



Community Calendar

Tuesday, Dec. 5

>> The Cross County Elementary Art Show will be held Tuesday, Dec. 5. The grand opening will be from 6-9 p.m. Cookies and coffee will be served in Mrs. Hinton's room during this time. This will be an opportunity to support the arts and get pictures taken with this year's mural.

>> The annual York High School Band Boosters soup supper will be held Tuesday, Dec. 5, from 5-6:45 p.m., at the York High School commons area. This will be held prior to the band concert.

>> The Pre-K through fifth grade winter concert will be held at Cross County School on Tuesday, Dec. 5, at 7 p.m.

>> Centennial will host and Elementary Family Night on Tuesday, Dec. 5.

>> A potluck dinner will be served at the Fairmont Senior Center on Tuesday, Dec. 5.

>> The Fillmore Central middle school winter concert will be held Tuesday, Dec. 5.

>> Give yourself an hour of freedom and your toddler some time to make friends, play games, discover crafts and learn developmental skills during Tot Time at the York Community Center on Tuesday, Dec. 5 from 10 - 11 a.m. Open to children ages 3-5.

>> The Gresham Village Board will meet Tuesday, Dec. 5, at 7 p.m., at the village office.

Dec. 5-10

>> Yorkshire Playhouse's Holiday Production of 'A Laura Ingalls Wilder Christmas' will be presented Dec.

5 - 10. Tickets may be purchased at yorkshireplayhouse.com/box-office today.

Wednesday, Dec. 6

>> The Cross County Booster Club will meet at 6:30 p.m., on Wednesday, Dec. 6, at the media center at the school.

>> Girl Scout Troop #50011 will meet Wednesday, Dec. 6, from 6-7:30 p.m., at the Benedict Community Center.

>> On Dec. 6, at Fillmore Central High School, there will be a "hands only" CPR class to educate all the students. Rotary District Governor Gary Brin issued the challenge to teach 200 people in the community hands only CPR. This is made possible by a Fillmore County Foundation Grant, firefighters and EMT personnel and Geneva Rotarians. The assembly to teach students will begin at 1 p.m.

>> The Fairmont Legion men and Auxiliary will meet at 7:30 p.m., on Wednesday, Dec. 6. Members are asked to bring Christmas treats.

>> High Plains will hold their National Honor Society Induction on Wednesday, Dec. 6 at 3 p.m.

>> Early Out Movie! Kids are invited to watch a newly released, animated, rated PG movie at the Geneva Public Library on Wednesday, Dec. 6 at 3 p.m. Free to attend.

>> St. Peter Lutheran Church will hold an Advent service on Wednesday, Dec. 6, at 7:30 p.m.

>> Classes at Hampton will dismiss early on Wednesday, Dec. 6 at 2 p.m. for Teacher In-Service.

>> The Waco senior citizens will meet at noon on Wednesday, Dec. 6, for a luncheon at Hunter's.



Rotary promotes safe driving

SPECIAL TO THE TELEGRAM

COLUMBUS — Columbus Morning Rotary is taking on a project to promote safe driving.

The group is installing 35 metal signs at local schools that remind students and parents to buckle up and not text while driving.

Rotary member Ken Curry, a former member of the Columbus Public Schools Board of Education, and Rotary President Kim Konz are leading the project.

A survey commissioned by AT&T as part of the “It Can Wait” campaign indicates that while 97 percent of teens know texting while driving is dangerous, 43 percent admit to sending a text while driving and 75 percent say the practice is common among their friends.

“Not texting is an important community message because text messaging makes a car crash 23 times more likely to occur,” Konz said.

The National Safety Council reports that cellphone use while driving leads to 1.6 million crashes each year. Nearly 330,000 injuries occur annually from accidents caused by texting while driving.

The sign project is funded partially by funds received when the Columbus Morning and Noon Rotary groups won second place for a video about their signature fundraiser, the annual Loup d’ Loup bike ride.

Columbus Morning Rotary meets at 6:50 a.m. Thursdays at Picket Fence Cafe.

Columbus Morning Rotary posted signs like this one at Columbus High School reminding motorists to drive safely by not texting while they’re behind the wheel.

JULIE BLUM, THE COLUMBUS TELEGRAM



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CALENDAR

TODAY

Fremont Rotary Club, noon, Fremont
Golf Club, N. Somers Ave.



Sex trafficking reportedly a growing issue in Nebraska

■ Webster shares insight, recent stats during Rotary speech

by Kurt Johnson

Trafficking of humans has reportedly become the second largest criminal industry in the world, with signs that this form of modern-day slavery may be spreading to Nebraska and even here to Hamilton County.

That alarming report came from Kerry Webster, who shared insight from her work with the Hastings Anti-Human Traffic Coalition during a presentation Nov. 22 to the Aurora Rotary Club.

“Unfortunately, you are not immune to this at all,” Webster said. “You are right off I-80, which is a huge corridor for sex trafficking, especially being so

close to Grand Island. It’s everywhere, and we really need to pay attention to other people.”

Human trafficking, Webster explained, is an umbrella term that encompasses both the exploitation of individuals for labor as well as exploitation for commercial gain through sex. The vast majority of cases (80-85 percent) involve sex trafficking. The age range of victims averages from 12 to 40 in Nebraska, though recent data from Creighton University and the Women’s Fund of Omaha suggests that number is dropping.

Webster,

who grew up in England, said she first became aware of human trafficking eight years ago while working at a sexual assault crisis center. While

helping a victim with what she thought were signs of domestic violence, she heard references to a “contract” and said it scared her.

“I googled it (human trafficking) and the things she was sharing kind of fit into that,” she recalled.

With the support of her employer, Webster attended training sessions on human trafficking, including a workshop in Nashville where she met a pastor who admitted to being a trafficker in a previous life.

“He shared that 15 years ago he came through Nebraska and he told me what Nebraskans liked for their girls,” she said. “After talking to him a little bit I realized this is a problem here in Nebraska.”

Webster said she felt like “a lone ranger” for years working on an issue many assume only happens in big cities or other parts of the world. That has begun to change, however, with the formation of three coalitions in Hastings, Lincoln and Lexington, as well as an FBI-led Omaha Exploitation Task Force.

Webster cited a recent study of a website called Backpage.com, which she called a sort of Craigslist for human trafficking. During the past year there were more than 1,500 ads listed in Hamilton County.

“Unfortunately, we see from

there that the ads are coming in to you guys here in Hamilton County,” she noted. “That is

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‘Unfortunately, you are not immune to this at all. You are right off I-80, which is a huge corridor for sex trafficking, especially being so close to Grand Island.’

Kerry Webster,
Anti-Human Trafficking
Coalition in Hastings

HOTLINE NUMBER

■ Anyone with information or concerns about possible human trafficking violations is encouraged to call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center at 1-888-373-7888.

TRAFFICKING

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based off demand as well. People are not going to advertise where it’s not needed.”

Hamilton County resource

Here in Hamilton County, Webster has begun working with Theresa Arnett Nickolaus, founder and director of Sozo Family Services in Aurora.

“I can tell you that I currently serve two human trafficking survivors,” Arnett Nickolaus reported of teenage victims she sees monthly. “This is a growing issue, very much so. For one, social media and smartphones make teenagers easy prey and targets.”

Arnett Nickolaus commended

the Nebraska State Patrol and local law enforcement for being supportive and aware of the issue.

“Just changing the way they interview women or suspected victims of trafficking is definitely

a huge step,” she said. “Statistically, a higher percentage of victims are female, however males are also being trafficked.”

Webster reported that human trafficking victims are often runaways or minors looking for love and support. Sadly, those vulnerable individuals often find support from the wrong people.

“One in three are approached for prostitution without 48 hours of running away,” she said. “We have to watch out for runaways and foster kids, especially in Lincoln and Omaha.”

The issue has spread well beyond large cities, however. Webster reported cases involving 14- and 16-year-old girls in a rural community who were allowed to leave school during the day for what was later determined to be sex trafficking appointments. She also cited a case in Iowa where an adult male was convicted of trafficking two girls from a nearby town of less than 500 population.

“Nearly half of the victims in Nebraska are from Nebraska and most of our victims are Nebraska youth, so that’s scary,” she said. “I have children and it scares me that at the age of 12 my daughter might be pulled into something like this.”

Arnett Nickolaus and Webster are both working to raise awareness on human trafficking, offering to make presentations to interested organizations. Both are able to connect victims with agencies that can shelter, counsel, transport and provide medical

services to victims.

Arnett Nickolaus can be reached at Sozo Family Services in Aurora (402-694-7267). Webster can be reached at 402-410-1502 or via email at kerryan-new1@gmail.com.