



LONGTIME BUSINESS HAS NEW OWNERS

Bob's Fleet Supply of Jackson — a downtown mainstay for more than six decades — has new owners. Jeff and Jen Tewes closed on the purchase of the business April 1.

Story, A3



JACKSON COUNTY PILOT

THURSDAY, APRIL 7, 2022

132ND YEAR/ISSUE 14

Sheriff's office sees spike in gas drive-offs, traffic crime

High gas prices, national rhetoric are likely factors

by JOSHUA SCHUETZ
Staff Writer

The Jackson County Sheriff's Office is seeing a spike in traffic-related crimes this year, with rising reports of gas drive-offs, speeding and similar offenses.

The department responded to seven gas drive-offs in Jackson last month — one the first day of the month, four over a five-day stretch March 14-19 and another two over a three-day stretch March 26-28. A gas drive-off is when a person fills up a tank of gas at a gas station and leaves without paying.

Jackson County Sheriff Shawn Haken said rising gas prices are almost certainly a factor in the recent increase in the number of gas drive-offs.

Because so many people go in and out of gas stations every day, it's difficult for employees to catch the thieves, Haken said, even with cameras.



Shawn Haken

"What we rely on is an employee spotting it and reporting the person to us, giving us a description of the vehicle and giving a direction," Haken said. "Then, we pursue and try to find them."

The increasing number of gas drive-offs comes on the heels of a recent rise in other traffic crimes the sheriff's office has seen.

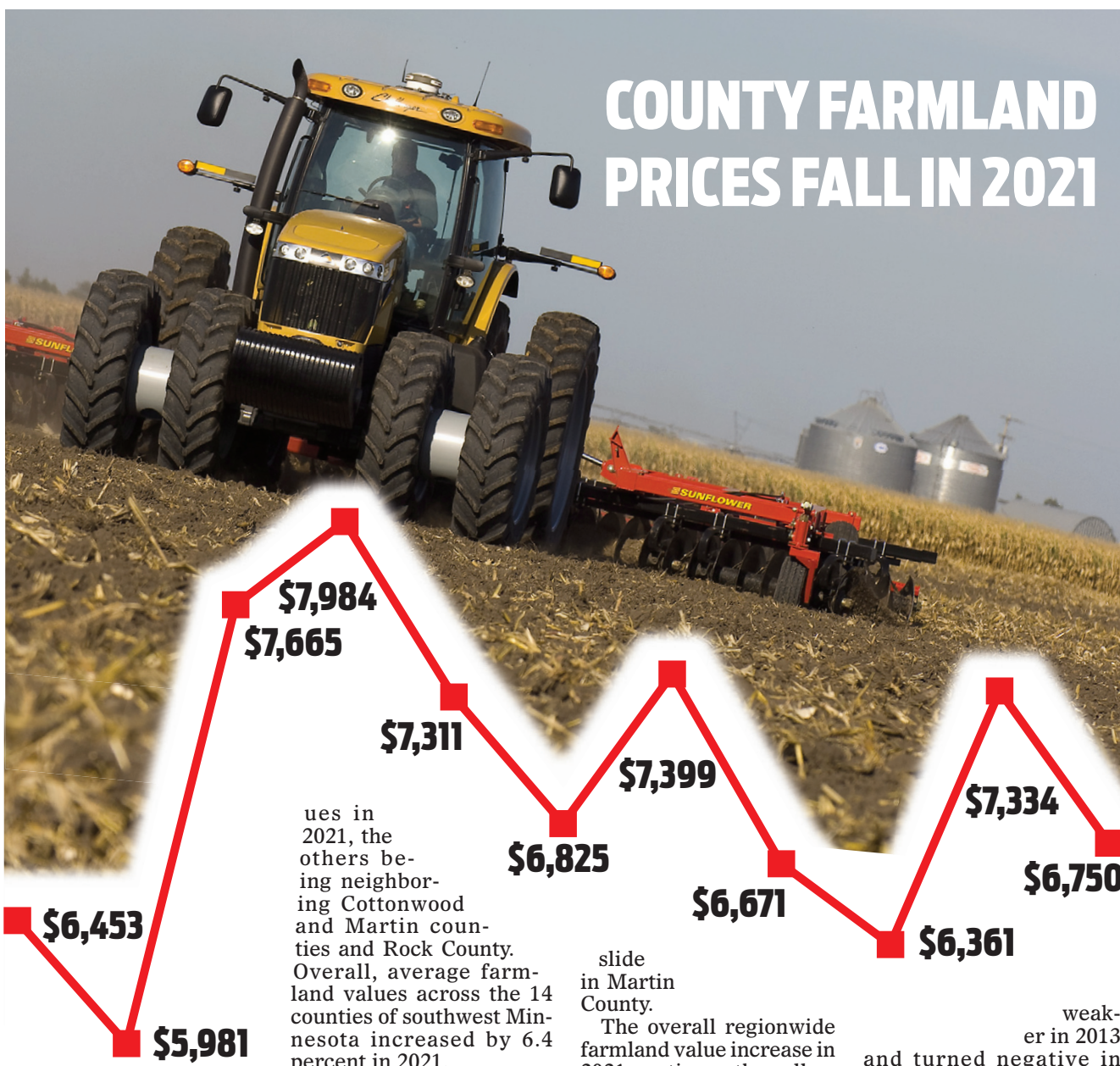
"We've seen it over the past year, and it started before gas prices started rising rapidly," Haken said.

Haken said Jackson's proximity to Interstate 90 is a major factor in the recent spike in traffic crime. The department has also seen an increase in outstanding warrants, most of which are from out of state.

"On any given day, we have several hundred active warrants for people, and I would estimate half of them are for traffic violations on the interstate," Haken said. "Not only are people not paying for gas, they're getting fines and not paying them or contesting them in court."

While as of last week, no gas drive-offs had been reported in nearby Lakefield, Haken said other municipalities are seeing similar behavior and attributed it to a lack of respect for the law and

See **TRAFFIC CRIME** on A3



by JUSTIN R. LESSMAN
Publisher

The average price paid for an acre of Jackson County farmland in 2021 was lower than the year prior, even as average sale prices across the region increased.

The average price paid for an acre of Jackson County farmland in the first half of last year was \$6,750 — 8 percent less than the average paid in the same time period in 2020.

The year-over-year sales price slide comes on the heels of a 15.3 percent local price spike in 2020.

Jackson County was one of only four counties across southwest Minnesota that saw a decrease in land val-



Dave Bau

ues in 2021, the others being neighboring Cottonwood and Martin counties and Rock County. Overall, average farmland values across the 14 counties of southwest Minnesota increased by 6.4 percent in 2021.

Jackson County's high-water mark for average farmland values was \$7,984 per acre back in 2014. Since then, average farmland values in the county have decreased five times and increased twice, settling in 2021 at a level more than 15 percent off the all-time high.

Dave Bau, area extension educator in ag business, said it's difficult to pinpoint exactly why land prices decreased in Jackson County and a handful of others in 2021, but increased on average across the region.

"Each year, sales vary," he said, adding land location, the quality of land sold and the number of sales in a county all factor into the equation.

That said, Bau admitted the spread in 2021 was wide.

"There was a lot of variability in the numbers from 2020 to 2021," he said, pointing out the 64 percent increase in Lincoln County and the nearly 16 percent

COUNTY FARMLAND PRICES FALL IN 2021

slide in Martin County.

The overall regionwide farmland value increase in 2021 continues the roller-coaster ride average land values have been on for the last decade. Land values had been steadily increasing until shooting up by nearly a third in 2012 and by more than a third in 2013. Values declined the next four consecutive years, increased a bit in 2018 and fell again in 2019 and 2020 before jumping by 6.4 percent last year.

"The 6.4 percent increase is above historical increases of 1 to 2 percent," Bau said. "For the last 10 years there have been large percent changes."

Bau said several factors affect land values, among them farm incomes, grain prices, interest rates, return on other investments and 1031 exchanges.

Local farmers enjoyed record farm profits in 2011 and 2012 and mixed results in 2013. Things turned sour in 2014 and 2015, Bau said, and it quickly caught up to the prices being paid for farmland.

"Farm profits were

weaker in 2013 and turned negative in 2014 with lower commodity prices," he said. "If the average farmer had losses from 2014 through 2018, this would soften local demand for the land from farmers."

However, average incomes improved in 2019 and 2020, Bau said, and were higher in 2021.

For those counties seeing a boost in average land prices, Bau points to several factors. Interest rates have stayed relatively flat, he said, and land rental income remains comparable to or higher than what an investor can earn from treasury bills, bonds or certificates of deposit at financial institutions. The stock market posted strong returns in 2021. And the 1031 exchange remains a factor.

"The 1031 exchange is for farmers or property owners who have land in an area of increased value due to location to city or development and, rather

See **FARMLAND** on A3

Case counts, vax stats flat

County notches single new case over last week

by JUSTIN R. LESSMAN
Publisher

The number of new cases of COVID-19 being reported in Jackson County has dropped to nearly zero, as has the number of people getting vaccinated against the disease.

Jackson County recorded a single new case of COVID-19 over the last

week, the lowest new seven-day caseload count in the last eight months. It's the third consecutive week of declining caseload numbers for the county and seventh straight week of single-digit COVID-19 caseload counts. The last time the county recorded just a single new weekly case of the disease the week ending Aug. 3, 2021.

The stabilization in the county's caseload count comes as the number of locals vaccinated against

See **CASE COUNTS** on A3

Jackson native runs for local congressional seat

by JOSHUA SCHUETZ
Staff Writer

A Jackson native is seeking to represent his former hometown in Congress.

Matt Benda, a 1988 graduate of Jackson High School and current Albert Lea attorney, is running for the First Congressional District seat vacated in February upon the death of former U.S. Rep. Jim Hagedorn.

Benda, who is running as a Republican, has three



Matt Benda

Inside...

A3 Former Minnesota Republican Party chair Jennifer Carnahan, wife of the late U.S. Rep. Jim Hagedorn, will travel to Jackson in the near future to campaign for his seat.

campaign issues he ranks as most important — energy independence, education and election integrity.

"One important thing for the First Congressional District is energy independence, and we need to use the tools we have in the district to achieve that," he said. "I'm an 'all of the above' guy with respect to energy policy, so that means biofuels, ethanol, wind and solar energy, natural gas and fossil fuels,

so I want to see us kickstart our shale fields and open up more to oil production."

He wants to see the government allow the Keystone Pipeline to resume construction and has his eye on a seat on the House agriculture committee, a position he says would allow him to better advocate for farmers and energy producers, groups he said often intersect in southern Minnesota.

See **BENDA** on A3



PHOTO BY JUSTIN LESSMAN

PUCKER UP

Sarah Theesfeld (left), a second-grade teacher at Riverside Elementary School, bursts into laughter as paraprofessional Laura Marker kisses a pig during a celebration of the school's One School One Book program last Tuesday afternoon.