

**WEATHER**  
Mostly sunny today; sunny, warmer Weds. and Thursday. Please see complete weather, pg. 2

**TODAY** 65° | **TONIGHT** 36°

# JOURNAL-ADVOCATE



75 cents  
**Tuesday**  
**April 28, 2015**  
Sterling, Colorado



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**DISTRICT COURT**

## Johnson receives life sentence for grandmother's murder

**Mother Jill Johnson calls son's plea 'a selfless act'**

**By Sara Waite**  
Journal-Advocate managing editor

There weren't really any surprises as 20-year-old Brendan Johnson appeared before Judge Michael Singer to be sentenced for murdering his grandmother,



**Brendan Johnson**

Shirley Severance, almost one year ago. After Johnson entered a guilty plea on March 12 for one count of first degree murder, in exchange for having the 13 other charges in the gruesome case dismissed and the death penalty withdrawn, the sentence was a foregone conclusion.

As Judge Singer noted, the law mandates either a sentence of death or life in prison without parole for premeditated murder.

The other charges filed against Johnson included a second murder charge for the death of his grandfather, Charles Severance.

So Monday's sentencing hearing was little more than a formality, as far as the judge's involvement.

But before Johnson was

led from the courtroom to begin serving out that sentence, his mother, Jill Johnson — the only living victim of the crimes Brendan Johnson and his girlfriend, Cassandra Rieb, were accused of committing — had a chance to address the court. The sentencing was not done on March 12 at the request of both sets of attorneys so Jill could be present.

Reading from a prepared statement, Jill Johnson said

she and Brendan's father have had a difficult time coming to terms with the reality of her parents' murders. But while she said that while they "have not accepted nor excused" his crime and believe he should be punished, she did not feel that the death penalty was appropriate in his case. She added that she felt sentencing a 20-year-old to spend the rest of his life behind bars was "not a victory for

anyone." Jill Johnson called Brendan's plea "a selfless act," done to bring an end to the proceedings for his family's sake.

Defense attorney Kevin Strobel also spoke on Brendan's behalf, noting that his client was too emotional to address the court. He said that in 40 years of practicing law, he's "never been proud to represent anybody."

See **JOHNSON, 6**

**NORTHEASTERN JUNIOR COLLEGE**



Courtesy photo

Those 2015 student PTK inductees who were present for the ceremony included: Jason Carson, Jake Gerck, Spenser Dexter, Tanner Mastin, Elijah Walker, Sean Camron, Tim Volberding, Christian Saunders, Kai Fuller, Lyle Koch, Matt Brower, Daniel Bacon, Tyler Axelson, Marlin Baranyak, Krystal Shelton, Ashley Hilton, Kelsey Bornhoft, Kayla Littlefield, Jessica Lechman, Karissa Smith, Taylor Harless, Kymbre Mitchell, Lauren Montoya, Jazmine Gutierrez, Shelli Adams, Kayla Fischer, Rhonda Vazquez, Jasmin Montes-Pedrego, Brittney Pepitone, Taylor Upchurch, Brianna Bade, Kelsey Kramer, Angelie Ring, Claire Jarolimek, Sara Meyer, Crystal Musser, Krista Carter, Laura Hanna, Danae Bushman, Jessica Lauritzen and Shaylee Krueger.

## Phi Theta Kappa inducts 59 new members

Group honors mentor faculty

**By Barbara Baker**  
NIC marketing director

Northeastern Junior College, during its annual spring Phi Theta Kappa induction ceremony, welcomed 59 new members into the Zeta Theta Chapter, an international honor society for two-year colleges. The PTK membership at Northeastern now numbers 88 students for the 2014-2015 year.

Keynote speaker for the evening was Scott Stump of Stoneham. He is currently the Chief Operating Officer at Vivavic, a mobile company headquartered in Lincoln, Neb., that specializes in designing learning solutions. He has been in this new position since January of 2015 and was previously the Assistant Provost for Career & Technical Education for the Colorado Community College System. He also was interim president



Courtesy photo

Guest speaker Scott Stump spoke to the PTK students and their guests about being good learners and referred to several proven facts such as something that is in motion tends to stay in motion. He handed out large rubber bands to help illustrate to the audience how energy can be harvested and moved forward for both good and bad purposes.

at Northeastern Junior College for a short time in 2011.

Those students inducted this year include: Shelli Adams (Sterling), Tyler

Axelson (Eaton), Daniel Bacon (Sterling), Brianna Bade (Julesburg), Marlin Baranyak (Byers), Kelsey Bornhoft (Sterling), Matthew Brower (Sterling), Danae Bushman (Aurora), Jason Carson (Holyoke), Krista Carter (Alliance, NE), Spenser Dexter (Casper WY), Kayla Fischer (Sterling), Kai Fuller (Sterling), Jacob Gerck (Haxtun), Jazmine Gutierrez (Evans), Laura Hanna (Fort Collins), Taylor Harless (Sterling), Danielle Harms (New Raymer), Ashley Hilton (Littleton), Claire Jarolimek (Estes Park), Lyle Koch (Sterling), Kelsey Kramer (Holyoke), Shaylee Krueger (Holyoke), Jessica Lauritzen (Rye), Jessica Lechman (Sterling), Lucas Lingreen (Atwood), Kayla Littlefield (Sterling), Marcus Longwell (Eaton), Shelby

See **INDUCTION, 2**

**STERLING CITY COUNCIL**

## Water tank rehab project to move forward

**Agenda includes action on W. Main parcel**

**By Sara Waite**  
Journal-Advocate managing editor

City administrators and the Sterling City Council showed their appreciation to the city employees Friday with a cookout at Pioneer Park — an event delayed a week due to inclement

weather.

The meal, which included hot dogs and hamburgers, a full complement of side dishes and a wide variety of desserts, was well-attended, including by at least two council members — Mayor Dan Torres and Dave Appelhans — who took a turn manning the grill.

Tonight, the council will turn its attention to less tasty matters during its regular meeting in council

See **TANK, 6**

## RE-1 Valley recognizes retirees



Callie Jones / Sterling Journal-Advocate

**RE-1 Valley School District** recognized its retiring employees at a retirement reception Monday, April 27. From left: Cindy Hartwig, library clerk at Campbell Elementary and Hagen Aug. 1995 - May 2015; Hester Howard, language arts teacher at Sterling High School Sept. 1981 - May 2015; Deb Roberts, language arts/reading teacher at Sterling Middle School Oct. 1985 - May 2015; LeeAnn Nichols, library specialist at Caliche 1985-1999 and district federal programs coordinator 2010-July 2015; Vicki Gertner, kindergarten, first grade, multicultural and ESL teacher at Campbell and ESL coordinator for district Aug. 1984 - May 2015; and Michael Gertner, sixth/seventh grade science teacher at Sterling Middle School Aug. 1979 - May 2015. Not pictured is Sallie Boden, technology coordinator July 2000 - Dec. 2014.

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