

City gets money to light crosswind runway

By Tom Betz

The Goodland Star-News

Goodland's Renner Field will get lights on the crosswind runway under a \$170,000 grant from the Kansas Department of Transportation aviation division, and last week, the commission approved the city's portion of the project.

City Manager Ron Pickman said at a City Commission meeting Dec. 15 that the grant

letter had come in that day, and required action by the commission before the next meeting. He asked the commission to amend the agenda to add the item.

Pickman said the project will install new lighting for the crosswind runway paid for 75 percent by the state and 25 percent by the city.

The total cost is \$170,000, with the state paying a maximum of \$127,500 and the city

\$42,500.

City Commissioner Chuck Lutters said this is a great upgrade for the airport, and that having lights on the crosswind would be a tremendous improvement.

Commissioner Dave Daniels said he thought it was a valuable project, and that the airport was important to the future of the city.

Commissioner Dean Blume agreed.

"We need to keep upgrading our airport," Blume said.

Mayor Rick Billinger asked if the city had the match money in the budget, and Pickman said that there was money set aside for the airport.

"We tried to do this through the federal program when we got the new lights this year on the main runway," he said. "However, we were unable to get that done be-

cause there were no existing lights on the crosswind runway.

"With this grant from the state, we will be able to qualify for any future federal grants for that runway."

The commission unanimously approved the grant and told the mayor to sign the papers to be sent to the state to accept the money.

Hospital OK's profit in budget

By Sharon Corcoran

The Goodland Star-News

The Goodland Regional Medical Center board approved a 2004 budget with a proposed \$288,000 net income at its December meeting.

The board reviewed November's financial reports and approved an asset transfer agreement to merge Rural Health Ventures.

Chief Financial Officer Jim Precht presented a projected budget to the board, showing total operating revenue for next year of \$9,041,000; revenue deductions of \$4,543,000; operating expenses of \$9,240,000; a \$94,000 loss from operations; and \$288,000 in net income after county tax support is added back in.

Precht said he was conservative on some projections to allow for changing circumstances. One figure he said might be low was the estimate of tax collections by the county of \$375,000 for the year. He said he was allowing for the possibility that some people wouldn't be able to pay their property taxes.

Although the hospital's acute patient census has dropped 30 percent in 2000-03, Precht said, nursing administration projected a 19 percent increase for 2004, a patient volume comparable to that in 1999, 2000 and 2001.

The patient volumes for those years were 884, 879 and 820, respectively. The projected patient volume for 2004 is 893. The patient volume in 2002 was 685, and hospital officials have estimated finishing 2003 with 751 patients for the year.

Precht attributed the drop in patients to changes in the medical staff. He said the current staff of five family physicians and three nurse practitioners will provide stability and likely increase referrals.

The proposed budget anticipates that the hospital will become a critical access hospital and have a hospital-based rural health clinic beginning March 1, Precht said, and that the hospital will thus see improved Medicare reimbursement.

The budget reflects reductions of the equivalent of 2.35 full-time employees, Precht said, between the insurance office, admitting and information systems. The hospital does not plan to lay anyone off, Administrator Jay Jolly said, but will continue to reorganize. When some employees leave, he said, their duties will be absorbed into other positions.

There is a projected net increase for nursing administration of .39 full-time equivalents, Precht said, and a 15 percent increase in nursing hours per patient day. The rest of hospital departments will remain at current staffing levels, he said, and no raises have been factored into the

budget.

Whether or not raises will be given, Jolly said, may depend on the hospital's financial performance. If raises are to be given that would significantly change the budget, he said, the budget can be revised or if the hospital is saving money elsewhere, raises may not require such a revision.

The projected positive cash flow should cover the hospital's financial obligations, Precht said, and allow for equipment purchases.

In a proposed capital budget, the financial officer listed possible equipment purchases for 2004-06 along with estimated costs. Possible purchases include office equipment, especially copy machines; kitchen equipment; radiology equipment; medical equipment; and repairs on the hospital's airplane.

Precht said with the amount of money likely to be spent on aircraft repairs in the next three years, the board may want to consider trading the plane rather than repairing. The hospital's board opted not to adopt the proposed capital budget with the 2004 budget.

Many of the hospital's copiers are overdue to be replaced, Precht said. One got so hot it nearly caught on fire. The paper was as brown as it could get, he said, without catching on fire. Another chews up paper.

In reviewing November's financials, Precht said he is still playing catch-up with paying the bills and with the fund for employee health care.

"I'm trying to get things caught up," he said, "so you have an idea how much we owe each month and to whom, none of this out of sight, out of mind stuff."

Precht said he has explained to employees that with a lack of cash flow, the hospital had to make choices about what to pay and that he is working to catch up their benefits.

The fact that the payroll was paid on time, every time, meant something, he said.

Board member Larry McCants pointed out that "for the first time in ages" the hospital had over \$400,000 in cash in November, with \$467,193 in cash and investments. The hospital had \$356,646 in cash in October and \$206,933 in September, and cash dipped below \$100,000 in June.

The hospital had a net loss of \$12,595 for November and has a net loss so far for the year of \$675,565, including \$7,724,974 in depreciation.

The board approved an asset transfer agreement for Rural Health Ventures, including the Sharon Springs clinic. The agreement included three possible names for the clinic when merged: Goodland Family Health Center, Goodland Family Practice Center and Goodland Family Medical Center.

Rollover northwest of Goodland injures four



Emergency medical technicians loaded the driver and passengers from a gold Ford Windstar into an ambulance Friday morning. The Sherman County Sheriff's Department said the driver, Barbara J. Fromholtz, 44, of St. Francis, was southbound on County Road 15 four miles west and five miles north of Good-

land at 10:05 a.m. She was close to the center of the road, swerved when meeting an oncoming pickup and lost control of the van, which rolled. Amber Fromholtz, 17; Sayoui Ito, 17, also of St. Francis; and Choromi Jang, 18, of Colby, were passengers.

Photo by Sharon Corcoran/The Goodland Star-News

Plane crash, chases, fires caused stir

A plane crash last February about 13 miles northeast of Goodland was one of the stories that caused a stir, but didn't make *The Goodland Star-News'* top 10 list for 2003.

A twin-engine Piper airplane belonging to Key Lime Air, a subcontractor for the United Parcel Service, was trying to land at Renner Field about 8 p.m. Feb. 12, when it came down in an empty field near County Road 26 between Roads 75 and 76. The pilot, Tate Baloun, the only person aboard, was unhurt. Baloun said both engines lost power, forcing him to look for a spot to land.

Automatic emergency systems alerted the Federal Aviation Administration of the crash, and the agency provided possible locations to the Kansas Highway Patrol and the sheriff's offices of Cheyenne, Sherman and Thomas counties.

After the crash, Baloun walked

about a half mile to the home of Tracy McCoy. She called her neighbor, Ken Klemm, who in turn called 911. Sheriff Doug Whitson said between that call and the help of another plane, searchers were able to quickly locate the site and secure it for federal investigators.

Two high-speed chases within three weeks of each other involved Sherman County law enforcement officers.

On March 13, a state trooper clocked a white TransAm doing more than 90 miles per hour eastbound on I-70 near Ruleton and tried to pull it over. The car attempted to escape by taking the exit at Caruso and fleeing east on Old U.S. 24 at speeds reaching 125 m.p.h.

The driver apparently had second thoughts and pulled over near Frontier Equity Co-op and surrendered. He and two companions, all 17,

were taken into custody.

The second chase involved a 15-year-old Denver youth driving a stolen 1999 Ford Expedition. On April 2, a trooper pulled over the truck traveling east on I-70 about eight miles east of Kanorado for going 79 m.p.h. in a 70 zone. After the trooper got the driver's information, the driver sped off east on I-70. Twice during the chase, at speeds exceeding 100 mph, the driver took an off-ramp only to immediately return to the freeway.

Just west of the off-ramp at the east Goodland exit, the Expedition hit a sheriff's pickup waiting in position to deploy road spikes. The Expedition rolled, landing upside down. The driver was taken to Goodland Regional Medical Center, where he was admitted under guard. The deputy driving the pickup was uninjured.

In the short time between these chases, four drivers got new tires after an unexpected delay courtesy of the Colby Police Department. On March 25, the Colby police used road spikes to stop a van driven by

a 16-year-old runaway from Arizona after a night chase. When the van hit the spikes at high speed, several were dislocated and, in part due to the darkness, could not be recovered before four other vehicles, including a semitrailer, ran over them. Nobody was hurt, but the city bought a bunch of new tires.

Three house fires warmed up 2003. In the early morning of June 11, a pickup belonging to Mastec, the company installing the wiring system for S&T Communications, caught on fire because of exploding paint cans stored in the back. The fire spread to a house at 1606 Texas Ave., causing significant damage.

A house trailer at lot No. 3, 2810 Commerce Rd., was destroyed during the morning of Nov. 13. A child playing with a cigarette lighter got the blame.

A another house trailer fire, at 5925 County Road 21, early Thanksgiving morning forced a family to find temporary shelter for the holiday weekend. Fire officials credit the trailer's smoke detectors for allowing the family to escape injury.

Machinery arrives here

A third load of equipment arrived last Monday at the Aircraft Seal and Gasket plant, and a final shipment is expected by Friday.

Plant Manager Chuck Lutters said they are beginning to get the plant arranged and get some furniture in place.

Company President Herb Menold was in Goodland on Tuesday. He said he thinks when the next truck arrives, the basic equipment will all be in place to begin the setup and manufacturing process.

"We are shooting for a Feb. 19 ribbon cutting," Menold said. "The governor and lieutenant governor are planning to be here."

Asked about a sign for the building, he said the artwork is done and he expects to have it ready to put up in a few weeks.

"We don't have a ladder to put it up with," Lutters said.

Internet tonight!
899-2338

Congratulations

Greg and Amy Sederstrom
Kansas Farm Bureau Young Farmers and
Ranchers Contest Achievement Award Winners

GOOD LUCK

at the American Farm Bureau Young Farmers and
Ranchers Contest in Hawaii in January

Sherman County Farm
Bureau Association

Kansas Farm Bureau
helping feed the world

Aten's January Clearance

ATEN DEPT.
STORES

Goodland, Kansas
Yuma, Colorado

Sale Starts
Wednesday, Jan. 7, 2004

Sale Ends
Monday, Jan. 19, 2004

Aten Department
Stores Will Be
Closed Tuesday,
January 6 To
Prepare For This
**GIGANTIC
SALE!**