



New sports park site on fast track

DEVELOPER CLOSE TO SEALING DEAL ON PROPERTY ON U.S. 6

LINDA GARCIA Hastings Tribune

The future site of Motor Sports Park Hastings is almost a done deal. Track developer George Anderson of Hastings said he signed papers for the purchase Monday, and expects to close the deal on the property at Showboat Boulevard and U.S. Highway 6 by April 1. Construction on the main track, a two-mile road course, and associated buildings could begin this summer,

and Anderson hopes to have a dirt-track rallycross event by May 1.

"Now is the difficult part of building the track," he said in a phone interview this morning. "We're likely to want to start building buildings out there this summer. An awful lot of the things are going to start."

Anderson

Anderson is purchasing about 150 acres of land, about a quarter section, on the southeast corner of the intersection for the track. The property on the east side of Hastings extends east to the Union

Pacific railroad tracks and south to a small road that marks the half-section.

The track originally had been planned to wind around the Hastings Municipal Airport in the northwest part of the city, but opposition from neighbors and a lack of space led Anderson to seek a different location at the end of December.

Without the help of people like Dee Haussler of the Hastings Economic Development Corporation and representatives from sanctioning bodies like the Sports Car Club of America, the track wouldn't be much more than a dream, Anderson said.

"There is so much that had to get done, an awful lot of it's to be dotted

and it's to be crossed, and I'm used to just going out to Fisher Fountain and putting things up," he said.

HEDC helped guide Anderson through the process so far and helped bring in Alan Wilson of Wilson Motorsports Inc. to do the original drawings. Anderson said Haussler likely will help a great deal as he works through the process of getting building permits, environmental checks and other details.

And the sanctioning bodies like the SCCA and the National Hot Rod Association have offered enthusiasm and encouragement, he said.

"There are so many people from the SCCA group in Nebraska who have

worked so hard in the background to make this happen," he said. "We've got the best of the best helping."

In the next few weeks, Anderson will meet with representatives from the Nebraska Department of Roads and the city to figure out where entrances and exits can be placed. He also wants to bring Wilson back to do drawings of the new site.

"We don't anticipate any hurdles that can't be dealt with," he said. "Now, we'll be working with the city. I have a lot to learn about building permits. As we learn more and more about what's going on, we'll tell people about what we're going to do."

School merger bill advances

SCOTT BAUER The Associated Press

LINCOLN — Both sides of a school merger bill agreed Tuesday to work on a compromise that would still result in a reorganization of districts in the state but would leave more avenues for elementary-only buildings to remain open.

Speaker of the Legislature Kermit Brashear outlined the terms of the agreement, the details of which were to be worked out before the bill was debated again.

Following announcement of the agreement, the bill cleared the first of three legislative votes 33-8.

The breakthrough came in the fourth day of debate on the bill, which proposed to force elementary-only, or Class 1 schools, to merge with larger K-12 districts.

The proposed compromise detailed by Brashear would still make that happen, but more exceptions would be allowed for currently-operating schools to remain open instead of being shut down by the K-12 school board.

The new plan would also delay implementation until current members of Class 1 school boards are able to be elected to the larger K-12 board.

Please see MERGER/page A7

AC board hires former Harvard coach

JOHN HUTHMACHER Hastings Tribune

Adams Central High School ended its search for a science teacher and girls varsity basketball coach Monday night as the school board voted unanimously to approve a former coach at Harvard.

Tim Marker, a 10-year educator, has taught in Harvard, Broken Bow and Grand Island. The former head boys basketball coach at Harvard, he is presently coaching the girls freshman team at Grand Island. He will assume his positions in August.

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RICK HOUGHIN/Tribune

Canada geese (foreground) take off while snow and dark-fronted geese lounge on the ice at Lake Hastings Monday afternoon.

CRANE SEASON TAKES OFF

JOHN HUTHMACHER Hastings Tribune

JUNIATA — The distinct and piercing cry of the sandhill crane signals the beginning of bird-watching season in south central Nebraska.

Although the official crane

migration season does not

Inside

Audubon brings cranes to Web. — Page A5

Meadows north of Juniata, said the large, gray birds — characterized by their long legs and necks, whitish chins, cheeks and upper throats — have already made their presence known.

"We have seen our first cranes," Hughes said. "They

were on the main channel near south Alda Road ... in our backyard. We've gotten a couple calls from people who've seen as many as 60 at a time, so they're definitely getting ready to move."

Please see MIGRATION/page A7

Giant Candy Land sweet success

EVENT EXCEEDS HC OFFICIALS EXPECTATIONS

SHAY GRAVES Hastings Tribune

Truly a success.

That is what students, staff, alumni and members of the community have been saying about the life-size version of the game Candy Land at Hastings College this weekend.

More than 2,000 area residents toured a life-size version of the children's gam, which was created by nearly 100 HC students.

"I can certainly say it exceeded my expectations on Saturday," said Phil Dudley, HC president.

When he was initially approached about the idea by coordinators Amy Schmidt, a student from Omaha, and Alex Bertland, an assistant professor at the college, Dudley thought that

it sounded like an exciting idea. Dudley never expected that more than 2,000 people would turn out for the event.

He even took part in the game and helped out where he could on Saturday. He had to leave several times to go get more candy.

Many parents stopped Dudley throughout the day to express what a wonderful time they had in Candy Land.

Even so, Dudley did apologize

to many parents who had to wait in line for at least 45 minutes because of the huge turnout. The parents didn't appear to mind the wait, he said.

Dudley said he has received numerous other positive responses about the event.

Schmidt said that all of the comments she received were positive. One excited parent even asked Schmidt and Bertland for their autographs.

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BRENT McCOWN/Tribune

King Kandy (Tom Kreager) hands out candy at the Candy Castle and tells everyone to make sure to eat candy every day Saturday at the life-size Candy Land game at Hastings College's Kiewit Gymnasium.

Weather

Lo: 18 Hi: 35 A 20 percent chance of rain and snow this evening. Colder.



Art by Thomas Lurz, 7, Lincoln School

BIG MAC RISING

OGALLALA — After dropping to its lowest level in history last summer, Lake McConaughy is on the rise.

Water officials said precipitation to the west and a decision to withhold water for irrigation have allowed the reservoir to rise from

State

the record low of 3,197 feet above sea level in mid-September.

Still, the elevation of 3,217 is 3 feet lower than a year ago at this time, said Jerry Steinke of the Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District.

Last year, the Central Nebraska

Public Power and Irrigation District Board voted to give irrigators 6.7 inches this summer, down from 18 inches.

Steinke said more flows into the South Platte River this year will help fill water in other area lakes, giving irrigators another option for water.

The Associated Press

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State

WATER TESTS HIGH

**FOR URANIUM GERING** — The city of Gering plans to develop a new well field after uranium levels at two entry points to the city were found to exceed federal limits.

The average of quarterly samples in 2004 did not meet the 30-micrograms-per-liter standard, Public Works Director Pat Heath said Monday.

Heath said the estimated \$3.5 million to \$4 million cost of a new well field is more feasible than the cost of treating the problem.

The city is in negotiations with landowners seven miles outside of town. Heath said he hopes to be in the design phase of a new well field by the end of the year, with the well being operational by the end of 2006.

Heath said there is no immediate need for an alternate water source because the uranium levels aren't close to the level where there would be health issues.

**SENTENCING HEARING SET**

**GERING** — The man convicted of killing Gering newspaper carrier Heather Guerrero is scheduled to have his sentencing hearing before a three-judge panel on May 16 and 17.

Scotts Bluff District Judge Randy Lippstreu will be joined by Douglas County District Judge Richard Spethman and Buffalo County District Judge John Icenogle.

They will hear mitigating circumstances and then decide whether Jeffrey Hessler, 26, will receive life in prison or the death penalty.

A Scotts Bluff County District jury found in December that all three aggravating circumstances alleged by the state were proved and that the first-degree murder conviction merits the death penalty.

**TWO-COUNTY CHASE**

**COLUMBUS** — A Norfolk teenager missing from a Lincoln rehabilitation center was arrested Monday after a high-speed chase in two counties.

Officials said the 17-year-old was arrested about an hour after Merrick County deputies first spotted the vehicle in Central City and suspected the driver of leaving a gasoline station without paying for fuel.

The unidentified teen was chased by officers from the Nebraska State Patrol, Platte County sheriff's office and Columbus police department.

The chase ended when the suspect hit a curb and disabled the vehicle.

An investigation determined the car was stolen, a spokesman for the Platte County sheriff's office said.

The teen was taken to a juvenile detention center in Madison. Officials said the teen faces nine charges, including willful reckless driving and possession of stolen property.

**ATTEMPTED RAPE NORTH PLATTE**

**NORTH PLATTE** — A 28-year-old North Platte man has been sentenced to 10 to 20 years in prison for his attempted rape conviction.

Terry Yonker was sentenced Monday in Lincoln County District Court.

Judge Donald Rowlands said the length of prison term was recommended by the Nebraska Court of Appeals. Rowlands referenced Yonker's criminal record, which includes thefts, assaults and several counts of criminal mischief.

Yonker was given credit for 290 days served in county jail for the attempted rape, which happened April 25, 2004.

**MEMPHIS FLIGHT LINCOLN**

**LINCOLN** — The Lincoln airport will now fly to Memphis, the Lincoln Airport Authority announced Tuesday.

Northwest Airlines will provide the service through its regional affiliate, Northwest Link, said John Hoppe Jr., a board member of the Airport Authority.

Service between the two cities is scheduled to start May 16, according to the Northwest Airlines Web site. *The Associated Press*

# Migration: Bird watching season takes off

Continued from page A1

Hundreds of thousands of cranes — accompanied in the early stages by Canada geese, snow geese and ducks — will make their annual pilgrimage through this area in March and April, stopping to refresh and nourish themselves en route to their final destinations. Annually, it is the largest concentration of sandhill cranes in the world, according to Michelle Parde, naturalist at Crane Meadows.

"They are coming from areas in the south — Texas, Mexico and New Mexico — and they're going north throughout Canada, Alaska, and as far as Siberia," Parde said. "Any crane may stay two to four weeks. Their main pur-

pose for being here is to put on fat and rest before they finish their migration north."

About 15,000 to 20,000 people are expected to flock to the Platte River to witness the migration this year, Hughes said.

"It's just breathtaking," she said of the momentous migration. "It's hard to believe something like this is still happening in the busy and developed world that we live in."

The observatory will offer several tours to enable bird lovers to get up close to the magnificent birds. Tours will begin at 5 a.m. and 5 p.m. on March 5 and continue through April 9.

"The trick is to get there before the

sun comes up for morning and before sundown," Hughes said.

Tour groups of 15-40 spectators are led to two locations known as bird blinds — small structures that enable viewing without being seen. Because the birds are skittish, flash photography is strictly prohibited, Hughes said.

"A flash will frighten the birds," she explained. "One flash and the whole game is over for us. The birds are gone." Cameras without flashes are permitted, however.

Because travelers pulling their cars off the road can create traffic congestion and serious health risks, Parde encourages all who visit Crane Meadows to utilize the pull-off areas created especial-

ly for the occasion.

"We want people to come out and see this spectacular event, but they must do it in a safe manner," Parde said. "There are designated viewing spots, and we want people to use these. That way they are safe and will not get hit."

Maps of the pull-off and viewing areas are available at Crane Meadows.

The observatory will offer a crane presentation by Felipe Chavez-Ramirez of the Whooping Crane Trust in Wood River at 6 p.m. Thursday.

Hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day. Crane migration season hours are 5 a.m. to 8 p.m. March 5 through April 9. For information, call (308) 382-1820.

## AC: Board picks former Harvard boys coach to replace Landwehr

Continued from page A1

Marker will take over for longtime Patriot coach Jim Landwehr, who is stepping down to devote more time to his athletic director duties. Landwehr led AC teams to a state title in 1995 and more than 300 victories.

"I think he's a great addition to the staff," AC Superintendent Mel Crowe said of Marker this morning. "It's good that he can coach and teach."

In other matters, the board voted unanimously to acknowledge Adams Central Education Association as the exclusive bargaining agent for teachers in the 2005-06 school year.

Crowe said the board is looking to adopt a landmark written negotiated agreement with teachers concerning salaries and benefits.

"We've never had a written negotiated agreement with the teachers' salaries and benefits," Crowe said. "I think we have it completed (but) it will have to be approved by the board."

"Two years ago, we agreed we would try to put together a master contract negotiated agreement. It's really a good thing. This way we will know what we agreed to at least."

The board opted to defer any action concerning Principal Jim Loch's one-year contract for 2005-06 until after the teachers' contract negotiations are settled.

A meeting to set budgets for AC's Class 1 schools was set for 6 p.m. Monday at the high

school. In his principal's report, Loch shared the agenda of the school's most recent staff development day on Feb. 7.

He said the latest changes to the school's handbook will make it easier to read.

Other items mentioned by Loch included:

- ◆ a successful on-campus blood drive Jan. 14 by the Future Business Leaders of America that attracted about 140 donors;

- ◆ a shared lecture activity for AC's sophomore and junior classes at Hastings High School featuring speaker Ron Gustafson;

- ◆ and recognition of the Honor Society for its work with the hungry and homeless.

In other business Monday, the board:

- ◆ Heard that with four sponsors secured, work continues on the base stand that will hold the Bronze Patriot sculpture created by local artist Dave Biehl. Crowe said there is no set date of completion for the project. When completed, the sculpture will be placed on the base and displayed in a prominent indoor location on campus.

- ◆ Heard from board member Bill Lindsteadt, who would like to see the new senior high gym made available for community use as frequently as possible.

- ◆ Discussed Sen. Ron Raikes' legislative bill that, if passed, would unite each Class 1 school with a K-12 school district. Crowe said he is unsure why Raikes has pushed so hard to pass the bill, and suggested the reasons given — racism and cost — were off-based after-thoughts.

## Success: HC president says event exceeded his expectations

Continued from page A1

They also have received e-mails from people across the country who had heard about the life-size game board from Web sites. She said that HC's Candy Land was featured on a nationally broadcast morning news program this morning.

Schmidt said that they plan to submit photos and dimensions of the game board to Guinness World Records. Also, Erika Nelson of Lucas, Kan., deemed it as the world's largest Candy Land board game.

Nelson, who travels around

the country researching and certifying the world's largest things, was in town to see the game. Last August, Nelson determined that Hastings' Kool-Aid stand during Kool-Aid Days was the largest on record.

Overall, Dudley said the event was a great success for not only the college, but also the community of Hastings.

"As I told one of the students, it just doesn't get any better than this," he said. "In my 32-year career here, this has certainly been one of the experiences I will always remember."

## Suspect in double-murder case to be tried as juvenile

**The Associated Press**

**OMAHA** — A teenager described as having special needs will be tried as a juvenile for a double-murder in Gretna, a judge has decided.

Andrew Joyce requires special care available in the juvenile system, said Sarpy County District Judge William Zastera.

Joyce, 15, is one of three teenagers to be charged in connection with the deaths of Jay Ellis, 41, and Rosco Jordan, 38, last October.

Joyce is charged with conspiracy to commit first-degree murder and aiding and abetting first-degree murder — Vincent Cline, 18, and Jason Golka, 17 — are being tried in adult court.

The men's bodies were found in Ellis' home by Sarpy County authorities after a report of gunshots Oct. 25.

James Ellis of Blair, Jay Ellis' brother, has said the shooting was a culmination of a dispute between his brother and Golka, who lived nearby.

## Merger: School bill advances after compromise reached

Continued from page A1

"I believe we can be successful," said bill introducer Sen. Ron Raikes of Lincoln, chairman of the Education Committee.

Bill opponents promised to work on details of the agreement, but also reserved the right to fight another day.

"Those of us opposed still have grave concerns," said Sen. Adrian Smith of Gering.

The compromise headed off a do-or-die vote to cut off debate on the bill as it was introduced. That would have required 33 votes in favor.

Even if backers of the bill gather the needed votes to pass it, what Gov. Dave Heineman will do with the proposal remains a mystery. Heineman declined to say Monday whether he would sign or veto the measure.

"I'm trying to carefully watch the discussion and debate," Heineman said. "I'm just going to reserve judgment until I receive that bill."

The bill (LB126) as introduced would force the state's 231 elementary-only districts to consolidate with larger K-12 districts next school year. Opponents argue the state should not force such a move but supporters said the time has come to merge to save money and provide a more equitable education across all districts.

The 231 Class I schools represent about 47 percent of all districts and educate less than 3 percent of the total students.

Under the original bill (LB126), whether to close a school building would be left up to the K-12 school board. Certain requirements related to attendance and location would have to be met.

"The devil's in the details," said bill opponent Smith.

### How they voted

**The Associated Press**

Nebraska lawmakers voted 33-8 Tuesday to advance from the first round of debate a bill (LB126) to force the state's elementary-only school districts to merge with larger K-12 districts. The bill needed 25 votes to advance. A "yes" vote was to advance the bill. A "no" vote was against advancing it.

- ◆ Senators Voting Yes (33): Aguilar, R., Grand Island; Baker, T., Trenton; Beutler, C., Lincoln; Bourne, P., Omaha; Brashear, K., Omaha; Brown, P., Omaha; Byars, D., Beatrice; **Combs, J., Friend**; Cornett, A., Bellevue; Cudaback, J., Riverdale; Engel, P., South Sioux City; Foley, M., Lincoln; Friend, M., Omaha; Howard, G., Omaha; Janssen, R., Nickerson; Jensen, J., Omaha; **Johnson, J., Kearney**; Kopplin, G., Gretna; **Kremer, B., Aurora**; Kruse, L., Omaha; Mimes, M., Blair; Pahls, R., Omaha; Pedersen, D., Elkhor; Preister, D., Omaha; Price, M., Lincoln; Raikes, R., Lincoln; Redfield, P., Omaha; Schimek, D., Lincoln; **Schrock, E., Elm Creek**; Stuhr, E., Bradshaw; Synowiecki, J., Omaha; Thompson, N., Papillion; Wehrbein, Roger R., Plattsmouth.

- ◆ Senators Voting No (8): Erdman, P., Bayard; Fischer, D., Valentine; Heidemann, L., Elk Creek; Hudkins, C., Malcolm; Langemeier, C., Schuyler; Louden, L., Ellsworth; McDonald, V., Rockville; Smith, A., Gering.

- ◆ Present Not Voting (6): **Burling, C., Kenesaw**; Chambers, E., Omaha; Connealy, M., Decatur; Cunningham, D., Wausa; Flood, M., Norfolk; Stuthman, A., Platte Center.

- ◆ Excused (2): Landis, D., Lincoln; Pederson, D., North Platte.

More protections for the Class I schools would be allowed under the terms of compromise Brashear described.

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