

**Your
August
2021**

Country Neighbor

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and Share!**

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This Majestic Cottonwood is on H-67.



“Back To School” began in July with early registration at Peru State College.

A Magazine from Small Town & Rural America

*Sweeten your Coffee Break with these
Voices and Views from the
Valleys of the Nemaha*

Tourists! Visitors! Welcome!

You will have a good time exploring communities in the Valleys of the Nemaha River. Take this free publication home with you to use as a reference for your next visit to this charming area.

Readers!

Returning this month are most of your favorite Nemaha Valley columnists. This 16-page issue can be your 2-cups-of-coffee companion.

Viewers!

In this issue you will find some of my recent photographs of wildflowers and other rural interests in Southeast Nebraska..

Shoppers!

Keep up with local businesses and news of what's special this month. Please thank them for advertising in “*Your Country Neighbor!*”

Contents

Covid Update.....	2
Parade Photos.....	3
July Wildflower Photos.....	4,5,8,12
“Why I Wear A Mask.”.....	5
Devon’s Poetry.....	6 & 7
Merri’s “ <i>Diary of a Part-time Housewife</i> ”.....	10
Janet’s “ <i>A Quiet Walk</i> ”.....	11
“Any Good Come From This Virus?”.....	12
 PSC Sports Review Part II.....	13
PSC Summertime Events.....	14
PSC News.....	15
Scholarships At Peru State!.....	16
 Valentino’s Coupon!!	16

Your Country Neighbor

Voices and Views From the Valleys of the Nemaha

Publisher & Photographer, Stephen Hassler

P.O. Box 126
Peru, Nebraska 68421

countryneighbor@windstream.net

Online at yourcountryneighbor.com

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Ralph Waldo Emerson



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August Writers & Contributors

Devon Adams - 6 & 7

Stephen Hassler - 5

Merri Johnson - 10

Dorothy Rieke - 12

Janet Sobczyk - 11

Thank You!

Covid-19 Cases & Deaths In S.E. Nebraska As Of July 30, 2021

Source: Google Search; 'Name' County, Nebraska Covid
Compare this data to next month's report.

Covid-19 Totals In SE Nebraska

County	Cases	Deaths
Otoe	1479	13
Nemaha	804	13
Johnson	656	10
Richardson	816	24

There have been only a few positive cases of Covid-19 in 'your country neighborhood' since the end of June with almost no new cases in July. That is not the situation in counties to the north, east, and south of us. Douglas, Sarpy, and Lancaster in Nebraska have begun to reflect the recent increase in infections seen in every state due to the contagious Delta variant. Also, Fremont county in Iowa, Atchison and Holt counties in Missouri, plus Brown and Nemaha counties in Kansas, have had several new cases the last few weeks. These are "low vaccination" areas.

The above table shows positive case and death totals as of the end of July. I will update this table in the next issue of "Your Country Neighbor" if I can access data from the state. Nebraska is one of four states that have quit daily reporting of positive Covid-19 cases making it more difficult to analyze and compare, but regardless of the flood of information "out there," the prudent action is to get vaccinated and wear a mask. Those of us who are vaccinated should consider being tested periodically.

Follow CDC Guidelines as to when/where to wear a mask.
I wear one when out of my house and in stores and other businesses.

Go to CDC.gov and search for "wearing a mask."

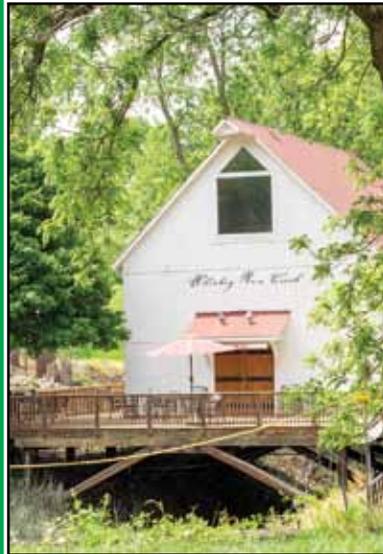
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I used to drive one like this on my dad's farm.



Peru Fire Dept. was among the Freedom Parade entries July 3rd.



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Common Sunflower



Common Chicory



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Compass Plant

Why I Wear A Mask

Stephen Hassler, Peru

I had a thought recently that I had not seen or heard elsewhere until this week when a health newsletter that I receive mentioned that vaccinated people could spread the virus more than previously thought if they are "positive" for the virus.

My thought was this; which person is most likely to transmit the virus, an unvaccinated person who is positive or a vaccinated person who is positive?

If a vaccinated person is carrying the virus, they could have mild symptoms or they might not even know they are infected. So they would continue to act as if they were immune; shopping, visiting friends and relatives, and going to work, and all over, while carrying a very contagious virus.

The unvaccinated person is likely to be in bed at home or in the hospital with much more serious symptoms, and thereby less likely to come into contact with other people. Just some thoughts.

A responsible person who is not vaccinated will wear a mask, but I have been vaccinated and I wear a mask to protect others... just in case I'm a carrier. After all, I drive to several towns doing my work and see a lot of people in businesses who advertise in *Your Country Neighbor*, not to mention my frequent contacts with friends. Some businesses ask that their customers wear a mask, and it's inconvenient for me to take it off and put it back on all day long, so I wear it regularly, and just pull it down a bit when I am jogging or driving. And maybe it provides some protection for me, too.

No one has died from wearing a mask. So if you want the pandemic to go away and life to return to normal (for everyone), wear a mask. If you feel a need to avoid ridicule from ignorant people, consider my reasons;

1. I'm practicing what I preach.
2. If I'm a carrier, I don't want to infect you.
3. The Delta variant is highly contagious!
4. The cold virus is more prevalent now.
5. It's the Pandemic Stupid!

Get vaccinated to protect your life and maybe the life of someone else.



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OLD BOOKS

There it was, sitting on a back shelf in a used book store. It was one of my most loved stories. As I pulled the volume out, I could see that it had been around the block. The spine was a little twisted, and the glue had lost it's grip on some of the story. The pages had a yellowed hue, and they had been folded and bent as people read through the chapters and marked their places. Here and there were little pencil notes in the margins, marking favorite passages or making notes for later reference. I sneezed, suddenly aware of the scent of lavender and mildew at the same instant. A dried sprig of my favorite flower was waiting there for me to discover it pressed between the pages, just as a previous reader had left it. As I read the words in

that section, time receded, and I was back in the blush of my youth, lost in fantasies of my future life. But then another sneeze broke the spell. I realized that my friends and I were a lot like old books: crumpled, rumped, tattered, wrinkled, stiff in our joints, sore in our backs. We haven't looked brand new for quite some time, with fresh new pages inside sparkling covers. But, just like our most cherished old books, we are dear to each other and relish our times together. Opening our hearts to one another keeps us sane when times are rough and the nights are long and dark. At the same time, sharing smiles, interests, memories and conversations helps us catch the beauty in each day, like walking through a lovely garden.

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P O E T R Y

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“BOO!”

The family is growing so fast that Mom has to spend her long days teaching the babies how to learn to live on their own. Her classroom is like any ordinary school, except that it is so much larger. Instead of electric lights on the ceiling, there is one huge bulb, and the room doesn't have desks. This class has only five students, but they are packed with energy and inclined to listen to the rules. Mom has shown them examples of what can happen when they don't listen to her. The five were very much impressed with the stinky, rotting bodies of others from their community who didn't pay enough attention to what is going on around them. The many predators who hide in plain sight had the advantage of surprise and caught the formerly alive critters and ate most of them. So, the fuzzy darlings follow Mom like they are tied to her tail, chattering to each other along the way. Yesterday they followed her right up to my back porch to look for cat chow. But they saw me instead, and ran like the wind when I said “BOO!” to scare away the raccoons.

STAR SPACE

Once upon a time there was a round globe that hung out with a bunch of other globes. They didn't have much to say about their orbits, and the way they were spinning like cue balls on a billiards table. Way back before any calendars were made, their little family had set up over here on this side of the Milky Way. At a community meeting, they'd voted that the Sun would be the chief of the solar system, and sit in the middle of the table. Time passed. LOTS of time. Life and water came and went, and burning heat and cold so low and hard that only rocks existed. After a few billion million trillion seconds ticked by, Earth won the lottery. It had life. Humans. They're never satisfied. Now that here is a lovely blue planet, they want to go there, OUT there, among the stars. Just to cruise around. Good idea. You go. I'll stay. Bring me some stardust!!

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NEIGHBORHOOD GANGS LIFE LIKE A FEATHER

Don't worry, they're not the kind of kids who steal and break things. They grew up fast though, and had to get A's on all their lessons. No room for errors with families like these who are transients. They come in the spring and leave before a hint of winter arrives. Soft, flute-like notes hidden in tree leaves find my ears in April, and dead silence is the clue that they've left in August. Their parents work hard to teach their kids how to find food, watch for predators, and to fly without crashing into unintended targets. For a time, the yard is crowded with bird bath bathers, flying lessons and comic attempts to eat ripe mulberries hanging upside-down. But then it's time to fly away from the nest forever, as kids of all species find out.

It comes twirling down to the ground from way up in the big old tree. It's so blue it makes the sky look pale. As sunshine spots wiggle over and light on it, the tiny feather flashes colors like a black opal. It is a gem of nature, shed from the perfectly planned body of an indigo bunting. Humans worked for centuries trying to figure out how to do what birds can do as soon as they leave their nests. Flight is like breathing for them, and wings make the sky a place to play and to hunt. Gizmos like drones can give us an eyeful from a bird's perspective, but can't convey the touch of the wind on wild wings as muscles use thermals and breezes to soar. In a short time the feather will melt into earth, but the spark of life that made it will exist for generations.



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Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson, Auburn

Hubby and I just returned from a week-long extended-family vacation at Lake Okoboji, Iowa. It was a combination surprise 70th birthday party for Hubby and our 50th wedding anniversary celebration. The weather was lovely for the most part, and the accommodations were comfortable, though not exactly what we had been led to expect.

Our lakeside rental house was to include a pontoon boat at our disposal from our personal dock. As you can imagine, that was a major motivator for choosing that house. Unfortunately, we found out a few days before departure that the boat was out of commission. The owner would do his best to get it fixed for us.

But, of course, it being peak boating season, the demand for boat repair services was high. He had to take the boat 25 miles away to a shop in Minnesota. Then, of course, a part had to be ordered, and yada-yada, the boat was not going to be fixed in time for our use.

The best Hubby could negotiate with the owner as compensation was \$400, which was only slightly more than the cost of a four-hour pontoon rental. That left us paying out-of-pocket for another 12 hours of boat rental, which was still a far cry from the luxury of having a pontoon boat available 24 hours a day for a whole week. There would be no early morning fishing excursions or evening star-gazing events out on the water. We were disappointed, but, not having our own personal pontoon boat on vacation is a “first-world” problem, as my brother-in-law says. We should be grateful we could afford such a vacation in the first place.

The house itself was adequate, with comfortable living room furniture and beds, plus four bathrooms. In addition to a personal pontoon boat, another of our first-world requirements had been separate bathrooms for each of the three family units. Any number of bathrooms more than two is difficult to find, so four was a real bonus. The house was actually a two-story duplex with a complete kitchen, three bedrooms and multiple bunk beds in each unit: a first-world excess of space for our group of eight total people. But, when on vacation, the ability to have some privacy and get away from each other a bit goes a long way toward achieving vacation bliss.

Overall, the house was nice enough, though there were a few minor inconveniences.

The jacuzzi tub in the master bath did not work. But I don’t think we even knew there was a jacuzzi tub – functional or otherwise – before we got there. There was a separate shower, so no problem. We first-worlders can put up with the absence of a jacuzzi on vacation if we have to. Although I must say that bathroom sink/vanity was designed for tall people. I nearly dislocated both hips hoisting my legs up there one at a time to shave. Again, awkward leg-shaving is pretty much a first-world complaint.

And speaking of sinks, the kitchen sink had two separate faucets, instead of the usual single-handle faucet. Logically, I turned on both faucets to achieve the desired temperature. When I was finished, I had a devil of a time getting both faucets turned off. Seriously, the handles just turned and turned, without ever completely stopping. I don’t even know how that kind of plumbing situation can happen. It turned out that you simply turned the faucet knob until the water stopped coming out, even though you could keep on turning the faucet in the same direction or in reverse and the water would start up again. Of course, with both faucets running, it was a bit difficult to tell if you actually had turned off either of them. You had to go by temperature. After that, everyone was instructed

to never turn on both kitchen faucets at the same time. Crazy. But again, in a lot of third-world places, there is no running water at all.

Next, we discovered that the handle of the sliding door in the ground floor unit did not actually latch, let alone lock. The little flippy thing that hooks into the door jam just wobbled around like a loose tooth. But, we first-worlders can be resourceful when we have to be. We rummaged around and found a short, heavy-duty curtain rod stashed in a closet to serve as a stop-stick. When we informed the owner, he seemed surprised that we would have any security concerns about the non-locking door. “We never lock our doors around here,” he said. Okay, then. Moving on.

We did have other doors that came with locks and keys, so I guess as long as intruders didn’t try too hard to find a point of entry, the odds were in our favor. But not really. One day, Hubby and half of our group returned to the house ahead of the rest of us only to discover that they did not have a key to get into the upper unit. Hubby called me and asked if I had the key with me, as I had been the last one out the door. Weelll. No. I must have left it lay on the table beside the door.

Well, Hubby said, with only a teensy bit of an exasperated sigh, he would just have to call the owner and hope he was available to come let them in. If not, they could wait in the lower unit. As soon as I ended the call, I had a thought. (Notice I didn’t say “hung up”? First-worlders use cell phones and, therefore, never actually “hang up.” Just sayin’.)

Anyway, I had a fortuitous memory of noticing that none of the windows had screens, nor did any of them actually lock. All of the latches were just a tad out of alignment. I called Hubby back with this news. Sure enough, he easily lifted the kitchen window from the outside, reached in and unlocked the door without even needing the keys, which were within his reach as well. So much for any security whatsoever.

Another issue of note was the absence of covers on several light switches and outlets. Probably a code violation. The owner blamed the painters for not re-installing the covers when they finished. Whatever.

I could go on and explain the near-fiasco we had with the washing machine. But that would take up too much space for this column.

Our family had a great time together, and all those odd little things that happened will make for great future stories. No doubt they will get better every time they are told.

Remember when we went to Lake Okoboji and Grandma forgot the key and we got locked out of that house and had to climb through a window to get in?

Yeah, and remember when Grandma dislocated her hip in the bathroom sink and had to go to the emergency room?

What about when she flooded the kitchen because she couldn’t get the faucet turned off?

That was the most fun trip ever. I wish we could do it all over again.

Here’s to family get-togethers. Forget your first-world hang-ups and ideas about “necessities” and just enjoy each other.

It's Back To School!



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A Quiet Walk

Janet Sobczyk, Omaha, © 2021

Step outdoors into an early small-town summer morn
Old concrete sidewalk merges to brick street
Patchy yards grow next to well-manicured lawns
Renovated Victorians stand stately among ranch homes
Whimsical outdoor art dots the lush landscaping.

Squirrels plant walnuts and rabbits enjoy garden greens
Robins snatch worms and bees examine zinnias
A bicyclist speeds by, slowing at the red sign to look both ways and glide past
A gray-haired gent putters around yard as wife reads on the porch
No breeze disturbs the moment, birdsong fills the air.

Rounding the block my temporary "home" comes into view
Up four steps, upon welcoming porch
The smell of bacon wafts through screened door
Made not by me, but for me... a rare role-reversal
Hospitality and quiet, the perfect combo for renewal.

*Dedicated to Karen and Mark Baker who make the
Bakers B&B in Blair, NE, a wonderful retreat.*



"Whimsical outdoor art dots the lush landscaping."

Any Good Come From This Virus?

Dorothy Rieke, Julian



Blackeyed Susan, Yellow Coneflower



Purple Coneflower

Some say that Americans will never recover from the current Coronavirus epidemic. We will always be haunted by the loss of life, the suffering, mental anguish, poor economy, and curtailment of our normal activities.

On the other hand, maybe this time has brought reflections of what is really important in our lives, awakening our attitudes toward others while creating feelings of goodness and generosity.

Of course, everyone was ill-prepared to face such a drastic situation. No one realized what this widespread illness would bring to those affected.

One of the smartest high school students I ever taught became a victim of this disease. I grieve his death.

Complicating this intense fear of the virus has been the hoarding, selfishness, and crimes. However, most of us are doing what we must do to survive while pledging to help others in any way.

We have no idea when this fear of Covid will subside or if another virus will arrive that might be more deadly. However, Americans are resilient. We have experienced the Great Depression, wars, election uproars, and other disasters.

Our ancestors encountered many problems while settling these Great Plains; we are encountering problems which are somewhat different. However, we as a nation will persevere and face whatever comes next.

Has any good come from this virus? Undeniably, this has been a horrendous virus that has, in a way, brought all of us to our knees.

What, then, could be good about this situation?

We have been reminded of what is important.

We learned that we really do not need some things.

We have renewed our relationships with others.

We have learned to rely more on technology.

We are reducing carbon footprints.

We are thankful for good health.

We have reconnected with others.

We learned we can do a lot more at home.

We have taken a new look at our freedoms.

We have gained appreciation for friendships.

We have reconsidered our priorities.

We acknowledged that toilet paper is an essential item.

We became a lot more mindful.

We have renewed our desire to meet the needs of others.

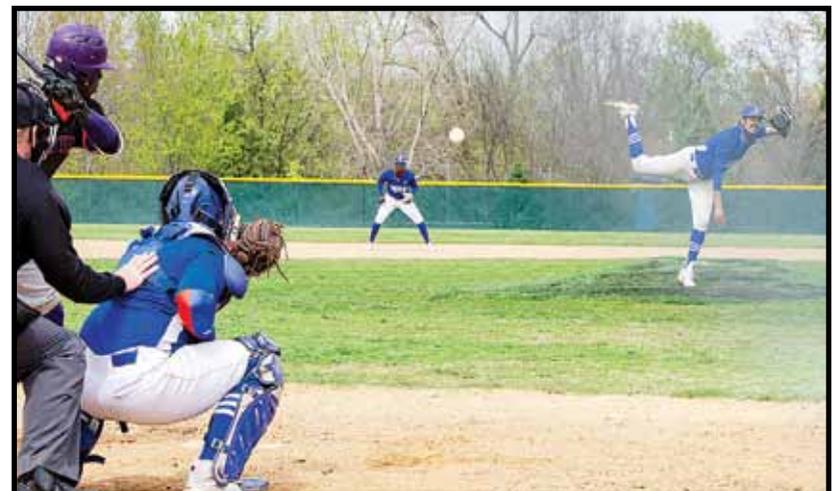
We have experienced a closeness of family members.

Yes, we Americans will overcome anything that comes our way. This means that we rely on traditions of our ancestors who met adversity with hope and faith to build a great country.



Peru State Sports Photo Review Part II

Baseball, Women's Basketball, Softball





Peru State College Summertime Events



PSC registration for the Fall 2021 term was initiated on July 16th. Welcome week begins August 19th.



There was a good turnout for Volleyball Clinic. July clinics were divided among grades 1-12.



Passing and serving skills on the 26th, setting and attacking on the 27th, all skills on the 28th.



Peru State College News

Phi Beta Lambda Brings Home National Leadership Conference Awards

Nine Peru State College students competed in the 2020-2021 Phi Beta Lambda (PBL) National Leadership Conference, earning eight top-ten awards in the nation.

Dr. Sheri Grotrian, professor of business and PBL advisor, shared, “While the pandemic continued to cause challenges for events for a second summer, we were fortunate for the national PBL organization to again host a virtual National Leadership Conference. With challenges come opportunities, and our students were able to experience what many organizations have resorted to the past several months with the use of technology for professional meetings.”

“I’m proud of the work these students put forth in their events, and I know we all look forward to getting back to the in-person setting in the coming year.”

Individual Events

Dawn Castle (Imperial, NE)

10th place – Future Business Executive

Austin Guhde-Egger (Auburn, NE)

2nd place – Computer Concepts

Tyler Harms (Falls City, NE)

8th place – Marketing Analysis & Decision Making

Noah Kreifels (Auburn, NE)

5th place – Retail Management

Kelsi Leininger (Essex, Iowa)

3rd place – Business Ethics

6th place – Job Interview

Noah Wynn (Auburn, NE)

10th place – Financial Concepts

2nd place – Future Business Executive

Michael Okpalefe (Mableton, GA)

and Stacy Bohlken (Palmer, NE)

also competed this year for Peru State.

Dylan Dittman Named to CoSIDA Academic All-America® NAIA Football Team

Senior Peru State football player Dylan Dittman (Omaha) became the 13th Peru Bobcat football player to be named as an Academic All-America® on Thursday. Dittman was named to the CoSIDA Academic All-America® NAIA Football Team.

Dittman is the second Peru State football player in back-to-back years to earn the status as Nicholas Novak (Dawson) earned the honor last year.

Peru State has now had at least one Academic All-America® honoree in one of their sports every year since 2012.

April Was Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM)

The Peru State campus was able to experience SAAM to its fullest without the concern of a pandemic as it did in 2020. The campus committee began planning for the month in late February and had a robust agenda for the month.

As part of the month-long activities, the Peru Association of Student Athletes (PASA) challenged its respective teams to gather supplies for Project Response. In total, 661 items were donated to Project Response.

The month-long events received a lot of play via different means of social media; on the @pscBobcats twitter, on the College’s Facebook page, on the Bobcat Life App and the Bobcat Life Facebook page.

Members of the committee joining Dr. Williams in the planning included faculty members Stephanie Huddle – Criminal Justice, Laura Lippman – Theatre, and Susan Moore – Art. Staff members included Eulanda Cade – Human Resources, Clara Edwards – Res Life, and Ted L. Harshbarger – Athletics. Student committee members were Addison Gyhra – PASA rep, Daniels Lagunas (Hastings) – resident assistant, Gretchen Tharp (Rock Port, MO) – resident assistant, Samantha Hernandez (Columbus) – Student Senate, and Sophie Horvath (LaVista) – Student Senate.

Peru State Volleyball among NAIA Top Teams Academically in AVCA

The United States Marine Corps (USMC) and the American Volleyball Coaches Association (AVCA) announced that 1,275 teams have earned the USMC/AVCA Team Academic Award for the 2020-2021 season.

The Peru State Bobcat volleyball team had a cumulative grade point average of 3.431. This was the 14th time in program history that a Bobcat team has been recognized. This was the ninth year in a row for Peru State.

All eligible team members who played during the season were included when determining the team’s grade point average. Including Cheyenne Birkle (Holden, MO), Alyssa Bock (Plattsburgh), McKenzie Brockhoff (Dearborn, MO), Hannah Burianek (Lincoln), Jamie Copenhavre (Omaha), Christena Crouch (Holton, KS), Cassie Davis (Colorado Springs), Jaddy Duarte (Brasilia, Brazil), Kelcie Gaines (Watson, MO), Tyra Mollhoff (Lincoln), Ofalata Mounaafi (West Valley City, Utah), Mattie Nichols (Auburn), Sidney Peck (Manitoba, Canada), Hannia Rios (Toa Baja, Puerto Rico), Pyper Roseberry (La Vista), Dawson Sharman (Sidney), Haley VanLeuven (Elgin, OR.), Arianna Waschkowski (Bellevue), and Randee Witt (Salem).

“Even though teams might not have played during their usual season or may not have competed at all during the past year, coaches still found ways to lead their players to academic excellence,” said AVCA Executive Director Kathy DeBoer. “This is a testament to the important role volleyball coaches play in their players success both on and off the court.”

Harshbarger Joins Peru State College Foundation

After nearly 32 years working for Peru State College, Ted L. Harshbarger has announced his resignation. The veteran administrator will take his talents to an office only a couple of hundred feet from his current one, to serve as Interim Director of the PSC Foundation.

Harshbarger said, “I would like to thank the Foundation Board of Directors for selecting me to serve as its interim director. This is a perfect opportunity for me to continue to serve the College and its alumni.”

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