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YEAR 2020 IN REVIEW

Stories that made news in the Fremont Tribune.

Editor's Note: The stories for the 2020 Year in Review are excerpts taken from some of the year's biggest stories that originally ran in the Fremont Tribune on the corresponding date.

January
Jan. 2: Celebrating 2020 with library event

Lots of people turned out on Laura England-Biggs' birthday.

Kids and their parents and grandparents attended. Party hats and treats were part of the festivities.

And then there was the balloon drop.

Actually, the 77 festive folks had assembled for the fourth annual Noon Year's Eve at Keene Memorial Library.

But Dec. 31 is also England-Biggs' birthday.

England-Biggs is the children's librarian and on Tuesday she rang in the New Year amid children, balloons — and lots of noisemakers.

Library patrons were advised ahead of time that the noise volume would increase between 11:45 a.m. and 12:15 p.m., when attendees planned to celebrate the New Year and watch a cascade of colorful balloons float from the second floor balcony to celebrants below.

Participants were ready when doors to the library's main-floor auditorium opened at 11:30 a.m.

Decked out in a tall hat made of red, yellow and blue balloons, England-Biggs kept track of attendees as they steadily filled the room.

"We've got a great turnout. It's only five minutes in and we're up to 33 people," England-Biggs said. "We hope they have a good time and eat some cookies and enjoy the balloon drop."

Attendees immediately got busy decorating paper party hats and coloring pages. They drank lemonade and ate blue or white sugar cookies. One mom later lined up her children against a festive New Year's backdrop for a photo.

Jan. 3: Sinai Lutheran Church to dedicate columbarium

It's a new ministry for Sinai Lutheran Church.

Members and clergy of the Fremont congregation have worked for a year, making plans for a columbarium.

A columbarium is a structure with small compartments, called niches, which each have room for a funeral urn containing the ashes of an individual.

The new columbarium, which is inside the church, is north of the altar area and situated behind an arched entryway.



COLLIN SPILINEK, FREMONT TRIBUNE

Dodge County Board of Supervisors Bob Missel speaks at a groundbreaking for one of four new radio towers northeast of North Bend Tuesday morning. The towers will be part of the county's new public radio system.

On Sunday, the congregation will dedicate the columbarium during its worship services at 8 and 10:30 a.m. The public is invited to the services in the church at 950 E. Eighth St.

At this time, the columbarium has space for 40 urns. When a second phase of the project is finished, it will have the capacity for a total of 96 urns.

A team of people worked on the columbarium project, meeting once or twice monthly.

That team included: the Rev. Jim Melang, chairman; the Rev. Al Duminy; Scott Flanagan; Annette Holtam; Jan Ostransky; Paul VonSeggern and Cheri Anderson.

Jan. 7: Woman retires as library aide

Susan Allen wasn't surprised when Bill Christensen said he was going to be her next husband.

That's because Christensen would portray the city's namesake — John C. Fremont.

And once again that year, Allen would take on the role of the legendary pathfinder's wife, Jessie Benton Fremont.

Throughout her career and volunteer efforts, Allen has assumed many roles — teacher, library aide, storyteller and even actress.

Allen plans to continue in her job as a kindergarten teacher in the Bennington Public School system.

But recently, she retired as a part-time library aide at Keene Memorial Library in Fremont.

"Sixty hours a week is beginning to be too much," Allen noted.

And Allen has other plans and dreams.

For one, she wants to spend more time with her real-life husband, Dirk.

She wants to do more at the school where she teaches and also at her church, St. Patrick, in Fremont.

Her biggest reason for retiring as a library aide, however, will incorporate being involved at Keene in other ways, which include helping with its expansion.

"I want to be on the library board and do more with the Friends of the Library so I can help more with the expansion project," Allen said. "I can't work here and be on the library board if an opening comes up."

Jan. 8: Groundbreaking held for new radio system tower

Local law enforcement, first responders and county officials gathered at one of the planned sites for Dodge County's new radio system tower Tuesday morning.

A groundbreaking for one of the four planned towers was held near the intersection of Foothill Road and County Road 10, just northeast of North Bend.

The county's new public radio system has been in the planning stages for almost two years, said Shelly Hozerland, communications director for Dodge County. It was approved by the Dodge County Board of Supervisors in July 2018.

The 800-MHz digital trunked radio system will allow the Dodge County Sheriff's Office, local law enforcement agencies and local first responders throughout the county to contact each other on

the same frequency.

The new system will also join Dodge County with the Omaha Regional Interoperable Network (ORION), which includes Douglas, Pottawattamie, Sarpy and Washington counties.

Dodge County Board of Supervisors Chairman Bob Missel called the groundbreaking a "great day" for the county.

"To get to this point where we're at today is very meaningful in this project," he said. "It's been a long road to get to this point, and I know that everybody that's here today has some ownership in this."

Jan. 10: Fremont Habitat for Humanity receives \$25k grant for flood relief

The Nebraska Flood Recovery Fund announced it would give six grants to communities and organizations working on flood recovery, including the Fremont Area Habitat for Humanity.

Habitat for Humanity will receive \$25,000 for its efforts to demolish and rebuild flood-damaged homes in the Fremont area.

Other grants include \$50,000 to the City of St. Edward, \$65,000 to the Heartland Disaster Recovery Group of Grand Island, \$75,000 to the Midwest Housing Development Fund, \$97,000 to the Village of Winslow and \$62,000 to the City of North Bend.

The fund was established by the Nebraska Community Foundation and Ethel S. Abbott Charitable Foundation last April to assist Nebraskans impacted by the March flooding.

Jan. 11: Platte Valley Equipment breaks ground on new

Fremont store

Platte Valley Equipment recently broke ground on a new store in Fremont. The business will move from its current location at 2263 Business Park Drive, Fremont, to just north of town.

The Fremont location is the flagship of the four-store company. The new facilities will allow the local business to operate more efficiently and play a larger role in supporting its customers and area communities. Key features of the new facilities include: 30,000 square-foot service shop; 55,000 square-foot total; 1,275 square foot of training facilities; current facilities total 34,000 square feet with 18,000 square feet of service shop space.

Owned by Brandt Holdings Company, Platte Valley Equipment LLC is a John Deere dealership serving eastern and north-central Nebraska. Founded in 1996, Platte Valley Equipment has locations in Clarkson, Fremont, Humphrey and Wahoo.

Jan. 18: Fremont Housing Agency earns top designation for first time in a decade

The Fremont Housing Agency received a high performer designation from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the highest recognition awarded by the agency.

It's the first time FHA has been awarded the designation in at least a decade, according to executive director Rita Grigg.

All public housing agencies that operate public housing programs are required to undergo a review of essential housing operations. The scoring system for this review is based on four factors: physical inspection, management, finances and capital funds. The four components all factor together in a final determination based on a point system. Those who receive a score of 90 or higher receive the high performer designation.

"For a smaller agency to get the high performer is something special," Grigg said. "We're excited because we've been working towards it and haven't received the award for several years."

For years, Grigg said the biggest factor preventing FHA's designation as a high performer was issues with occupancy. The agency's two public housing locations, Stanton Tower and Gifford Tower, had 30-plus vacancies when Grigg became the executive director in 2017.

Since then, she said occupancy has been trending up. Now, FHA holds an occupancy rate hovering around 95%, a factor Grigg said played an important role in the

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Review

From 11

agency's high performer designation.

Jan. 18: Retired firefighter looks back after 20 years of service

Firefighter Dana Leland wondered what the patient was thinking.

As part of the Fremont Fire Department, he and other rescue squad members were at a woman's house when she went into cardiac arrest.

They performed CPR. Defibrillator pads were placed on the woman, who became conscious after she was shocked.

On the way to the hospital, Leland told the woman what had happened. A concerned look crossed her face and Leland wondered if she'd had a near-death experience.

"It looks like you're thinking about something," Leland said.

And she was. "I think I left the stove on at home," she said.

Leland smiles about the unexpected answer.

Now retired after more than 20 years of service, Leland has a kaleidoscope of memories from his years as a paid firefighter — one who started that career before he was 37 years old.

Leland was born in Fremont, where he grew up. He graduated from Fremont High School in 1980 and worked in the construction field for about 17 or 18 years.

He had a friend, a paid firefighter, at the department. He enjoyed listening to the other man's experiences.

In 1998, Leland earned basic certification as an Emergency Medical Technician. He applied and was hired in March 1999.

The Fremont Fire Department has three shifts — A, B and C — of paid firefighters.

"I spent my whole career on B shift," Leland said.

Leland would become a paramedic and then was promoted to lieutenant in 2006.

"I enjoyed being part of a team that was able to help people in medical emergencies and helping to protect their property and belongings in fire situations," he said.

He'd see an increase in the number of calls.

"When I started in '99, I think we were running maybe around 1,500 calls a year and then the last year — when I retired — I think they had over 3,000. I think last year, they had 3,015."

He retired in May 2019 — but not before historic flooding that occurred in mid-March.

A couple of days into the flood, Leland and other first-responders were using a large, military truck to shuttle people from the north side of the Broad Street viaduct to the Wooden Windmill restaurant's parking lot.

At the viaduct, Leland and firefighters were talking to an elderly man who said his animals — dogs, cats and rats — were in cages above the water. But he wanted the men to take him to his house so he could get the animals some food and water.

"We were just pulling up to his house when a call came in for a trailer on fire at Regency (mobile home park). We told him that he was going to have to hold tight for a little bit," Leland said.

The man would wait awhile during a time when firefighters were flooded with calls for assistance.

"He ended up going to the fire station with us about four hours later. He stayed in the back of the truck that whole time," Leland said.

The man would get someone else to take him to his house.

"He was really good about it," Leland said.

Leland has non-flood-related memories, too.

One time, the rescue squad was



TAMMY REAL-MCKEIGHAN, FREMONT TRIBUNE

Children and adults watch the cascade of colorful balloons fall from the second floor of Keene Memorial Library in Fremont during its Noon Year's Eve event.

called to help a man whose internal defibrillator kept activating and shocking him.

"He'd yell and jump when it would go off," Leland said. "We decided we were going to start an IV to give him some medicine to help try to calm down his heart, which was actually doing its job."

Leland was about to insert a needle for an IV when the man's internal defibrillator went off.

This time, the patient wasn't the only one who jumped.

"I think I jumped twice as high as he did," Leland said. "I didn't know. I didn't think you get shocked, but I guess you're always a little hesitant."

Rescue squad personnel were able to get an IV into the man and transport him to the hospital.

Leland said rescue squad personnel have performed cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) on several people, who survived, left the hospital and then visited the fire station to thank them.

"That's always a good feeling," Leland said.

What advice would he give for someone considering being a firefighter or paramedic?

"It's a good job," he said. "You need to have a good sense of humor and your training is important, because sometimes that's all you have to rely on in situations you haven't been in before."

Jan. 18: Ricketts honors Fremont Rural Fire Department for flood efforts

Gov. Pete Ricketts visited Fremont Friday afternoon to honor the Fremont Rural Fire Department for their efforts during the spring flooding.

The town hall also scheduled for Friday afternoon was postponed after Midland University closed for the day due to weather concerns.

Ricketts said the state wanted to recognize heroes during the flood with the award. Although other fire departments were invited to the State Capitol last month for honors, Fremont was not able to make it.

Jan. 24: Fremont High students win awards for infographics

Two students in Fremont High School's graphic design program have placed in a statewide competition for their infographics.

Madalyn Stemley, a junior, placed first, while Chloe Jaspersen, a senior, placed third in the Nebraska Educational Technology Association's contest in the category of infographics.

Both Stemley and Jaspersen will attend the 2020 NETA Spring Conference this March at the CHI

Health Center Arena in Omaha to receive recognition for their awards.

NETA, created in 1993, is a statewide organization that provides opportunities for highlighting technology in education.

Both Fremont High students were in Kristen Strickler's Graphic Design II class in fall 2019. The class also saw three students take the top three spots for last year's competition.

An infographic displays data in a graphic form with images, charts and sources.

Jan. 24: LifeHouse receives grant

Care Corps' LifeHouse has received a \$10,000 grant from the American Family Insurance Dreams Foundation.

The grant will allow the local agency help those facing homelessness who come to its emergency shelter.

"Grants like these make it possible for program participants to begin to find success," LifeHouse CEO Tera Kucera said in a prepared statement. "When someone is homeless, their journey starts with having their basic needs met. Everyone deserves a safe place to stay."

By providing the most basic needs — food, shelter and clothing — the local nonprofit can work to alleviate an initial crisis and help provide the groundwork for a successful relationship between program participants and a case manager.

Jan. 24: New campus pastor leading Westside flock

He worked in a boys' home in Honduras.

And helped with disaster relief in the Philippines.

And he drove a forklift in Kearney. Landscaper, bank teller and deliverer of medical equipment.

When it comes to life experiences, Pastor Seth Rehmer has had quite a few during his 32 years of life.

"I've tried a lot of different professions on the road to ministry," said Rehmer, who's embarked on the latest leg of his journey.

In October, Rehmer became campus pastor of Westside Fremont Church. Now, the young husband and father looks to the future with anticipation as his guides his small flock forward.

The church at 605 N. Broad St., is the Fremont campus of the Omaha-based Westside Church.

Jan. 28: Fremont police officer promoted to sergeant

An officer of the Fremont Police Department was promoted to sergeant earlier this month.

Dominic Savio was recognized at



COLLIN SPILINEK, FREMONT TRIBUNE

Fremont High School freshmen Josie Bell, left, and Brittany Tule-Mejia decorate strawberries for a fundraiser for the school's Family, Career and Community Leaders of America chapter in February.

the Fremont City Council meeting on Jan. 14, where his promotion was approved.

"He's just a hardworking guy," Police Chief Jeff Elliott said. "He's willing to put forth the extra effort, and he's willing to be proactive."

Savio started with FPD in 2014 as a patrol officer. After working as a K-9 handler, he joined the III Corps Drug Task Force.

February

Feb. 4: Fremont High students receive Scholastic Art Awards

Since 1923, the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards have recognized students gifted in the arts, including Stephen King, Andy Warhol, Joyce Carol Oats and Robert Redford.

Now, nine students from Fremont High School have joined the ranks of these artists with recognition from the Scholastic Art Awards of Nebraska.

The Scholastic Awards in each state give Gold Key, Silver Key and Honorable Mention awards every year to students in grades seven through 12 throughout 29 categories. Almost 340,000 entries were submitted across the country last year.

Out of 22 submissions from Fremont High students, nine entries were given either Silver Keys or Honorable Mentions, with one student being awarded a Gold Key. Students who win Gold Keys are then judged on a national level.

FHS teacher Kristen Strickler said the Scholastic Awards is quite possibly the most prestigious competition that the school enters. Last year, FHS only had two students winning Silver Keys, the same as this year.

"We didn't enter as many students last year either, but to have 10 students place in a competition like this is very impressive," Strickler said. "It just shows we have a lot of talent in our school, so I was very, very happy."

Koarah Bearden received a Gold Key in the Sculpture category, as well as an Honorable Mention. Chloe Jaspersen and Diego Luna received Silver Keys, while Honorable Mentions were given to Michel Carranza Bernal, Hayleigh Johnson, Lexi Montoya, John Russell, Jennifer Sandoval-Monroy and Antonio Zarate.

The students took about two weeks making the art projects. All of the students were Strickler's except Bearden, who is in Jennifer Gay's advanced pottery class.

Feb. 11: Local businesses honored at Chamber banquet

The Fremont Area Chamber of Commerce honored three local businesses at its 140th annual banquet last Friday night.

Juice Stop won the award for Small Business of the Year, Sawyer Construction won Large Business of the year and Lincoln Premium Poultry won Workforce Game Changer. Each category had three businesses as finalists.

Chamber Executive Director Tara Lea said the banquet was an amazing event, bringing over 285

business leaders in the community together.

Feb. 13: Fremont High School reboots FCCLA chapter after 20 years

When Tiffany Lopez joined the staff at Fremont High School, she had one goal: to get a chapter started for the Family, Career and Community Leaders of America.

It had been 20 years since FHS had one, and Lopez felt it was the right time.

"I was in FCCLA when I was in high school, and it's really instrumental to me to get that going," she said. "And so here we are. We are getting started, and we're doing great."

Lopez was successful in rebooting the FCCLA chapter, which now has 25 high school students in its membership.

As part of its fundraising process, FCCLA is first making chocolate-covered strawberries for Valentine's Day this week for students to purchase.

FCCLA is a state and national organization that focuses on leadership and opportunities in careers to support families. The organization, founded in 1945, has over 175,000 members in 5,300 chapters across the country.

FCCLA also allows for students to take part in Students Taking Action with Recognition (STAR) events, which let members compete with presentations at statewide and national levels.

Feb. 15: Many attend grand opening for brownstones at Gallery 23 East

The brownstones at Gallery 23 East are now open, adding a new for-sale option to this growing area in Fremont.

Many people attended grand opening on Thursday.

The Gallery 23 brownstones are a series of attached townhomes featuring two-car garages, open-concept floor plans, three bedrooms and square footages ranging from approximately 1,500 to 1,700.

The Gallery 23 brownstones have two product types with varying floor plans.

Depending on the floor plan and finishes, prices will range from approximately \$179,000 to \$220,000.

March

Mar. 8: Woman with COVID-19 visited YMCA in Fremont for Special Olympics event; players, coaches and team staff are asked to self-quarantine

The 36-year-old Omaha woman who has tested positive for COVID-19 visited Fremont on Feb. 29 according to a release from the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

State and local officials are requesting basketball players, coaches and team staff who participated in the Special Olympics event at the Fremont Family YMCA on February 29, 2020, from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. to self-quarantine to limit exposure to others and monitor themselves

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