Dramatic immigration raid left mark on town

By JIM OFFNER
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**POSTVILLE** — As the sun’s first rays fell on Postville on May 12, 2008, no one could anticipate the intensity of the spotlight that would focus on this drowsy little farm town before the day was over.

Within hours, the very mention of Postville would conjure images of black helicopters, SWAT teams and an immigration raid that tore apart the town of around 2,300 people and its largest employer.

Before noon, helicopters were circling over the city. A convoy of government vehicles charged toward Agriprocessors Inc., the largest kosher meatpacking plant in the U.S.

“Told me to turn on the TV,” said Tony Gercke, a Postville native and current chamber of commerce president who was a corporate attorney at the time.

“I said, ‘Which channel?’” Gercke said.

“All of them,” was the reply.

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**MONDAY**

A look at legal aftermath

The ICE raid on Agriprocessors spawned a massive legal drama, involving not just immigration cases but a criminal fraud trial that landed several company principals in prison. A look at how those cases were eventually resolved.

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**INSIDE**

Diversity still defines life, work in Postville

By KAREN BUSHANAM
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**POSTVILLE** — Postville is still a melting pot.

Five years after what was then the biggest immigration raid in U.S. history, people still come from afar in search of a good job and a good life. They are still drawn by jobs at the meatpacking plant — now under new ownership as Agri Star Meat & Poultry LLC.

Workers still bring families and settle down. But the raid on May 12, 2008 — when ICE agents detained 389 undocumented workers at the now-defunct Agriprocessors plant — did leave a mark.

“Prior to the raid there was more a sense of community pride. It was kind of like this American story, this taste of American Midwest pride,” Gercke said. “After the raid things were a little more disjointed.”

Regardless of whether the child speaks Spanish, hails from Somalia or Israel or is a native Iowan, the assurances are the same.

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For a complete look at the Courier’s coverage of the historic raid and all that has happened since, visit wcfcourier.com/postville-anniversary/

Five years after an immigration raid at Agriprocessors Inc. in Postville decimated the plant’s workforce and tore apart families, the town remains very much a melting pot of cultures, ethnicities, races and religions. This diversity is reflected at the Cora B. Darling Elementary and Middle School in Postville, where Yuvitza Toj gets a push from Aliya Hirsi during recess on April 30.