

Ag Education Department Receives \$10,000 grant



THEDFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS PHOTO

Eighth period students with the welders, l-r: Alvaro Ferran, Coby Higgins, Connor Cooksley, Seth Scranton, Dane Pokorny, Parker Ballenger, Zeb Wilde, Kaden Haake and Drew McIntosh.

The Thedford Agriculture Education Department recently received a big equipment boost thanks to a nearly \$10,000 Perkins Funding grant that was used toward purchasing three Miller Multiprocess 235 welders. The welders are capable of welding three different processes on one machine, including shielded

metal arc welding, gas metal arc welding, and gas tungsten arc welding all in steel. In addition, all are capable of spool gun welding aluminum. Thedford Public Schools Agriculture Education Teacher, Bridger Chytka, said the multiprocess welders allow students to be as up-to-date as possible on new and emerging

technologies in the Power and Industrial Technology pathways. Seth Scranton said FFA has helped prepare him for life after high school, and the new welders will help those looking at pursuing that field of work.

Thedford Schools has

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Buzz without the booze:

**Omaha couple, Valentine brewer tap
‘zero proof’ beverage business.**



Andrew Wassinger and Erica Wassinger, co-founders of Sandhills Elixir, which makes nonalcoholic spirits. Erica Wassinger is a venture capital investor and Andrew Wassinger is a food scientist. The couple is seen here in their Omaha home Jan. 9.
Photo by Ryan Soderlin for the Flatwater Free Press

By Barbara Soderlin
Flatwater Free Press

Kelly Morris of Omaha isn’t imbibing this month, but not because it’s “Dry January,” when millions of Americans turn the page on holiday excess and put their drinking on ice.

Morris, 42, gave up alcohol this summer, when she was sometimes drinking four bottles of wine a week. “My drinking was escalating,” Morris said, a shift seen in Nebraska and across the country during COVID-19.

Morris works at a non-profit focused on mental health, and knows that pulling a cork isn’t a healthy way to cope. She decided to renegotiate her relationship with alcohol.

An entrepreneurial midtown Omaha couple had people like Morris in mind as they worked in their kitchen and garage,

labeling and shipping sparkling bottles of a new – alcohol-free – beverage.

Andrew Wassinger, a food scientist, and Erica Wassinger, a venture capital investor, combined their skills and their own desire for an alcohol alternative to conjure Sandhills Elixir, a “zero-proof spirit.”

It’s a liquor substitute made by blending ingredients and know-how from across Nebraska, right down to the Ogallala Aquifer water they use from the heart of the Sandhills.

The creation is a product of time the Wassingers spent in Summer 2020 with their young sons along Long Pine Creek, east of Valentine.

In his career at ConAgra Brands, Andrew Wassinger has developed and improved products such as frozen vegetables and microwave popcorn. He understands the sci-

ence behind taste, texture and processing methods.

In Long Pine, he got to thinking about how he might develop a beverage with the same attention to flavor, ingredients and changing consumer desires – something special like a cocktail, but without alcohol’s drawbacks.

“We’d wake up every morning and see this beautiful creek flowing by the cabin,” he said. “We were sitting there and thinking, how can we relive this, and have this restorative effect all the time?”

He tinkered with flavors and extracts made from plants and fruits, especially those found in Nebraska: sage, chokecherries, elderberries. He looked to create a layered taste, with a bit of alcohol’s warmth.

When he had some recipes, the Wassingers

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Pioneer Memorial Rest Home May Be Forced To Close

The fate of the Pioneer Memorial Rest Home, Mullen, could be in your hands. That’s what concerned citizens heard at an informational meeting Wednesday, February 9, at the Lariat.

Community members are needed to step up and work in the facility for a day or two a week or month, long term, not temporarily.

To remain open the

nursing home must hire a Director of Nursing (DON), a night nurse and several Certified Nursing Assistants (CAN).

Nolan Gurnsey, interim DON’s last day will be March 23, and if a DON is not hired before then the rest home will be forced by the state to close.

The Hospital District Board held a special meeting Tuesday, February 22,

where the future of the rest home will be decided.

Current staff members are working five to seven days a week, 16-hour days.

Gerri Peterson reported in the *Hooker County Tribune*, past and present administrators and board members have tried to recruit staff, but more people are leaving the

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Something for everyone



There was something for everyone at the 21st annual Heart City Bull Bash in Valentine. This young cowgirl tries her hand at roping.

Story & Pictures By:
Linda Teahon

Billed as the Heart City’s “Main Event,” Valentine, Nebraska rolled out the red carpet once again for the 21st annual Heart City Bull Bash.

Kicking off the activities on Friday, February 11th was livestock judging held at the Valentine Livestock Auction. According to Brent Nollette, organizer of the day long event, “The livestock judging went well. We had just under 200 participants from six states.” 4-H, FFA and college students judged.

Saturday, February 12th started with a chilly morning, but warmed up throughout the day. Sev-

enteen cattle producers exhibited 25 pens of bulls and heifers. Also on display were two pens of quarter horses and a pen with mules. Eleven commercial exhibits were present and featured among the cattle pens. All the exhibits were downtown on the Main Street.

Attendees were treated to seeing the animals up close and many other activities were held as well including a quilt show, 5KRun/Walk, 4-H Luck of the Draw, dummy roping and wine tasting. Later in the afternoon a forum was held at the Valentine Livestock Auction. Three candidates for Nebraska governor and two candidates for the Nebraska state Board of Education

attended. A nice sized crowd of voters turned out. Following that was a Cowboy Church Service and it was very well attended by locals.

The day capped off with a concert at the Valentine High School Auditorium by Becky Schlegel and the Traveling Opry Show. This event was co-sponsored by the Valentine Arts Council.

Committee chairman, Shane Keller commented “The weather was nice enough to make it enjoyable for numerous people to be out and take it all in. The cattle industry was well represented on Main Street and viewed by many. The many events were well attended and good reports on sales from businesses.”

And of course this year’s bull bash again included the Heart City’s “Main Event,” pictured below. Seventeen cattle producers exhibited 25 pens of bulls and heifers. There were also two pens of quarter horses and a pen with mules.

