

## Building a house to give away



Larry Linsner (left), owner of Linsner Plumbing, and Ron King helped build a play house last month in Goodland for the Northwest Kansas Court Appointed Special Advocate Association. The organization, known as CASA, plans to give away the small house and is asking for donations for chances to win. The house was on display here and has been moved to Colby. Photo by Nathalie Staats/The Goodland Daily News

## Southwest Kansas water users overpumping

GARDEN CITY (AP) — Water is clear gold in southwest Kansas, liquid currency, so exalted in value that to lose water rights can spell economic devastation in land use and livelihood.

Four southwest Kansas farmers face possible water shutoffs under a state program to curtail repeated overpumping of dwindling water supplies. Southwest Kansas has more so-called overpumpers than any other region in the state.

The state program, dubbed Blatant Recurring Overpumping, identified 50 potential Kansas overpumpers by tracking irrigation water use on state-mandated meters since 1998, said David Pope, chief engineer for the Kansas Department of Agriculture's Division of Water Resources.

Two of the four likely overpumpers in the latest report are in Finney County; the other two are in Gray County. They include Mike Gigot of Garden City; the Beach family of Pierceville; Arlena Tucker of Copeland; and the Hatcher family, whose property is just east of the Finney County line in Gray County.

The Hatcher family and Mike Gigot, president of Gigot Manufacturing, are under a no-pump advisory from the state.

Mark Rude, the area's state water commissioner, said the four property owners face potential suspension of their water rights for the 2001 irrigation season, meaning they could not water crops growing in their fields.

As concerns over a diminishing water supply have increased in Kansas, so have efforts to identify and monitor water-rights owners using more than their allotment.

"There's a few places where water is still available, near the Oklahoma border," Pope said. "Most of the region is closed to water rights."

Low rainfall levels for several years have made local farmers more dependent on using irrigated water with wells drawing from the Ogallala Aquifer, the nation's largest underground body of water. The aquifer is not rechargeable because its sources were cut off thousands of years ago.

Over the last 60 years, the water table has dropped about 50 feet in northern Finney County and about 100 feet in southern Finney County, the Kansas Geological Survey said.

By the mid-1950s, Finney County led other western Kansas counties in number of wells and irrigated acres. Recent state figures indicate Finney County leads all Kansas counties in irrigation and groundwater diversion such as wells.

Finney County also has the greatest number of wells of any county in southwest Kansas, a total area with more than 10,000 wells and more than 1.85 million acres of irrigated farmland.

At the Bar-O-Bar Ranch, Garrett Beach now manages the property, which includes two water rights for four wells near Pierceville. Owner

Phyllis Beach says the farm ended up on the overpumping list after relying on figures from a former employee.

Another factor plaguing several farmers on the overpumping list are old, inaccurate meters, Rude said. He said this past year, no one could determine how much they pumped.

Garrett Beach said about 1,000 acres of alfalfa are irrigated.

"I didn't overpump. I didn't turn in accurate readings. I never overpumped in '99. I haven't overpumped this year in 2000."

Beach said state water officials helped him establish a water conservation plan.

"I send in monthly water-use reports so I can keep better track," he said. "I'm trying to figure out how to make a living."

At the Alrena Tucker farm, Abe Goosen farms about 426 acres, growing wheat, soybeans and sorghum near Copeland in Gray County. At issue are four water rights involving three wells.

"We were pumping more with one well versus another," Goosen said. "It started out with an error on my part. I didn't put the numbers in correctly. I know we did have some overpumping, but not as excessive as (the state) thought."

For next year, Gossen is installing a pivot sprinkler system he said would be more efficient than flood irrigation.

Goosen said he recognizes the dilemma between a farmer's need to successfully produce crops with a judicious use of water.

"I believe the water should be the people's, but we do need some direction on how to use it wisely and not be dictated for everything going on," he said.

Mike Gigot's water allocation was shut off in early September.

"They notified us, we knew we were getting close," Gigot said. "It didn't affect me this year; we timed our cutting so it didn't affect us."

Like others on the overpumping list, Gigot blamed an inaccurate water meter.

"I'm between a rock and a hard spot," Gigot said. "I believe in what they're doing. I think the water should

be monitored."

Rude said he was sending Gigot a "cease and desist order" telling him he must develop a conservation plan for his overpumped property.

"If he breaches it in overpumping, that will be used to bolster the case for denying water rights for a year. The repercussions are significant."

If he loses his water rights, Gigot said he would go back to dryland farming.

"It would be disastrous," he said.

At the Charlotte Hatcher farm in Gray County, the one water right for four wells has been in that family for several generations. Nick Hatcher assumed responsibility for the acreage after his father died, and part of the operation was delegated to a tenant farmer, Bob Husband.

Two of four wells are now shut off.

Hatcher blames the allocation of acreage for each well for the problems with state water enforcers. He said he has not gone over his total allocation, but some wells show more usage per acre.

"From a farmer's point of view, I don't think the program is fair," Husband said. "If we're going to implement the program, then we need a program that affects all the irrigators ... They designated a few people who had overpumped the most. They've selected only a few in western Kansas to make examples of them."

In mid-July, Husband was told to shut off one well, followed by a similar order for another well at the end of August.

"The program has cost me in excess of \$30,000," he said. "I couldn't irrigate my crop. I didn't irrigate my alfalfa."

Husband said the rules of today's irrigation have changed dramatically from the heyday of pivot sprinklers spewing endless streams of water. Nobody stopped overpumping when pivot irrigation started in the mid-1960s, he said.

"Why did they wait 30 years to implement a program until we're down to a desperate situation? The technology was there, a lot of people stood to make a lot of money off the farmers of western Kansas," Husband said. "What's happening today affects all farmers and is a very serious matter."

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## Lottery helps with economic growth

LOTTERY, from Page 1

be able to spend it anyway they want to.

Money generated from the lottery has been used in Goodland for a tourism grant, Sherrer said, helping to pay for the 80-foot replica of a Van Gogh painting Canadian artist Cameron Cross is doing.

The money has also gone to a demolition program started by the city, he said, where old run-down buildings are torn down in an effort to make the city look better.

"The money would also be needed for the air service you are trying to start here," he added.

Anything the state does to help with the start up of the air service, he said, is going to have to come from lottery money.

"If they do away with the lottery money," said Sherrer, "they have to find some way to continue to help communities."

The state decided to rebuild the tourist information center near the

Colorado-Kansas border, he said, and that is paid for by lottery money.

"If it wasn't important, would they be building a new one?" said Sherrer.

He stressed the importance of the money in training workers, noting that the new air service will need to train employees and the state could help with training. Lottery money, again.

The idea that all the money generated from the lottery goes to economic development is false, he said.

Of the \$60 million the lottery brings in, half of the money goes to economic development, he said, and \$10 million goes to the vocational and technical schools.

He said the Legislature doesn't have to reauthorize the lottery, but if they take away the lottery money, then they need to find a way to replace it.

Economic development creates jobs for people, he said, and the money helps to train employees. It is helping with tourist attractions also, Sherrer said. It helps everybody.

## Lt. governor sees city

SHERRER, from Page 1

get a sense of the results of the grants, Sherrer said, and to give him an idea of what the community needs and what needs he can help to fulfill.

The lieutenant governor said the Van Gogh painting is a unique project that said a lot about the community and the quality of life here. He said a town that does special things, like the painting, is trying to raise its quality of life.

He thanked the ambassadors for coming out to see him, saying they reflected a lot of pride in the community.

A lot of people don't know about the programs that are available through the department, said Sherrer. He said western Kansas has two representatives, one out of Hays and the other out of Garden City, who are supposed to tell communities about the programs.

"Economic development is the highest priority that we can have," said Sherrer.

The lieutenant governor also addressed comments from the audience.

"You have got to go back to Topeka and tell them that the farmers are really hurting out here," said Dale Stephens, an Ambassador.

Sherrer replied it doesn't make sense for Congress to use what the farmers are producing as leverage in foreign policy.

"We need to aggressively open international markets," he said adding that selling overseas shouldn't be any different than selling product downtown.

Advertising abroad is important, he said. If the farmers don't get out and promote the product overseas, it limits what they can sell.

"We grow the best products here," said Stephens. "That is what we do, and now we can't sell it."

Sherrer said he felt lucky to be where he is today, and that he never intended to be lieutenant governor when he was young. He has been appointed as chair of the national Conference of Lieutenant Governors.

"I look forward to going there and telling them how great Kansas is," he said.

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