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Postville: 5 years later

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Postville: 5 years later



MATTHEW PUTNEY / Courier Photo Editor

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.

Dramatic immigration raid left mark on town

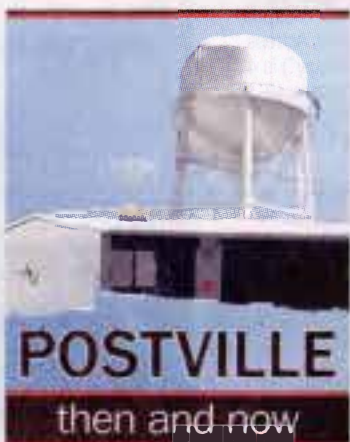
By JIM OFFNER
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POSTVILLE — As the sun's first rays fell on Postville on May 12, 2008, no one could anticipate the intensity of the spotlight that would focus on this drowsy little farm town before the day was over.

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.

"I lived in Minneapolis, and I got a phone call that told me to turn on the TV," said Tony



Gericke, a Postville native and current chamber of commerce president who was a corporate attorney at the time.

"I said, 'Which channel?'" Gericke said.

"All of them," was the reply.

See **POSTVILLE**, page A6

INSIDE



Aaron Goldsmith

A Postville success story

Aaron Goldsmith, the owner of Transfer Master Products Inc., a manufacturer of custom electric hospital beds, has seen the highs and the lows in Postville. **Page D1**

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.

Monday in The Courier.

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 Postville. Look at all these dif-

ferent cultures, this kind of American Midwest pride. We all sort of get along more or less. Where as now it seems a lot more disjointed," said the Rev. Greg Bahl of St. Bridget's Catholic Church.

But the diversity is still evident in the schools, where children from 18 different lands form a kind of United Nations of education and the district's phone directory offers instructions in English, Spanish and Somali.

When students enroll in Cora B. Darling Elementary and Middle School, Principal Chad Wahls tries to soothe first-day nerves.

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

See **DIVERSITY**, page A4