

And the winners are...



Aubrea Winter (left) was named Athlete of the Year and Drew Wilkens was named Mustang of the Year at the Grant Junior High awards ceremony this morning. Each year, an outstanding girl and boy athlete are chosen from the eighth grade class. The award were presented by Mary Kratky, health and physical education teacher at the junior high.

Photo by Janet Craft/The Goodland Daily News

Feeders split herd in fight against packers

By Roxana Hegeman
Associated Press Writer

WICHITA — A marketing cooperative that controls as much as 25 percent of the fed cattle in some of the nation's biggest livestock producing states has had a rocky start as it seeks to boost its clout in an industry dominated by four big meatpacking plants.

After its first eight weeks of selling cattle, Consolidated Beef Producers Inc., has fallen far short of selling all the cattle consigned to it each week.

It has also drawn the ire of other feeders, who accuse it of dumping cattle and depressing market prices in other states, something its officials flatly deny.

Oklahoma cattleman Paul Hitch formed the consortium of 130 cattle feeders from Texas, Kansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico and Colorado last year in an effort to increase their leverage against the major meatpacking giants. The group is based in Amarillo, Texas.

The four big packers — IBP, Excel, ConAgra and Farmland — buy about 81 percent of all steers and heifers sold for slaughter, government statistics show.

Since the cooperative actually got into the cattle market slightly more than two months ago, it has been sell-

ing an average of 17,000 head per week, Hitch said. But that is only 65 to 70 percent of its weekly consignments for sale.

"That is discouraging to me. I'd like to see the number of cattle sold increase to the 90 to 95 percent number," Hitch said. "We are not getting them all sold."

However, the cooperative has opened some new markets that individual feeders may have passed up. Consolidated earlier this month sent a shipment of cattle to Nebraska, where market prices were higher that week, he said.

"With Consolidated Beef we now have access to markets we didn't before," Hitch said.

But St. Francis feedlot owner Mike Callicrate said that shipment of cattle from the Texas Panhandle to Nebraska was just the latest example of how the cooperative has actually depressed cattle prices since it got into the market.

"They ship cattle from the Texas Panhandle to Nebraska — pay the freight and stand the shrink — only so IBP could knock down Nebraska prices," Callicrate said.

Callicrate, who is not a member of the cooperative, said cattlemen had hoped to move the Nebraska market prices higher — until Consolidated Producers jumped out and sold out.

Callicrate's criticism irked Hitch, who said cattle naturally tend to go where the market prices are higher.

"Am I willing to ship cattle to Nebraska?" Hitch asked. "Yep. If he doesn't like it, tough

apples."

Roger McEowen, associate professor of agriculture law at Kansas State University, said it is way too early to tell yet if Consolidated Producers is having any effect at all on cattle prices.

McEowen, who recently hosted an agriculture law seminar where both men were speakers, said they are trying different approaches to solving the same problem of meatpacker concentration.

In July 1996, Callicrate joined a handful of cattlemen in suing the nation's largest meat packer, charging that IBP Inc. illegally cornered the beef market and conspired to fix prices paid on the open market. That lawsuit has languished in the Alabama court where it was filed.

Callicrate has also filed a complaint under the federal Packers and Stockman's Act accusing packers of blackballing him by refusing to buy his cattle at competitive prices.

Callicrate said the cooperative is addressing a symptom of the packer consolidation problem, rather than the problem itself.

When feedlot operators are committing as many as a quarter of the fed cattle supply to a cooperative, McEowen said, it indicates that there is something wrong in the market.

"It is significant what Paul is doing," he said. "It shows concentration is bad enough that feeders and producers feel that they have to do something."

For his part, Hitch said the marketing cooperative has succeeded in negotiating higher base prices for cattle sold using a formula or grid pricing mechanism that uses that base price with premiums or discounts based on carcass quality.

"Up until Consolidated Beef, the packers didn't negotiate a base price," he said. "Whether we are negotiating a better base price is debatable, but at least we are negotiating."

ConAgra uncovers internal fraud

OMAHA (AP) — Fictitious sales and misreported earnings in a ConAgra Foods' subsidiary will result in lower earnings for three years totaling about \$123 million, the multifooods giant said.

The company and the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission are investigating accounting problems at United Agri Products Cos., ConAgra chief executive officer Bruce Rohde said late Wednesday.

"I have directed that the control systems at UAP be strengthened," Rohde said, "and that we take additional actions, as appropriate, including personnel changes."

The agricultural subsidiary distributes seed, fertilizer and farm chemicals. It accounts for about 9 percent of ConAgra's business.

Shares of ConAgra were off 54 cents to close at \$20.07 in trading Thursday on the New York Stock Exchange.

Older man, blind man scale top of Everest

By the Associated Press
INTERNATIONAL

KATMANDU, Nepal — Two Americans who reached the peak of Mount Everest today set records, becoming the first blind climber and the oldest man to step onto the roof of the world.

The first blind climber, Erik Weihenmeyer, 32, of Golden, Colo., and Sherman Bull, a 64-year-old physician from New Canaan, Conn., reached the summit of the world's tallest mountain at about 10 a.m., said the Nepal Ministry of Tourism, which oversees climbing.

Weihenmeyer reached the peak with Eric Alexander, 31, of Vail, Colo., Luis Benitez, 28, of Boulder, Colo., and Jeff Evans, 31, of Denver.

Minutes before they reached the summit, Chris Morris, 33, from Wasilla, Alaska, with Bradford Bull, 33, of Denver, and his father Sherman Bull also reached the 29,035-foot peak with eight Nepalese Sherpa guides.

Unlike most climbers who depend on careful coordination between eyes, hands and feet to make their climb, Weihenmeyer follows the sounds of bells tied to the jackets of his climbing mates and Sherpa guides.

NATIONAL

YORK, Pa. — Mayor Charlie Robertson is quitting his campaign for a third term as he deals with a murder charge stemming from the shooting of a young black woman in the city's 1969 race riots.

After narrowly winning the Democratic primary last week, Robertson vowed to carry on with his campaign, but on Thursday he said it had become clear that he could not do so because of the serious toll the riot aftermath was taking on the city.

"It's in pretty bad shape with what's happening," said Robertson. "I would have loved to continue serving the city for another four years in order to make sure these good things keep happening. But, I recognize that this is not possible."

Robertson, whose term expires in January, has said in the past that he would not resign from office.

Councilman Ray Crenshaw, whom Robertson narrowly defeated in the Democratic primary, praised Robertson's decision.

Robertson is one of nine white men charged in the July 1969 shooting death of Lillie Belle Allen, 27, on the fourth night of riots after a white gang member shot and injured a black man.

Prosecutors say Robertson, who was then a city police officer, provided ammunition to men who shot at a car in which Allen was riding.

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — California's power grid officials and utilities will be required to let the public know up to two days in advance if rolling blackouts are likely to hit.

Gov. Gray Davis said Thursday that he will order managers who oversee the state's power grid to issue blackout alerts 48 hours in advance of outages.

Utilities, which decide where to cut power, will give a 24-hour warning that includes which neighborhoods will be hit. Grid managers will then issue a final blackout warning one hour before ordering blackouts.

Davis made his announcement days after consulting with Chicago officials,

who are able to provide similar warnings there.

The governing board of the Independent System Operators, which oversees California's power grid, proposed a plan to give 30 minutes warning.

It had said it did not want to alarm people when there was still a chance that a last-minute purchase of power could stave off blackouts. The utilities had also resisted giving warnings, saying they did not want to tip off burglars.

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1204 Sherman, Goodland, Kan. 67735-2823
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This is an apartment house with two 2 bedroom apartments, and three 1 bedroom apartments on 3 levels including one in the basement. Would make a good rental property. Cash Flow!

1502 Broadway, Goodland, Kan. 67735-3051
\$45,000

This 5 bedroom home with full basement offers lots of footage for this price range. There is a \$4,000 carpet allowance. Call for your personal showing. This home is great for living upstairs and renting the basement.

307 W. 12th, Goodland, Kan. 67735-2803
\$25,000

This 2 bedroom house is currently a rental property. Would make a good starter home or rental. It is centrally located and has new windows.

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