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MONDAY, JULY 14, 2025

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LEE ENTERPRISES SPECIAL INVESTIGATION

UNEARTHING THE TRUTH OF ALLEGED KILLINGS



A forensic excavation is seen May 23 in rural Fremont County near Thurman, Iowa, as crews search for evidence of an alleged killer's burial ground.

JUSTIN WAN PHOTOS, LINCOLN JOURNAL STAR

Search for evidence continues after recent digs come up empty

ERIC FERKENHOFF | Lee Enterprises Public Service Journalism Team | eric.ferkenhoff@lee.net

The investigation into a daughter's claims that her father killed and then buried bodies in wells on about 400 acres of farmland near Omaha suffered a setback after no additional wells were found during a recent forensic dig.

With crews — commissioned by a documentary production team — still searching for the wells, forensic anthropologists haven't fully been able to test the veracity of Lucy Studey-McKiddy's claims that the rural hillside, located about 40 miles from Omaha in rural Fremont County near Thurman, Iowa, was used as a burial ground for her father's alleged victims.

The most recent dig lasted five full days in late May, with a reporter and photographer for Lee Enterprises Public Service Journalism Team on site.

Please see KILLER, Page A4



From left, landowner Sean Smith, Lucy Studey-McKiddy and University of Nebraska-Lincoln associate professor William Belcher look at an excavation on May 23 in rural Fremont County near Thurman, Iowa. Studey-McKiddy has long claimed that her father, Donald Studey, killed multiple people and buried them in this rural area near Omaha.

Search for Texas flood victims put on pause

Heavy rains bring new threat of high waters

GABRIELA AOUN
Associated Press

KERRVILLE, Texas — More heavy rains Sunday in Texas paused a weeklong search for victims of catastrophic flooding along the Guadalupe River and led to high-water rescues elsewhere as officials warned that the downpours could again cause waterways to surge.

It was the first time a new round of severe weather had paused the search since the July Fourth floods, which killed at least 129 people. Authorities believe more than 160 people may still be missing in Kerr County.

In Kerrville, where local officials have come under scrutiny about the warnings given to residents, authorities went door-to-door to some homes after midnight early Sunday to alert people that flooding was again possible. Authorities also pushed alerts to the phones of those in the area.

Ingram Fire Department officials ordered search crews to immediately evacuate the Guadalupe River corridor in Kerr County until further notice, warning the potential for a flash flood is high. Search-and-rescue efforts were expected to resume on Monday, depending on river flow, fire department spokesman Brian Lochte said.

Please see FLOOD, Page A2

Documents: Man arrested by ICE said he was in gang

JUSTIN DIEP AND MADDIE AMES
World-Herald staff writers

The man who ICE called an "MS-13 kingpin" after an Omaha-area arrest last week entered the country illegally in 2016 and admitted to being a gang member, court documents reveal.

Court documents reviewed by The World-Herald say that 50-year-old Melvin Varela Perez also had at least one previous encounter with law enforcement in Nebraska: In 2023, Valera Perez pleaded guilty to driving without a license in Platte County.

Court documents say that Varela Perez had an expired Texas driver's license at the time.

ICE did not directly identify Valera Perez, saying that the arrest was part of an ongoing investigation.

Please see GANG, Page A2

Box office best
"Superman" and DC Studios fly to a \$122 million opening.
Page A2

Patriotic ceremony
Nebraska Veterans Cemetery at Grand Island dedicated.
Midlands, Page A3

Weather
High: 92 Low: 69
Partly sunny
Details: A8

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