

## Spring has sprung at carnival



## Youngsters have a blast at carnival

**POURING SAND** was fun for Giuliana Smith, 2, (above) during the Oberlin Elementary Carnival last Monday, but Jenna Juenemann (left) enjoyed the ring toss. Students and younger children had fun and won small prizes at the many games and booths set up for the occasion.

— Herald staff photos by Kimberly Davis

# Meteorologist gives class, trains 'storm spotters'

By **STEPHANIE DeCAMP**  
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Do you know what to look for in the clouds when there's a tornado warning?

If so, then chances are you've been to one of the annual "storm spotter" classes given by David Floyd, warning coordination meteorologist for the National Weather Service office in Goodland.

Mr. Floyd visited The Gateway two weeks ago to teach a room packed full of Decatur County residents the ins and outs of severe weather watching.

"Storm spotters are tasked with warning operations," Mr. Floyd said, "but can't be there all the time, so we have doppler radar. And that's a great tool, but we would really like people on the ground looking at the storm and calling in reports to us."

Storm spotters are asked to report high wind, hail, tornados, wall clouds and funnel clouds, Mr. Floyd said. Hail the size of a penny or greater, he said, should be reported to the service. When you talk to the agency (or send the report, which you can do with some nifty new cell phone applications), you need to be sure and tell them who you are, what, when and where it happened, and how long it lasted.



David Floyd

When a storm is coming, Mr. Floyd said, you can pick out the elements that may culminate into a tornado. First, in a thunderstorm, an updraft will appear, a tall wall of cloud that flattens and spread out on top. That top part is called the anvil. When a storm is particularly strong, you may see clouds coming up from the anvil, an "overshooting top," which tells you that there is a really intense updraft.

Rain and hail form inside the updraft until gravity pulls them down, creating a down draft, Mr. Floyd said.

"As the downdraft gets close to the ground," he said, "it accelerates outward as it falls. This is when we see fences go down, shingles fly off the house, that kind of thing."

If you're on the leading edge of an oncoming storm, he said, you can usually see a shelf cloud that will accompany the storm front.

"It isn't necessarily flat," he said, "but rounded or arched. It's the leading edge of the rain and hail, and precedes it. There won't be funnels or tornados here; they don't occur here. But with shelf clouds, the storm is being nice and telling you it's on its way."

What a storm spotter is really

looking for, however, is a wall cloud, which will be under the base of the storm toward the rear, and is the part that spawns funnel clouds — which can turn into tornadoes.

"If there's a wall cloud," Mr. Floyd said, "it is situated underneath the most vigorous updraft currents in the storm. They should get your attention. They are associated with inflow and uplift, and typically form after the rain reaches the surface in a downdraft. A wall cloud looks kind of like a flower blooming upside-down, stuck to the underbelly of the updraft base. It's usually a concentrated clump, a quarter-mile to a half-mile wide.

"They're not always horizontal or parallel to the ground; sometimes they slope. If there is a slope it will point down and toward the rain. It's not a huge thing, the wall cloud."

If there are winding bands or stripes across the updraft of a storm, he said, that means that the storm has become a "super cell," which basically means it's become more severe.

If you sign up as a storm spotter at one of his classes, Mr. Floyd said, the weather service may contact you for reports on what's happening in your area. Severe weather typically comes through Decatur County between March and September, he said.

## Weather warnings change

By **STEPHANIE DeCAMP**  
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If there was one good thing that came out of the drought last year, it was a lack of severe weather.

David Floyd, warning coordination meteorologist for the Goodland office of the National Weather Service, said 56 tornados were spotted in 2007 in the office's 19-county area. Last year, there were just five. The average over the last six years, he added, was 28.

However, that doesn't mean this year won't be different, and with that in mind, the service has made some changes to its warnings, including an "enhanced impact statement" section that explains in laymen's terms exactly what to expect from an approaching storm.

The service is making the change, he said, after learning that many people who lived through a major storm said later they had no idea it was going to be so bad. They said all of the weather warnings from the service sound pretty much the same.

"Now the third bullet (of the report) will have the impact statement," Mr. Floyd said. "This will include

what (forecasters) think the storm might do to your property, like mobile homes may be destroyed, power lines may go down, or if roofs may be removed. It's trying to bring the impact to more everyday terms for people to understand the threat.

"Half the people in the U.S. don't know the difference between a watch and a warning. So what's a watch? The possibility of severe weather and atmospheric conditions indicate that things are coming together for (whatever the watch is for). It means to keep your eyes peeled, though you don't need to jump into the basement for eight hours."

A warning, he said, comes when the radar starts lighting up like a Christmas tree, or a storm spotter calls in with a report of a twister or golf-ball sized hail.

If you want to know more, he said, courses and mobile web applications are available free online at weather websites, including: [www.meted.ucar.edu](http://www.meted.ucar.edu), [www.nssl.noaa.gov/projects/ping/display](http://www.nssl.noaa.gov/projects/ping/display) and [www.redcross.org/prepare/mobile-apps](http://www.redcross.org/prepare/mobile-apps).

## Energy company to hold meeting

Midwest Energy will hold a member meeting to discuss getting the cooperative out from under state regulation at 6:30 p.m. Thursday in Room 108 of the Student Union at Colby Community College.

The company, which supplies natural gas in Oberlin and other Kansas towns, and provides electricity in rural areas, plans a vote of its customer-owners in May to become self-regulated, returning most decision-making authority from the Kansas Corporation Commission.

"Self-regulation would benefit members by returning most deci-

sion-making authority on rates, rate design and terms of service to our member-elected board, who share a common ownership interest with all customer-owners," said Pat Parke, the company's vice president for customer service. "We will be more efficient and transparent, at a lower cost. But customers will still have an appeals process to the KCC on rate decisions."

Midwest has mailed brochures to members in preparation for the meetings, which will also be held in Great Bend, Scott City and Hays.

"By being self-regulated, we can respond faster to the changing needs

of our customer-owners and the changing nature of our business," said Earnie Lehman, president and general manager. "Our board can make decisions faster as well as better than a regulatory agency with no local ties."

Lehman added that ballots will be going out to all customers after the last member meeting in April.

"If you pay a Midwest Energy bill, you have an ownership stake in our cooperative," Lehman said. "We encourage our members to exercise their rights and vote 'yes' when their ballot arrives."

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