

Clark School looking for a pair of principals

After an hour and 45 minute executive session, Monday, at the March meeting of the Clark School Board, it was decided to advertise for two principal positions for the 2020-2021 school year.

One principal position would be elementary-colony with extra duties to be assigned. The other principal position would be middle-high school, with extra duties to be assigned.

Earlier in the public portion of the meeting, elementary-colony principal Tracy Stallman was let out of her proposed 2020-21 principal contract and hired as a teacher at Fordham Colony. The principal contract offer to Stallman was rescinded, therefore opening up an administrative position for next year.

Other positions hired at the March meeting include: Myra

Lewis, kindergarten aide; Tabitha Schmidt, band/dance; John Brown, head golf; Bobbi Bohnet, junior high golf; Ashley Dandurand, moving to preschool teacher (80%) and Aleigha Hallberg, moving to grade one due to class size.

Schmidt, who will be the new instrumental teacher, according to superintendent Luanne Warren has been at the Clark School this week, working with Lola Bartels, who is retiring at the end of the year.

The lengthiest discussion during the nearly two hour portion of the public meeting dealt with how to disperse the \$18,910 Northern Plains Insurance Dividend.

Several options were put on the table, trying to rebate fairly and broadly of the Clark School staff. This decision had to be made at this time as business manager Mary Nelson stated that the money had

to be dispersed by a certain April date.

What the school board finally decided was to divide the dividend between the 30 teachers enrolled in the insurance plan at the time (two years ago) who are still in the system. This amount would be approximately \$630.00 before taxes, etc.

During the capital outlay plans discussion, superintendent Warren handed out preliminary plans for the wrestling room/garage addition to the Field House. Warren gave an approximate cost of \$300,000. She wanted to get started with the bid process and shared with the board dimensions, foam, foundations, insulation, etc. This \$300,000 would be building costs, not Field House renovation costs.

Clark School
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March has snow and moderate winter weather

When children are bundled up for the outdoors in the winter, it's hard to tell who is who. At the Clark Elementary playground last Friday - it was a beautiful sunny day to go out and play in the snow.

On their way back into the school after their morning recess is over are, left to right, Ewan Henning, son of Alayna Wellnitz and Matthew Henning; Avery Olson, daughter of Rick and Kim Olson; Kayden Wheel-

er, son of Tiffany Wheeler and Lucas Johnson, son of Trevor and Amanda Johnson.

This March, the weather has been bearable. The rest of the week is supposed to be above normal weather wise, with light snow every day.

It was a year ago this week with a big snow bearing down on us right before the State basketball tournament.

From China to Clark - senior Dakota Lilly has made the transition and is enjoying every minute of it

His senior year is being spent at Clark High School. But Dakota Lilly's first 11 years plus kindergarten were spent at International Christian Schools in China.

Dakota was born in Beijing, China, the son of Steve and Linda Lilly. His grandparents on his mother's side are Daryl and Judy Wileman of Clark. Doing compassion work, working in the medical field and with orphanages is what brought the Lilly family to China from the United States.

Dakota started kindergarten at the International Christian School (ICS) in Shenyang which is the capital and largest city of the Liaoning Province of northeast China. He went there until the fifth grade and there were 16 students in his grade.

When in the sixth grade, the family moved and then school was attended at the ICS in Hong Kong where there were 96 students in his grade.

Ninety percent of his classmates were of Chinese descent in his Christian school which is open to all races in Hong Kong. Hong Kong is considered free religion-wise and Christianity is not chastised in Hong Kong he stated. "Like anywhere else, Christianity is getting a larger following," he stated.

At his school, they acknowledge the western and Chinese holidays such as the Chinese New Year. "Christmas is huge there," he stated of the western holidays celebrated in Hong Kong.



Dakota Lilly, the son of Steve and Linda (Wileman) Lilly, is nearing the end of his senior year in Clark. The previous years he has spent attending International Christian Schools in China while his parents were compassion workers working in the medical field and with orphanages. Dakota was born in Beijing, China, 18 years ago.

In Hong Kong, a city of 7.4 million people, his schooling began at 7:50 a.m. and went until 3:15 p.m. Lilly took a Chinese class and a Spanish class but was raised speaking English at home. He can speak some Cantonese which is a different dialect of the Mandarin language spoken in Hong Kong. Cantonese and Mandarin have the same characters but are pronounced differently he explained.

The school subjects he took are similar with the exception of history class, learning more European and Asian histories.

School is more academically focused in China, noticed Lilly. There they focus more on music and your academics. Sports come after that.

High school is more like a prep school for college, with similar to Clark's classes, courses like math, physics, anatomy and physiology. Lilly is planning on going on to become a physical therapist and is thinking of the University of Jamestown in Jamestown, N.D.

Lilly
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County terms expire this year

Five county offices are up for election this year.

The terms of County Commissioners Chris Sass in District #2 for a 4-year term and Bob Bjerke in District #4, 4-year term, States Attorney Chad Fjelland, County Coroner Louann Streff and County Treasurer Kay Mahlen, all 4-year terms, expire this year. Nominating petitions are currently available from the auditor's office.

Each nominating petition needs

a certain number of signatures before that petitioner becomes a candidate. To become a County Commissioner candidate, the petitioner needs signatures from one percent of those voters, in the petitioner's party and in his district, who cast their votes for that party's candidate for governor in the last general election.

To become a candidate for a county office, signatures can be obtained from one percent of the voters in the

party and in the county, who voted for that party's gubernatorial candidate in the last general election.

The final day for filing nominating petitions for county office is March 31 and the Primary Election Day is June 2, 2020. Petitions can be filed with the County Auditor and further information on circulating a nominating petition can be had from that office. Chris Tarbox is the Clark County Auditor.

Legislative fight between electricity providers coming to a head

Nick Lowrey
South Dakota News Watch

A long, simmering battle between electricity providers in South Dakota is coming to a head as the 2020 legislative session winds down, and at stake is the potential for faster economic growth in some cities versus the possibility of higher electric rates for rural residents.

The debate is raging between municipalities that provide electricity to residents and rural electric cooperatives that serve customers living outside of South Dakota's major cities, and it is one of the quietest but potentially highest-impact issues now being considered in Pierre.

Rural electric cooperatives are angered by what they say is the unfair loss of tens of millions of dollars' worth of potential revenue due to the unilateral taking of parts of their service territories and customers by growing cities that annex new lands and homes — a process now legal under state law.

The rural providers are backing legislation that would add new hurdles to the process by which municipal electric utilities take over a co-op's service territory and begin collecting utility payments from customers within the territory. The bill under consideration this session is the second attempt at a change in the law in the past two years and follows the failure of a 2019 legislative study committee to reach a compromise between the co-ops and the municipal utilities.

Leaders from several cities that own their own electric utilities have been fighting against any attempt to curtail their ability to take electric service territory when they grow. Some city and municipal utility leaders argue that restricting

city-owned utilities from taking territory when needed will slow economic development and harm the state's overall growth in the long run.

The rural electric co-ops this session are pushing House Bill 1262, introduced by Rep. David Anderson, R-Hudson. The bill would force city-owned electric utilities to meet in-person with the electric utility provider whose territory is being taken before a takeover can happen. The bill would also give co-ops the ability to demand a court hearing to contest a service territory takeover they think was fraudulent or an abuse of discretion.

The bill was scheduled for a hearing in the Senate Commerce and Energy Committee at 10 a.m. on March 5. If the bill passes out of committee, it would move to the Senate floor either later that day or on March 9.

The conflict between electric co-ops and municipal utilities stems from a law known as the Territorial Act of 1975. During the 1970s, there was a nationwide public policy movement aimed at making the build-out of electrical infrastructure more efficient by giving various types of electric utility providers exclusive rights to serve pre-defined pieces of territory.

That essentially created state-approved electric service monopolies for rural electric cooperatives, municipal utility departments and investor-owned utilities. The thinking was that by giving each electric utility a monopoly over their service territory, there would be less duplication of expensive infrastructure, which would keep rates down for end users.

"If we didn't have service territo-



The Oahe Electric Cooperative, based in Blunt, S.D., serves rural residents and businesses in central South Dakota. It is one of 32 rural electric cooperatives in South Dakota. For the past two years, rural electric cooperatives have been trying to change a state law that allows city-owned utilities to take territory and customers from neighboring utility providers.

Photo: Nick Lowrey, South Dakota News Watch

ries and any company could build anywhere, you can imagine a residential city block and you have three electric companies running lines, poles and wires into a residential area each hoping to serve customers in that area, you can imagine how inefficient and, probably even from a safety perspective, hazardous it would be," said Chris Nelson, one of South Dakota's three public utilities commissioners.

But not all monopolies are treated equally under the 1975 law. City-owned electric utilities, in particular, were given a powerful tool — the ability to take over neighboring service territory whenever they deem it necessary for a city's growth. Of the three types of elec-

tric utility providers in South Dakota, municipal electric departments are the only ones allowed to take territory without first coming to an agreement with the provider from which they are taking territory.

"As those municipalities, over the years, have continued to grow and continue to take territory from my member systems, the economic impacts have continued to elevate and it hurts. It stings," said Ed Anderson, general manager of the South Dakota Rural Electric Association.

There have been 18 takings of territory from rural electric cooperatives since 2010, Anderson said. Several of the takings included infrastructure and customers and most were done without the expressed consent of the co-op whose territory was being taken, he said.

City leaders in communities such as Brookings, Watertown, Vermilion and Volga say the bill would create new and unnecessary hurdles to their economic development efforts. Uncertainty and delays can kill a city's bid to bring in a new factory or ethanol plant.

"They want to know who's going to serve them and what's the cost going to be," said Steve Lehner, general manager of Watertown Municipal Utilities. "And if I can't tell them that, because the (co-op) can challenge in court for who has the right to serve, or challenge in court the cost that we're gonna pay, then that company is going to go look for another community."

For several decades, the monopoly system created in 1975 worked pretty well. Power lines, substations and electric generation capacity expanded to serve most every customer that needed it. Rural electrical cooperatives worked closely

with many of the state's 35 municipal electric utilities to build transmission lines and even provided emergency maintenance services.

But as the pace of growth sped up in cities such as Watertown and Brookings, the cities ran into the edges of their own defined service territories and started taking territory from neighboring rural electric co-ops. Those city-edge territories often became home to large, industrial customers that can generate a lot of money for the utility that sells them electricity. For cities, successfully recruiting such customers means more jobs and an increased tax base.

One recent example is the Bel Brands cheese plant in Brookings. The plant started construction in 2012 on land annexed into the city. The city's annexation included a takeover of electric service territory belonging to the Sioux Valley Energy co-op. At the time of annexation, there was no electric infrastructure on the ground, said Al Heuton, executive director of the Brookings Economic Development Corporation.

Promising to take over electric service on the land slated for the Bel Brands plant allowed Heuton and other city leaders to guarantee to the company that electrical infrastructure would be in place and what rates for service would be. The certainty and potential for cost savings were critical to Brookings' successful bid for the plant, Heuton said.

"If we can't provide that here, then they're going to go somewhere else," Heuton said. Building power lines and substations is expensive, but providing electricity is the easiest utility ser-

vice from which to turn a profit and provides revenue municipal utilities need to cover their costs, Heuton said. Selling electricity has been especially lucrative for Brookings. The municipal utility company annually returns about \$2 million to the city's general fund, city budget documents show.

While cities such as Brookings have been able to expand their service territories and boost their revenues, rural electric co-op members have been forced to pay higher rates as a result, said Carrie Vugteveen, director of communications and government relations for Sioux Valley Energy.

Sioux Valley Energy, one of South Dakota's largest rural electricity cooperatives, estimates it has missed out on about \$21.5 million in revenue over the past 20 years that could have been generated on territory taken by city-owned utilities. The estimate is based on rates that could have been charged to businesses and residents in the lost territory, Vugteveen said.

Rural electric co-ops have won several large customers over the

Electricity
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WEATHER				
Robert Cole - Official Weather Observer				
		HI	LO	PR
Mar. 3	36	17	0
Mar. 4	39	27	0
Mar. 5	.....	47	28	0
Mar. 6	.....	34	20	0
Mar. 7	.....	40	19	0
Mar. 8	.....	52	36	0
Mar. 9	.....	57	22	0
2020 precipitation to date		1.06		
2019 precipitation to date		2.86		