

It's Baseball Season

Doubleheader against Holdrege . . .

Norton Legion battles in opening game

Derek White

The Norton American Legion baseball team entered Wednesday's road doubleheader hoping to add to their win total, but instead walked away with a pair of tough losses that tested the team's resolve. In the opener against Holdrege Inspire Rehabilitation team, Norton played hard but couldn't match the host team's offensive surge, falling 9-0 on July 9.

Although the scoreboard didn't reflect it, the Norton boys showed grit and discipline in flashes—particularly on defense, where they turned two double plays to halt scoring threats. Starting

pitcher Caden Seems worked into the fifth inning, striking out three and walking four, battling against a Holdrege lineup that capitalized on nearly every opportunity.

The game remained tight until that fateful fifth, when Holdrege erupted for five runs on six hits. Lyndon Rodewald's RBI double sparked the outburst, followed by a two-run single from Nick Taylor, an RBI single by Tegan Weaver, and a run-scoring double from Hudson Otto.

While Holdrege's Kegan Steinke was dealing-holding Norton to just three hits while striking out nine-Norton found its chances limited

but not invisible. Owen Hammond, Colin Springer, and Eli Springer each tallied hits for Norton, and the team continued to show sharp situational awareness in the field.

Holdrege proved to be relentless, tacking on two more runs in the sixth inning to put the game out of reach. Norton never quit, and their effort in this opening game set the tone for a resilient-if uphill-night.

With the first loss in the books, the team turned their focus quickly to Game 2, looking to bounce back and leave Holdrege with a split. Unfortunately, the night would only grow more difficult...

Norton Legion endures painful second game loss

By Derek White

Following a tough 9-0 loss in the opener, the Norton American Legion team took the field again Wednesday evening with hopes of redemption. But those hopes were dashed early as Holdrege exploded for nine runs in the first inning and never looked back, handing Norton a 15-0 loss to complete the doubleheader sweep in three innings.

For a young Norton squad still forging its identity in a competitive summer schedule, the loss stings—but the effort and commitment remain deeply rooted.

Holdrege came out swinging in Game 2, tallying nine runs in the opening frame behind doubles from Chance Bailey

and Cameron Waldo, and a pair of RBI singles by Tristin Benson and Lyndon Rodewald. Defensive miscues and wild pitches added to Norton's early troubles, and starting pitcher Zane Shields, who struck out two in his 1.1 innings, couldn't stem the tide alone.

Despite the setbacks, Norton's bench never lost its voice, cheering each other on through every pitch. In the top of the third, center fielder Cooper Railsback was hit by a pitch to become Norton's lone baserunner of the game. Though the offense was stymied, their attitude remained intact.

Pitcher Nick Taylor closed the door for Holdrege,

throwing three hitless innings with five strikeouts and no walks. Holdrege committed no errors in the field and stole seven bases to keep Norton under pressure all night.

Even with the losses, Norton sits at 10-14 on the season—a record that includes major progress from a group continuing to grow together.

The community continues to stand behind these boys, who represent Norton with pride and perseverance—even when the scoreboard doesn't go their way. With only a few games remaining in the season, they'll have more chances to prove that their best baseball still lies ahead.

Owing over \$300,000 in back taxes

San Juan Mexican Restaurants shut down across Kansas

By Derek White

In a sweeping enforcement action across Northwest and Central Kansas, agents from the Kansas Department of Revenue (KDOR) on Tuesday seized the assets of San Juan Mexican Restaurant Inc. and several individuals associated with the business, citing more than \$300,000 in unpaid state taxes.

The multi-county operation was executed on July 8 with the assistance of sheriff's departments from Russell, Scott, Thomas, Phillips, Rooks, and Pawnee Counties. Authorities closed six San Juan Mexican Restaurant locations in the following communities: Russell, Colby, Scott City, Phillipsburg, Plainville, and Larned.

KDOR officials reported the total tax debt at \$301,031.29, stemming from unpaid sales tax and liquor drink tax obligations. Tax warrants were also issued for personal income tax liabilities against several

individuals linked to the business, including Bernabe A. Lopez, Margarita Lopez, Johnaton Lopez, Santiago Gutierrez, Bernabe K. Lopez, and David Serrato.

Assets seized include on-site cash, all known bank accounts, business inventory, and personal property. Each business was sealed and marked with a public notice indicating closure. According to the release, all confiscated assets will be sold at public auction, with proceeds applied toward the outstanding tax debt.

"The Department of Revenue works extensively with taxpayers in delinquency to reach voluntary repayment agreements," said Aubrey Challquist, KDOR's Taxation Communications Manager. "Only after repeated failed attempts to resolve the matter do we resort to enforcement actions such as these."

KDOR stated that its goal is to ensure fairness to law-

abiding businesses and to recover funds vital for public services like education, highways, and public safety.

The six San Juan restaurant locations impacted are:

- 740 E Wichita Ave, Russell
- 1921 S Range, Colby
- 1213 S Main St, Scott City
- 609 3rd Street, Phillipsburg
- 711 S Washington, Plainville

Owners of El Dos de Oros had their property seized on July 8 due to 18 tax warrants.



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The red Ford Shelby F-150 has a price tag of \$114,000 from Ford for the basic package, and the owners were able to roll 12,000 miles before getting caught

Tremors in the Heartland: Series of earthquakes rattle Northwest Kansas

By Derek White

Free Press Contributor

What began as a quiet Saturday afternoon in Northwest Kansas quickly turned into a jittery one as a series of small earthquakes rolled beneath the region's rural landscape near Hill City.

Just after 2 p.m. on July 6, the first tremor—a 2.6 magnitude quake—was felt southwest of Bogue. Less than two hours later, the ground shook again, this time south of Hill City, with a 2.5 magnitude jolt. Then, only minutes after that, a third earthquake struck. This one measured 2.7 in magnitude and hit near the Trego-Graham County line, northeast of Collyer.

Though none of the quakes were strong enough to cause damage, the Graham County Sheriff's Office confirmed that many residents reported feeling the tremors. "We didn't have any structural reports come in, but people definitely felt them," said a representative from the office.

According to the U.S. Geological Survey, all three earthquakes occurred between 5 and 10 kilometers below the surface—depths typical for this part of Kansas. The strongest, near WaKeeney, was recorded at 10 kilometers deep and stands as the most powerful quake in the state this week.

But Saturday's events weren't

isolated. In fact, they're part of a larger pattern of seismic activity that's been building across the region in recent weeks.

Just two weeks prior, a 3.4 magnitude quake struck near Stockton, the largest in Kansas so far this month. Hill City, once again, saw two more tremors that same week—a 2.3 and a more noticeable 3.5 magnitude quake. A month ago, Phillipsburg registered a 2.4 magnitude event.

All told, Kansas has recorded 10 earthquakes in the past seven days and 15 in the past month. Over the past year, the state has experienced 137 earthquakes of magnitude 1.5 or

greater.

These numbers, while not alarming on their own, are drawing increasing attention from geologists and local officials alike. Though Kansas isn't typically known for earthquake activity, the central and western parts of the state have seen more frequent quakes in the past decade.

While none of the recent tremors have caused damage, they've certainly stirred conversations in coffee shops, diners, and among neighbors. For many in northwest Kansas, it's a reminder that even the most solid ground can shift when you least expect it.



Brothers Ryder (on the left) and Roper Rich will work as bullfighters at this year's Phillipsburg Rodeo.

~ PHOTO COURTESY OF RYDER RICH

Colorado brothers, bullfighters are part of family tradition at Kansas Biggest Rodeo

New personnel at Phillipsburg Rodeo

Two new faces will be in the arena at Kansas Biggest Rodeo this year.

Bullfighters (and brothers) Ryder Rich and Roper Rich have been hired for the Phillipsburg rodeo.

The men, who live in Eaton, Colo., will work during the bull riding, distracting the bull after each ride, giving the bull rider time to scramble to safety.

They are the second generation of their family to work the Phillipsburg rodeo; their dad, Kevin Rich, worked the Phillipsburg rodeo in the early 1990s and entertained in the Wrangler Bullfights as well.

But when the men were young (they are 25 and 23 years old, respectively), their focus was on high school baseball and football.

"We played baseball every

single day, year-round," Roper said. Both men had college scholarships to play baseball, but shoulder injuries stopped Ryder from playing, and the pandemic ended Roper's college sports.

So they turned to rodeo. But their mom wasn't crazy about them following in their dad's occupation.

Ryder entered his first freestyle bullfighting competition at age 14, without his mother knowing. His dad knew, as his dad provided the bulls for the event. "Dad and I kept it a secret till I was 18," he said. "When she found out, she laughed about it."

The duo not only works rodeos as bullfighters, but has a herd of bulls, with their dad. They haul bulls to freestyle bullfighting events across the region.

They are inspired by

their dad, Kevin, who has spinocerebellar ataxia (SCA3), a progressive genetic condition that affects coordination and balance. Kevin uses a walker to get around, but he's still very involved in the bull business, and he encourages his sons to fully live their lives. "He tells us, you boys make the most of life," Roper said.

Ryder is married to Cameron Rich.

This year's Kansas Biggest Rodeo will be held July 31-August 2. Shows start at 8 pm nightly.

Tickets are available online at KansasBiggestRodeo.com and at Garrett Insurance (685 Third Street, Phillipsburg) or by calling 785.543.2448.

Tickets range in price from \$13-\$22.

For more information, visit the website or call 785.543.2448.

Selden's July 5th Celebration shines as a small-town jewel

By Derek White
Free Press Contributor

The tiny town of Selden, with just under 200 residents, once again proved that community spirit can outshine town size as it hosted its annual post-Independence Day celebration on Saturday, July 5. Designed to complement, rather than compete with, other area festivities, Selden's celebration offers a second chance for regional families to gather in honor of America's freedom—an idea that has blossomed into one of Northwest Kansas' most cherished summer traditions.

By early afternoon, the heart of Selden had transformed into a pedestrian-only festival zone. Over a thousand visitors from across the region packed the streets, parks, and sidewalks, creating a vibrant scene that mixed hometown warmth with regional hospitality. The event's charm continues to draw larger crowds every year, propelled by word-of-mouth praise and the universal appeal of small-town Americana.

"It's something really special," one visitor said. "You get to enjoy your own community's Fourth, and then come here the next day and do it all over again with friends and neighbors from all over. There's nothing else like it."

The town's commitment to hospitality was evident at every turn. Food vendors lined the edges of downtown, their lines stretching throughout the afternoon. From burgers and brisket to lemonade and

kettle corn, the fare offered something for everyone.

At P.D. Paul's Memorial Park, which had been immaculately prepared by town volunteers, live music echoed from 6 to 9 p.m. as families sprawled out on blankets and lawn chairs beneath shady trees. The crowd sang along to a blend of country, rock, and blues favorites, including a soulful rendition of "Shallow" performed by DaeDozzin, a local group from Trenton, Nebraska.

Throughout the day, activities for all ages kept the energy high. Children enjoyed barrel train rides, bounced in inflatable castles, tried their aim at the dunk tank, and competed in the popular kids' pedal pull. A cornhole tournament drew spirited competition, while the always-popular golf cart parade ran through the streets with decorated carts and smiling riders tossing candy to young spectators.

One of the event's highlights came when organizers raffled off a hand-painted American flag artwork, with all proceeds donated to the Brandon Gaede family of Phillipsburg. Word of the raffle spread quickly, and guests lined up eagerly to purchase tickets, showing once again the generous spirit that underpins this close-knit region. The raffle quickly raised over \$2,500 for the fallen hero's family.

As dusk arrived, a soft breeze swept across the park, cooling the evening air after a scorching day. Families gathered in small groups, sharing stories and laughter, enjoying the kind of quiet magic that can only be found in moments like these.

When the final note of music faded, the crowd slowly made its way to the south edge of town, where Selden capped off the celebration with a fireworks display hailed as one of the best in the tri-state area. Bursts of color lit up the sky, met with cheers and applause from every corner of the town.

For Selden, this annual July 5th celebration is more than a party—it's a symbol of what community can be when people come together with purpose, generosity, and joy.