



The Forum

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INFORUM.COM



'Haunted by nightmares'

ND State Hospital housekeeper talks about how assault has changed her life

Editor's note: This is part one of a two-part series on violence at the North Dakota State Hospital. Read part two on Monday, Aug. 12.

By Patrick Springer
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JAMESTOWN, N.D.

Christin Eastman was cleaning a restroom in the male wing of Lahaug Hall at the North Dakota State Hospital when she felt an arm reach around her neck and lock her in a choke hold.

She was dragged backward from the sinks down a small hallway leading to the showers, struggled to free herself and screamed for help, she told police.

ASSAULT: Page A4

Photo by Patrick Springer / The Forum

Above: Christin Eastman, left, and her sister, Jessie Mead, talk about how an assault on Eastman has affected their family. Eastman was assaulted by a patient with multiple assault convictions who was sent to the North Dakota State Hospital for a psychiatric evaluation. Eastman has been unable to return to work since the March 29, 2019, assault.



Photo special to The Forum

Christin Eastman is shown here in the emergency room at Jamestown Regional Medical Center after she was assaulted by a patient at the North Dakota State Hospital on March 29, 2019. The patient, Jason Benefiel, was charged with attempted murder and two counts of felony assault.



Kim Hyatt / The Forum

Dham Subba, left, tosses back her scarf while talking to her 21-year-old daughter Roshma and neighbor Ganga Chawn in her newly remodeled apartment at The Arbors at McCormick Park, formerly known as Community Homes, 702 23rd St. S. in Fargo.

Low-income housing property in south Fargo undergoing changes to remain open

By Kim Hyatt
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FARGO — Changes are underway at an established property in south Fargo that has historically provided low-income housing for new Americans who call McCormick Park home.

Community Homes, 702 23rd St. S., a subsidized housing complex built in the 1970s, was at risk of closure due to issues with financing and management. This is according to new owners, Integra Property Group, a Washington-based developer preserving affordable housing across the U.S. by tapping into federal tax credits rare for North Dakota.

Fargo is Integra's second project in the state after it preserved another at-risk subsidized property in Minot back in 2015.

The North Dakota Housing Finance Agency approved a \$9 million bond to renovate the 96-unit Meadowlark Apartments in Minot. Last year, the agency awarded Integra another \$9.25 million bond for the remodel of Community Homes, which has a total of 186 units within eight

apartment buildings.

Along with the remodel of Community Homes comes a new name, The Arbors at McCormick Park, as well as shifting away from exclusively serving new Americans.

Hans Juhle, Integra co-founder, said "there is no longer a focus on new Americans." Rather, The Arbors will be inclusive for all Fargo families in need. Residents are required to pay 30% of monthly income toward rent and meet certain eligibility requirements through Section 8 project-based housing.

During the renovation, residents were not displaced thanks to a "rolling rehab" process, said Dave Nagel, vice president of Integra's construction. Nagel said this worked by moving residents so that all vacancies were in one building that was gutted and renovated. Once that work wrapped up, residents were moved in so work could begin in the next vacated apartment.

Integra provided boxes

HOUSING: Page A9



Photo by John Enger / MPR News

The U.S. border crossing at Roseau, Minn., used to be open for 16 hours a day, but the schedule was cut by four hours in order to send officers to the southern border.

Roseau feels the strain as Minnesota-Canada border hassles take a toll

By John Enger
Minnesota Public Radio

Nurse Darcy Wakefield crosses from Canada into Minnesota four days a week to help deliver babies. It's a job she loves — and one she says she'll soon have to quit.

The babies haven't

slowed, but the border has.

Minnesota-Canada crossings have become a nightmare for Wakefield and others since January 2018, when the Roseau, Minn., station cut its hours as the U.S. Customs and Border Protection shifted officers to the Mexican border.

The Roseau station, which ran for years from 8 a.m. until midnight began closing at 8 p.m. The nearby Lancaster, Minn., crossing, which was once open until 10 p.m., now closes at 8 p.m. in the summer and 6 p.m. in the winter. The shorter hours have played havoc with

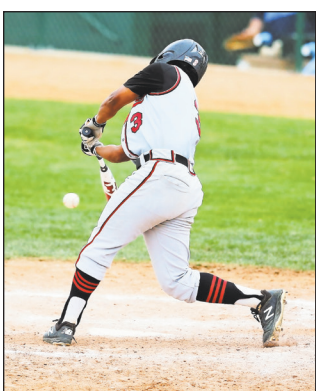
people who built their lives around the old order.

While U.S. officials say officers are returning, the border towns are still struggling and local leaders are not confident of a return to normal.

Roseau city planner

ROSEAU: Page A7

INSIDE TODAY'S FORUM



SPORTS: Fargo Post 2 plays Sunday for chance at American Legion World Series. PAGE D1

Standing Rock, Morton County work to mend relationships after tense pipeline protests

By Natasha Rausch
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MANDAN, N.D. — The nearly yearlong Dakota Access Pipeline protests that ended in early 2017 created tension at the border between the

Standing Rock Sioux Nation and ranchers in the neighboring county.

But in the two years since protest camps were evacuated and cleaned up, both sides have worked to mend their relationships.

"The people who live here, we do commerce with each other, we do rodeos together, bas-ketball, church, marriages. That goes way back," said Scott Davis,

PIPELINE: Page A7



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Today's weather



Partly cloudy

75°
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Details, D6

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ASSAULT

From Page A1

“She said she struggled and got his grip loosened and screamed out,” according to a police report. “He was hitting her. She said then she remembers opening her eyes and seeing other staff around her.”

Eastman, a housekeeper at the state hospital, suffered lacerations on her face, fractures and lost consciousness in the assault, the police report said.

Jason Benefiel, who police said was seen standing over Eastman covered in blood, was charged with attempted murder and two counts of felony assault in the March 29 attack. He has pleaded not guilty and awaits trial.

Eastman, who is telling her story for the first time publicly to The Forum, said she was unaware of Benefiel’s criminal background, including multiple assault convictions.

Benefiel, who was in the hospital for psychiatric evaluation and who police said was diagnosed with schizophrenia, was convicted of two counts of simple assault in 2008 and, for an incident in 2007, was convicted of assaulting detention officers who brought cosmetic items to him in a jail segregation unit.

Later, Eastman, who still hasn’t been able to return to work, would come to believe that a policy change adopted so the hospital could regain its accreditation contributed to her attack by allowing Benefiel to elude confinement.

She believes that a safety protocol calling for two male staff members to be present in the wing wasn’t followed at the time of the assault.

“When my attack happened the two male staff were not on the unit,” she said.

State hospital administrators said, however, that there is no male staffing requirement on wards.

“There is no state hospital policy that requires a certain number of male staff members be present on any given unit,” the hospital said in a statement.

Similarly, Eastman believes the staff member who was monitoring security cameras was inattentive during the attack — the camera would have captured her being dragged down the hallway, she said.

“I thought I was safe and my life was in the hands of the camera



Photo special to The Forum

Christin Eastman, shown here a few days after her assault at the North Dakota State Hospital on March 29, 2019, required surgery and dental work. She requires more dental work and still undergoes counseling after the attack.

patients and inmates confidential, so couldn’t reveal if he was under watch and whether prison officials notified the hospital of that.

Christin and Charles Eastman moved from Michigan to North Dakota in search of better opportunities. They followed Christin’s parents, who found jobs plentiful and the state to be safe and hospitable.

“And we felt that before this happened,” Charles Eastman said. “It kind of pulled the carpet out from under our feet. Before this happened we had everything going for us.”

The housekeeping job at the state hospital provided decent wages and good benefits, including health insurance. Because of Christin Eastman’s post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety, however, she is uncertain about whether she could go back there, unless she could be assured of her safety.

“Now we have to start over again,” Charles Eastman said. “We don’t know what the next step’s going to be.”

Since the assault, Christin has been unable to return to work. She said she suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, post-concussive disorder and anxiety as a result of the attack.

She required surgery to fix her broken nose and a dental procedure to straighten her front teeth, which were pushed in during the attack.

More dental work, including root canals, will be required because of nerve damage to the teeth, Mead said.

When she came home from the hospital after the attack, her 10-year-old daughter was disturbed by her mother’s facial injuries and required counseling, family members said. Eastman also receives counseling.

“It has affected my life greatly and the life of my family,” Eastman said. “I’ve had to ask for help. I need to be taken places,” requiring her husband to take time off from work, without pay. “So that doesn’t help.”

Eastman, who said she is “haunted by nightmares,” decided to talk publicly about the assault in the hope that it would lead to changes that will better protect staff.

“It’s crazy how my attack that maybe lasted minutes has now consumed the life of not only myself but my family as well,” Eastman said. “I feel I have been robbed of so much, everything has revolved around me and I feel so guilty for that. I’ve been robbed of normalcy and happiness.”

Readers can call Patrick Springer at 701-241-5522.

person,” she said. “It gave me a false sense of security.”

Hospital administrators would not answer questions about the security cameras and whether they were properly monitored, saying they do not comment on “specific situations that are under investigation, currently being prosecuted, or specifically involve clients.”

It wasn’t unusual for nursing assistants who staffed the security camera monitoring booth to be disciplined for not paying proper attention, such as being distracted by smartphone videos, said Jessie Mead, Eastman’s sister and a former certified nursing assistant at the state hospital.

Still, she added, “There’s no reason why something like this should have been missed.”

Also, although staff at the hospital were supposed to carry radios for their safety, Eastman said she never was issued one.

“I was basically told that they were too much money,” she said. Instead, housekeepers were given pagers that were virtually pointless,” Eastman said. “It really wasn’t of use for emergency situations.”

The radios have a panic button, which staff call the “man down” button, to summon help if needed.

“As a CNA, I was never on that unit once without a radio,” Mead said. “I was told that was a dangerous unit to be on.”

Soon after the attack, she learned through co-workers and an email to staff, housekeeping staff were equipped with radios and worked in

pairs for their safety. The number of staff not directly assigned to direct patient care who carry radios was expanded following an “after-action review,” the hospital said in a statement. Such reviews “may result in changes in order to prevent future similar events.”

Eastman regularly said patients at Lahaug Hall have freedom of movement in the building, and many roam the hallways.

“The patients have free range in the unit,” she said. “They pace the halls to kill time.”

On the day of her assault, March 29, the unit was quiet, with only a few patients. Most were in classes or other activities.

Nothing seemed unusual before the assault. Eastman won’t discuss the assault because the suspect still awaits trial. But she spoke freely about her experiences as a housekeeper at the state hospital, where she’d started working in mid-December.

During her orientation, new employees were told to expect abuse from patients, including physical abuse.

“We were told that staff would be hit, smacked, spit on and swore at,” but never told they could be brutally attacked, Eastman said. “They said basically we knew what we were getting ourselves into with the job.”

At the time, Eastman wasn’t alarmed. “They justified it well,” she said. “It seemed OK. At the same time, they assured our safety quite a bit.”

Rosalie Etherington, superintendent of the state hospital, issued a statement in response

asserting that staff are instructed to report all incidents, including assaults:

“Staff are trained/oriented to report all assaults on an incident report AND to their supervisor,” she said. “The state hospital reports assaults to the police, with the exception of assaults involving individuals lacking competency (examples: dementia, acute episode of psychosis, etc.) Staff members are informed of their right to call the police if they are assaulted.”

But Eastman and Mead, who said she resigned from the state hospital in 2018, said employees commonly fail to report incidents because they are afraid of repercussions or because nothing is done about complaints.

“Everyone’s afraid they’re going to lose their job,” Mead said. “Nobody wants to step up and say anything.”

Mead said she quit her position when she learned her supervisor planned to fire her for write-ups and showing up late for work because of her child’s daycare schedule.

“People drop like flies at the state hospital,” Mead said. “People are let go. The door’s revolving. They leave or get fired.”

Staff turnover generally is high at psychiatric hospitals. The state hospital’s staff turnover rate was 24.2 percent in 2018 and 26.2 percent in 2017, according to state figures.

In fact, Eastman and her family believe they reported the assault to law enforcement, not the state hospital. While riding in the ambulance to the emergency room, Eastman called her mother to inform her of her injuries.

BRIEFS

History harvest event at Hjemkomst Center Aug. 24

MOORHEAD — The Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County (HCSCC) will host a community oral history project known as a “history harvest” from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 24, at the Hjemkomst Center, 202 1st Ave. N.

History harvests are community-based oral history projects during which visitors bring historical objects like photographs, diaries, letters and maps and share stories. The goal of the event is to gather and preserve stories about local experiences for HCSCC to share in articles, books, documentaries and museum exhibitions.

Interested parties are encouraged to bring an

item to the event. Local historians will be present to talk to visitors about their items and histories. With permission, they will then photograph the items and document those stories for future use by researchers, teachers, students and journalists. These photographs and stories will be entered into the community’s local, public record. Participation is free and includes museum admission.

This project is offered with support from the Science Museum of Minnesota and the Institute of Museum and Library Services. For more information or questions about accessibility and accommodations, contact Emily Kulzer, HCSCC’s director of operations at 218-299-5511, extension 6737, or emily.kulzer@hcmuse-

um.org.

Burgum says ‘red flag’ legislation is ‘worth considering’

BISMARCK — North Dakota Republican Gov. Doug Burgum signaled some conditional support for so-called “red flag” legislation to curb gun violence Tuesday, Aug. 6, after two mass shootings over the weekend.

The Republican-controlled state House earlier this year easily rejected legislation allowing judges to issue protection orders temporarily preventing people deemed dangerous from possessing guns. Critics said it infringed on constitutional rights, which proponents disputed.

In a statement, Burgum suggested the idea has some merit.

“We must ensure that

law-abiding citizens aren’t denied their Second Amendment right without due process first, but if family members or law enforcement believe an individual is suicidal or mentally ill and a danger to themselves or others, and a process can be established through the courts to keep that person safe after ensuring their right to due process, that’s worth considering,” he said.

A Burgum spokesman said the statement wasn’t meant to suggest he would have signed this year’s bill had it reached his desk. The spokesman wasn’t sure whether Burgum would advocate for such legislation when lawmakers reconvene in 2021.

Fargo Democratic Rep. Karla Rose Hanson, the primary sponsor of this

year’s bill, said Monday she wasn’t sure if she’d

reintroduce the bill next session.



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