

weather report

57° at noon

Today

Sunset, 4:45 p.m.

Tomorrow

Sunrise, 7:06 a.m.

Sunset, 4:46 p.m.

Midday Conditions

Soil Temperature 36 degrees

Humidity 23 percent

Sky sunny

Winds southwest 18-21

Barometer 29.86 inches and rising

Record High 75° (1953)

Record Low -19° (1963)

Last 24 Hours*

High 56°

Low 23°

Precipitation none

Northwest Kansas Forecast

Tonight: Cloudy, 20 percent chance of snow, low 25-30, north-west winds 20-30 mph. Tomorrow: 100 percent chance for snow, 1-3 inches, high mid 30s, low 20, north-west winds 20-30 mph.

Extended Forecast

Sunday: dry, high 30, low 20. Monday and Tuesday: dry, high 30-40, low 10-20.

(National Weather Service)

Get 24-hour weather info. at 162.400 MHz.

* Readings taken at 7 a.m.

local markets

Noon

Wheat — \$2.99 bushel

Posted county price — \$2.87

Loan deficiency payment — 0¢

Corn — \$1.93 bushel

Posted county price — \$1.94

Loan deficiency pmt. — 5¢

Milo — \$3.20 hundredweight

Soybeans — \$4.25 bushel

Posted county price — \$4.17

Loan deficiency payment — 73¢

Millet — \$8.25 hundredweight

Sunflowers

Oil current crop — \$5.90 cwt.

Loan deficiency pmt. — \$3.75

Confection current — \$15/\$7 cwt.

Pinto beans — \$15

(Markets provided by Mueller Grain, Frontier Equity Co-op and 21st Century Bean. These may not be closing figures.)

afternoon wire

Late news from the Associated Press

1 p.m.

Merger affects Internet access

WASHINGTON — Newlyweds America Online and Time Warner promise to harness their vast resources to expand consumer choice for Internet access, entertainment and communications. To make sure the \$106 billion merger doesn't have just the opposite effect, the government has set strict limits to keep the companies from crushing the competition.

Those include a requirement that AOL must make future generations of its popular instant messaging service work with competing services.

The companies crossed a last regulatory hurdle and moved to close their deal late Thursday — a year and a day after announcing the unprecedented combination of old and new media. The new AOL Time Warner wasted no time in touting the benefits.

Districts scared of merging

School officials say it won't happen soon

By Rachel Miscal

The Goodland Daily News

Superintendents of small, rural schools say they are scared of the word consolidation. To them, it means closing a school, losing a job, students on buses for two or more hours a day and further damage to a city's economy.

But while a 15-month study suggests merging small districts — like those near Goodland that have less than 200 students — with larger schools, superintendents say it's not likely to happen anytime soon.

They say the state Legislature, which ordered the study in 1999, has looked into consolidating districts before, but nothing came of it. And, they say, lawmakers who rock the boat with talk of merging schools could fall off in an election year.

"In years past, there have been a lot of studies," said David Spencer, superintendent of the Triplains district in Winona, "and nothing has ever been done. It's not that this is the study that will change everything."

Triplains is one of 50 districts consultants which a Denver firm — hired to study district boundaries because of declining enrollment across the state — identified as too small. The district, which has 95 students, was also among 28 others in the category of low student performance and high per-pupil spending.

Other districts near Goodland identified as too small include, Brewster, 168, Cheylin in Bird City, 177, Golden Plains in Rexford, 174, Grinnell, 139 and Weskan, 132.

Consultants with the firm of Augenblick & Myers, reporting their conclusions Wednesday to lawmakers and the State Board of Education, suggested the 78 districts merge with larger neighboring districts. They said the state could ask districts with less than 80 to 100 students to dissolve immediately and encourage others to merge.

Consultants also identified 26 districts, out of 304, that are too big, and suggested those districts merge with smaller schools or break up into multiple districts. They concluded that after reorganizing the state's 304 districts — including merging schools and creating new districts — there would be 255 left.

Spencer, who has worked in Winona for a year, said the consultants suggested Triplains merge with the Oakley district, which is 40 or more miles away from some students' homes.

"It just doesn't seem feasible," he said, noting the Oakley School Board could let students attend school in closer districts like Sharon Springs, Colby, Brewster or Leoti.

Jim Garner, superintendent of Brewster schools, said if Brewster merged with the Colby district, which is a neighboring district about 20 miles east, some students could be away from home for 12 hours a day.

"Some kids live 18 to 20 miles north or 18 to 20 miles west of Brewster," he said. "We're looking at 50 miles in a big bus on country roads. They will wake up at 5 a.m. and get home at 5 p.m."

Spencer said superintendents had received an executive summary of the study on Wednesday and a complete copy by Thursday.

The study, he said, suggests the state give districts with low student performance and high per-pupil spending, which includes Triplains, three years to merge with a neighboring district.

Spencer said they suggested emergency dissolution for districts that had less than 80 students in 2000, or less than 100 in 2001 — which could include Triplains. Others, he said, would be encouraged to merge but not forced.

Garner said legislators won't force districts to merge because schools and communities wouldn't cooperate.

"I suspect if a school is too small, too costly or not performing," he said, "they will make contact, make a sug-

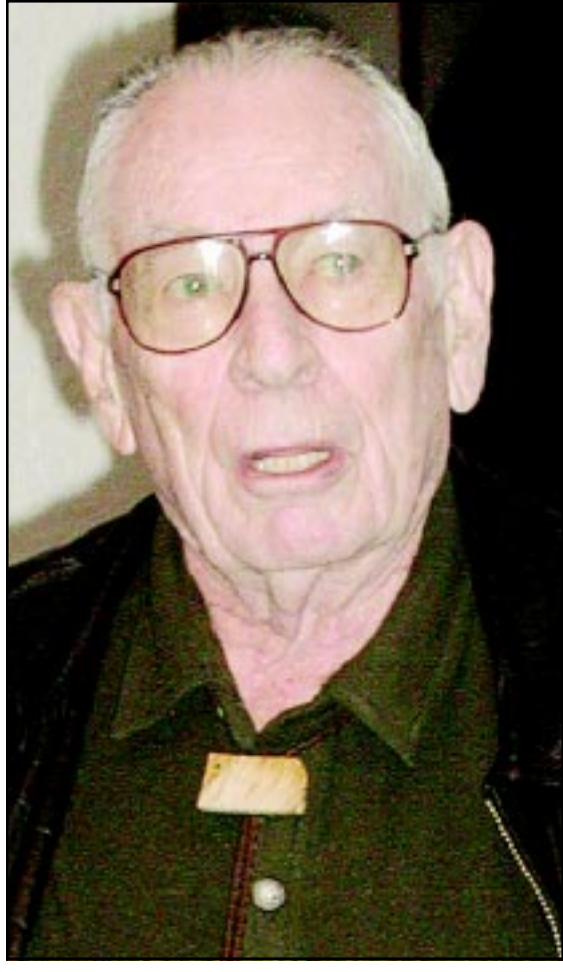
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Stained-glass maker dedicates courthouse windows to relative

Relatives of Dixie Chatfield (above) and others gathered at the courthouse Friday morning to dedicate three stained glass windows to Chatfield's grandfather-in-law. Chatfield, a widow who once worked in the courthouse, said she made the windows to complement the courthouse and serve as a memory of L.A. Chatfield, 1853-1940. Lowell Chatfield (right) told stories about his grandfather, who helped establish Goodland as the county seat and was county treasurer, while 17-month-old Braden Calvin, a great, great, great grandson of L.A. Chatfield, looked at the windows.

Photos by Rachel Miscal/The Goodland Daily News



Supply, demand are pushing gas prices

By Janet Craft

The Goodland Daily News

Many Goodland residents had to sit down before opening their utility bill this month, discovering it was two or three times higher than what it was a year ago.

George Minter, senior director of corporate communications for Utili-Corp United, said the average residential gas bill last year in January was \$83.83.

He said customers can expect to pay \$245.71 for natural gas this month, which is a 193 percent increase. That means, he said, most customer's bills have nearly tripled from what they were a year ago.

For customers in Goodland, gas service is provided by Peoples Natural Gas/EnergyOne, a division of Utili-Corp United.

Minter said gas prices are high because the utility company is experiencing a larger demand for natural gas in

the U.S., particularly due to the increased use of gas-fueled power plants.

As with all commodities, he said, when the demand increases, prices go up. He said when you add to that a strong economy that drives up usage, and lower production levels which cause delays in new supply, it's clear why the price of natural gas is at an all-time high.

"Price has really gone to historic levels," Minter said, noting low prices earlier last decade are contributing to higher prices now.

Low natural gas prices in the late 1990s, he said, led to low gas exploration activities, but now that prices are relatively high in relation to finding costs, the exploration and production are again picking up speed.

Minter said natural gas storage in the U.S. is 33 percent less now than at this same time last year. Because of that, he

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Looking to lower your utility bill?

With natural gas prices causing utility bills to double or triple in the past few months, people are asking what they can do to save money.

Here are several things people can do to lower their gas bills:

- Use cold water whenever possible. Many laundry detergents allow you to use colder water which helps conserve energy.
- Lower the water heater temperature a few degrees to help reduce energy usage.
- Take showers, not baths. Typically, a shower uses 10 to 20 gallons of water and a bath requires about 30 gallons. Avoid showering more than five minutes.
- Adjust the thermostat during the day and night. During the winter, set the thermostat at 68 degrees during the day and lower it a few degrees at

- night.
- Dress for indoor winter warmth. Simply wearing sweaters or other warm clothes at home can help. Loose-fitting clothes are comfortable and they help hold in your body heat, allowing you to lower the thermostat a few degrees.
- About once a month, check the furnace filter and replace it if necessary. This helps the furnace operate more efficiently.
- Prepare your home for winter by using weather-stripping and caulking around windows and doors. Both help keep cold air out and warm air in.
- Install a set-back thermostat that automatically adjusts the temperature in your home at different times

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Elementary school serves up fun, soup for equipment

Soup and other activities will be served up Tuesday night at a Goodland elementary school to raise money for equipment.

Sharon Gregory, principal at Central School, 1311 Main, said the school will hold a "Soup Spectacular" from 5:30-7:30 p.m. Tuesday in the school's gym.

During the meal, she said, there will be other things going on. Third and fourth grade students will sing in different places in the building, and parents and children will read together in the library.

Gregory said she will hold mini-sessions to explain to parents how to read

the test assessments for their children, received in the spring. These sessions will last 15 to 20 minutes and be held in the music room by the gym.

The supper is to earn money, she said, for park benches and a table to be put on the school's playground.

Gregory said the community is in-

vited to attend and people can take in as many of the activities as they want.

Chili, chicken noodle soup and cinnamon rolls will be served at the meal.

The cost for the supper is \$3.50 for adults and \$2.50 for children. Tickets are available at the door and from any of the students at Central.