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Cavalier County JDA purchases Stanley R. Mickelsen site

- September 14, 2017

Nowhere is politics and the after effects of partisan decisions more evident than in the history books.

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By Lisa Nowatzki

Our past is littered with reminders that tell of the struggles our nation and our communities have endured. Nekoma is one of those communities that is a living historical reminder of our past and of the past decisions of our political leaders.

One look at the cover of the Nekoma, ND Centennial commemorative book and residents and others around the county, and possibly the state, will recognize the ideas the cover represents and conveys. Pictured are two grain elevators, the grain house, railroad tracks, and, far off to the left and in the back, is a foreign-looking pyramid structure with two round targets on both visible faces.

Of course, everyone around the area recognizes Nekoma's pyramid or the Stanley Mickelsen Safeguard Complex. A small, deserted army base with barracks, guard shacks, NCO and Officer's clubs, and even a bowling alley sit alongside numerous missile silos that once housed the Spartan and Sprint Missile Subsystems.

These relics are of the bygone Cold War, left in the middle of the North Dakota prairie. A decision, good or bad, that was made by the Brack Commission and other Washington, D.C. politicians. Six billion tax dollars was spent in the 1970s and then abandoned but not forgotten.

Carol Goodman, a consultant for the site, and Shannon Duerr Executive Director of the Cavalier County Job Development Authority (JDA), have not forgotten. On June 23, 2017, the JDA reached an agreement with the seller to purchase part of the property for \$462,900. The money is part of a \$600,000 grant from the North Dakota Department of Commerce that the JDA received to help buy and redevelop the property. It was a deal that Goodman and the JDA have been working on since 2012.

There are two sections to the property: the tactical area which includes the pyramid, two smaller bunkers, and the generator housing and the other side, called the administrative side, which contains all of the military buildings. According to Goodman, a private investor purchased the administrative side.

What can you do with a military structure and out buildings that were designed to withstand a nuclear blast and have been abandoned since 1976? According to Goodman and Duerr, "Quite a lot, actually."

The JDA has quite a few ideas and plans for the property. According to Goodman and Duerr, they are taking a three-prong approach to the development of the site.

“First, we would like to develop a historical site that will attract tourists and businesses,” said Duerr. The JDA would also like to develop the surrounding 38 acres on the north and east sides into an industrial park.

According to Duerr, “We would like to find the pyramid building a new occupant or owner.

Maybe a company that would consider starting a server farm,” Goodman added. She also said that in 2012, an engineering firm completed a data center concept plan study focused on redeveloping the 25,000-square foot server floor in the pyramid which revealed that turning it into a server farm was feasible.

They also hope to rent or lease the two smaller bunkers to businesses in the area that may need or want a quiet, well-built building for a workspace or storage space. The dugouts were designed as areas to bring in the Sprint and Spartan missiles from the individual silos while maintenance was performed on the warheads. Each bunker is a single, concrete, reinforced room with ground access to the missile silos away from the pyramid.

The larger bunker has several rooms including offices and bathrooms and a large crane and pulley system designed to move the massive warheads. The smaller structure lacks the administrative rooms and contains only a mechanical area.

At this time, the only section ready for visitors is the missile area. The silo field is studded with white capped concrete hatches that at one time housed the 100 Sprint and Spartan missiles. This area would be part of a guided tour Goodman and Duerr would like to provide as a part of the historical tour.

One of the largest hurdles the JDA will face is clean-up. The site was abandoned for many years. Parts of the area has been flooded by seeping groundwater. At one time, the power plant and nearby tunnels were under roughly 30 feet of water. Although most of the water have been pumped out, a few inches still remain. Asbestos is still present in the remaining floor and ceiling tiles and wrapped around pipes as insulation. Rusted metal in the ceilings, floors, and walls will also need attention.

Many of the walkways, handrails, and even what appeared to be a large freight elevator have rusted and fallen to pieces. The thick cement-lined walls and floors have cut, jagged metal channels sheared off at floor and ceiling levels where salvage crews went through; they took as much wire and precious metals as they were able to cut and pull out.

Duerr indicated that cleaning the site could take as little as two years. Goodman said, “The clean-up effort would consist of stoppage of the groundwater, sandblasting the walls and painting, and upgrading all of the electronic connections and wiring.”

According to Goodman and Duerr, the JDA will apply for a federal EPA Brownfields grant next year, which would be awarded in 2019, to help finance the monumental clean-up effort. According to the EPA website, the Brownfields Program “provides grants and technical assistance to communities, states, tribes, and others to assess, safely clean up, and sustainably reuse contaminated properties.”

During a phone interview, Goodman was asked what time frame the Cavalier County taxpayers could expect to see a return on the substantial investment made by the JDA. Goodman would commit to no timeframe on the clean-up or the site development. Regarding the pyramid structure, Goodman believes that it is impossible to know under what conditions a private developer would accept the property.

No matter how long it takes to bring the site up to a salable state, nothing will happen to the property over the next few months.

Goodman stated, “The JDA will send out feelers to companies that specialize in rehabbing abandoned military property, then wait four or five months to evaluate offers and conduct interviews.”

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Langdon Area School gets an exchange student from Ukraine

News Coverage

By Lisa Hester

Langdon Area School has a new exchange student from Ukraine. The student, a 16-year-old girl named Daria, is currently staying with the Hester family in Langdon. Daria is a member of the Ukrainian national basketball team and is here to participate in a basketball tournament in Langdon. She will be staying with the Hester family for the duration of the tournament. The Hester family is excited to have Daria as a guest and is looking forward to her visit. Daria is a very talented basketball player and is expected to perform well in the tournament. The Hester family is also looking forward to introducing Daria to the local culture and community. Daria is expected to stay in Langdon for about two weeks. The Hester family is looking forward to her visit and is excited to have her as a guest.

Local football stars

Local football stars are expected to play in the upcoming season. The local football teams are preparing for the start of the season and are looking for new players. The local football community is excited about the upcoming season and is looking forward to seeing the local football stars in action. The local football community is also looking forward to seeing the local football stars in action. The local football community is excited about the upcoming season and is looking forward to seeing the local football stars in action.

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Seth Sijerheim donates bone marrow through Be the Match

Seth Sijerheim has donated bone marrow through Be the Match. Seth is a local resident and is a member of the Be the Match community. Seth is a very kind and generous person and is looking forward to helping others. Seth is a very kind and generous person and is looking forward to helping others. Seth is a very kind and generous person and is looking forward to helping others.

Annie's Project comes to Langdon

Annie's Project is coming to Langdon. Annie's Project is a community organization that is dedicated to helping the community. Annie's Project is a community organization that is dedicated to helping the community. Annie's Project is a community organization that is dedicated to helping the community.

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