

# Norfolk City Outlook

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## City Administrator Al Roder

By Diane Becker  
City of Norfolk Staff Writer

Although he hasn't been in Norfolk long, City Administrator Al Roder is able to identify goals for the City of Norfolk and can say there has already been progress towards those goals.

Longtime Norfolk city administrator Mike Nolan left the position in Norfolk in April to work for the Nebraska League of Municipalities based in Lincoln. Roder took over the job in August. He had previously been serving as a city administrator in Northfield, Minnesota.

In talking with Norfolk citizens and members of the City Council, Roder has begun to formulate a direction of where the City of Norfolk needs to go.

"Identifying the city council goals for the next fiscal year has been a great start. We need to be very deliberate in how we invest in the future. We need goals and a long range financial plan which includes increasing the investment in Norfolk's infrastructure. It allows us to transition from where we're at today to more and more meeting the needs of the community," Roder said

Those goals have been quite specific and the



Norfolk's new City Administrator  
Al Roder

top ten include: Memorial Field/Aquatic Recreation; Nucor Road/drainage project; water and sewer south of Elkhorn River; natural gas supply; city administration offices; economic development; LB 840 economic funds; park and playground development; improve Ta-Ha-Zouka Park playground; implementation of Keno.

Roder can point to most of the goals and explain progress on each one.

An overall goal is maintaining the city's infrastructure and Roder said improvements need to be made to Memorial Park, the waste water system and the city offices.

"Some of the waste water system is in pretty good shape but like anything else, we need to maintain them to keep them that way," Roder said.

Roder added that a critical piece in developing a list of priorities of the city is feedback from the citizens of Norfolk.

"We need to know if we're on the right track, if we're doing the right thing, if we're addressing the issues. It's important to hear citizens' priorities," Roder said.

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Besides helping to set goals for Norfolk, one of Roder's own top priorities has been getting to know community leaders, government officials, business owners and the city itself. Roder said he likes to meet people so that he can better understand past projects and how Norfolk got to the place it is now. What has impressed him?

"A very pleasant surprise has been the longevity of city employees. This is very unusual. They stay because it's a great community and the quality of life is there," Roder said.

His family has also been busy getting to know the community. Roder's wife, Robin, is a

mental health counselor. She is in the process of transferring her license to the State of Nebraska and has been visiting with mental health agencies in the area.

Their son, Johnny, is a seventh grader at the Norfolk Middle School. His interests are in tennis, golf and academics.

One of the family's favorite spots in town? Skyview Park.

"What a great community, the culture, the environment. We have a chance to decide where we want the community to grow. What an awesome opportunity with a new administration and a new mayor. It's an incredible responsibility," Roder said.

# Keno Comes to Norfolk

By Diane Becker  
City of Norfolk Staff Writer

The game of Keno has been in Norfolk since August and seems to be right on track in bringing in the amount of recreation funds that City of Norfolk officials had hoped it would.

Finance Officer Randy Gates said that if the first check from the Keno contractor to the city was any indication, the income from the game would be about what had been estimated. The original projections were that \$400,000 annually would be raised by net Keno revenue.

"In the first six days at one location, people bet \$10,000. Most of the revenue usually comes from the satellites so it's too early to tell. We won't know until next summer when the permanent main location and all of the satellites are open what we will have for income but it should be pretty good," Gates said.

On May 13, 2008 Norfolk residents voted to allow Keno to come to the city with the proceeds for the first four years to be utilized for parks and recreation projects. Before May, Norfolk was the largest city in Nebraska that did not have Keno.

In the game of Keno, players pick from 1 to

20 numbers from a bet slip that has 80 numbers listed on it. The automated Keno ball draw selects 20 numbers at random and the player wins or loses according to how much they wagered and how many of the numbers selected match with those drawn. From as little as a penny for one hundred games to \$100 per ticket can be wagered. The minimum wager per ticket is one dollar. The maximum is \$100.

Dave Sinnott, a Big Red Keno general manager from Omaha who has helped get the Norfolk Keno up and running, said so far there have been two \$1000 winners in Norfolk. One of the \$1000 winners had played the Penny Keno game and won when the numbers he chose filled out vertical rows similar to a Bingo win on the screen. The other \$1000 winner won in a different game when none of the numbers on the ticket were selected.

"As people become more familiar with Keno, they'll try the different games. We're planning on doing some classes to show people the different aspects of Keno," Sinnott said.

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Sinnott said that the Norfolk Keno was unique from some of the other cities that offer the game in that it has a live ball draw where players at the main location can watch the numbered balls fall into the slots as the machine randomly selects them. In other towns where there are Keno operations, the numbers are selected by computer or a “random number generator.” At the satellite locations in Norfolk, players watch a screen that shows what numbers have been drawn at the main location. Currently there are about 180 games played a day or one every five minutes. The main location is open from 9:00 am to 1:00 am each day.

Susan Craft is the manager of the Keno operation in Norfolk. She had previously worked with Big Red Keno in Hadar and Osmond. There are currently ten employees at the main location. The Nebraska State Department of Revenue certified all of the equipment at the main location and also certifies each satellite location.

“There are a lot of people coming in to check the game out and there’s a lot of interest on how the game works,” Sinnott said.

According to State law, no less than 65% of the funds wagered must be rewarded to players as prizes. In Norfolk, 73.5% of the funds are rewarded to the players. At least 12.5% of the funds is given to the City of Norfolk. The city is responsible for auditing costs and a 2% lottery tax to be paid to the state.

After the Keno vote passed, Big Red Keno, the company that was chosen to operate Keno in Norfolk, donated \$100,000 to the city for improvements to Memorial Field. They will also sell “Memorial Field Burgers” at their permanent main location with \$1 of each burger sold donated to a fund for the Memorial Field renovation. Big Red also donates 100% of its pickle card sales at the main location toward Norfolk charities.

Although Big Red is currently operating next to Michael’s Cantina, according to their contract with the city, they have roughly one year to build



Shown above is Keno worker Nikki Luikens. Nikki writes out tickets, cashes in tickets and calls games at the main location

a sports bar/restaurant in Norfolk which will then be their main location. Satellites currently operating in Norfolk include the American Legion; TJ’s Sportbar; the Eagles Club; Fifth Street Tavern; Harbor Bar; Mel’s Drive Inn; The O Bar; The Office Bar; The Vets Club Post 1644; Wolfgang’s Pub; and the Mint Bar.

A grand opening is planned for this fall with satellite locations having grand openings on consecutive Thursday nights. Other opening events are planned in January.

“We’re about where we thought we’d be. We’re pretty pleased,” Sinnott said.

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# Peter Kiewit Foundation Donates Playground Equipment

By Diane Becker  
City of Norfolk Staff Writer

A grant from the Peter Kiewit Foundation for \$7,500 and an additional \$2,500 from the Norfolk Lion's Club has gone toward new playground equipment at Johnson Park in Norfolk.

According to Pat Mrsny, City of Norfolk Parks Director, the city applied for \$10,000 last fall to go towards \$22,000 to replace old playground equipment at the park. In February the Peter Kiewit Foundation offered \$7,500 to the city with the stipulation that the other \$2,500 be raised in the community outside of city funds. The Lion's Club in Norfolk heard about the need for extra money for the project and provided the required \$2,500.

"Word got out about us needing more money to receive the grant and the Lion's Club stepped in and offered what we needed. They've

been very generous over the years. They're always more than ready to help us out with projects," Mrsny said.

Before installing the new equipment, some of the old equipment needed to be removed. A foot of dirt was also taken off of the site so that a thick layer of double ground tree chips could be put under all of the new and the remaining equipment.

Mrsny said that some of the old equipment that was removed was over forty years old and included an old swing set, teeter-totters, and a merry-go-round.

The city chose to keep some of the equipment that was in good shape and would meet current safety guidelines. City employees re-painted the existing slide, the four way unit with

slide and jungle gym, and the spring horses. An arched climber was also left on the site.

The new equipment includes a three piece dragon, a seven section climbing wall, an infinity climber, new swings and two modern style benches.

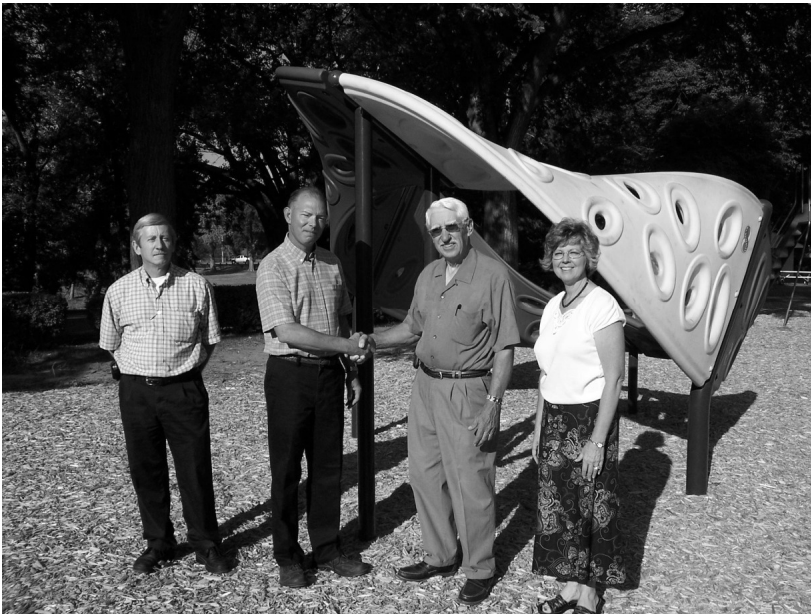
The dragon looks like it's coming out of the ground while the climbing wall is just that – a plastic wall with plastic rocks to climb up on.

"We tried to incorporate old and new in the park so we added something a little more modern and unusual," Mrsny said.

He said the city is constantly upgrading the playgrounds in Norfolk. They first had to get rid of the pieces made of treated lumber.

"There's more upkeep on wood. It splinters. It's treated with chemicals so the

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Shown above Park Director Pat Mrsny, Lion's Club member Jay Putter, Mayor Gordon Adams and Human Resources Director Sheila Schukei in front of one of the new pieces of playground equipment at Johnson Park.



Shown above is Andrew Carpenter, age 3 of Norfolk on the new playground equipment at Johnson Park.

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recommendation from safety officials is not to have that on our playgrounds,” Mrsny said.

Stainless steel slides that get hot in the sun are also being phased out as are tornado slides. Mrsny said they have taken down the tornado slides as kids are apt to use the braces to the top of the slide as fireman poles.

“We’re going to shorter swing sets and play decks that are less than eight feet tall,” Mrsny said.

The new playground equipment in Johnson Park sits on the east side of the park under shade trees and is able to accommodate a younger set of kids ages 1 to 5 and an older set of kids ages 5 to 12.

## Broadband Access Now at Memorial Field

Broadband wireless Internet access is now available at Memorial Field in Norfolk. Jim McKenzie, Information Systems Manager for the City of Norfolk, said that anyone in the stadium area, stands or press box is able to access the Internet from their laptop.

McKenzie said that the wireless Internet connection was made available at the baseball field located at Memorial Field earlier this fall. A request had been made by organizers of the American Legion Baseball Tournament to make it possible for them to make live updates from the state baseball tournament held at Memorial Field to a tournament website of scores and game results. Having Internet access at the field had other benefits. Reporters from the Omaha World Herald and the Lincoln Journal Star were able to upload their stories from the site. People with laptops could multitask while watching the games.

“It’s been a long term goal for the city to provide broadband wireless Internet as an amenity in the city parks. People watching an event can check their email, connect with their office intranet and conduct other business while they’re at

the game,” McKenzie said.

Officials at the baseball tournament were also able to monitor the weather as they checked online radar maps for approaching storms.

One of the requirements for running a State American Legion Baseball Tournament is to have access to the Internet for score updates and posting schedules that can be distributed to the public and media that need information concerning our tournament.

Larry Wetterberg, tournament director, said that the State American Legion Baseball Director attended the games and was able to use the connection for dealing with his duties as the lead contact for American Legion Baseball.

“We were able to transmit a continuously updating database for those unable to attend the tournament. We were also able to monitor progress at the other State Tournament site at Millard North,” Wetterberg said.

Jack Mayfield, who operates a web site dedicated to high school and American Legion Baseball also used the connection to update his website

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with some current pictures and commentary on activities at the site.

When football games started, the city moved the wireless router from the baseball field to the football field. As a public hotspot, people can access the Internet in the stands by selecting the “city\_free\_internet” wireless connection from the list of available network connections on their laptops.

Currently the city library, the city council chambers and the city auditorium also are public hotspots for Internet access.

Many people will take their laptops to the library to go online. With online access in the council chambers, access to information on city issues is readily available. McKenzie said that having Internet access in the auditorium is convenient for show organizers and participants. For example, a gun show exhibitor may want to access a website to provide more information on a gun for a potential customer. A craft show exhibitor could show off more of their wares that are available on their website from a laptop.

In the future, wireless Internet access may be provided for campers, baseball and softball players and campers at Ta-Ha-Zouka Park.

“It’s an amenity for campers who want to be able to access their email and websites on the campgrounds. People are used to having the Internet available to them,” McKenzie said.

## CCDC Re-funded for Five More Years

The Community Character Development Coalition (CCDC) is an abstinence until marriage project whose goal is to see that teens throughout Northeast Nebraska receive a persuasive abstinence message regarding sex, alcohol, drugs and other risky behaviors.

CCDC is funded through a federal grant—Community Based Abstinence Education. Recently staff received notification that the project has been re-funded for five more years. The goal is to integrate many of its programs into already existing community agencies so that kids will continue to get

a persuasive abstinence message in Northeast Nebraska after CCDC is gone.

The project has a variety of programs to identify and address the specific needs among all kids, whether low risk, “persuadable”, or high risk kids.

**Low Risk**—The Youth Mentor program targets high school kids who are making good decisions and have made a commitment to abstinence. They are provided with leadership training and create a network of support to affirm their decisions. These Youth Mentors participate in providing school assemblies throughout Northeast Nebraska.



Shown above are CCDC staff having interaction with kids enrolled in the program.

**Persuadable**—School assemblies are provided for 72 schools in Northeast Nebraska three times each year for approximately 14,000 students. Three full time staff members accompany the Youth Mentors. Other ways that staff reach the persuadable population are through classroom interventions, special speakers, TV commercials, and website ([www.youareaboveit.com](http://www.youareaboveit.com)).

**High Risk**—Programs for the high risk population provide the same abstinence message, but are more intense and focus on building relationships. The Zone is the after school program for kids in 7th to 9th grade. It is designed to help youth who are struggling in school or at home and need a place to hang out, get help with homework and participate in abstinence-based group activities. Approximately 30 kids are enrolled with one full time staff member and 8 part-time staff. Staff also provide abstinence education to the girls group home, Ponca Tribe, Juvenile Detention, and kids on Probation and Diversion.