

weather report

87°

at noon



Today

• Sunset, 8:15 p.m.

Tomorrow

• Sunrise, 5:30 a.m.
• Sunset, 8:15 p.m.

Midday Conditions

- Soil Temperature 77 degrees
- Humidity 44 percent
- Sky partly cloudy
- Winds light and variable
- Barometer 30.10 inches and falling
- Record High 106° (1954)
- Record Low 48° (1987)

Last 24 Hours*

High 88°
Low 65°
Precipitation 0.28 inch

Northwest Kansas Forecast

Tonight: Partly cloudy, 40 percent chance of thunderstorms, low mid 60s, east 5-15 mph. Tomorrow: Partly cloudy, 40 percent chance of thunderstorms, high 85-90, low mid 60s, southeast wind 5-15 mph.

Extended Forecast

Saturday and Sunday: high 85-95, low 60. Monday: dry, high 90s, low 60s.

(National Weather Service)

Get 24-hour weather info. at 162.400 MHz.

* Readings taken at 7 a.m.

Passion for fire



Set up along the back side of the race track at the county fairgrounds were several hundred tubes, each containing shells which were part of the Fourth of July show Joe Diaz arranged. His uncle, Matt Medina, Omaha, finished tying the "electric match" to the fuse of one of the largest eight-inch shells, which were buried in the ground several feet. Photos by Tom Betz/The Goodland Daily News

Fireworks flare leads native to success

By Tom Betz

The Goodland Daily News

He had his first fireworks stand as a teen-ager, and the passion for shooting them off has led Joe Diaz into a successful business and given Goodland some spectacular Independence Day programs.

This year's show lasted about half an hour, but Diaz's portion went up in the final eight minutes, lighting the sky with a combination of different fireworks.

The first part of the show was the Goodland National Guard setting off the shells by hand, but when it was Diaz's turn, he began twisting dials on his control board and pushing buttons to set the assembled fireworks off.

"When I was a kid I would ride out to the fireworks stand the day it opened, and I was there every chance I got until after July 4," Diaz said. "I was fascinated by all the variety of fireworks and shooting them off."

As a young teen, Diaz opened his own stand, and began learning about the business.

"I think I was 14 or 16 when I was watching the Veterans of Foreign Wars setting off the fireworks by hand on July 4," Diaz said. "They invited me to stay around and let me set a few off. I was hooked."

"I began going to conventions and getting promotional material because of my stand," he said. "After a time I decided to get into doing shows and setting up stands in the surrounding



Paul Lutters and Joe Diaz took the "electric match" wires coming from the shells and placed them in order in a field module, which connects to the control panel to set off the pre-arranged fireworks show.

cities."

He and his wife were doing shows in Atwood, Oberlin, Colby and

Oakley and then expanded into Colorado, with shows in Limon, Stratton, Bethune and other small cities.

"I knew to make it really pay we needed to break into the large cities," Diaz said.

A few years ago, he got the chance to do a Christmas show for the City of Denver.

"That really made the difference," he said. "We started getting calls and it really took off."

Today, Diaz does a lot of shows. His firm packages shows for many towns in western Kansas and eastern Colorado. While he was shooting off the fireworks in Goodland his wife Sharon was in Golden, Colo., handling another show.

"We both really enjoy doing this," he said. "She is even into designing and building the shells, and has shot some off at the conventions. I am not interested in building them. I enjoy shooting them off."

Diaz says he always tries to get the best material he can, and that safety is always on his mind.

He said he cringes when he hears about a fire at a fireworks show or plant. These always have an impact on the industry, because every time something happens, there are additional regulations from the federal Alcohol, Firearms and Tobacco people.

"We have lots of hoops to jump through already," he said. "We always double check things and exceed the requirements to ensure we have as safe

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Will a killer go free?

Parole board decides, but release is delayed

By Rachel Miscall

The Goodland Daily News

The Kansas Parole Board has decided whether or not to release Gregorio Gomez Jr., a man convicted of beating an 89-year-old Goodland man to death in June 1982, but won't reveal its decision until the prisoner has heard the news.

After taking public comments in May, reviewing Gomez's disciplinary report and parole plan and meeting with the inmate in June, the board has decided whether Gomez, who is being held at the state's maximum security prison, will rejoin society this month.

Norma Jackson, a parole board employee, said the decision hasn't been posted because the inmate must be told the hearing results before they are released.

The hearing minutes were sent out on Wednesday, June 27, she said, but the Fourth of July holiday and other factors may have delayed Gomez receiving the results. Jackson said the decision will most likely be posted Friday.

Gomez, 17 at the time; Ron Kernal, 18; and a 13-year-old Goodland boy, were convicted of killing Jesus Saavedra by beating him on the head with a 2x4 board.

The youths reportedly kicked in the back door of Saavedra's home at 1618 Sherman Ave., hit the old man repeatedly with the board and stole about \$1,400. The next day, a neighbor found Saavedra unconscious in his home and he died at the Goodland hospital four days later.

The three were arrested on June 28, 1982, and charged with burglary and first-degree murder. The 13-year-old was sentenced in juvenile court, while Kernal and Gomez, who turned 18 on April 11, 1983, were considered adults.

The charges were reduced to second-degree murder, and on Sept. 9, 1983 Gomez was sentenced to 15 to 40 years in prison. Kernal — who waived his right to a preliminary hearing, pleaded guilty and testified against Gomez — got seven to 20 years.

Kernal was released in June 1992, but was sent back a little over a year later after he violated the conditions of his release. He is now being held in the maximum security section at Larned Correctional Mental Health Facility, a prison for inmates who are mentally unstable, and will be released on June 28, 2002.

Gomez, now 36, has been denied parole nine times, most recently in June 2000, when the board passed him over for one year. Colene Seidel, parole board administrator, said the fact that the board saw Gomez again after only one year has little meaning.

Bill Miskell, spokesman for the Kansas Department of Corrections, said though Gomez, an inmate at El Dorado Correctional Facility, is eligible for parole in July, the board doesn't have to make a decision by a certain time. He said he wasn't aware that the board had made its decision already.

Miskell said the parole board can choose one of three options when considering whether to release an inmate.

The board, of course, can grant parole, releasing the prisoner and assigning a parole officer, he said, or they can pass the decision and set a new parole eligible date, which can be up to 10 years in the future for some inmates.

Or, Miskell said, the board may choose to put off making a decision until after the inmate has completed a drug program or other type of program, or the board has gathered more information. Then, he said, the board would decide later whether or not to release the inmate.

Prisoners can earn one day of "good time," Miskell said, for every day of their sentence. A good time day, he said, is given when the inmate behaves well, and subtracts one day from the total sentence.

Subtracting the good time he has earned, Gomez's conditional release

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local markets

Noon

- Wheat — \$2.81 bushel
- Posted county price — \$2.45
- Corn — \$2.19 bushel
- Posted county price — \$1.97
- Loan deficiency payment — 2¢
- Milo — \$3.55 hundredweight
- Soybeans — \$4.81 bushel
- Posted county price — \$4.55
- Loan deficiency payment — 37¢
- Millet — \$5.00 hundredweight
- Sunflowers
- Oil current crop — \$8.75 cwt.
- Oil new crop — \$7.45 cwt.
- Loan deficiency pmt. — \$1.96
- Confection current — no bid
- Pinto beans — \$16 (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.

White House has false alarm

WASHINGTON — The West Wing of the White House was partially evacuated for about an hour today after a car parked on the north driveway raised suspicions. Authorities checked for explosives and found none, and the building was reopened.

"It's all clear," said Secret Service spokesman Tony Ball. "It was a false alarm."

President Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney remained at work inside, carrying on with their weekly lunch together.

The car was parked on the driveway during a Rose Garden ceremony. White House press secretary Ari Fleischer said the car belonged to the driver of an unidentified member of Congress who had a meeting with the president.

People were asked to leave the press office and briefing room of the West Wing.

Board asks for budget increase

By Tom Betz

The Goodland Daily News

Members of the Sherman County Extension Board brought their 2002 budget request to the Sherman County Commissioners on Tuesday, asking for a 7 percent increase over this year.

Board President Marsha Schilling explained some changes in the figures for next year, including an increase in insurance to provide liability coverage.

Reba White, northwest area extension director from Colby, presented copies of the budget and said the figures include a 3.5 percent cost of living increase for salaries and wages. She said that Kan-

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Hay fire does \$16,000 in damage

A semi-trailer carrying 26 bales of hay caught on fire southeast of Goodland on Wednesday, causing about \$16,000 in damage and blocking the road for several hours.

The Sherman County Rural Fire Department was called about noon to the scene which was near Alan Pickett's farm on County Road 25 about 18 miles southeast of Goodland.

Doyle Rider, a partner in Rider Trucking Co. of Burlington, said the truck was one of several loads of hay being hauled to a feedlot down by Wallace.

The one that caught fire was the middle truck of five when the fire started.

He said the driver noticed the fire in a bale on the left rear of the trailer and tried to roll it off into a ditch about a mile north and west of Pickett's. When he was unable to do that, he drove on to Pickett's and the fire department was called.

Four trucks responded, and the load of hay was broken apart as the firemen tried to keep the flames knocked down. Rider said he later went on south and



Sherman County volunteer firemen sprayed water to dampen flames on a load of rolled hay bales which caught fire about noon Wednesday southeast of Goodland.

Photo by Tom Betz/The Goodland Daily News

got a front end loader to help spread out the hay and squelch the fire. He said his crew would go back today and check on the hay to be sure it was out.