout killed a large number of fish and

See RIVER on page A9



A section of the Ocheyedan River was dry for months in 2022. Melting snow has since recharged it. Osceola County Rural Water System wants the restrictions imposed due to the dry river lifted. Photo by Ed Jones

Spring turkey season afoot

Time to gobble up hunting tags

BY ERIC HARROLD EHARROLD@NWESTIOWA.COM

REGIONAL—A ride through wooded countryside at daybreak will reveal that turkey season is underway as gobblers and strutting male turkeys with fanned tails add to the vibrancy of the spring landscape.

Iowa's spring turkey hunting began April 7 with a youth-only season, followed by four shorter individual gun/bow seasons and one long archery-only season.

The 2023 Iowa spring

turkey seasons for combination gun/bow licenses are:

- Youth: April 7-9.
- Season 1: April 10-13.
- Season 2: April 14-18.
- Season 3: April 19-25.
- Season 4: April 26-May 14.
- Resident archery-only season: April 10-May 14.

Chris Larue, wildlife management biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources in Spirit Lake, offered some helpful tips and safety advice for those venturing out into the woods this spring with

See HUNT on A9

WEEKEND WEATHER:

SATURDAY
HIGH: 44
LOW: 32
CHANCE OF PREC: 80%/20%



SUNDAY
HIGH: 46
LOW: 29
CHANCE OF PREC: 30%/20%

SHELDON, IOWA



\$1.75

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ROOMS AVAILABLE - NO WAIT LIST

NEWS

Safety, stability, healing offered by area services

HOMELESS

Continued from page A8

"How do you leave with six kids? You have no money — nothing at all. You have so much responsibility," Betty said. "How do you leave? You don't. My thinking always was there was hope. But the longer we lived together, the worse it got. So, I knew there wasn't much hope. But I knew there was hope in God."

Her urgency to leave was compounded by a serious medical condition — asthma — which had been exacerbated by the decades she spent living in a large home with a wood-burning fireplace. There was smoke residue in the walls and furniture, and her doctors advised her to leave or face the health consequences.

"I was getting so ill — I could have died. That last year, my doctors told me, 'Betty, either get out, or you will be on oxygen 24/7 — or you might die,'" she said. "And I chose life."

Choosing life meant facing the obstacles that confront many domestic violence victims. The first and most pressing question when Betty left her home with next to nothing was: Where would she go?

After showing up at the hospital, she was referred to the emergency shelter then operated by Family Crisis Centers in Sioux Center.

That shelter has since closed, replaced with a new model for providing housing services to crime victims, but Betty spent three months in the facility, regaining her footing.

"When I moved into that place, all I had was my clothes because he had threatened me with that for years — if I left, I would just have my clothes," Betty said.

"You left, and then essentially became homeless," Pastor Deb Rensink said.

Rensink is the founder of the faith-based organization Whispers of Love, Hope & Joy, based in Sioux Center. Whispers comes alongside victims and survivors of domestic violence to help them address their practical, emotional and spiritual needs.

Rensink came alongside Betty.

A restraining order was put in place by the court to protect Betty from her husband, and she was granted permission by the court to enter her home and get her clothing several days after she left. She was accompanied by a member of the Sheldon Police Department.

"My legs were shaking so bad," she said. "I was worried he would come home."

Betty is slender, with close-cropped hair, and she has a penchant for wearing funky patterns and jewelry. She is quick to laugh, and she regularly uses phrases like, "Jesus, take the wheel." That day, however, she was terrified.

Once Betty was living at the shelter, she was referred to Rensink.

"I went to the safe house,

and the second day I was there, Pastor Deb walked through the door, and I said, 'God just sent me an angel' — and He certainly did, because she has been there for me every day," Betty said.

Betty started rebuilding her life. She moved into an apartment in Sheldon to remain close to an ailing friend who died earlier this year. Eventually, the arrangement became unsustainable — Betty is living on a fixed income, supplemented by a small and shrinking amount of savings from a settlement with her husband.

"The Sheldon apartment complex where she lived didn't accept Section 8," Rensink said.

Unable to use a housing voucher to help her cover her rent, Betty applied for low-income housing in Sioux Center. Rensink helped her navigate the complicated application process.

"They said, 'She's number two on the list, so it could be three to six months,'" Rensink said. "There's a lot of waiting involved — a lot of waiting."

In Iowa, there are only 40 available rental units for every 100 extremely low-income renter households, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition. Low-income renter households have incomes at or below either the federal poverty guideline or 30 percent of their area median income, whichever is greater.

Eventually, Betty's name came up next on the eligibility list for openings, and this month, she moved to Sioux Center. The move put her nearer to Rensink and nearer to Shop Church, a bimonthly worship service that takes place at the Sandy Hollow Country Club near Sioux Center. The service is led by Rensink, and the gathering includes domestic violence survivors and supportive members of the community.

"She's our oldest person at Shop Church — and you are spunky at Shop Church, I just have to say," Rensink said.

"I love to laugh," Betty said. "I always said, 'There were two things he couldn't steal from me, and that was my faith and my laughter.'"

"You hear that resilience in her?" Rensink said.

"You can lose a lot of things when you're in a situation like that — those are two things I was not willing to give up," Betty said.

Betty said it is because of her Christian faith that she finally was able to take the brave, disorienting step toward freedom from abuse.

"God carried me out that day," she said. "He just put his arms around me, and away we went."

Services

According to Rensink, domestic violence knows no categories — women of all demographics are among the ranks of victims and survivors. However, she said, despite the barriers they face, there are



Dordt University senior Erin DeJong participates in a planning meeting with executive director Becky Erdmann and Northwestern College senior Ruth Chalstrom at Genesis House in Orange City. Genesis House supports women and children who are affected by domestic violence. It is partly run by volunteers, including a number of the college students in the area. Photo by Aleisa Schat

reasons to hope.

Betty is one woman of many in the region who have faced a primary obstacle — securing housing — after leaving a violent situation in their homes. Betty's case represents in miniature the complex apparatus that exists to address the homelessness and housing instability faced by victims of domestic violence and other crimes who are living in N'West Iowa.

The following are three regional service providers that work separately — or in tandem, through referrals — to address the housing crisis facing crime victims. They use a variety of different approaches, but the goal is the same: safety, stability and, ultimately, healing.

Rapid Rehousing

Early in the history of Family Crisis Centers, establishing an emergency shelter for victims of domestic violence was a top priority.

"Our agency invested in that greatly," said FCC's housing and economic development coordinator Stefanie Behrens. "We had a beautiful building — it was state of the art."

Eventually, however, the prevailing wisdom about how best to provide housing services to crime victims began to shift.

"All the research that was done said that this is not an effective method of providing services, and they said, 'We're finding that it's almost traumatizing for people to be in that emergency housing setting, and their recovery is not as successful.'"

Instead of providing emergency shelter to victims until they were "housing ready," the priority at FCC became "housing first."

"They found 'housing ready' to not be what people needed. They needed housing first," Behrens said. "So, before you even get a job, income, all of those things, everybody is ready for their own housing."

In 2014, FCC transitioned to a Rapid Rehousing model, which helps establish emergency and transitional housing in a community of the victim's choice.

"In the short term, our victim services said, 'Don't invest in the place. Invest in the people.' And so that's what we started to do," Behrens said.

It shifted its model to invest-

ing in people, not places, but FCC does continue to own two homes in Sioux Center that can be used for emergency housing.

Interim executive director Jessica Rohrs said domestic violence victims do best in a place of their choosing, and she encourages people to imagine themselves in the shoes of someone who is fleeing an unsafe situation.

"Maybe I live in Sibley, or Sheldon or Spencer. And now you're telling me that not only am I having to go through the trauma of violence, but now I also have to take my children out of their school district. I have to quit my job. I have to leave my support people. And I have to do all that just to seek safe shelter in Sioux Center? And we're finding that really set people back versus propelling them forward," Rohrs said.

FCC is the designated homelessness and housing services provider for the 10 counties in Iowa's Region 1, including the four counties in The REVIEW's coverage area. It is part of a statewide effort, overseen by the Iowa Balance of State Continuum of Care, to build and foster an effective homelessness response system in Iowa.

Historically, the organization's focus has been serving crime victims, but during the COVID-19 pandemic, they received additional funding from the state to broaden its services to include the general homeless population, many who also have experienced victimhood in their past.

"With the funding we have for the Rapid Rehousing program, we can work with individuals from anywhere from six months to two years. And then, hopefully, through that program, people are becoming sustainable on their own," Rohrs said. "We want to help these families be OK without us."

Residential rehab

Genesis House is a faith-based organization in Orange City that provides residential housing and holistic support to women and children who are impacted by homelessness, domestic violence and addiction.

Executive director Becky Erdmann is careful to stress the residential program at Genesis House is not an emer-

gency shelter, however.

"We come in later, when the immediate crisis has passed, and the immediate needs have been met," she said. "We're after the more intensive, inpatient rehabilitation."

Genesis House has a maximum capacity of 12 people, and residents can stay up to 24 months. Applicants must be at least 18 years old, and female children 17 years old and younger and male children 11 and younger are allowed.

Capacity, however, is resource based, and dips in giving, which often happen during the summer, results in Genesis House housing fewer people.

"I distinguish between our physical capacity and our resource capacity," Erdmann said. "We may have a room or two open at any given time, but we know, given our resources, we can't fill those rooms until we are at our resource capacity."

Because Genesis House is faith based, it relies on community support for its funding. Along with its three, three-quarters-time employees, it also is staffed partly by volunteers, including students from Northwestern College in Orange City and Dordt University in Sioux Center, who often leave the area for the summer.

When women show up at Genesis House, along with connecting them to external resources and services, Genesis House creates a "self-sufficiency plan" tailored to the unique needs of each resident.

"We have four phases of care. Phase 4 is the most restrictive phase, as far as expectations, frequency of case management, accountability," Erdmann said. "Then you're working your way to Phase 1, and there are more privileges, more and more freedoms, more and more independence."

Once residents transition out of the program, Genesis House helps them navigate the bureaucratic maze of public housing assistance and the general unavailability of affordable rentals and homes. Until then, however, Genesis House offers a safe place to land — and heal.

"When you are constantly in survival mode, it's that dose of adrenaline all the time," Erdmann said. "We want to provide a place where it's safe

for them to come down out of survival mode, however long that takes, and then be there. Because that's when they are actually going through the healing process — and it can be hard, and scary."

Healing campus

The services provided by Whispers of Love, Hope & Joy are not bound by geography — Rensink often works out of her car, driving across the region to support women where they are at. Other times, she invites them into her rural Sioux Center home, where she provides pastoral care and counseling.

However, Rensink and the organization's five-member board have a vision for a healing campus that would ground the ministry in a physical location and offer emergency and transitional housing for survivors of intimate partner violence.

"We see this healing campus as a place where the whole person is cared for, grown, developed and transformed," she said.

The organization has made significant headway in fundraising for that project, and Rensink is actively visiting properties for sale that may be suitable for the campus.

"It's about developing the whole person and reintroducing life to them — it's about breathing life back into them," Rensink said. "We have these delineations — we have 'victim' and then we have 'survivor' — and that's great. We love it when we have survivors, but we are into the thrivers. Until every single part of the person is cared for, there cannot be healing."

Along with living spaces, Rensink hopes the campus will include a ministry center, a space for worship gatherings, offices that will provide space for meetings and one-on-one counseling, a community space and a commercial kitchen.

For victims of domestic violence, who often find themselves on the social margins, the campus would offer a community, she said — a place to belong.

"We need each other," Rensink said. "We can't do the healing campus by ourselves. We need community; we need partners; we need churches. We need people to rally around this vision."

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