

Eventide plans \$18 million expansion, renovation project in south Moorhead, BUSINESS

The Forum

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'THEY PUT ME ON ALL THESE PILLS'



Illustration by Troy Becker The Forum

ND LEADS NATION IN GIVING MENTAL HEALTH DRUGS TO FOSTER KIDS

By Kim Hyatt khyatt@forumcomm.com

Fargo

As a troubled foster kid bouncing from doctor to doctor, Deborah Zaun worried about the long-term effects of being on so many mental health drugs.

"Every doctor I went to diagnosed me with something different. It was a confusing time for me in foster care because I thought I was just a big problem. I didn't know what was wrong with me and thought everyone was against me," she said. "I thought I was never going to be normal because they put me on all these pills."

Foster kids and psychotropic drugs

State	Foster care population	Number of foster care children on psychotropic medications	Percentage
North Dakota	2,734	1,021	37.3%
Virginia	14,999	5,584	37.2%
New Hampshire	2,614	944	36.1%
Iowa	13,951	4,981	35.7%
Maine	3,527	1,155	32.7%

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General

Zaun was placed in foster care in the Fargo area when she was 6 years old. Before adoption at age 12, she said she was cycling through counselors and at one point was on a dozen different mental health drugs, also known as psychotropic medications.

Zaun, now 25, only takes two medications for depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Her experience with psychotropic drugs in foster care is not uncommon, especially in North Dakota.

The state has the highest rate in the country of foster care children on these medications most commonly used to treat

depression, bipolar disorder, PTSD, schizophrenia and anxiety.

A report released by the Office of Inspector General for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services last year found that more than 37% of foster care children in North Dakota, or 1,021 out of 2,734 children, were on psychotropic drugs. The report was based on numbers from 2013, and focused on five states with the highest use of psychotropic drugs among foster children.

The inspector general and advocates find this rate concerning because there is a

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Note: Be sure to read part five of this "Core communities" series about the issues and opportunities facing older neighborhoods. The next story will appear in print and online Wednesday, May 29.



David Samson / The Forum

This is a look at one of the streets in the Horace Mann neighborhood in northeast Fargo. The Oak Grove Lutheran School area is also in a part of the Horace Mann neighborhood.

Fargo's Horace Mann neighborhood rallies around school, keeping single-family homes

By Barry Amundson bamundson@forumcomm.com

FARGO — If there's one thing a person can learn from going to a neighborhood association meeting, it's that many people love where they live and want the best for their community.

In Fargo's Horace Mann Area Neighborhood Association meeting Thursday night, May 23, about 10 neighbors gathered to talk about a snack donation they gave to their neighborhood school, a movie night planned for Aug. 6 outdoors at Horace Mann Elementary, a community meeting planned with Sanford Health about its expansion in their midst, and they also heard from a representative of Folkways, a nonprofit agency working to improve Fargo's urban life.

Horace Mann residents also noted that block parties are still a "thing" in some parts of their northeast Fargo neighborhood that borders downtown to the south and runs east to the Red River, west to Broadway and includes what some call the Oak Grove neighborhood surrounding the Lutheran school and park that bears the same name.

Horace Mann Area Neighborhood Association officers and others, including State Rep. Josh Boschee and State Sen.

Merrill Piepkorn who both live in the neighborhood, also talked with The Forum about the positives they see in their aging, core neighborhood, as well as some challenges.

It was the positives that overtook the conversation. "It's a place where we know people by the name of their dogs," joked Boschee about the sense of community there.

Association Co-President Tracy Walvatne also joked that it's a place where a person has to know their neighbors because no one has an attached garage.

For Association Vice President David Huebner, he said he simply "loves" his home and its "character."

He wouldn't want to live in a newer neighborhood because he feels many lack the character he has found in Horace Mann, with its wide variety of home architecture and no "beige-colored homes" to be found.

Walvatne added that Horace Mann is one of the last affordable neighborhoods left in the city for those wanting a starter home or for low-income families.

Boschee, who sells real estate, said home prices even in his neighborhood have jumped substantially in the past five to six

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Today's weather



Partly cloudy Details, D4



\$1.50

(Suggested retail price) Copyright 2019 The Forum

Some emergency responders embrace specialized license plates

But other ND volunteers wary of cost, danger

By Jack Dura Bismarck Tribune

WILTON, N.D. — Paul Schauer was one of the first in Wilton to receive a volunteer emergency responder license plate.

"I think just about everybody in the squad took advantage of that opportunity," said the volunteer ambulance driver, who is

also a Lutheran pastor. North Dakota voters in 2018 approved a statutory initiative by 64% to provide volunteer firefighters and emergency medical personnel with red-colored license plates free of charge that grant admission to state parks.

Since it took effect on Dec. 6, more than 2,550 sets of plates have been distributed to qualified volunteers, according to the North Dakota Department of Transportation. Volunteers must apply for the plates.



Tom Stromme / Bismarck Tribune

Paul Schauer, of Wilton, is a volunteer ambulance driver who applied and received a volunteer responder license plate in January from the passage of measure 4 in 2018.

Mandan Rural Fire Chief Lynn Gustin said 10 or 12 firefighters of his 32-member volunteer department have applied

for and received plates since February or March.

Gustin said he supported **PLATES:** Back Page

SPORTS: Like Tom Brady, Carson Wentz spent NFL offseason emphasizing diet and nutrition. **PAGE D1**

HOMES

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years. What was a \$78,000 home five years ago is now selling for about \$160,000, he said.

Many of his neighbors said they also have noticed many of the smaller, older homes selling for \$150,000 to \$200,000.

The Horace Mann neighborhood is tucked along the banks and curves of the Red River. Association Treasurer Jordan Runsvold said it is blessed with multiple parks, including Oak Grove, a new lift bridge that crosses the river into Moorhead, Jack Williams baseball stadium, nearby ball diamonds and Wildflower Grove Park filled with a spectacular wildflower bloom in the warm months.

"People like the walk-ability the parks offer," Piepkorn said.

Resident Carol Pearson said she simply likes the livability of the neighborhood and the wide variety of residents that

include young families, senior citizens and women homeowners.

She's working to secure a "historic overlay" district near the Oak Grove school, as there are many historic homes that line the streets in that area, some of which are already on the National Register of Historic Places.

Despite all of the positives, the association did talk about some challenges.

Pearson is the most outspoken about some of those challenges. She is still against developer Jesse Craig's planned \$19 million, 120-unit River Lofts Apartment complex planned on Oak Street along the river, also near Oak Grove school, in a square block that has a somewhat deserted atmosphere.

"I just don't think we need a five-story-high building there. It's ridiculous. It just doesn't fit," she said, adding that a three-story structure might be more suitable.

Pearson and some of the others added that



Photos by Barry Amundson / The Forum

The former Sahr's Sudden Service, a building owned by the Kilbourne Group, is in Fargo's Horace Mann neighborhood. The neighborhood association has talked about ways the property could be used until it's developed.



Barry Amundson / The Forum

A huge, covered horseshoe pit shelter and the tall trees offer a dramatic entrance into the Oak Grove Park in northeast Fargo.

the single-family homes provide the city a strong tax base, too.

However, in defense of Craig, neighbors said he was a speaker at the last association meeting and many felt like at least he has kept in touch with neighbors about his plans. He has also offered a plan to add single-family townhomes as a buffer between the apartment complex and existing homes.

"I just think there is so little we can do," said

Association Co-President Dawn Nygard about the situation. "However, at least he came and has been asking our opinion."

Nygard also worries about losing single-family homes, which are the lifeblood of keeping the Horace Mann school open. Flood protection took some of the homes and she doesn't want to lose more.

She said the fight to save the school is what caused the association to form about 18 years ago, and it

has evolved into a group that works to support the school in other ways.

Residents worry about the lot formerly occupied by Sahr's Sudden Service on Fourth Street and Sixth Avenue North that is now owned by Kilbourne Group.

That's why Steve French of Folkways was at the meeting to talk about inviting the neighborhood to join him in possibly using that corner for events or gatherings or to even make it a gar-

den spot. He has already planted a small garden on the property that likely won't be developed for a few years, he said.

The association members agreed to talk about it more. It was just another example of the neighborhood association, which loosely connects through a Facebook page or email string, showing how they want what's best for their corner of the city.

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FOSTER KIDS

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lack of effective treatment and monitoring that increases the risks of inappropriate dosing of drugs and combinations of drugs with serious side effects.

Samantha Bartosz, deputy director of litigation for Children's Rights, a national watchdog group advocating for abused and neglected kids, told The Forum in a phone interview from her office in New York City that the report brings public attention to the issue of states not safeguarding foster kids.

"There's a lot of science on how these drugs work on the brain and central nervous system. They create profound and sometimes permanent changes, and yet, they are delivered without any consistent oversight," Bartosz said. "A foster child gets on a drug, moves homes two or three times and collects different prescriptions along the way. It's not unusual."

Bartosz said the high usage rate in North Dakota could be a result of not enough providers or therapeutic services. "It is lower density, so it can be a real challenge to attract a sufficient number of mental health

providers to really get the job done," she said.

Tami DeCoteau, a Bismarck psychologist specializing in trauma-informed care, agrees the state lacks mental health providers.

"If you don't have access to quality care that's collaborative and integrated," she said, "what else do you do but turn to the medications?"

Trauma-informed care

DeCoteau works with foster children who have experienced multiple traumas, from in utero all the way into childhood when they are traumatically separated from their family.

"Children in the foster care system typically have a broad range of traumatic experiences, and the severity and intensity can be higher than what we see in the typical non-foster care child," she said. "Treatment needs to be broad and needs to be longer term and more intense, not just psychotherapy and medication, but physical and occupational and academic support."

The basis of trauma-informed treatment is about supporting the body to support the brain. Strategies are basic things, like adequate sleep, constant hydration

and movement. DeCoteau said children first and foremost learn how to regulate the body through safe relationships.

Caregivers are encouraged to provide healthy snacks every two hours and movement breaks every 90 minutes to promote a child's success.

It's all about "rebuilding the brain," she said, and by doing so there is more long-term effectiveness that may reduce the need for medication. "As much as we can reduce the need or how long they need to be on drugs is better for overall development," DeCoteau said.

Bartosz said states need to build up their capacity of trauma-informed mental health care and develop therapy approaches that are truly trauma-informed. She said too often children are not seen by a mental health specialist and instead therapy is done through a general practitioner.

Foster kids have traumatic pasts, and the "scars of that manifest in their behavior," she said. While drugs may be needed, it's important to provide services that address the trauma, she said, "rather than give a drug that helps them and their behaviors, but masks

the underlying trauma."

Because foster children are transient, Bartosz said, their medical history becomes very fragmented. She said it's essential for states to have a database to share comprehensive medical information. The system should have red flags alerting staff of potential problems, such as when a child is on more than one psychotropic medication or is in need of review.

The North Dakota Department of Human Services has such a system, which streamlines the sharing of medical information, said Dean Sturn, foster care administrator for the state department.

Bartosz's organization has filed a lawsuit, M.B. v. Corsi, in Missouri where she said foster kids are overmedicated on psychotropic drugs that aren't properly monitored. The lawsuit is named after a 14-year-old boy in foster care who was on more than six psychotropic drugs without review or an updated health record, resulting in side effects like hypothyroidism and suicidal thoughts.

"Hopefully other states take notice, and where states don't, we may find other opportunities to be the spark," she said.

"It doesn't have to take a lawsuit. It's the right thing to do."

Signs of progress

The North Dakota Department of Human Services provided data to The Forum that shows a decline in the percentage of foster youth — ranging from birth to 21 years old — receiving psychotropic drugs.

Based on North Dakota Medicaid claims data, 31% of foster youth in 2015 were prescribed psychotropic drugs. In 2016, that fell to 30%, and in 2017, the most recent data available, 25% of foster youth were receiving the drugs. The state's data is different than the data used for the inspector general report and not a direct comparison.

Sturn said North Dakota has made strides in reducing the rate of psychotropic drug usage. Asked why the state could lead the nation in prescribing such medication to foster youth, Sturn pointed to the lack of mental health services.

"In the absence of services, especially for children, sometimes the way to treat them are putting them on psychotropic medications to help with symptoms," he said.

Sturn also noted that kids in foster care are

more likely to need psychotropic drugs than children not in the system.

"It's not rocket science. It's pretty easy to understand that kids entering the foster care system have experienced exponential amounts of trauma as compared to ... children who aren't," he said.

Out of the work of a health care oversight committee formed in 2014, Sturn said some changes were made to enhance treatment. Every child entering the foster care system needs to have a screening that looks at physical, dental and optical health, with the mental health screening portion strengthened, he said.

A federal law requires that a foster child is seen by a caseworker at least once a month, he added, and caseworkers must go through four weeks of training that includes a segment on trauma-informed treatment.

Sturn said any way the state can figure out ways to help a foster child without medication is the goal.

"It's no different than if I can control blood pressure through diet and exercise," he said. "Don't put a chemical in if you don't have to."

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PLATES

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Measure 4, viewing the special plates as an incentive and "good deal for first responders" with voters' approval. He said he may apply for a plate this fall, though his pickup has a personalized license plate.

Bismarck Rural Fire Chief Michael Voigt said his department encountered "a quandary" with the plates

as the fire department includes paid, part-time employees who meet the state's volunteer definition.

"We don't want to basically create a situation where it looks like over here we're saying we're not volunteers for the purposes of all our payroll and everything that we do, but then we bend the rules over here and we say that we are volunteers because this law reads a certain way," Voigt said. "I just

don't want to create that with the public."

He added his department will leave it to North Dakota lawmakers to adjust or clarify volunteer language in the 2021 legislative session. Lawmakers passed a bill in their 2019 legislative session to put criteria in definitions related to the plates, such as volunteers' membership and pay.

Since early May, Dan Schelske, park manager of

Fort Abraham Lincoln State Park, said he's seen about six of the license plates at the park south of Mandan.

License plates are something he takes notice of as visitors from other states frequent the park. He's also seen the red plates around Bismarck-Mandan. "There's a few floating around. They're really easy to spot," Schelske said.

Schauer said he was neutral on Measure 4 but applied for plates "just to

see how it worked." He received his plates in January and affixed them to his pickup.

Some Wilton ambulance volunteers didn't apply for plates due to their "additional burden to taxpayers" and easy identification, he added. Schauer said he had wondered if the plates' visibility would make responders "a target" in some instances, such as an active shooter. "Those red plates do

stick out," he said, but also called them "a nice gesture," especially for volunteers who log many hours on call.

NDDOT in 2018 estimated a combined 10-year revenue loss to the highway tax distribution fund and state parks of about \$17.7 million for Measure 4's fiscal impact.

About 11,000 people serve volunteer fire departments and ambulance services in North Dakota.

BRIEFS

ND legislative session recap May 30 in West Fargo

WEST FARGO — A recap of the 2019 North Dakota legislative session will be held from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. Thursday, May 30, at Deaner's Diner, 405 Main Ave. W.

Legislators from West Fargo's District 13 will present an overview of the session's highlights, and focus upon specific legislation they were involved with as sponsors or through their committee work.

Presenting will be Sen. Judy Lee, chair of the Senate Human Services Committee and a member of the Senate Political Subdivisions Committee; Rep. Kim Koppelman, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee and a member of the House Political Subdivisions Committee and Rep. Austen Schauer, a member of the House Industry, Business and Labor Committee, and the House Government and Veterans Affairs Committee. The event is open to the public.

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PUBLIC NOTICE

The Fargo Park District and the Fargo School District will be applying non-restricted herbicide to control dandelions and broadleaf weeds at various parks and school sites throughout the City of Fargo. The Fargo Park District will be spraying during the month of May and the Fargo School District will begin spraying in May and continue into June. Spraying will take place only when conditions are appropriate for application and will be applied only by staff who are certified pesticide applicators by the State of North Dakota Department of Agriculture.

Turf areas which have been sprayed will be posted with a notice at the time of application and will remain posted for 24 hours. Signs will be posted at the entrances to parks and at various locations leading to the property. Fargo Public School maintenance staff will notify each schools administration office at the time of application if any spraying is done during school hours.

The Fargo Park District and Fargo School District does not apply any herbicides or pesticides listed as restricted chemicals by the US Department of Agriculture on neighborhood parks or school property. Only non-restricted herbicides, available to the public, are used for these applications.

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