



ALMORA TORNADO

Almora residents recall the deadly tornado of June 17, 2010, SEE PG. 12

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MAKE A SPLASH

Splash pad now open in Wadena

By Michael Johnson
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June 17, 2010, a tornado hit the Wadena City pool leaving behind a crumbled mess of cement blocks and metal fence along Seventh Street.

Almost 10 years later, on Tuesday, June 16, the city brought back some of the excitement once had at near that site by opening a splash pad. The momentarily wet occasion was welcomed as temperatures surpassed 90 degrees in the afternoon.

The opening was held off until just after 12:30 p.m. as the project had to undergo an inspection for public use. After passing inspection, a crowd of children bounced about nearby eager to get in.

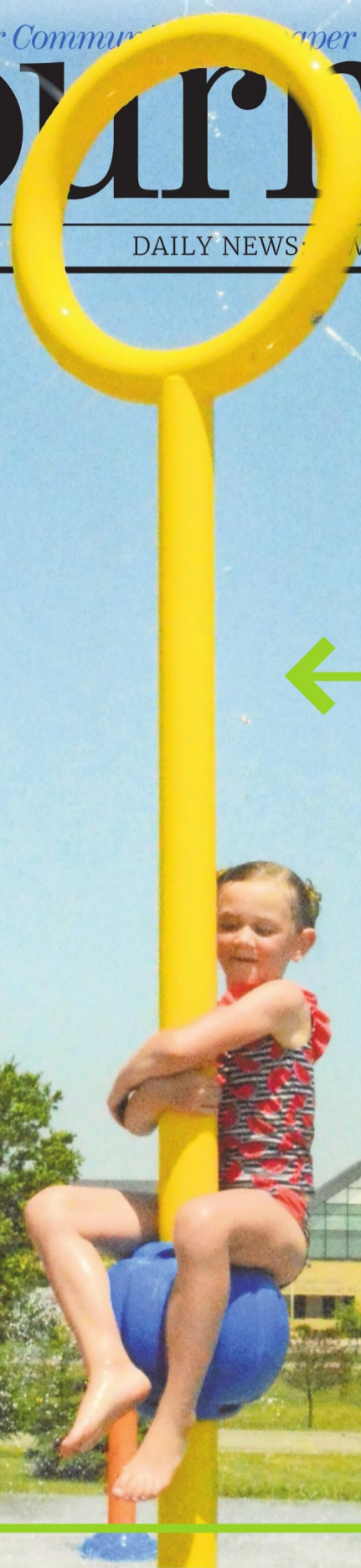


Photos by Michael Johnson / Pioneer Journal
RIGHT: Avery Oyster clings to a spinning sprinkler moments after the splash pad opened Tuesday afternoon in Fink's Park in Wadena. ABOVE: Ruger Oyster reacts after having a bucket of water dumped on him Tuesday afternoon at Wadena's splash pad.

Ruger and Avery Oyster both announced that the opening was "exciting!" Moms in the mix were glad to see the option open up as

temperatures were on the rise and water was on the minds of their kids.

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No rest for the weary

Police reflect on public safety efforts involved in the 2010 tornado

By Rebecca Mitchell
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When the tornado burst toward Wadena 10 years ago, on June 17, 2010, local law enforcement set aside their shifts for the June Jubilee parade route and searched the skies for the tornado not knowing the days and weeks ahead would test their skills of public safety like never before.

As reports came in from Otter Tail County, the officers and deputies were distributed throughout the city as weather spotters with a focus on the southwest portion of town. And after the destruction hit, local officers and deputies off-duty headed in to help. Law enforcement agencies and fire departments from throughout the region and state came too, including deputies from Douglas County who had fol-



Photo by Carrie Snyder / Forum News Service
Wadena County Sheriff Mike Carr (right) comforts sisters GERALYN PETERSEN (left) and JONELL ASFELD who lost her southwest Wadena home in the June 17, 2010 tornado.

lowed the Almora tornado up Co Hwy 143.

Wadena County Sheriff Michael Carr said it was an "unbelievable experience" and "probably one of the most destructible things I've ever witnessed in my entire career" of 27 years. He was weather spotting south of town about one-half mile from the tornado path and could not see a car's length in front of

him. One of the county jailers first alerted him of the tornado on the ground.

The parade and all-school reunion had brought in extra people, and the 5 p.m. tornado meant people were traveling home from work, "bad timing," as Carr said. With power lines down and gas leaks, the Emergency Operations Center

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Oma's Bread is serving up their delectable treats in a new location around the corner from their previous location between Verizon Wireless and Central Minnesota Credit Union. They opened in their new location at the old Family Dollar Building on June 9.

Rebecca Mitchell / Pioneer Journal

Oma's Bread keeps things exciting at new location

By Rebecca Mitchell
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The around the corner move for Oma's Bread took place in a matter of hours, and 10 days, to organize and arrange their bigger space. While Oma's was closed May 30-June 8, Oma's head baker and business development manager Yvonne Strom said the previous location was cleared out in approximately five hours with the help of friends.

The new location, in the old Family

Dollar building at 10 SW Aldrich Ave., has a larger dining room space and bigger kitchen, including more ovens and a walk-in fridge and freezer. While operating under coronavirus re-opening measures, outdoor and indoor seating are open with the tables set 6 feet apart and a maximum of four people per table or six if a family. Strom said people love the indoor space but "a lot" choose the fresh air outside.

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Hunkes consider plan to expand Southside Sinclair station

By Michael Johnson
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The response from the public for the new Southside Sinclair fuel station in Wadena has been positive enough that owners are considering expansion projects at the business that's been operating just six months.

The Wadena City Council approved entering into a Purchase and Right of First Refusal Agreement with Patrick Hunke for Lot 3, Block 2, of the Wadena Business Park Addition during their regular council meeting Tuesday, June 9. This additional lot would allow the business to secure further ground to add more fueling stations, a convenience store and an attached car wash.

Hunke's chose to move to the southside location last year after the need arose to move from their fuel site along Hwy 10 with the pending reconstruction of the highway. Since December, the fuel station has been

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Michael Johnson / Pioneer Journal
Southside Sinclair could see an expansion as plans are underway to add more fuel pumps and a convenience store at the south Hwy 71 location.

Friendly Rider

Temporary Hour Change: Starting Monday May 4th 2020

In Coordination with Wadena County Public Health- Friendly Rider's Hours for Dispatching are Monday - Friday 8:00a.m. to 4:30p.m. Friendly Rider will be closed Saturdays.

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mi DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Wadena County



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allowing pay-at-the-pump fuel 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Ryan Hunke spoke with city council members about the proposal and shared that the convenience store could have ready-to-eat-food, some grocery items and if the city was on board, a potential second municipal liquor store location.

"There is a need for food and fuel south of town, I think we can all vouch for that," Hunke said.

To meet the expected increase in demand for fuel, Hunke is considering adding another canopy and more fuel pumps to the north of the existing center. The site plan for this project shows there is a need for more space than is available on lot 4, as such they are requesting a purchase option to Hunke Realty on lot 3 of the Wadena business Park and approval to assign the current option on lot 4 from Hunke Fuel to Hunke Realty.

Hunke emphasized that talk of the city renting a portion of the convenience store for liquor sales was very preliminary. He simply wanted to "spitball" the idea to council members to hear their thoughts. In his opinion, the move would be a win-win for both the fuel station and the city. Hunke said he's been hearing about people not pulling into the current location due to a crowded parking lot, or due to the difficulty to turn in under the current road access restrictions.

The idea brought considerable discussion from all council members.

Councilman Mark Lunde asked if a rental space would be added even if the city was not interested in the liquor store option. Hunke said that space would require backing from the city as it was a large investment.

"We really would love the backing of this foot traffic," Hunke said.

Lunde next asked if it was safe to say that the business was doing well enough to consider such an expansion. Hunke expanded on the state of the business sharing that the funds the business received from the state to move their business helped them cover some costs involved in the new location, which gave them a good start without excessive debt.

Lunde said he would love to see another location, but was unsure at this time that it would be profitable without further information.

In looking at what other cities are doing, City Administrator Janette Bower found out that the city can start a second location, and doing so is much easier than starting the first location. It requires a city resolution. That was encouraging to her to know there were not as many hoops to jump through in order to make for a speedy process if needed. Bower referenced Lakeville, Minn., a city of about 66,000, was opening a fourth municipal liquor store.

Councilman Bruce Uselman said it looked like a great idea, but there was a lot to think about for the city to consider such a move. Mayor George Deiss said those passing through Wadena are going to have and already have difficulty turning around to get into the current liquor store, especially those with boats and campers that miss a turn. Deiss said a traffic count would be a major help to see how helpful this would be.

Wadena Economic Development Director Dean Uselman echoed that statement.

"A lot of people traveling on Hwy 71 will turn in there because it is so much easier than negotiating the traffic and the new center curbs of Hwy 10 in the 10/71 vicinity," Uselman said.

Hunke shared that the retail rental space would be about 2,500 -2,700 square feet. That would be larger than the city's current location.

Wadena Liquor Store Manager Tim Booth said it was difficult to know just how well a second location would do, whether it would just take away from the current location or add to it. He believed that it would be a convenience to those on the southside of town. He also shared that the city is going through a liquor store feasibility study that may shed light on what would be a good move.

"If I was traveling, I would probably go there," Booth said.

Booth considered that with payroll and rent, possibly around \$14,000 a year, they would have to sell nearly \$700,000 in product to pay for the added cost of a second location.

"It's going to be a risk," Hunke said. But he considered that those traveling south on Hwy 71 don't have another place to purchase until Sauk Centre. He didn't want to completely focus on the liquor store, however.

"I think all together this plan would be great for the community, I think it would work," Hunke said. "It's hard to think it wouldn't."

No decisions were made regarding the liquor store idea. All parties agreed to continue the conversation.

The Wadena Development Authority board reviewed the proposal of the option to purchase and the right of first refusal prior to the council meeting and recommended approval of the option to purchase lot 3 for the posted price of \$20,000, as well as the assignment of the current option to purchase lot 4 under the same terms as written. All council members were in favor of the WDA recommendation.

While the agreement states that Hunkes have the right to purchase for a five-year period, Ryan Hunke said that expansion by next spring was possible. Hunkes right of first refusal means that if a third party makes an offer on the same piece of property during the next five years, Hunkes Realty has 15 days after that notice to enter into a purchase of the property with closing to take place within 60 days. They can also choose to not purchase during the period and the city can sell to another interested buyer.



The dining room area has expanded to include tables and bar seating. For now, the tables remain 6 feet apart and people have the option of sitting outside.

Rebecca Mitchell/
Pioneer Journal

BREAD

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"So far everybody loves it and they can't believe it's such a beautiful place in Wadena. They're like, 'We're in

Wadena? This doesn't look like Wadena,'" Strom said.

Strom has enjoyed the additional kitchen space, especially as wedding season brings in orders.

"We're just trying to make it everyday and still keep it exciting and different," Strom said. "Wedding

season's happening now, so there's more and more wedding orders, which helps with the bigger location, bigger kitchen."

The new hours for Oma's are: Tuesday-Wednesday 7 a.m. to 3 p.m., Thursday-Saturday 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. and closed Sunday and Monday.

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response still developed quickly in the bottom of the Wadena County Courthouse, according to former Wadena Police Chief Bruce Uselman and Carr. As emergency management director, Uselman coordinated with other departments, including the sheriff's and fire departments.

As an officer at the time, current Police Chief Naomi Plautz was preparing for a shift. "I didn't get called in but I went in," Plautz said. "We all did, all of us officers."

In the Emergency Operations Center, Plautz and Wadena County investigator Amy Lane worked on logistics and operations. The goal was to "Get that done. Make that happen," as Plautz said, from dump trucks and rakes to officer shifts and duties.

"Later driving through the affected area it was just surreal to see citizens and people that I've known for years literally walking on the street with their pet and/or their children in hand not having a house anymore. And that was an image that I'll never forget," Plautz said.

Along with the public, the devastation and the amazing fact that no one was killed in the Wadena tornado came quickly to their minds, as Carr, Plautz and Uselman remarked.

While roads were blocked off for the public's safety, it was also difficult for emergency responders to make it through the debris of homes and trees, according to Uselman. The Minnesota State Patrol rerouted traffic for a few weeks, according to Plautz. Law enforcement officials went house to house to check for injuries and deceased people, according to Carr.

Both Uselman and Plautz recall images of the school. For Plautz, her first view of the destruction was the school and community center as she drove in from the west side of town on Hwy 29.

"The roof of the community center looked like somebody took tin foil and just ... crumpled it into a ball and it was on top of the house there," Plautz said.

As the days continued, Uselman sought to keep people out of the school.

"(The school) was collapsing each day and deteriorating, and so that was a big piece in and of itself working with the school superintendent to determine if anything could be salvaged out of that building and basically there was nothing that was really able to be salvaged," Uselman said.

People had to be kept out of areas in town, too, with check-ins required at the Wadena County Courthouse and law enforcement and fire department escorts to their properties. The city also had curfews and lockdowns to protect people's belongings from looters and scammers with as many as 35 officers spaced out along the streets throughout the



Wadena Pioneer Journal archives

The remains of Wadena Community Center can be seen sitting on Wadena-Deer Creek High School moments after an EF4 tornado tore through Wadena June 17, 2010.

Tornado safety tips

*The following list is from the American Red Cross. For more information, visit www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/types-of-emergencies/tornado.

Before

- ▶ Assemble an emergency preparedness kit.
- ▶ Create a household evacuation plan.
- ▶ Stay informed about your community's plans.

During

- ▶ Don't wait until you see the tornado to act. Listen to local area radio, NOAA radio or TV stations for the latest information.
- ▶ Identify a safe place in your home: a basement, storm cellar or an interior room on the lowest floor with no windows.
- ▶ In a high-rise building, pick a hallway in the center of the building. You may not have enough time to go to the lowest floor.
- ▶ In a mobile home, choose a safe place in a nearby sturdy building. No mobile home, however it is configured, is safe in a tornado.
- ▶ If you are outdoors seek shelter in a basement, shelter or sturdy building. Stay away from bridge/highway overpasses.

night, according to Carr.

"It was one of those things that we did a lot of good things of making the public, I felt, feel secure the best that we could even though ... their properties were destroyed," Carr said.

At the time, Uselman and Carr learned to "make do" with the radio communications available and the long hours for officers and deputies. Carr said he did not sleep for the first two days.

Shelter for people, providing Porta Potties and making sure people had food and water through the Red Cross and Salvation Army were other pieces law enforcement focused on immediately, according to Uselman and Carr. The support from state agencies included Homeland Security and Emergency Management, Minnesota State Patrol, Minnesota Department of Transportation, Minnesota Department of Public Safety, the National Guard and State Fire Marshall Agency, according to Plautz.

"Mutual aid started coming in immediately but we had to coordinate all that," Uselman said.

While the state aid greatly helped, Carr, Plautz and Uselman each credit the work of local law enforcement and fire departments working together for the

recovery success. Plautz said these relationships are "worth its weight in gold." Carr also said everyone put aside their egos and rolled up their sleeves to work.

"These men and women all know each other by first name and we work that way on a daily basis so it just fell together in a big incident. And that's pretty comforting ... to know that we have communities here that work that well together," Uselman said.

As the agencies worked together, one barrier was the radio communication system, which only had three channels at the time, according to Uselman and Plautz. The three channels were local, repeater and statewide, though agencies who came to help might not have the local channel. Today the channels have greatly expanded with separate channels for law enforcement, fire departments and ambulances. The separate channels allow for smoother communication, according to Plautz.

Another part of the police and sheriff departments' response are the tornado sirens, which warn people to take cover and find shelter, according to Plautz and Carr. While the sirens were originally used for the fire department, Carr said after