

The Arnold Sentinel

“Serving the South Loup River Valley”

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Arnold Grad Is On Track To Becoming a Surgeon

Lydia Connell Hesseltine is set to graduate from UNMC in May 2027

By Janet Larreau

Since graduating from Arnold High School in 2019, Lydia Connell Hesseltine has been on a path to a career in medicine, and she's just a few months away from hitting yet another goal – graduation from UNMC. From now until September 1, she'll be completing monthly rotations in her chosen specialty and preparing to submit her application for residency. Next spring, she'll "match" into a residency program somewhere in the United States, embarking on several years of intensive clinical training, continued learning, and skill development aimed at preparing her to be a capable, patient-centered, and well-rounded physician.

Looking back, Lydia said it's hard to pinpoint a specific "aha" moment when she became aware that she wanted to go into the field of medicine, but she does give credit to Arnold teachers for recognizing her potential. In second grade, her teacher recognized her strength in math and encouraged her to excel, which fostered her curiosity for complex problem-solving. That same year, Lydia earned the lighthearted nickname "doc," not because of any medical knowledge, but because her handwriting was already living up to the stereotype. In fourth grade, she had a teacher who placed

a strong emphasis on science, further reinforcing her curiosity and love for STEM subjects. For several years, she had a junior high English teacher who consistently encouraged her to push herself academically, which helped Lydia build confidence in her knowledge and shaped the way she approaches learning today. These early experiences nurtured an interest that continued to grow through high school and ultimately led her to pursue a career in medicine.

During high school, Lydia focused on building a strong academic foundation and took several dual credit courses through Mid-Plains Community College. Her senior year, she was fortunate to have flexibility in her schedule that allowed her to spend several afternoons each week shadowing in clinic in Callaway. This experience gave her early exposure to the clinical environment, helped her better understand the realities of patient care, and affirmed her interest in pursuing a career in medicine. Her senior year, she applied and was accepted to the RHOP program through Chadron State College, which provided her with acceptance to the UNMC's College of Medicine earlier than traditional applicants.

"I was fortunate to receive scholarships at that time, and for several years afterward, that helped support my education after high school. Those scholarships were

"The Arnold School System provided me with a solid educational foundation and emphasized the importance of responsibility, persistence, and discipline. Although the depth and intensity of medical school far exceeds what can truly be prepared for at the high school level, the habits and values I developed in Arnold translated directly into skills that have been essential in meeting the challenges of my medical training."

- Lydia Connell Hesseltine

incredibly meaningful, not only financially, but also as a reminder that my community believed in me and my goals," she said.

To supplement those scholarships, and while studying at Chadron, Lydia began working overnight shifts as a CNA at Crest View Care Center, a nursing home in Chadron. She also began working for Independence Rising, a company contracted by DHHS. This role entails supervising visitations between parents and children currently residing in foster care, as well as connecting with parents to improve parenting skills and support family reunification. She has been fortunate to have flexibility in this position and has continued to work occasionally throughout medical school.

At Chadron, Lydia completed her bachelor's degree in human biology while fulfilling pre-medical requirements. She then matriculated to medical school at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in 2023, where she is currently completing her medical training and

preparing for residency. She will graduate from UNMC in May of 2027.

She recently chose her specialty, which she said has been one of the toughest decisions she's faced so far. Over the past year, her clinical experience and performance on various standardized exams helped confirm that general surgery was the right path and fit for her.

"While I strongly considered family medicine, I ultimately gravitated toward general surgery because I enjoy hands-on work and the problem-solving it involves. I find the pace exciting and the work deeply rewarding, and I love seeing how quickly surgery can make a difference in patients' lives," she said.

Lydia said it is common for medical students to match and complete residency training out of state due to the limited number of residency positions in Nebraska. However, their long-term goal is to eventually return to Nebraska, where she plans to practice in a more rural setting where she can contribute to providing high-quality care



Lydia Connell Hesseltine has begun monthly rotations in her chosen specialty. - Courtesy photo

in areas where physicians are most needed.

"There are a lot of unknowns at this stage of my training; I am trying my best to remain flexible and open to experiences while staying grounded in my long-term goals," she said. "Although medical training is long and demanding, I am motivated by the opportunity to help others during some of the most vulnerable moments of their lives. Early in my training, we were encouraged to make a list of 'reasons why,' which I continue to reference during difficult weeks."

Lydia said she is deeply supported by her family and her husband, who has taken on many roles to support her training, often shouldering added responsibilities and patience and understanding. She is also continual-

ly inspired by the mentors and physicians who have invested in her along the way, and their encouragement and support reminds her of the end goal and the importance of the many long years of training.

She tries to come back home whenever her schedule allows, which changes from year to year. "It's always nice to be home, spend time with my family, and reconnect with the familiar people and places I grew up around. It's striking to see how much has changed in just the few short years since I graduated though!"

Editor's note: Lydia is the daughter of Heidi Horst and Randy Connell.

Senior Meals Are Back, Thanks to School

Local senior citizens were enjoying chili dogs and a fresh salad bar for the first Senior Meal offered by Arnold Public School on Thursday, January 22, at the Legion Hall.

"We had 14 people, which is a good number for the first day and fell in line with what they had before," said Superintendent Joel Morgan, who will be taking the food down to the Legion Hall after the school cooks prepare it. The menu will pretty much follow the school menu.

The buffet style lunches with to-go containers will be served at the Legion Hall Monday through Friday, from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Meals will be available only on days school is in session. Those days will be marked on the lunch calendars that will be available at the Legion Hall.

Mr. Morgan said the school will make adjustments as needed to make this a successful offering to senior citizens. The school has taken on the senior meals contracts while it's in session. New contract bids will be taken in June.



This was the first group of seniors to arrive for a good meal at the Legion Hall last Thursday. Mr. Morgan said he heard comments that they're glad to have the senior meals back.



Arnold Superintendent Joel Morgan is in charge of taking the food down to the Legion Hall for the Senior Meals and setting things up, including laying the food out in the brand new salad bar, purchased with a grant from the Arnold Community Foundation Fund. - Debbie Connelly photos

Filing Deadlines Approaching

The Custer County clerk's office is reminding candidates of filing deadlines for the Primary and General elections. There will be several open positions on Arnold boards.

The terms of Joe Cool, Merle Bierman, and Jen Dalrymple will expire on the Arnold School Board. These open positions will be voted on in the General Election, but if more than six register to run, then the candidates will be narrowed down in the Primary. Incumbents must file by February 17 and the non-incumbent deadline is March 2.

The terms of Donnell Decker's office is reminding candidates of filing deadlines for the Primary and General elections. There will be several open positions on Arnold boards.

The terms of Charles Blowers' term will expire on the Custer County Supervisors board for District 5. Incumbents have until February 17 to file and non-incumbents, March 2.

The clerk's office has not yet received certification for Arnold Township.

Letters Sought for Alumni News

Letters are now being welcomed for the 2026 edition of the *A.H.S. Alumni News* that will be mailed out in the spring. Honored class members are especially encouraged to submit a letter, giving a short or long account of what all has happened since graduating.

Letters can be e-mailed to: arnoldsentinel@gpcom.net with the subject line Alumni Letter, or mailed to The Arnold Sentinel at PO Box 136, or to the A.H.S. Alumni Association, PO Box 121.

The deadline to submit is March 1.

Last Call for Babies

The *Arnold Sentinel* will be featuring the "Babies of 2025" in an upcoming issue. The deadline to submit has been moved up just a few days to February 4.

The feature is open to all of our readers, no matter where they live. To be part of the feature, submit photos and information, including baby's name, birthdate, parents and grandparents by e-mailing arnoldsentinel@gpcom.net with subject line "Babies." Please attach photos at original size.