

Officials hope for support to keep tourney here

By Tom Betz
The Goodland Star-News

Officials of the Western Kansas Liberty League, split over whether to keep their annual basketball tournament in Goodland or go back to Colby, would like to see some more support — and maybe more freebies — from Goodland.

Bill Wilson, principal of Greeley County High School in Tribune, talked to the Sherman County Convention and Visitors Bureau board about the tournament, which was held in Goodland in January, and about the possibility of it being held here again next year, at a meeting last Monday.

The league includes smaller

Class 1A schools from around the area.

The tournament was held here this year, but has been in Colby for several years.

“We are looking for what will be best for the league,” Wilson said. “We are going to talk to both cities (Goodland and Colby) about a number of issues dealing with the tournament.”

Wilson said they were pleased with how the tournament had been run this year, but that there was a concern about holding it in Goodland next year because the revenue this year had been about \$1,000 lower than the previous year in Colby.

Rental fees were one point, Wilson said. In Colby, he said, they use the Community Building for free, but they pay fees for using Colby High School.

He said he wondered how the Max Jones Fieldhouse was handled.

He said there was no fee for using the fieldhouse this year, but that there had been some discussion about paying for extra custodial staff.

Other issues he listed included custodial costs, programs, the hospitality room, concessions, hosts, restaurants, access to fax/phone lines and other complimentary items.

Chairman Dale Neil said handling the tournament probably is a better fit with the Chamber of Commerce, but that he hoped the visitors bureau would continue to help support it.

“We certainly want you to come to Goodland,” Neil said, “but most of our main effort is to have people stay in the motels here because that is where the tax money comes from.”

Wilson said he had been impressed with the cooperation he had seen at the tournament this year, and said he would be talking to Chamber manager Jo Simmons.

He agreed that most of the 10 schools that participate in the tour-

namment would not be staying in the motels, but that they would be eating in the town’s restaurants.

“We have had some problems in Colby with restaurants being open after the championship games on Saturday night,” Wilson said. “We called one and said we would be bringing about 40 to eat after the final game.

“We were told that was great, but they closed at 10 p.m. Later when it appeared we were going to be late we called and told the manager. He told us that ‘We close at 10.’”

The motel managers on the board agreed that the league basketball tournament did not draw any people for them this year, but said that they

were sold out for the regional wrestling tournament, which draws people from farther away.

Norma Notz, owner of Motel 7, said these tournaments have brought some business in the past from family members who decide to stay over, but that she did not have any this year.

Wilson said they would take the information to the league, and said there is sort of a split between those who want Colby over Goodland.

He said they all think the Max Jones Fieldhouse is the best facility, however.

Wilson thanked the board for their support, and said he would let them know what happens.

Board hears update on nurses

By Sharon Corcoran
The Goodland Star-News

The Goodland Regional Medical Center board heard an update last Monday on the reorganizing of the hospital’s nursing staff, including what nurses on various levels of the clinical ladder will be paid.

The new process started March 1, said Debbie Hickman, director of patient care services, and all the nurses are excited about it. There will be three nurse managers, she said. Nurses will turn in portfolios to the clinical ladder committee on April 1 to see where they fit.

There will be three staff nurses and three supervisors on the committee, Hickman said, who will use the information in the portfolios to see where the nurses belong on the ladder.

Most of the registered nurses are now in the Clinician II or III level, Hospital Human Resources Director Dale Schields said, so their pay will change if they move up the ladder. The hospital is trying to develop a system, he said, where nurses know how they can raise their salaries by improving their skills and education.

Nurses are extremely hard to hire right now, Schields said, and command the salaries they do because of the demand for nurses and the hours they have to work. They work strange hours, weekends and holidays, he said, and it is not easy to attract people to a job that demands that.

The committee is accountable to the hospital’s executive team, Hospital Administrator Jay Jolly said, which will have to approve the placements.

A popularity contest or personal feelings will not determine where the nurses are placed, he said.

There are several steps on the ladder, Hickman said, and room to move up in pay within each level. For registered nurses, the levels are Clinician I, \$16-\$18.35 per hour or a salary of \$33,280-\$38,168 per year; Clinician II, \$18.40-\$20.15 or \$38,272-\$42,912; Clinician III, \$21.20-\$24.25 or \$44,012-\$50,440; and Clinician IV, \$24.35-\$27.95 or \$50,606-\$58,136.

Nurse managers will have to be Clinician III or higher, Hickman said, and will be on salary. They will not be eligible for overtime, she said. There is a 15 percent increase built into each level, Hickman said, and an additional 10 percent in-

crease for Clinician IIIs for management responsibilities.

The other levels on the ladder are: Licensed Practical Nurse I, \$11-\$12.65 per hour; Licensed Practical Nurse II, \$12.70-\$14.35 per hour; Nurse Aide I, \$7.30-\$8.40 per hour; Nurse Aide II, \$8.45-\$9.55 per hour; Unit Clerk I, \$8-\$9.20 per hour; and Unit Clerk II, \$9.25-\$10.45 per hour.

The nurses are excited about this, said Resource Development Director Dale Schields, because they see it as a way to be compensated for their knowledge, skill, experience and additional education.

“I think this will be used as a model for other departments,” he said.

The new nursing schedule will allow supervisors to know where all managers and staff are, Hickman said, so when one department is busy, the manager there can call someone from another area instead of calling someone in. That will save the hospital some overtime pay, she said.

In other business:

- Chief Financial Officer Andy Laue reviewed the January financial report. The hospital had a \$147,749 net loss for the month. The hospital will fare better in coming months because salaries will be down, Jolly said, since some positions have been vacated that will not be filled.

- The board approved a resolution to pursue bringing the Rural Health Ventures Clinic under the hospital’s control. Story to come (or on pg. 7)
- Hickman gave a report on the infection control committee. There were two infections patients got while in the hospital in 2002 among 1,415 patients discharged. That is well below the national average, she said. The committee will continue to gather data on infections, she said, and will update the board quarterly.

- Schields reported on the hospital’s workers compensation claims, coverage and premiums. The hospital had 24 claims and 12 injury cases for the year, he said, and 181 work days missed in 2002. The hospital had \$1,744 in losses from January through August, he said, and \$59,338 from Aug. 6 through December 31. Four claims in those months required surgery, he said.
- The board scheduled its next meeting for 6:30 p.m. Monday, March 31, at the hospital.

Stoplights on the blink



The intersection of K-27 and Business U.S. 24 is back to being a four-way stop, as the new stoplights are all flashing red. City Manager Ron Pickman said the lights are flashing because the video cameras that control the light sequences need to be replaced. Ed Wolak, public works manager, said the state Department of Transportation is saying that Goodland is about seventh on a list to have the cameras replaced. Wolak said they are not sure when that will happen. He said several recently installed intersection lights had bad cameras, including one in Colby and the one here.

Photo by Tom Betz/The Goodland Star-News

Security light rates being checked

Over the years the city has accepted petitions to have security lights installed, city commissioners learned at a utilities workshop last Monday, and a review shows that many are not being charged to those who asked for them.

Ed Wolak, public works director, said the utility workers did an inventory and found 255 that have been installed as security lights, plus 314 alley lights.

He suggested having the security lights put on a single bill rather than the separate bills there are now, and that everyone who has a light now should be notified about the cost and asked if they want to continue to have the light.

Pickman said it would be a good idea to update the petitions as well, and that there should be a new pricing structure based on the size of the light.

The city commissioners agreed that this needed to be updated, and

looked at raising the rates to \$7 for a 100-watt light, \$14 for a 250-watt light and \$32 for larger lights.

On the subject of sewer plant improvements, Pickman said the staff needs to get a new billing system installed, and that this would be done by late April or early May, then give the commission time to get more of the questions answered about the options for upgrading or replacing the plant.

He suggested each commissioner make an appointment with Wolak to visit the plant and talk to the operators about what the problems are. He said the workers have some ideas about what will and won’t work.

Pickman said he was investigating a money source that might provide up to 30 percent in a grant and the remainder in a loan for rebuilding the plant.

He said the loan would have an interest rate of around 5 percent

while the state revolving loan fund has an interest rate of 2.9 percent.

“We want to get our ducks in a row,” Pickman said. “We know we have to adjust rates and do something about the plant.”

Commissioner Dean Blume asked about the current sewer rates and what it would take to adjust them.

Pickman said some of the figures are not totally accurate, and that they need to get the commission accurate figures to make decisions.

He said the plant, north of the airport, has had trouble from the time it was built, and the state health department people were out there frequently.

“I was told it hasn’t worked since it was built,” Pickman said, “and the plant was modified in 1985 to make it work.

“At that time, they bypassed part of the system to make it work and that cut the capacity dramatically.”

Deadline approaches for insurance

Sherman County farmers have until March 15 to apply for coverage under the Noninsured Crop Assistance Program for crops that aren’t covered by regular crop insurance.

“Crop insurance is an important risk management tool for farmers,” said Dennis Mote, county executive director for the U.S. Farm Service Agency, “but it’s not available for all crops. That’s why this program is so important.”

Farmers can purchase coverage for alfalfa, coes, which is a cattle feed similar to milo, millet, sweet sorghum and native grass.

This federal program provides financial assistance to farmers when low yields, loss of inventory or prevented planting occurs because of natural disasters.

Mote said it’s not a new program, but some major changes were made two years ago.

“Prior to 2001,” he said, “producers applied for NAP benefits after a weather-related loss. The program has changed, and now it’s more like regular crop insurance. You have to apply before disaster strikes.”

To be covered, he said, producers must file their 2003 applications for coverage and pay the service fee by March 15.

“Like regular crop insurance,” Mote said, “once an application period closes, the opportunity to obtain coverage is gone.”

There is a service fee of \$100 per crop, per producer, with a \$300 cap per county.

Out-of-pocket expenses will not exceed \$900 for any farmer, even if production occurs in more than three counties.

Fees may be waived for eligible limited-resource producers.

Crops eligible for coverage are those for which crop insurance is not available, and include fruits and vegetables, aquaculture, pecans, turfgrass, and forage crops.

“If you can go downtown and get insurance for your crop,” Mote said, “then you are not eligible for this insurance.”

On the Veterans’ Affairs Committee, Moran will be to vice chair of the Subcommittee on Health, which oversees the Department of Veterans Affairs health care system, serving nearly 250,000 Kansas veterans.

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WASHINGTON — Congressman Jerry Moran, who represents much of rural Kansas, has been named to chair a key subcommittee with authority over commodities and crop insurance programs.

Rep. Moran say he has been selected by House leadership to continue serving on the Agriculture, Veterans Affairs and Transportation

committees.

On the Agriculture Committee, he has been named to chair the Subcommittee on General Commodities and Risk Management by Chairman Bob Goodlatte, R-Virginia

“The Kansas agriculture economy has a strong interest in the future of commodity programs, and

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