

weather
report

48°

at noon



Today

- Sunset, 7:25 p.m.
- Tomorrow**
- Sunrise, 6:06 a.m.
- Sunset, 7:26 p.m.

Midday Conditions

- Soil Temperature 44 degrees
- Humidity 34 percent
- Sky sunny
- Winds south 12-18
- Barometer 30.15 inches and falling
- Record High 87° (1948)
- Record Low 20° (1953)

Last 24 Hours*

High	47°
Low	26°
Precipitation	none

Northwest Kansas Forecast

Tonight: Mostly clear and brisk, low 35-40, south wind 15-25. Tomorrow: Sunny, high 78-80, low mid 40s, southwest wind 10-20 mph.

Extended Forecast

Thursday: dry, high 75-85. Friday: chance of thunderstorms, high 80, low 40s. Saturday: dry, high 75-80, low 35-45.

(National Weather Service)

Get 24-hour weather info. at 162.400 MHz.
* Readings taken at 7 a.m.

local
markets

Noon

Wheat — \$2.81 bushel
Posted county price — \$2.73
Loan deficiency payment — 0¢
Corn — \$1.94 bushel
Posted county price — \$1.85
Loan deficiency payment — 14¢
Milo — \$3.11 hundredweight
Soybeans — \$3.74 bushel
Posted county price — \$3.71
Loan deficiency payment — \$1.19
Millet — \$6.00 hundredweight
Sunflowers
Oil current crop — \$6.60 cwt.
Loan deficiency pmt. — \$3.08
Confection current — \$15/\$7 cwt.
Pinto beans — \$14 (new crop)
(Markets provided by Mueller Grain, Sigco Sun, 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.

Troops seize
part of Gaza

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip — Israeli troops seized a Palestinian-controlled area in the Gaza Strip early today — a first in seven months of fighting — and rocketed Palestinian security bases in retaliation for mortar fire on an Israeli town.

A Palestinian policeman was killed and 36 people were hurt in the attack from the ground, air and sea which ended with Israel seizing about 0.8 square miles in the northern part of the 140-square-mile Gaza Strip. Israeli troops also divided Gaza into three parts, barring north-south traffic in the crowded strip of more than 1 million Palestinians.

Palestinian officials accused Israel of reoccupying Palestinian territory.

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat called the raid a “dirty Israeli ploy to end Palestinian resistance.”



Easter-egg
madness

It took less than a minute for children to pick up all the Easter eggs the Goodland Lion's Club had set out Saturday at Gulick Park. Brock Butts, 3, (right) carefully opened one of his plastic eggs and ate the Tootsie Roll inside. Lions member Connie Grieve (below) was the “Mad Hatter” Easter bunny.

Photos by Rachel Miscall
The Goodland Daily News



Pilot has ‘always been a hero’

Friends plan
big homecoming,
expect thousands

By Rachel Miscall

The Goodland Daily News

When Jeff Vignery's friends and family heard he was one of 24 members of a Navy spy plane crew being held in China, they were shocked and scared, but they knew if anyone could survive, it would be Jeff.

Friends say the 27-year-old Goodland High School graduate has always been a model student and person, heavily involved in his school and community. He was homecoming king, played football, basketball and golf in high school, sang in the choir and was student council president his senior year.

Those who know the Navy lieutenant (junior grade) best say he stays away from drugs and alcohol, remains levelheaded under stress and loves spice cake with cream cheese frosting. When the pilot returns to Goodland this month, friends and community leaders plan to greet him with a huge homecoming celebration, and they expect thousands to attend.

“My first thought,” said Dan



Standoff U.S.-China
Navy pilot Jeff Vignery
and 23 crew back home
17 days



Hayden, who grew up with the Navy pilot in Goodland, “was that he was alive, he was fine and he’d be home soon.”

Why?

“Because Jeff is the kind of guy who will do good in any situation,” said Hayden, a classmate who now works at Bankwest here. “I knew he’d be fine. He’s always had a strong leadership ability and strong principles. You know he’ll get through anything that comes at him.”

Vignery, a 1997 graduate of the University of Kansas, and his fellow crew members did pull through, flying home to the Naval Air Station in Whidbey Island, Wash., on Saturday, after Chinese officials released the crew Wednesday. Vignery said his faith in God, his military training and support from the U.S. government and public helped get him through the 11 days he was detained on Hainan Island — while Chinese officials demanded the U.S. apologize for the plane accident, which killed a Chinese pilot.

A letter from President Bush saying the government was “very sorry” for the pilot’s death and the spy plane’s unauthorized landing in Hainan ended the standoff.

“I had faith in both my family and the government,” Vignery said. “I knew it wasn’t a matter of if we would be released, but when.”

Family and friends give credit to Jeff’s positive attitude and strong sense of himself.

“He’s a pretty laid-back guy,” said his father, Ron Vignery, on Monday from his son’s home in Washington. “He’s got the personality to be a pilot.”

Ron and Judi Vignery, Jeff’s parents, flew to Washington on Friday with his two sisters and brother and plan to fly back today, returning to Goodland on Wednesday. Jeff may follow shortly

See VIGNERY, Page 7

City elects
new mayor

Former vice-chair takes lead

By Janet Craft

The Goodland Daily News

Commissioner Tom Rohr was elected as mayor of Goodland at Monday night’s City Commission meeting. Rohr, who has been on the commission for two years, will serve as mayor for a year.

Newly installed Commissioner Dean Blume nominated Curtis Hurd for vice chairman of the commission, but there was no second, so Rick Billinger was chosen for the position instead. Billinger has been a commissioner for 10 years.

Sharmis Schultz, deputy city clerk, administered the oath of office to three recently elected commissioners, Chuck Lutters, Billinger and Blume.

Rohr wasn’t at the meeting, so Billinger took over as chairman as Lutters, who has been mayor for two years, stepped down.

City Manager Pickman said a \$1,300 membership fee in the Nebraska Municipal Power Pool was due, but didn’t know if it would benefit Goodland to belong any longer.

Public Works Director Ed Wolak said he had talked to Sunflower Electric of Holcomb, the co-operative that provides electrical power to Goodland.

They told him that bringing power from the north to the south is difficult and that they have had problems with transmission load restrictions.

Wolak said it has been over a year since Goodland has gotten power from Nebraska.

“If we can’t utilize any power, then it’s not doing us any good,” he said.

He said the last time he had talked to the Nebraska electrical broker about costs, their rates were higher than those in Kansas. Pickman said he couldn’t see spending \$1,300 just to have Goodland’s name on a piece of paper.

Wolak said he will speak Nebraska contacts.

Pickman said they would look at the issue and get back to the commissioners with a final decision.

Pickman said he had read that natural gas prices are expected to skyrocket this summer, and that will have an impact on the city’s electric utility budget.

“We’ve been in the red all year long,” he said, “but we don’t want to come in with a rate increase.”

Pickman said the cost for the city to purchase or produce electricity has gone up considerably, forcing the city

See CITY, Page 7

Legislative group
brain storming
education bill

TOPEKA (AP) — Legislators are cooking up a new school finance package and testing proposals like spaghetti, throwing ideas on the wall to see what sticks.

The Senate Education Committee continued meeting today and putting ideas on a computer screen projected on a Statehouse wall. It was building a plan that would increase spending for elementary and secondary education by \$99.4 million above this year’s \$2.26 billion.

In addition, during the committee’s Monday meeting, Sen. John Vratil, R-Leawood, proposed putting an additional \$10 million in the higher education budget for the fiscal year that starts July 1. Vratil suggested \$4 million for a technology program and \$6 million covering utility and operational costs.

“I think it would be a true education package for the Senate,” Vratil said.

The plan — the average of seven proposals tossed on the wall Monday — would add \$90 to the base state aid per pupil, raising it to \$3,910; fund special education at 88 percent of excess costs; and dedicate \$8.9 million to extended learning programs, such as all-day kindergarten, weekend classes or summer school.

Senate Majority Leader Lana Oleen told the committee during Tuesday’s session that it should be restrained and not let the program grow to big — risking rejection.

“The plan is too rich. You’re not go-

ing to get \$100 on the base, and you’re probably not going to get \$90,” said Oleen, R-Manhattan.

To fund the plan, the committee is considering increasing the state sales tax to 5.1 percent from 4.9 percent, raising about \$75 million.

However, several committee members had other sources in mind.

Sen. Lynn Jenkins, R-Topeka, suggested lowering the state’s required year-ending balance to 6.5 percent of total expenditures from the current 7.5 percent. That would free about \$66 million in one-time funds.

State law requires the balance in the general fund, the largest source of money for Kansas government programs, as a contingency.

Jenkins said decreasing the rainy-day funds would send a message that education is important and deserves serious budget consideration. She dismissed the question of how to rebuild the treasury balance in subsequent years.

“Have our revenues ever been less than they were the year before?” Jenkins said.

Senate Minority Leader Anthony Hensley, D-Topeka, spoke of legalizing slot machines at dog and horse racing tracks and reinstating an inheritance tax for non-blood relatives.

Slots would raise about \$63 million annually when fully operating, he said, while the inheritance tax would generate another \$20 million.

Cloud seeding opponents celebrate program’s passing

By Rachel Miscall

The Goodland Daily News

A three-year fight to stop cloud seeding over northwest Kansas came to a close on a recent Saturday as members and supporters of an opposition group met in an Atwood garage, munching roast pork and blowing the last of their war chest on a party.

Outside the garage, a sign reading “Vote here on cloud seeding,” leaned against a pole.

Inside, the video recording of a heated public meeting played on a television set.

Both served as reminders of the Con-

cerned Citizens for Natural Weather’s long battle against Ground Water Management District No. 4, which ran the weather modification, or cloud seeding, program spanning portions of nine northwest Kansas counties, including Sherman and Thomas.

While the district’s manager and board claimed that cloud seeding has major economic benefits by increasing rain and reducing hail, the group’s members — mostly farmers themselves — said there was no hard evidence and anyway, they’d rather leave

See SEEDING, Page 7

Manager says water district will pay taxpayers back

The Groundwater Management District No. 4 board plans to repay water users the \$181,000 they paid into this year’s cloud seeding program, says district manager Wayne Bossert.

The board voted to end the three-year-old program in November, citing financial and administrative problems. The program, which covered parts of nine counties in northwest

Kansas, including Sherman, met with resistance early, and straw polls showed a majority didn’t want it.

Bossert said the Colby-based district isn’t actually going to give the money back, it just won’t collect as much over the next two years, returning the full amount to water users plus 7 percent interest. He said the district will collect \$97,000 less from water users in 2002 and do the same

in 2003, equaling \$194,000.

The program accounted for nearly one-third of the district’s \$471,675 budget last year. Bossert said water users paid between \$50 and \$200 each quarter for the weather modification program, which wasn’t stopped until after the money had been collected.

It may take two years, he said, but, “We’re going to give that money back.”