

from the Director's Desk

It's hard to think about Christmas when it has been between 45° and 55° every day the past week. I had the rare opportunity to slow down this past week. COVID will do that for/to you. I managed to avoid the virus the whole time we were in the pandemic, while not missing a single day of work. But the renewed wave that is hitting the Panhandle recently found me over Thanksgiving and it's no fun!! Particularly when my spouse had it too and was even sicker than me!!



But as someone told me as I whined about cutting into the time to plan, decorate, and shop for Christmas – slowing down is not a bad thing. Doing less to be 'ready' for Christmas is OK. What's important is the 'reason for the season', as the saying goes. I'm going to embrace that this year and I hope you do too. Shopping locally is one way to save time in the busy season.

Find time to drive around Chadron after dark. The lights are terrific, and many folks are adding more lights as the warm weather permits. I want to specifically thank the city, utility workers, Nebraska National Forest, Chamber of



Commerce, downtown businesses, and anyone else who decorates this time of year for making the drive down Main Street magical. The lights, the tree, the decorations – old and new – all evoke the feeling we long for this time of year. Chadron IS a Magical City this time of year.



NNDC Annual meeting planned for January 2024

Each year in the month of January, the NNDC Board of Directors holds its annual membership meeting, in accordance with our Bylaws. This year, we will be trying something a little bit different. Instead of a luncheon, we will host a morning coffee gathering

to share information with our members about the past year's activities. Watch your inbox for the announcement and invitation to this event. We will hold our regular board member election and convene the board to elect officers and approve an annual budget.



Air Link made an appearance at the hospital.



Dr. Patterson welcomes students.



New Leaf - Construction



Chadron Police Department



NPPD - Virtual Reality Goggles

Career Cabs Bring Sophomores from Northern Panhandle

Two-hundred sixty-two students (give or take a few), more than 20 counselors, sponsors and committee members, and 8 or 10 bus/van drivers converged on Chadron Nov. 29 for the first event of its kind. We held a regional career exploration day, one of three held in the Panhandle under the planning expertise of the Career Connections of Western Nebraska. Students came from Harrison, Crawford, Chadron, Hay Springs, Rushville-Gordon, Alliance and Hemingford. What an undertaking! Tenth graders were allowed to select a career pathway (Health, Human Services, Education, Agriculture, Criminal Justice or Trades).

Each student then attended sessions with at least three different employers in that field in Chadron. The stars of this show were the counselors, who herded the students to the various locations and the employers – who took the time and effort to present their jobs in a way that would be meaningful to 10th graders! Employers included: CSC Rangeland Center, Dr. Regina Rankin, DVM, Upper White NRD, US Forest Service, CSC Criminal Justice instructor Dr. James Wada, Chadron Police Department, Nebraska State Patrol, CSC Child Development Center, Nebraska National Guard Recruiter, CSC Education Department Dr. Sasse, Dr Rust and CHS instructor Craig Nobiling, NCAP's

Head Start, Prairie Pines Assisted Living Center, Chadron Community Hospital, the Eye Company, Western Community Health Resources, Region 1 Office of Human Development, Northwest Community Action Program, Butler Ag, the New Leaf Construction Company, NPPD and Black Hills Energy. Each employer spent about 40 minutes with a group of students.

And then there was the small army of volunteers who delivered pizza, water and cookies for the lunches – at five different locations! Thanks to them for helping as well. A special shout-out to Chadron State College who hosted the students for the kick-off, provided many of the employer stops, allowed use of the Student Center Ballroom and helped coordinate some of the sessions.

A special thanks to Craig Schroeder, Chelsie Herian, Jordan Dietrich, Kelsy Sasse, Melissa Mracek, Jamie Bright, Anthony Gurrola, and the other committee members who spent countless hours planning and finally delivering this event in our community. When the surveys are tallied from the students, counselors, and employers, we will learn how we might improve this event next year when it will be held in Alliance.

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Career Cabs--

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The effort is seen as a great awareness activity to keep some of our best & brightest youth in our region when they graduate and look for careers.

The youth involvement strategy started in our area as an off shoot of the Rural Prosperity Project. This was a three year grant funded project administered by the Heartland Center for Leadership Development. We identified the need to engage and involve youth as an ongoing strategy to supply a workforce. In 2021 Craig Schroeder reached out to the Dawes & Sheridan County school districts and surveyed students about their wants and desires as they grow, graduate, and join the work force.

Craig was put in touch with an effort in the North Platte Valley that was looking at workforce development issues, and ways to encourage youth to look at careers in their hometown. Career Connections of Western Nebraska was formed. This not-for-profit entity seeks input from school districts, ESU's, economic development professionals and secured funding from various contributors including the Snow Redfern Foundation, ESU 13, FNBO, local school districts and interested economic development organizations.

The process above was started in the middle of the year, seeking the same survey information from

the entire Panhandle as had been gathered in Dawes & Sheridan Counties earlier. That data is now available for schools and economic developers alike to strategize how to best reach the younger generation as they mature and graduate. Ultimately Career Cabs were put on in three locations (Sidney, Scottsbluff/ Gering, and Chadron). The Career Cabs is not the only activity the group will be addressing. Working on a regional (Panhandle-wide) basis is a challenge but is worth the effort to retain additional graduates in our area. The plan is to evaluate this effort and do the same type of event next year, possibly moving the host locations a bit to benefit everyone.



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