

Lead street construction project to shut down

BY JACI CONRAD PEARSON
Black Hills Pioneer

LEAD — The western half of a \$1.7 million street project in Lead is nearing its end, with city officials hoping to button up the project next month. Workers will resume with the second portion next spring, to be completed in 2011.

An ongoing continuation of the sewer separation project, concrete is back on the streets affected by construction this summer. South Main to Lower May and Addie Street from CC Curran to Lower May will soon be navigable again.

Lead City Administrator Mike Stahl said that he expects the finishing touches to be put on the project by mid-November and streets will open up at that point.

“Right now, we’re just winding down for this year,” Stahl said. “Concrete will be poured for sidewalks and driveways in the next two weeks or so and sealing the expansion joints in the concrete will also be complete.”

While portions of the streets are opened up, Stahl said that the “settling” process is not yet complete and he wants to take adequate time allowing for that process, in order to ensure a quality finish to the job.

Construction on the other half of the project, or the eastern half, which will affect Addie Street from May Avenue to Grand Avenue, will start up next May or June.

“The next big phase after 2011, will of course, be the state Main Street project in 2014,” Stahl said. “We’ll coincide the sewer separation with the state’s road construction at that point.”

First-time homebuyers

In one year, Dakota Land Trust assisted 13 local families in getting homes

BY KEVIN NORTON
Black Hills Pioneer

SPEARFISH — Low-income families in the Northern Hills have their own place under the sun because of a program that helps people become first-time homebuyers.

The non-profit Dakota Land Trust purchased 10 lots at McGuigan Ranch in northern Spearfish one year ago. Since then, five of the spaces have been filled with families and their new homes.

“As the word spreads I’m sure that by this time next year we’ll probably have all 10 of those lots filled,” said Joy McCracken, executive director.

Community land trusts are a proven concept, first tried in 1970 in Albany, Ga., and are now found in more than 200 places in 38 states across the U.S. - but Dakota Land Trust is the first one in South Dakota, said McCracken.

The new homeowners were ready to show their homes on Tuesday.

“You have a lot more privacy. I also have freedom to do what I want to inside. A lot of times when you’re renting, they won’t even let you paint or have a dog, which I have now,” said Liz Richards, who lives in a tidy 800 square foot house at McGuigan Ranch. She has exercised that freedom by landscaping the entire yard and furnishing the inside of her house with hardwoods, giving off the smell of a freshly-built cabin.

Bernie Butcher moved into her 1,200 square foot house with son Tanner in April. She said that more space and being able to decorate were important, but also that her quality of life has risen.

“This is a college town, so some of the apartments I’ve lived in have been party places. Now it’s peaceful, quiet, and my son can go out and play, because there’s a yard,” she said.

Founded in 2007, Dakota Land Trust has now assisted homeowners in Lead, Spearfish, Sturgis, Box Elder and Rapid City.

The program works by sparing low income buyers the cost of the land, thus requiring only the cost of the house.

The property is leased to the home-



The children of Eugene and Larinda Ryckman, of Lead, eagerly await completion of their new home at McGuigan Ranch subdivision in Spearfish. In the back row from left to right are, Kyle and Joe, and in the front row, Autumn, Sunny, and Mikus. Pioneer photo by Kevin Norton

owner, who can renew the lease every 99 years, provided they or their descendants remain the inhabitants.

Over time, real estate prices tend to rise, especially in the Black Hills. Market appreciation creates equity in the house, which is value that exceeds the debts against the house. This equity is divided proportionally if the buyer chooses to sell, which keeps the property affordable to the next qualified buyer.

“There’s a whole lot of benefits to home ownership,” McCracken said. “Normally, when kids come from families that own a home they’re better as students, they’re more likely to go on to college, there is less crime in that neighborhood, and people are more likely to get

involved. So there’s a lot of benefits to the family and the community.”

Affordable housing is good for the economy, also.

“The business sector has a hard time finding employees, if they can’t afford to live here. If people don’t have an opportunity to buy a home here, then they’ll move to someplace where they can buy one,” she said.

Before Dakota Land Trust was founded in 2007, McCracken said that real estate prices were shown to be increasing by 8 to 13 percent each year across the Hills.

“Eventually real estate prices would overwhelm the local wage earning

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Former museum director sentenced for forgery

BY KEVIN NORTON
Black Hills Pioneer

DEADWOOD — The former executive director of the Black Hills Mining Museum charged with forgery was sentenced Tuesday to serve 30 days in the Lawrence County Jail and five years of supervised probation.

Cyndi Fisher, 52, of Sturgis, pleaded guilty to two counts of forgery. She was also ordered to pay restitution in the amount of \$1,343, a \$750 fine and other court fees.

Fisher was able to avoid most of the 26 counts of forgery and one

count of grand theft that a Lawrence County grand jury indicted her for in May. Fourth Circuit Judge Warren Johnson approved a plea agreement last month that dropped all but two of the forgery charges.

The total amount stolen was \$1,343. The checks were written between November 2009 and March 2010.

Fisher admitted that she didn’t have authority to send the checks, but that “I often took it upon myself to pay for museum supplies,” and that the checks were a way of paying herself back. She insisted that she did not intend to steal the money.

Fisher began her sentence immediately on Tuesday.