

Heaney starts new ‘virtual assistant’ service in Crosby

By John Bayer

Riley Heaney wants to read your emails. And shred your sensitive documents. And whatever other office work you may need done.

Heaney has recently set up shop in Crosby as a professional “virtual assistant.”

Wikipedia describes virtual assistants as providing “professional administrative, technical, or creative (social) assistance to clients remotely from a home office.” Because the virtual assistant is not an employee, clients are not responsible for employee-related taxes, insurance or benefits.

Heaney sees her job as one of lightening the load for her clients.

“I could help with their everyday workload,” Heaney said. “Light-duty, like from scanning to bookkeeping to emails to just the simple things that they don’t want to do every time. Then they have more time to do their other things.”

Heaney, who has lived in Crosby for about two years, began renting an office out of the Haugland Insurance Services building back in August, to have a space to perform her other job: medical coding.

“The project that I am (currently) contracted with comes in spurts,” Heaney said.

Heaney looked for other work she could perform out of her office. A friend of hers from Michigan hired her to work on her bookkeeping and billing. That friend suggested that Heaney look into providing similar services locally.

“I’m paying for my office; I might as well use it,” Heaney said.

She made the decision to



John Bayer -- The Journal

become a virtual assistant and, soon after, found a client close by.

Haugland Insurance hired Heaney to scan some of its paperwork into a computer so that it would be available as digital files.

“I thought it was only going to be a couple things, but it seems like I’m doing all five years,” Heaney said, referring to how long Haugland Insurance has been in business.

“So it’s going to take me two months to pretty much do it. But I like to work.”

Heaney takes her new role seriously, going so far as training on becoming a professional virtual assistant, through a company called The Virtual Savvy.

“They’re really good,” Heaney said. “And it’s a program they teach you from contracts to everything that you need to know to start your business.”

Heaney loves to stay busy. In addition to the regular medical coding and virtual assistant jobs, she has recently expanded into forensic medical coding, a specialized field in which medical coders analyze health care documentation for legal purposes.

“I got certified in forensic medical coding, and so now just trying to get my name out there and to the state attorneys,” she said.

Heaney is always open to new clientele, and encourages individuals and businesses to contact her to learn more about her services. She can be reached at 701-334-2568 or riley@thevirtualofficeinfo.com.

Heaney said it’s been a “pretty neat” experience and service to provide.

“People do it for side jobs,” Heaney said, “or, like me, I’m trying to do as a main job.”

SCHOOL: Board performs quarterly self-evaluation

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to get used to,” Vandal said, “and there has been a lot of change in testing in the last 10 years.”

For now, Vandal and the school principals will be focused on following the curriculum and looking at what needs further changing.

Vandal said the administration uses a “student first” mindset that includes making regular classroom visits and other steps to ensure necessary skills are being taught.

“Sometimes we, as educators, tend to look at things and say, ‘This will work better if we do it this way,’” Vandal said. “But when we are implementing a new curriculum, we want to make sure we are following all the things.”

In the next year, Vandal plans to incorporate a couple of professional development days into the school calendar to specifically address curriculum with teachers, though the dates are currently unfirmed.

Vandal also praised administrators for their monitoring of student academic progress, which is how the district and the board are able to stay informed and clearly see trends in growth to make decisions.

“This is one of the districts I’ve come into where administrators really own the data,” Vandal said, “and if they lead their buildings that way, it trickles down to the teachers and then to the student, who we are ultimately here for. We want our students to make gains.”

School board evaluations

The board’s quarterly self-evaluations have continued to show progress, and board members made plans for further improvement in 2026.

The self-evaluation reviews

topics such as the district’s use of student data, “ownership” of student progress, time management at board meetings and communication with the community.

The board reviewed its performance with Karen Hinch from Elliott and McMahon, a consulting firm working with the state’s Be Legendary School Board Leadership Institute, which was recently renamed to Student First Governance.

Hinch praised the board for its focus on students and its mindfulness of progress on long-term goals.

“You guys are my best board about going directly to, ‘Is this what’s best for students? Does this align with our Be Legendary goals?’” Hinch said. “That is in the forefront of your mind all the time.”

Progress was seen in the category pertaining to adoption of a monitoring calendar for student progress and goals.

Stephanie Reistad, board president, said the board has been doing more to inform the community about student progress reports and plans.

One area the board felt needed improvement was on its objective to spend at least 25% of meeting time focused on student needs.

“We want most of our meeting to be about students,” Reistad said.

Plans to improve the delivery of information from the administration to the board, and to schedule a special meeting with community members to gather feedback, will be addressed in the next quarter.

Extracurricular approvals

Extracurricular agreements for 2026 were approved for Allison Muncaster as an

art instructor and Kristen Ator for updating the school website and app.

Muncaster, who has taught art classes at Divide County High School since 2020, is now teaching them virtually through instructional television after moving out of the district.

Muncaster’s classes are part of the Great Western Network -- a state consortium, of which Divide County is a member, that offers various elective courses to high schools through ITV. The district receives reimbursement from the network for Muncaster’s pay.

Ator’s stipend was increased to \$1,200, as last year’s \$800 agreement began partway into the school year, Vandal said.

“That takes a lot of time and energy, and she is very creative,” Vandal said.

In other business:

- The board has officially adopted a revised phone use policy for students following the policy’s second reading. The revised policy adjusts student allowances for phone use during school time.
- The board also approved first readings for three Title IX and sexual harassment policies and amended several policies regarding website accessibility and board meeting decorum.
- District bus drivers are happy with the new management contract this year with Harlow’s Bus Service, according to Vandal and Reistad.
- “What I gathered from conversations is that overall it is going super well, bus drivers are happy,” Reistad said. “There is also a learning curve with anything new, and that seemed mostly about clocking in on a new system and using that technology.”

Liberty FCE donates winter clothing to North Star



Betty Dhuyvetter photo

The Liberty Family and Community Educators Association presents a donation of \$500 in winter clothing to North Star Human Service Zone’s Divide County office and its Angel Tree program this month. The donation was funded in part by a grant from Thrivent Financial. From left: Helen Dahlke, Mary Dhuyvetter and Mary Jo Anderson, Liberty FCE; Erica Domonoske and Samantha Pulvermacher, North Star Human Service Zone; and Des Verlinde, Liberty FCE.

Bakken briefs

Burke gets battery hearing

The North Dakota Public Service Commission will hold a public hearing in Bowbells on Dec. 19 regarding a proposal to construct a battery energy storage system in Burke County.

Northern Divide Energy Storage is requesting a siting permit for a 100-megawatt battery energy storage system with a four-hour duration capable of storing excess energy available on the grid when production exceeds demand.

The estimated project cost is \$130 million.

The project is proposed to be located adjacent to the existing Northern Divide Wind Energy Center and would connect to the existing substation. The project area would encompass approximately 20 acres in Burke County.

The Dec. 19 hearing is at 10 a.m. at Bowbells Memorial Hall, 100 Main St. NW.

--Burke County Tribune, Bowbells

Stanley community center?

Elevate Stanley, a new group seeking ideas to improve the city of Stanley, hosted a community meeting Dec. 2 to solicit public input and feedback on its proposal for a community center.

The project is currently in the idea phase, and whether it moves forward will depend on community input and future decisions.

Attendees were asked whether such a center should prioritize wellness and fitness uses; social gathering spaces; or spaces and activities for youth, seniors or families, among other questions to provide further guidance for the group.

Comments in support of the initiative cited reasons such as improving local physical and mental health across all age groups, offering year-round recreational opportunities and helping to attract and retain residents.

--Mountrail County Promoter, Stanley

Williams’ new bookmobile

The Williston Community Library has replaced its Williams County Bookmobile.

The new bookmobile departed from the library for the first time Dec. 2, stocked with 1,019 books. About five minutes later, it pulled up outside of Little Rascals Clubhouse Daycare in Williston, where children eagerly awaited.

Library Director Andrea Placher said the

bookmobile serves the “littlest and oldest,” making 35 monthly stops at public schools, day care centers, preschools and senior facilities.

The library travels throughout the county, stopping in Grenora, Zahl, Ray, Alamo, Wildrose, Tioga, McGregor and Epping, in addition to Williston, said Tori Lee, mobile library coordinator.

The previous bookmobile had served the county for the past 15 years, Placher said.

--Williston Herald

Water project finish delayed

Delivery of water from the Northwest Area Water Supply project will be delayed until possibly mid-2026, a Minot official said Dec. 1.

The Northwest Area Water Supply, once operational, will bring Missouri River water to the Minot, Berthold, Kenmare, Mohall, Westhope and Bottineau areas to improve water quality.

Jason Sorenson, utilities director for the city of Minot, said his prediction in July that water would be flowing by the end of 2025 turned out to be overly optimistic. While events were moving smoothly in the right direction at that time, there have been project delays since, he said.

The biggest delay, Sorenson said, is related to filters at the water treatment plant near Max, as an engineer’s evaluation found a defect that the supplier must remove and replace.

--Minot Daily News

Watford plaza plan advances

Watford City’s collective dream of a vibrant, centralized downtown area is quickly becoming reality as the city council advances a downtown redevelopment plan for North Main Street.

This initiative is intended to create a destination hub that will generate revenue and hopes to spark community life, directly answering the needs expressed by residents in a 2024 survey.

The city recently selected Construction Engineers as the project’s construction manager.

The project has two phases. One phase is for a “commercial hub,” replacing three existing single-story buildings with a multilevel building hosting both retail and office space.

The other phase is for a 10,000-square-foot Main Street Square urban park, offering event space as well as a permanent, covered stage.

--McKenzie County Farmer, Watford City

SEED AVAILABLE

ND WILLIAMS OAT
Contact: Morgan Jacobs (701-648-9807)
ND Williams is a high-yielding spring oat variety developed at NDSU, delivering up to 27% higher yield than CS Camden in North Dakota trials. It combines excellent test weight, a low proportion of thin kernels, & strong resistance to new races of crown rust, with resistance derived from A. strigosa. It also offers good milling characteristics, making it an excellent choice for both growers & processors. It is well adapted across all oat-growing regions of ND.

Location (2025)	Test Weight	Yield	3-Year Avg Yield
Dickinson	35.2	164.2	138.8
Minot	38.8	120.1	100.8
Langdon	37.8	200.1	175.1

ND STAMPEDE HRSW
Contact: Chad Anderson (701-340-2263)
ND Stampede is a short to medium statured wheat with high yield potential & adaptation to a wide area of the Northern Plains. Compared with ‘Faller’, it has similar yield & improved straw strength, shorter height, earlier heading date, greater leaf rust resistance, & superior end use quality. It is moderately resistant to FHB, moderately susceptible but similar to many commercial cultivars for BLS, moderately resistant to leaf & stem rust, & susceptible to stripe rust.

Location (2025)	Test Weight	Protein	Yield
Dickinson	61.4	14	86.1
Hettinger	59.9	12.4	67.2
Minot	63	16.1	78.5
Williston	54	17.2	35.6





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