

The Arnold Sentinel

“Serving the South Loup River Valley”

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Hundreds of Volunteers Stop Betty’s Way Blaze

High fire threat continues

By Janet Larreau

February 26 would turn into a long day and night for many area ranchers and farmers, community members, and by the end of it, well over 100 fire departments that came to help from what seemed like everywhere in the state. A grass fire that started on Betty’s Way Road near North Platte was out of control. There was plenty of fuel for the fire, with red flag conditions of low humidity and high wind.

The mutual aid call, for what is now infamously known as the Betty’s Way Fire, came into the Arnold Volunteer Fire Department at 11:16 a.m. The fire ended up being in Arnold’s district. Countless volunteers spent hours fighting fires in canyons, fields, and roadways. Country Partners Cooperative stepped in, supplying water. In the end, the State of Nebraska declared an emergency, bringing in two National Guard Black Hawk helicopters to aid in the effort.

“There were just people showing up from everywhere. Towns you normally don’t see. We called for any and all help, and it took everyone to get these fires under control,” said AVFD Chief Andrew Tickle. “Everyone local helped in every way they could with equipment,

water, and food for volunteers, and pivots were turned on. Families of the people that were fighting the fires helped take care of everything back at home, from kids and work and everything else in between.”

Tickle said the biggest concern for the Betty’s Way Fire, which ended up burning around 70,000 acres, was the weather and wind that day and trying to get it stopped as soon as possible at Highway 47. If the fire would have made it about another three miles east, firefighters may not have stopped it until between Callaway and Cozad, at least.

Meanwhile, Arnold town residents were becoming nervous. Some North Platte residents were being evacuated and urged to go anywhere south or out of danger. Just to the northwest, Stapleton and Gandy residents were being evacuated due to a separate fire known as the Stapleton fire. Some grass rigs were sent to that fire because nearly all the area resources were focused on the Betty’s Way Fire. Thankfully, some of the towns heading to that one from north of us were able to go help. The Stapleton fire ended up destroying around 7,000 acres before it was stopped.

“The Stapleton fire was a concern for Arnold. We

received helped with both fires and were in contact with people in the path of each fire,” said Tickle. “We made plans on what we were going to try to do to protect Arnold and the area if they had to go to points/lines we drew on the map.”

For the Betty’s Way Fire, the AVFD had relief crews show up around 10:00-11:00 p.m. Arnold’s crew that was at the Stapleton fire left there around 7:00 p.m. to come back and help with the Betty’s Way fire once Stapleton had a good handle on theirs. Days later, volunteers were still at work, taking measures to prevent flare-ups.

Tickle said to add to the day, Arnold received a call at 3:10 p.m. with a report of a fire five miles north of Arnold on the Dunning Road, which ended up being the smoke from the Stapleton fire. There were also multiple unit calls in the 24 hour period while everything else was going on.

“I want to thank our volunteers for stepping up and doing an awesome job! And again, to our families that pick up all the pieces when we are serving our community and area,” said Tickle. “Fire season has hit already. We need rain. Be vigilant and watch what you’re doing and what’s going on around you.”



The above photo, taken by AVFD member April Tickle on February 26, shows large fires raging in canyons northwest of Peterson Hill between Arnold and Gothenburg. By the end of the day, over 100 fire departments from across the state were battling the fires. Gov. Jim Pillen declared the Betty’s Way fire a disaster, prompting assistance from Nebraska National Guard personnel, including a pair of Blackhawk helicopters.

FRIDAY, MARCH 1 - Days after the raging grass fire came dangerously close to their farms, residents living south of Arnold were still trying to deal with the mess.

“Thankfully, the fire didn’t reach the house. About 3 miles away to the southwest, they stopped it,” said Natalie Cool, who lives about 15 miles southeast of Arnold with husband Joe and their kids. “I had just got home from North Platte and the state patrol came in with their lights flashing. They told me the fire was nine miles away and we needed to evacuate. I didn’t evacuate until an hour-and-a-half later when the smoke started coming and I decided it was time.”

Natalie, who is a bookkeeper, prepared to evacuate by grabbing the couple’s tax forms, financial files, and computer.

Joe Cool and neighboring landowners in the area were filling their tanks with water to help fight the fast-moving fire but ended up having a change of plans in order to save their own livestock and property. Cattle were moved to a pasture or a field where the grass was really short and wasn’t in direct line with the fire. Horses were moved to corrals with bare ground or trailered to be moved.

Natalie said all of the Cool boys, who were at school, wanted to leave and help fight the fires.

“Lots of people were trying to help,” said Natalie. “One neighbor had the fire come as close as a ½ mile. We were very thankful that evening that several of the fire crews stayed all night to patrol the perimeter for hot spots. I think they were from Bayard, and it was very kind of them. Joe very much felt like he could rest. Hopefully, it allowed the local firefighters time to rest too.”

“Man, it makes you grateful for your neighbors, family, and friends, and all of the people who volunteer. I think we’re always grateful for our community, but it’s times like this when we’re extra grateful. We’re all processing what to do next time. What do you grab in a fire?”

“We’re all processing what to do next time.”

- Arnold rural resident
Natalie Cool

Work Will Begin on N-40, South of Arnold

March 5, 2024 (North Platte, Neb.) — Weather permitting, work will begin March 11 on Hwy 40 South, from reference post 0.5 to reference post 11.10, according to the Nebraska Department of Transportation.

Vontz Paving Inc. of Hastings, Nebraska, is the contractor for this project.

Work includes bridge repair, asphalt pavement overlay, earth shoulder construction and seeding. Traffic will be maintained with temporary traffic signals, lane restrictions, flagging and pilot car. A 12-foot width restriction will be in effect. Anticipated completion is October 2024.

The purpose of this project is to preserve the transportation asset, improve the reliability of the transportation system and perpetuate the mobility of the traveling public.

Motorists are reminded to drive cautiously in and near work zones, to buckle up, and to put phones down.

Eight Teams Cook Up Some Great Chili



“Spice Girls” Heather Hagler, Cathy Bowers, and Cassy DeLosh were serving the #1 chili of the night to a great crowd at the annual Chili Cook-Off. - Debbie Connelly photo

The month of February was a tough month for many in the area, and as March rolled around, they were ready for a good time. Chamber’s 35th Annual Chili Cook-Off provided just the ticket last Saturday.

During the afternoon, eight teams spent the afternoon in the community center conjuring up their best chili recipes. Judging took place at 4:00 p.m. and at 5:00, the teams started greeting and serving a steady stream of people until 7:00.

On the north side of the building, people were lining up to decide between chicken-noodle or potato soup. Katie Weinman was selling pies for the St. Agnes Church and mentioned Dell Cerny’s generosity of purchasing numerous slices for others.

Winners were announced at 7:00, with the following results: 1st place - “The Spice Girls” sponsored by

Homegrown Kids Day-care; 2nd place – Arnold Fall Festival, Robin Dailey and Della Dailey; 3rd place – Austin Snyder and Brent Kulp sponsored by Nansel’s Best Service; People’s Choice – “Out Of This World Chili” sponsored by Pinnacle Bank; Best Decorated Booth – Codie Turner sponsored by Green Acres Lawn Care; and Mr. & Mrs. Congeniality – Andrew Tickle and Jessica Fletcher.

B.J. Jamison entertained the crowd from 6:00 to 8:30.

The event had a great feel, with groups of kids playing outside the community center, while the adults had a good time inside. Some even enjoyed a dance or two.

Co-organizers Debbie Connelly and Taylour Snyder said the attendance was great, and they couldn’t have done it without help from the Junior Chamber members.