

## Is it ready for Friday?



Volunteers from civic organizations were out in force Saturday, getting rides ready at the Sherman County fairgrounds for the Chamber of Commerce-sponsored Freedom Fest on Friday. Clark Jordan climbed up on the carousel to make sure every horse had been well greased. The rides will open at 6 p.m. Friday and run until the Fourth of July fireworks begin about 9 p.m. The Goodland Rotary Club will sponsor a free watermelon feed and the Chamber board will serve hamburgers, hot dogs and crab legs.

Photo by Tom Betz / The Goodland Star-News

# Cutting nurse hours not always good idea

By Sharon Corcoran

The Goodland Star-News

One of the things the Goodland Regional Medical Center has done to save money is to send nurses home when there are few patients, but the nursing department has found that is not always a good idea.

Debbie Hickman, director of patient care, told the hospital board at its meeting last Monday, that the patient census does not tell the whole story. The numbers can look good, she said, but the number of patients can change quickly. Sometimes a few patients can need special care.

And when nurses lose hours because of being sent home, Hickman said, they may look for other jobs.

Hickman said one nurse has already gone elsewhere. She is a single parent, the only wage-earner in the family. She added that the hospital may lose other nurses by cutting hours when the patient count is low.

But that's not the only concern. Hickman said when few nurses are scheduled because a light shift is expected, others may need to be called in. And there is not always

someone available, she said.

"I'm going to tell you a true story," Hickman told the board.

There were only nine patients when the shift started Sunday night, Hickman said, and the only catch was that two had the same last name.

Because of the names, she said, the nurses had to do a lot of double checking to avoid mistakes with medications.

Within a 24-hour period, Hickman said, a baby was admitted with dehydration due to tonsillitis, a woman in her 40s with a stroke was admitted and refused to be transferred, a woman gave birth with a nurse present but no doctor because the baby decided to come out quicker than the doctor could get there, there was an emergency appendectomy and another patient was admitted with the same last name as the other two.

There were a lot of what-ifs, Hickman said.

Before this, she said, a man who had been dragged by a horse was brought in Saturday. And a family of six was brought in Thursday after a roll-over accident, and 17

people were needed to take care of the six.

The census can look good on paper, Hickman said, but this is what the nurses are dealing with. It's hard to set the schedule six weeks ahead.

"It's hard to establish a core nursing staff," Hickman said, "so we start sending the unlicensed home first even though it's cheaper to keep them (rather than licensed nurses)."

But sometimes licensed nurses have been sent home, too, she said.

Despite scheduling difficulties, the changes made with the nursing department in recent months have had positive results, she said.

One change has been allowing the nurses to make their department's schedule. Dale Schields, director of human resources, said the nurses are really taking responsibility for that.

There was a first aid tent at the Slice of Life golf tournament, Schields said. When the two nurses were not busy, they were working on the next month's schedule.

"They are really taking ownership of the department," he said. "I'm really proud of them."

## New biologist loves outdoor job

By Tisha Cox

The Colby Free Press

There's a new face at the Kansas Division of Wildlife and Parks.

Matt Bain has been with the division office in Colby since mid-March as the district wildlife biologist, replacing Leonard Hopper.

Bain, from Ness City, received bachelor's and master's degree in biology from Fort Hays State.

He said his farming background and love of the outdoors led to his career in biology.

"I like to hunt and fish," Bain said. "That's what triggered it."

He is responsible for nine coun-

ties in northwest Kansas, Gove, Logan, Wallace, Sherman, Thomas, Rawlins, Decatur, Sheridan and Cheyenne.

"It's a lot of driving," he said. "A large part of my day is spent in the truck."

The biologist said his job is hard to describe because it has so many facets. His responsibilities include anything that benefits wildlife on private land, and part of his job is to be a resource for people on wildlife.

Bain said if a farmer called wanting to improve the pheasant population on his land, he would make recommendations on how to do it

and help come up with a management plan.

"I provide information and I also help coordinate programs," he said.

Habitat work with game birds like pheasants is one component and helping find ways to increase their numbers is an important task.

Bain said pheasant numbers have dropped off because of changes in agriculture. He said "clean farming," or not leaving any cover, has helped contribute to that.

Less wheat in the state has meant less stubble for cover and is another factor that has led to the drop in population.

# School taxes may drop as state takes windfall

By Shannon Davidson

The Goodland Star-News

The Goodland School Board is facing a dilemma on how to manage a change in the state's property tax distribution which the superintendent says will create a "yo-yo" effect in people's property tax bills.

Taxpayers will get a break, though, if Gov. Kathleen Sebelius decides to implement the change. Local school property taxes for the general fund should go down by one-third for a year, then bounce back up.

The Legislature decided to let the governor move up the date for collecting the second half of property taxes from June 20 to May 10. The one-time shift will help the state to meet a shortfall in its budget, and the requirement of a 7 percent ending balance at the end of the 2004 fiscal year.

The timing will give the state a one-time windfall, but schools and

other local governments can't take advantage of that. They have cut their tax rates, then raise them again.

Over the last two years, said Superintendent Marvin Selby, the school board has set the local option budget at a rate of 14.7 and 14.04 mills. That is what it needed from taxpayers to make up the \$800,000 or so in local taxes needed to fill out the school district general fund.

With the change, Selby said, you can collect the \$814,000 needed for next year with a local budget option at 8 mills, or \$8 for each \$1,000 of assessed valuation. The levy has to be cut, because the state won't let the district keep the "extra" money. Then when the 2005 fiscal year starts, the local budget option will go back to needing a levy rate around 14 mills.

"I will look like a hero this fiscal year with a decrease in taxes," Selby said, "then next year, people will begin to wonder why there was a dramatic increase in taxes from the last year."

The state's economic problems caused the Legislature to produce this solution in order to meet the 7 percent year-end balance they needed, he said, but the school board is forced to manage the state problem on the local level. That will create a "yo-yo" effect over the next couple of years.

## corrections

The Goodland Star-News will correct any mistake or misunderstanding in a news story. Please call our office at (785) 899-2338 to report errors. We believe that news should be fair and factual. We want to keep an accurate record and appreciate you calling to our attention any failure to live up to this standard.

## Air Force jet makes hot stop



An Air Force jet called Renner Field about 10:30 a.m. Saturday, saying there might be a fire on board and the plane would land in five minutes. The Goodland Fire Department dispatched a truck and manned the airport crash truck. The firemen had just

driven up when the plane rolled to a stop. No fire was found, and after refueling, the plane, a two-engine executive jet of a type used to ferry generals, continued its journey.

Photo by Tom Betz / The Goodland Star-News.

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