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"Serving the South Loup River Valley"

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Falconry Leaves Only a Small Footprint

Falconer Makes Arnold His Seasonal Home

By Pepper Werner

The Nebraska Sandhills are known for outstanding hunting: whitetail deer, rifle, pheasants, shotgun, mule deer, archery, and the lesser known sport of falconry. Just exactly what is this sport? There is actually a falconry season from September 1 to March 31 and Tony Head would love to tell you all about it.

Tony is a homeowner in Arnold, as well as a Montana resident. After 36 years in the fire service in Littleton, Colorado, as a captain and paramedic, he retired two and a half years ago. He has been hunting with his birds in Custer County for nearly 30 years.

After retirement, Tony knew that he wanted to get out of Colorado and relocate somewhere outdoorsy that had easy access to hunting, fishing and his falconry skills. So, he left Colorado and moved north to Montana where he built a house in a rural area east of Billings.

Usually one week each month, from September to March, Tony comes to Arnold with his birds and stays in his second home. He is a big supporter of the community and considers this a great place to be. His visits are weather dependent so that his birds can hunt and receive their rewards. It also depends on corn harvest since that is where his birds are hunting. They are hunting the prairie chickens that are eating the leftover corn in the fields after harvest.

How does one learn about the art of falconry? Tony started reading books in the 7th grade after meeting a friend that had an owl. He read about birds of prey, falconry and how to train birds. The art of practicing falconry is hunting wild quarry (prey), in its natural state with a trained raptor, such as a hawk or falcon. It is a 4,000-year-old sport and is practiced today in the Middle East and Asia for the upper-class or in areas such as Mongolia as a supplement for a very limited diet.

Currently, Tony has two gyrfalcons (pronounced jir-fawl-kuh n): a white phase - Harley, and a black phase - Nero. The largest falcon in the world, the ghostly gyrfalcon is a fierce predator where it chases down



Montana resident Tony Head returns to his seasonal home in Arnold almost monthly for the seven month falcon hunting season. Here, he is pictured with Nero, a Black Phase Gyrfalcon and Harley, a White Phase Gyrfalcon. (Pepper Werner photo)

game birds in flight or plummets from the sky at breathtaking speeds to strike prey to the ground. This action is called "stooping."

Tony also uses a dog to point the prey. In Nebraska this is prairie chicken (grouse). Not all falconers use a dog, but being upland game birds, dogs are beneficial. Tony, however, utilizes an English Pointer, Boomer, to locate the grouse, requires the dog to hold the point, removes the hood from the falcon that is sitting on his fist, allows time for the bird to adjust, releases the bird and watches as it makes its ascent.

It can take three to five minutes for the bird to reach its height. All the while Boomer is holding the point, Tony actually flushes the grouse for the falcon to stoop and capture. The entire process can take five to six minutes which is a long time for a dog to wait.

"It's an amazing thing to have the bird flying so high, nearly out of sight, flush the grouse and have the falcon drop into a stoop, and appear like a bullet to knock the prey to the ground. A falcon has excellent eyesight, but only average hearing, so it's a fast event that the falcon circles right back around

to capture the stunned grouse," said Tony.

The reward to the gyrfalcon is getting to eat the head and neck of the grouse. To acclimate the bird to eating food other than hunted prey during the off season, Tony trades frozen quail for the fresh grouse. Hot weather is hard on the gyrfalcon since they are arctic birds. They originate in Alaska, Canada, Greenland and Iceland. His birds are kept in an aviary chamber during the off season where they molt (shed their old feathers). They prefer the cold weather.

To get the gyrfalcon to return to Tony's fist after the catch, he swings a lure around with meat on it to get them to return. There are jesses (tethers) on both legs to hold once they return. Both of his birds are imprinted to humans since he got them as babies. Once hooded, they aren't afraid of being touched.

As for flying away, Tony's gyrfalcons have a miniature GPS magnetized to their backs. There is a battery-operated transmitter tied to an application on Tony's cell phone that keeps the location of the birds on his screen, even if he can't see them up in the sky.

When asked about the ideal raptor to use for hunting, Tony responded that it depends on the quarry. A Golden Eagle can capture coyotes, or a hawk may



As an eyas, Harley was imprinted to Tony.

be used for sparrows. The best falconry is in the United States - having the wide variety of quarry and raptor species. However, the life of a raptor can be limited or up to 20 years. They are hunted just as they are the hunter. Great Horned Owls, Golden Eagles, Bald Eagles and Red-Tailed Hawks have all been known to kill a gyrfalcon. It is the cycle of life and a heart-breaker for a falconer.

Tony states that his greatest appreciation is to the farmers in Custer County. He doesn't recall ever being denied access to hunt. There is no impact when practicing the art of falconry. He doesn't leave anything behind other than the occasional footprint.

Colbi Smith Wins School National Geographic Bee Moves One Step Closer to \$50,000 College Scholarship



Colbi Smith (center) won the school competition of the National Geographic Bee last week. Crew Witthuhn (left), a 4th grader, placed 2nd and Rio Remund (right), a sixth grader earned 3rd place. (Julie Mohr photo)

Arnold, Nebraska January 10, 2018—Colbi Smith, a 8th grade student at Arnold Public School, won the school competition of the National Geographic Bee on January 10 and a chance at a \$50,000.00 college scholarship. The school Bee, at which students answered questions on geography, was the first round in the 30th annual National Geographic Bee, a geography competition designed to inspire and reward students' curiosity about the world.

Thousands of schools around the United States and in the five U.S. territories are participating in the 2018 National Geographic Bee. Once the school champion has been identified, the school Bee coordinator may administer the online qualifying test for the student to be considered for advancement to the state Bee. As many as 100 of the highest-scoring students will be invited to represent their school at their state Bee. State Bees will be held in 50 states, the District of Columbia, and participating U.S. territories on Friday, April 6, 2018.

The National Geographic Society will provide an all-expenses

paid trip to Washington, D.C., for state winners to participate in the Bee national championship rounds May 20-23, 2018. The first-place national champion will receive a \$50,000 college scholarship, a lifetime membership in the Society, including a subscription to National Geographic magazine, and an all-expenses-paid Lindblad expedition to the Galápagos Islands aboard the new National Geographic Endeavour II. Travel for the trip is provided by Lindblad Expeditions and National Geographic. Second- and third-place finishers will receive \$25,000 and \$10,000 college scholarships, respectively.

National Geographic will air the final round of the National Geographic Bee Championship in May 2018. It will air later on public television stations; check local television listings for dates and times.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the National Geographic Bee. The National Geographic Society developed the National Geographic Bee in 1989 in response to concern

Board Continues Discussion on Makerspace, Adding Preschool

By Fallon Gibson

The first meeting of the year for the Arnold School Board started early with a workshop led by Clay Mohr discussing possibilities of building a Makerspace at APS - a place in which people with shared interests can gather to work on projects while sharing ideas, equipment and knowledge. There has already been one visit to a Makerspace in Wichita, Kansas, that board members and community members have attended. There are plans for possibly two more trips for community members to learn more about what a makerspace is exactly. Mr. Mohr discussed some ideas about including some ag related items, such as GPS units that are used in tractors, as well as the standard woodworking, welding and other electrical and industrial items. He also discussed possibly getting in touch with businesses in the county that could provide machines and parts for the students to get more hands-on learning experience. It would help students who plan on attending a tech school or even some of those that don't plan on attending college to get hands-on experience learning a skill. Currently, no other schools in Nebraska have a Makerspace; however, a couple

of board members stated they had heard that Lexington was talking about possibly building one.

The board agreed that Mr. Mohr should go ahead and speak with some of the businesses he named, and a committee should be formed to help educate community members about what is currently going on at School House Graphics and the plans for the Makerspace. Superintendent Dr. Dawn Lewis stated that Senator Matt Williams is also on the board for Makerspaces, so she offered to talk to him about possibly coming to speak at a town hall style meeting that will be offered at a later date.

Board Reorganizes

The regular meeting started with election of officers. All positions remained the same, with Tony Eggleston elected president, Joe Cool vice president, Diana Cowerman secretary and Duane Boleman treasurer.

Public Preschool Discussion

There was more discussion on the possibility of adding preschool to the school system. Heather Hagler, owner of Homegrown Kids Daycare, was again present to answer any board members' questions. Referring to a suggestion made during previous discussion on adding pre-school, Heather said

it wouldn't matter if parents were still paying for their children while they weren't there because she would still have to be the one busing them around. Heather also said that she would still have to lay off some people due to scheduling issues with there being an influx of kids at different times. Each daycare building has a maximum of 12 children, so it wouldn't make sense having them both open if there weren't enough kids there. This would force her to have to turn some kids away then, as well, because of lack of room.

It was brought up again about the kids needing more hours and that Callaway has seen great things since adding preschool to their school. Dr. Lewis stated that there is no comparison on the situations between Arnold and Callaway. Mr. Morgan and Dr. Lewis both agreed that Arnold has an amazing privately owned preschool program in place right now and they haven't noticed any children coming in and not being academically prepared.

Board member Diana Coleman stated, "I don't think (preschoolers) need to be in school longer. Kids need to be kids. They have the next 13-plus years to be in school longer."

Board members were also

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