

By Sharon Corcoran
The Goodland Star-News
After being shocked by a line carrying 7,620 volts of electricity, Jim Backes kept the ambulance crew entertained on the way to the hospital.

When he got to the emergency room, Backes said, he felt like a celebrity while everyone looked at the holes in his feet.

Now, he just tells everyone he’s electrified.

Electrocuted is when someone is killed by a charge of electricity, Backes said; electrified is when you’re charged with electricity.

“I’m electrified,” he said. “You’re looking at an electrified man.”

And that’s what he has been telling his doctors, nurses and physical therapists. Backes said he has had plenty of people in stitches with his “electrified” jokes.

Backes and his boss Rex Smith, owner of B’s Pump and Well Service, were trying to move some irrigation equipment owned by farmer Jon Voth in Wallace County last month, on Monday, April 4, when they got the shock of their lives.

Backes said he backed up the truck to pick up an irrigation gear-head, and Smith was raising the boom. Backes said he reached into the back of the truck to grab a chain, and the boom went right into a power line.

Backes said the electricity went through his right hand and stomach and out his foot and started a fire on the ground.

“I was frozen for 3 1/2 minutes,” he said. “I saw my life flash before my eyes.”

Backes said he was lying on the ground and couldn’t move but shouted to Smith that there was a fire. He said Smith later told him he couldn’t see him, but when he



Jim Backes uses a motorized scooter to get around since being “electrified” last month. The bandages on his feet cover sores the size of quarters and half dollars that are half an inch deep.

Photo by Sharon Corcoran/The Goodland Star-News

shouted, Smith noticed the boom crackling and sizzling.

Some say it was his boss’s fault, Backes said, adding that he thinks it was a total freak accident.

“We were both in a hurry,” Backes said. “I just thank God we’re both alive.”

Smith told *The Western Times* of Sharon Springs that he “got jolted

pretty good” but that he wasn’t really hurt.

Backes has a hole about the size of a half dollar and 1/2 inch deep in his right foot, a hole the size of a quarter on his left little toe, holes in the stomach area where he leaned against the truck, nerve damage in his feet, numbness in his right hand, and he developed heart problems.

Three months after getting married and four days after his “once in a while” job became full time, Backes’ world was turned upside down. He married Brenda Welch, a student at the Northwest Kansas Technical College, on Jan. 4. Since the accident, he said, she has had to take time from her school schedule many times to take care of him. He said he had worked for Smith off and on since April 2004 but became a full-time employee April 1; he’s now on workman’s compensation.

“This has put me in a major hole,” Backes said. “I’m financially strapped.”

Workman’s comp pays the medical expenses, he said, but it doesn’t come close to paying for the lost wages. He said all the money goes for bills.

He’s not bedridden, but he needs to spend a lot of time in bed to keep the sores on his belly from rubbing together and keep his feet up to improve his circulation. His feet stay bandaged, and he uses a motorized scooter to get around the house. As far as long-term damage, Backes said, only time will tell.

But he knows it could have been worse.

“I had on my steel-toed boots the day before,” he said. “I’m glad I didn’t have them on that day; it would have taken all my toes off.”

After being electrified, Backes’ troubles were just beginning, but he has kept a sense of humor about it all.

“After the accident,” he said, “we were about five miles down the road when the ambulance had a blowout.

“Rex said, ‘Jim and I’ll go change the tire for you.’

“We had to wait 15 minutes for another ambulance. I had them all laughing.”

When they got to the hospital, Backes said, everyone kept looking at the holes in his feet. There was no blood, he said, because they were singed. He said he felt like a celebrity getting so much attention, and he has been showing off his shoes ever since.

Though the holes in his feet are fairly large, and his socks were burned, the shoes have such small holes where the electricity went out, it is hard to see them, even when you’re looking for them. The right shoe has a hole the size of a pinhead through the sole, and the left shoe has three holes the same size on the side.

He got out of the hospital after two days. Three weeks later, he had to go to a wound care center in Garden City and has been going there every week since to have dead skin cut off his feet.

Backes has been having irregular heartbeats since the accident, and his blood pressure has been rising. He went to a cardiologist in Hays and did echocardiography, an electrocardiogram and a stress test, but doesn’t know yet what the problem is. He is on a heart monitor and says the heart trouble seems to be coming to the forefront as his sores get better.

Backes said he is healing fast because his attitude and outlook is good.

“Why look at it in the negative?” he asked.

He credits his doctors and nurses and his wife for helping with his recovery. Dr. Robert P. Moser of Tribune has an excellent bedside

manner, Backes said; he goes out of his way for you. The nurses from Good Samaritan Home Healthcare from St. Francis come to his home, he said, and really take pride in their work.

He said he and Smith were taken to the hospital in Tribune because it was closer than Goodland, and that worked out well.

“I got excellent help,” Backes said, “above and beyond the call of duty.”

He said his wife has been good about dealing with the accident and has been a big help with driving him to doctor’s appointments and with cleaning and bandaging his wounds.

“She works hard, 200 percent, on my feet,” he said. “She’s been my right hand; you couldn’t ask for a better wife.”

Backes said he doesn’t know what’s going to happen with his injuries. Only time will tell, he said, but he considers it a privilege to still be alive.

“I can be a witness for the Lord,” Backes said. “He saved me.”

Backes said he is also glad he can be with his family and play with his toys. He has a collection of cars and said he is known as the “car nut.”

He has lived in Goodland for 10 years, working a variety of jobs, farming, working on wells and rough and finish carpentry, including the construction of Wheat Ridge Acres in 1999 and early 2000.

Before coming here, he had lived in Hawaii for 2 1/2 years and then Fairbanks, Ala., for two. He hadn’t seen his parents, Bob and Darlene Scott of Goodland, in five years and said his mother said she wanted him around, so he moved here.

Besides his parents, his wife and friends, Backes said, he has two cats, B.J. and Millie, looking out for him.

Council starts search for director

By Tom Betz
The Goodland Star-News
The Sherman County Economic Development Council is back to full strength with the selection on a candidate at a meeting May 17 to fill a vacancy.

Chairman John Garcia said there had been three nominations to fill the position of Larry Harper, who resigned because a job change made it impossible to attend meetings.

Nominated were Chris Bauman of Aquila; Lincoln Wilson, owner of the Howard Johnson Hotel; and Chuck Wilkins, owner of Wilkens Truck and Trailer.

Wilkens was at the meeting and was given a chance to speak to the council.

He said his family moved to Goodland in 1970, and he graduated from Goodland High School in 1975.

“I have a son graduating this year,” Wilkins said. “When I graduated, there were 130 in my class, and there are 61 in my son’s class. There has been quite a change there.

“We need to have more people and businesses to increase the numbers in the school. I think many in the community have a new thought pattern, and think that is excellent.”

A written ballot was handed out to the six council members present, and Treasurer Kim Bohme counted the results and said Wilkins had been elected unanimously.

Garcia welcomed Wilkens to the

council, noting that the selection would be forwarded to the county commissioners for approval.

Garcia said efforts continue to find a director, but the last person they had offered the job to decided to stay where he was.

Garcia said he has received a few more names, and continues to follow up on leads.

Kay Younger, office manager, said she has been in contact with a man who plays steel drums who wants to be part of a block party on July 29.

She is working with the Goodland Arts Council on plans for the party.

She suggested the economic development office could be a central point for employers and youth seeking summer jobs.

Employers could call in with their job openings, and the kids could check with the office to see what was available. The council decided to table the idea for further investigation.

The council approved advertising in the Northwest Kansas travel guide and travel guides if it is split with the Goodland Chamber, Arts Council and Sherman County Historical Society.

Younger said the cost of the two ads would be \$650.

The next council meeting will be 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, June 21, in the basement of the Western State Bank.

Memorial Day service



Members of the Goodland Veterans of Foreign Wars Color Guard presented the colors at the Memorial Day service Monday. Since last May, these veterans have been buried in the Goodland Cemetery: Barney Heigert, Eugene Hall, Charles “Conn” Cody,

Shelby F. Coons, Bill E. Leitner, Richard Hurd, John Schiefen, Albert Fenner, Harold Peck, Myron G. Miller, Melvin Standish, Kermit A. Huebert, Dale Murphy and Scott D. Armstrong.

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