

Midwest Messenger

LIVESTOCK

ROUNDUP



Sandhills Celebration in Burwell to explore ranching, natural history

The Sandhills Celebration event hosted by the Sandhills Task Force will include guided tours at three ranches and an afternoon of presentations Friday, Sept. 18 at the Hitching Post in Burwell, Nebraska.

Morning activities begin at 8 a.m., featuring visits to the Redman Ranch, the Lakin Ranch and the Larsen Ranch near Burwell. Lunch will be served at noon and cost \$15 (an RSVP is required for the meal only).

Afternoon presentations from 1-6 p.m. will showcase the Nebraska Sandhills, ranching and natural history themes through presentations, exhibitors, panelists and discussions.

Sandhills ranchers will be featured in a panelist discussion, exploring the theme of "ranching innovations" with topics on stream and wetland restoration, prescribed



Sandhills Task Force photo

Ranch tours will be part of the Sandhills Celebration Sept. 18.

fire, grazing improvements, virtual fence, mental health and more.

Paul Hanson, professor with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) School of Natural Resources, will present

"Geologic History of the Nebraska Sandhills." Research updates with UNL graduate students and biologists with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission will also be featured.

Work of the Sandhills Task Force will be highlighted at 5 p.m. with a review of projects and

programs, followed by an evening dinner and social event from 6-8 p.m. Ranchers and supporters will gather over a New York strip steak meal and drinks served by the Hitching Post. The cost is \$30 (an RSVP is

required for meal by Sept. 14).

"This event is an opportunity to gather and celebrate the Nebraska Sandhills," said Shelly Kelly, Sandhills Task Force executive director. "We hope to make this an annual event and we encourage folks to stay an extra day to explore the area."

The Sandhills Celebration will also feature a silent auction with all proceeds to benefit the Sandhills Task Force, a rancher-led non-profit formed in 1993 with the mission of enhancing grassland ecosystems and water, while sustaining private, profitable ranching in the Nebraska Sandhills.

All events are free and open to the public (the RSVP and costs are for meals only). For more information and meal reservations, visit sandhillstaskforce.org or call/text Amy at 402- 440-8612.

ULDRICH CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

Sept. 1, Uldrich moved his cattle out of the pasture that had been decimated by army cutworms. They were able to knock down most of the weed growth.

"We hope with intense grazing that we stimulated some of the native seed that's in the seed bank," he said.

Next, he will have a friend fly on an annual cover crop with a drone, hopefully ahead of rainfall so it germinates quickly.

Now, the herd is grazing through a hay patch that suffered from drought conditions. Bromegrass didn't grow enough to cut, and crabgrass and other weeds outcompeted it. The cattle were able to take cover from the hot sun in the shade of the creek side trees.

Meanwhile, he's watching more closely this year for cutworm infestations. Cutting hay he's noticed larva, but numbers aren't high yet. Once they reach the threshold, he plans to spray.

Uldrich and about 40 other producers attended the Nebraska Soil Health Coalition field day at Zach Mader's farm near Grand Island. Uldrich said he appreciated seeing alternatives to raising row crops and how it can pencil out.

Jordan Uldrich is a fifth generation on his Fillmore County farm, working with his dad and brother to raise conventional corn, soybeans, milo and rye and a small beef herd. He has adopted regenerative practices, including interseeding cover crops and rotational grazing. Jordan is a board member and has one of the demonstration-education sites for the Nebraska Soil Health Coalition.

SEBERGER CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

When we have twins, we always pair them into a smaller pasture or into a corral so that we can keep a closer eye on them and it is easier for the cow to keep track of them. Twins can also be more difficult if the cow wants only one of the calves. In that case, we usually run the cow into a chute to give the calf a chance to drink.

On Sept. 2, Rock County FFA travelled to Sargent, Nebraska for a range judging competition. Range judging is an FFA contest where participants identify range plants and their characteristics, determine soil types, and complete a ranch map with a multiple choice test. Identifying all 24 plants is a challenge. Some plants are easy, like big or little bluestem, but some are more difficult like four-point evening-primrose.

When determining soil type, you classify it as an "ecological site" like sandy, loamy upland, or shallow. The map is of an example ranch with water tanks, salt and mineral locations, weeds and other components labeled. Participants answer questions about the management of the ranch like adding cross-fencing or beginning rotational grazing.

The competition started at 9 a.m. and it quickly got hot out. After our range judging, our team stopped and had a picnic at the park in Taylor, Nebraska.

One of Rock County FFA's goals is expanding involvement opportunities for our freshmen and junior high members. Each year, an event called "Bigger or Better" provides a chance for younger members to get more involved in our chapter.

"Bigger or Better" is a competition among our FFA pods, which are smaller groups with an officer and around 10 other members. The competition is to see who can trade a

paperclip for the biggest or best item. All the groups start at the high school and have one hour to go around town trading the paper clip for a better item, and then

trading that item for an even better item and so on. The pod leaders aren't allowed to do any of the talking, so the junior high and freshman members have to learn and use communication, salesmanship and leadership skills.

My group traded from the paper clip to breadsticks and cheese dip, to a box of cookies, to a water bottle and Rice Krispies Treats, to a dinosaur costume and a necklace.

In the coming weeks, I look forward to the start of branding season, more range judging competitions, and watching my sister's volleyball team play their first game!

Noah Seberger is a high school junior and president of the Rock County FFA chapter in Bassett, Neb. He enjoys working alongside family on haying operations and raising Black Angus cattle as the sixth generation on the ranch now run by his grandparents, Frank and Pam Seberger.



Submitted photo

Rock County FFA's annual "Bigger or Better" event is a chance for underclassmen to get involved and practice communication skills.



Submitted photos by Katie Kaliff-Jagels

SANDHILLS SUNRISE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

that 10 years have passed since we said “I do” in the back yard of my parents’ home.

As with any relationship, it hasn’t always been easy, but I don’t think God leads us to marriage because it’s easy, but rather to learn how to love the way he does – with grace through the seasons.

The last five years were some of the toughest for us – between the move and miles from what we knew, health challenges, to adding a daughter and another business on top of the one we started with, there were some pains in the process. I had to learn to let Jason lead us during times, and he had to let me lead at times, too. We’ve had to love and lean on one another through those big life changes, and I know it wasn’t always easy to love me.

When we were first married, I was able to help with the cattle more. There’s something really special about being able to work alongside your spouse, even on the days that it’s really challenging. You can almost read their mind, and you’re in a flow together. As my full-time job got

busier, and now with raising our daughter, I just don’t get to help as much. I miss those days. Sometimes it’s hard to find time in between the race of life to connect, aside from the short conversations as we lay there before bed.

Jason and I are both independent, and I’ve said it before, he’s really the calm to my chaos. To be fair, I never promised a quiet or boring life in the vows. He’s grounded and firm in his convictions, and I’m always floating in orbit with my dreams and ideas (not all good ones). This summer he’s taken our daughter with him countless days, and I’m so proud of the dad he is. I know our daughter will cherish these memories, and I think Jason will, too.

Marriage also comes with the addition of in-laws to your life, and we celebrated my mother-in-law, Suzanne’s, birthday this month. When I think of the saying “giving someone the shirt off your back,” I think of Suzanne.

My in-laws have made many sacrifices for Jason and I – from making it possible for Jason to come back and farm, to helping us with the ranch, to now helping with our daughter. I’ll forever be grateful for how much they’ve showed up for us. Even during the negative-degree nights in the middle of calving season, they’re here helping.

When we first moved, and I was in my own battles, it was hard for me to accept any help. I watched everyone help when I couldn’t. I was maybe the worst version of myself during those times, and somehow my in-laws kept showing



up and giving grace.

I think that’s the unconditional love of a parent, in my opinion. In the seasons where it’s so hard, you keep loving your kid, not really knowing how it’s all going to work out, but trusting that you’ve prayed so hard that the Lord will work it all out in the end. I’m thankful for how much they’ve loved their son, and in turn loved me too.

See you at the next sunrise.

Katie Kaliff-Jagels is a farmer’s daughter with a passion for fashion, marketing and her rural roots. She and her husband, Jason, ranch in the Nebraska Sandhills—raising Angus bulls, their toddler, and the occasional “surprise” critters that Katie sneaks home.

JACLYN WILSON

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

Agriculture has entered the influencer era. Social media has given producers an incredible opportunity to tell our story, communicate directly with consumers and give rural America a voice.

That’s valuable.

But followers are not the same thing as experience. Reach is not the same thing as economic understanding. And the ability to create a viral post does not automatically translate into understanding cattle cycles, international trade, packing capacity, price discovery, risk management or the unintended consequences of federal policy.

The issue isn’t whether influencers or highly visible agricultural voices deserve a seat at the table.

They do.

The problem comes when the influencers become the table, and that aging demographic that we so often talk about in agriculture is nowhere close to that table, much less even in the same room.

A cattle industry stretching from Florida cow-calf operations to Nebraska feedyards, western public-lands ranchers, seedstock producers, livestock markets, processors and exporters cannot be represented by a handful of voices selected because they are politically connected, highly visible or particularly effective at generating attention.

Real wisdom in agriculture is often remarkably unglamorous.

It belongs to the person who has survived five cattle cycles. The feeder who understands what a \$20 move in the market does to a pen of cattle. The rancher who knows retaining heifers means sacrificing income today for production years from now. The trade expert who understands that America’s beef industry doesn’t operate in isolation. The economist willing to tell politicians something they don’t want to hear.

Washington’s biggest mistake would be designing cattle policy around what sounds good in a 30-second social-media clip.

The beef industry absolutely needs change. We need

competitive markets. We need processing options. We need strong international markets. We need sensible regulation. We need transparency. And above all, we need policies that encourage American cattle producers to do what government says it wants us to do: build the American cow herd.

But you cannot rebuild an industry by manipulating its market every time consumers become uncomfortable with the price of its product. And you cannot develop sound agricultural policy by confusing popularity with expertise.

Where was the large-scale commercial cow-calf producer from the Great Plains? Where was the Nebraska/Kansas/Texas cattle feeder? Where was the livestock auction sector? Where were the packing plant owners? Where was someone deeply involved in international beef trade? Where was an agricultural economist specializing in cattle markets? Where was someone who could explain how MCOOL affects the integrated North American cattle supply chain? Where were the producers whose businesses depend heavily on exports? Where were the leaders of the largest cattle and breed associations?

If Washington truly wants to put ranchers first, perhaps the next meeting shouldn’t be built around who has the biggest platform. It should be built around who has the deepest understanding of how this complicated industry works.

While I don’t have that expertise, and my wisdom is not fully developed yet, I will be at Husker Harvest Days on Sept. 16. The Boss Man will also be with me, and he does have the wisdom. I will be speaking on a panel about Beef Quality Assurance, followed directly by another panel talking about women in agriculture. Please stop by and say hi.

With that, have a blessed week!

Jaclyn Wilson is more than a rancher, raising Red Angus cattle at Wilson Ranch near Lakeside, Nebraska. She’s an artist with a welder’s torch. She holds leadership positions with several agriculture organizations. She can be reached at jaclyn@flyingdiamondgenetics.com. This column represents the views of one person and are not necessarily the opinion of the Midwest Messenger.



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MYSTERIES ON THE MAP

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

on the east side of La Platte in 1898. The small building cost \$400, as denoted in records from Chris. By 1902, attendance dwindled from 36 pupils to few enough that the Lower School closed temporarily.

"Children were transferred to the main school on Clay Street, which was not a satisfactory solution," Chris's research of school records found. The school reopened in 1904 but then permanently closed within two years. Chris said, "The river flooding had begun to cut away the land near the school."

After the Lower School closed, education resumed solely in the original District No. 2 schoolhouse until the mid-1950s. In September 1955, it was moved to the east side of the block, adjacent to Stone Hall, to make room for a new, brick elementary school.

La Platte Community Elementary School closed in 2000 and is now privately owned, Chris said. She attended school there from kindergarten to sixth grade before transferring to Platteview High School in Springfield.

As with many of the buildings in La Platte, the old District No. 2 schoolhouse was remodeled after being moved. The former center of education has been revived into a religious sanctuary for the neighborhood, the La Platte Community Church.

"The church is well attended, full nearly every Sunday," said Chris.

Long before this church opened, La Platte's first church was erected by a Presbyterian parish in the 1860s. When the building was torn down years later, the lumber was salvaged into a new home for longtime La Platte resident Margie Taylor.

Another church, the Free Methodist Church, was built in 1872 to the north of Stone Hall. Services were held every Sunday, led by ministers of different denominations and students from the former Grace University in Omaha, Chris confirmed.

"The church was very small with only two rows of pews and a pulpit in a small area at the front," described Chris. An upright piano in the corner accompanied the congregation with music and a woodburning stove provided heat for the one-room building.

The church remained a stronghold in La Platte until termites were discovered in the 1970s. Afraid that they would infest the nearby elementary school, Stone Hall or La Platte Community Church, the congregation sold the building to Lawrence Iske for \$100. He used a John Deere 4020 to tow the century-old building to the Iske farm, where it was converted into a machine shed.

Looking from the outside, you would not believe that this white-washed shed with a large sliding door and adjoining lean-to was once a house of worship. Dark brown wainscoting upholds the cracked plaster that lines its interior walls. An inset alcove outlines where the altar once graced the front of the church. The altar itself has been replaced by a pile of jacks and planks; the Iskes used this moving equipment frequently to move buildings around La Platte.

"My grandpa and his boys would take any job during the war and Great Depression," Chris said, listing odd jobs they undertook, including moving houses or buildings



Submitted photo

Chris Iske Trost has lived at La Platte, Neb., her entire life. She is pictured as a child riding her pony in front of the Iske house, which was built in 1869.

and clearing timber. "They did anything they could to make extra money."

It was 1951 when her grandfather Lawrence purchased the 140-acre farm that overlooks La Platte. He chose the highest point on the hill for his modern brick home. While digging the basement in the 1950s, though, he exposed the grave of an Indian chief. Chris explained, "We knew it had to be a chief because of the tokens, pipes and tomahawks." The artifacts were given to the La Platte school.

Other family members have uncovered traces from "ancient days" while farming on the Platte River bottoms, close to the Merrill Mission historic chimney. Chris shared more memories from Florance and Ethel, saying, "The stories told by them of walking behind horse and plow to farm when they were young was fascinating enough, but they would also unearth the remains of battles between the natives from ancient days," she said.

University of Nebraska-Lincoln archeology dated some of these artifacts to the Paleo-Indian Period 10,000 years or more ago.

Chris's cousins just north of La Platte found many relics on another high hill. Washed out gulches have revealed arrowheads, spearheads, pipes, scrapers and broken shards from pottery. Old maps of Sarpy County indicate the existence of Otto and Pawnee Indian villages on this land.

The hill presiding above the Iske farm ground and the town of La Platte is called Observatory Point. From this vantage point, one can see the Platte and Missouri Rivers



Midwest Messenger photo by Kristen Sindelar

Chris and John Trost stand among the graves of the La Platte Cemetery in Sarpy County, Neb. They were caretakers of the cemetery for many years.



Midwest Messenger photo by Kristen Sindelar

The original La Platte schoolhouse was moved and remodeled into a church. Services are held weekly at La Platte Community Church.

LIVESTOCK ROUNDUP •

to the east, flanked by gently rolling hills signature of Nebraska topography. Goss confirmed in his 1859 book that Observatory Point was indeed the resting place chosen by early natives, writing that this is where "the eye gazes upon pristine beauty."

Pioneers chose the same place to bury their dead. It became the gravesite for La Platte settlers, as well as the eternal destination occasionally for those passing through via wagon train or stagecoach. Chris said her grandfather Lawrence and his sons were hired to dig graves at the cemetery. Once they found an unmarked grave containing a woman with long red hair with a comb in it. "Somebody just passing through probably," Chris said.

Hogeboom donated the land to the La Platte Cemetery in 1891. The marker denoting the Hogeboom family's graves can easily be spotted towering high

above other tombstones.

"What a beautiful view the cemetery has," Chris commented as we wandered through the rows of simple headstones in the pioneer section of La Platte Cemetery. Nearly imperceivable dates on the aged stones reflect a short lifespan of 40-50 years. Infant mortality was also all too common.

On Feb. 14, 1891, a group of men met in the Stone Hall to vote in the first board of the La Platte Cemetery Association. Dedicated volunteers have maintained the cemetery ever since.

Chris and her cousin Kenny Gearhart cared for the cemetery for more than 25 years. On April 5, 2025, they transferred the records and caretaking duties to the next generation. The meeting was held in the La Platte Community Church, 134 years after the first board was formed.

"I think that it is amazing that what they started is still surviving and thriving," she said.

New board members are Chad Trost, Jenny Burton and Tina Wulf.

The passion Chris has for her community is evident. As Omaha and its suburbs swell, she is determined to maintain La Platte's existence on the map. She has been fighting annexation for years and will continue to protect La Platte and her family's heritage.

"We're farm people—we don't roll over easy," said Chris.

She shares in Larimer's fervor about the "place of all places" that he envisioned more than 170 years ago. To her, La Platte is her hamlet on the hill. It's not a mystery on the map but a place where families have lived and farmed for generations.

"Maybe La Platte didn't become the 'place of all places,' but people of La Platte were proud to call it home," Chris reflected.

Mysteries on the Map is a series that highlights a different ghost town and how it contributed to the rich history of Nebraska. Running through the summer months, it pays tribute to the pioneers who endured incredible hardship and paved the way so that we can now enjoy the good life called Nebraska. If you have suggestions or stories to share about a community that no longer exists, contact reporter Kristen Sindelar at Kristen.Sindelar@midwestmessenger.com or editor Janelle Atyeo at 605-681-7040.

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