

BARRETT STINSON/AP

A construction worker works on the roof line of the west side of the Heartland Events Center Nov. 17 in Grand Island.

Dates filling at unfinished Heartland Events Center

The Associated Press

GRAND ISLAND — The head of the Heartland Events Center isn't worried about filling dates at the new building. At least 11 events already have been scheduled for next year at the facility, which is set to open next fall.

Hugh Miner Jr., Fonner Park's executive vice president and CEO, said Hall County Fair entertainment would christen the $35 million, 6,000-seat arena in August.

Miner said events also have been scheduled for future years, including the Mid-Nebraska Boat and Travel Show in February 2007.

"It's a major show," Miner said. "It will be very similar to the annual shows they have in Omaha and also in Minneapolis."

Many of the events will move from adjacent Fonner Park.

"We have more than 100 events out here already at Fonner Park," Miner said. "A lot of them are going to be able to expand because of the events center."

Among those events are the annual Home Show and RV Show.

Grand Island Senior High activities director Joe Kutlas said he is working with Miner to bring sporting events to the new building.

Among those events are the Tip Off Classic basketball tournament and an annual wrestling meet that that high school hosts.

Miner said he hopes community events, such as graduation ceremonies, can be held at the center.

"That's why the facility is being built — to better serve the needs of the community and surrounding area," Miner said.

Miner said he also hopes to announce one or two tenants within the next two or three months.

"We've had inquiries about hockey and also indoor arena football," Miner said. "Certainly, basketball is another (sport) that we will definitely check into."

A stand-up performance



BEN DeVRIES/AP

Dave Matthews sings during a performance by The Dave Matthews Band at the Qwest Center in Omaha Sunday night.

Strike: Bowlers pin hopes on team

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He believes that if bowling becomes an NSAA-sanctioned sport, there will be little burden on the schools because schools use their local bowling alleys and often pay a one-time fee for use throughout the entire season.

All three area teams use Pastime Lanes for their practices. Blue Hill students travel to Hastings twice a week to practice.

> "Sports like tennis are school sports and this (bowling) is obviously popular, so why not make it a school sport."
>
> **- Lynn Burg**

The Holiday Kick Off Classic marks the beginning of the season, which lasts until February and the state tournament.

During the season, head coach Ken Snider said the Blue Hill bowlers participate in about 10 competitions.

With a total of eight girls on the team, they were able to have two separate teams participate at Saturday's event.

This was the norm for many of the schools that had both boys and girls teams and possibly two of each.

In this tournament and in most of the competitions throughout the year, teams participate in what is called a baker tournament. This means that with five bowlers on a team the first bowler bowls the first and 10th frame, the second bowls the second and ninth and so on, Hogan said.

After each game, the team moves on to the next lane and plays against a new team.

On Saturday, the teams played a total of 15 games that lasted about three hours.

With the baker tournament set-up, bowling becomes a team sport. Bowlers depend on each other to perform well as they advance in tournaments.

But no matter how anyone played, it was all cheers and encouragement as they competed.

And it wasn't only the teammates who were giving words of encouragement. As with any high school sport, the coaches and parents were also there cheering the teams to victory.

Lynn Burg and Lisa Christen both came out to cheer on their sons, who play for Hastings High.

Christen said her son, Brett, has watched his father and uncles bowl for years.

Burg said bowling is a great sport for students.

"Now they just need to wake up and make it a school sport," he said of the NSAA. "Sports like tennis are school sports and this is obviously popular, so why not make it a school sport."

Another HHS parent, Eric Christenson, believes that this is a great way for high school students to get involved.

"It's just another avenue for kids to get into athletics on the high school level," he said. "And it's a sport you can be involved in all of your life."

Chambers: Omaha senator joins term limits fight

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Byars was rejected today in his bid to file for re-election, lighting the fuse for a legal challenge to the term limits voters approved five years ago.

Secretary of State John Gale rejected Byars' filing after the two met privately for several minutes in Gales' office.

"What this is about is the Constitution," Byars said. "It's not about me."

Byars said his lawyers are preparing to file a lawsuit challenging the term limits directly with the Nebraska Supreme Court.

State Sen. Marian Price of Lincoln said she might join in as well.

Byars said he'll welcome everyone who wants to join in.

"Anybody who wants to join can," Byars said Friday.

Byars said he didn't speak with other senators before making his decision. It was his constituents who wondered if something could be done.

Legislative term limits have been ruled unconstitutional by high courts in four states: Oregon, Massachusetts, Wyoming and Washington.

In Massachusetts, Wyoming and Washington, courts deemed it impermissible for term limits to be attached to elected offices through citizen-approved additions to state statutes, according to the national Conference of State Legislatures.

In Oregon, term limits were approved in the form of a constitutional amendment, not state statute. But they were thrown out on a technicality. The court said the amendment violated a rule that limits to one the number of constitutional sections that can be added through each ballot question.

It's no surprise senators are challenging the law, said Doug Kagan, a supporter of term limits and chairman of group designed to prevent them from being overturned called "Don't Touch Term Limits." But he said he's surprised at how the fight is being waged.

"We knew something was coming, but had no forewarning Byars was going to file this lawsuit," Kagan said.

He said his group, taking advice from a national organization, planned to wage a public relations battle against Byars and other senators wanting to challenge the term limits.

He said one way to do this would be to publicize the percentage of voters in particular areas who approved term limits five years ago. He said they would also target the districts of any senator openly challenging the law.

"If the vote total shows voters in those areas favored term limits, we'll want to mobilize people to chastise those senators," Kagan said.

Group provides bikes to people who have no other transportation

The Associated Press

GRAND ISLAND — Mark Merritt is in the business of helping people get back on their feet — and then using them.

He has given away about 150 bicycles to people who have no other form of transportation though a program with Central Nebraska Community Services.

Bikes can really make a difference in the life of someone who needs transportation, he said. They can help people get to appointments, receive medical care and even make it easier to get — and stay — employed, said Merritt, who works for CNCS as a supportive housing project case manager.

The rise in gas prices also makes the bikes more attractive, he said.

Dozens of bicycles have been donated by people who simply don't use them anymore. Merritt and other people at Wayne's Cyclery in Grand Island then fix the bikes before they are distributed.

"Used bikes have little to no value and they often get tossed in the trash," said John Wayne, owner of Wayne's Cyclery. "If it's a functional bicycle, the way I see it, there's no reason not to give it a good home."

About a dozen bikes are currently in the store waiting to be distributed, while a few more are waiting for minor repairs.

The idea came to Merritt while he was working part-time at the shop, he said. Several other employees also work during their spare time to fix the donated bicycles.

They've been able to meet demand so far, but sometimes Merritt said he has to tell people wanting bikes to come back in a week. The bikes usually don't need much in the way of repairs, he said, and it's not really worth it for them to fix anything that needs more than $30 worth of work.

Merritt said he hopes they get more donations this winter, when they'll have more time to spend on repairs.

"It's a constant search for more," he said.

Some people who have received the bikes have turned around and donated them after their situations improve and they're able to provide transportation for themselves.

Underage drinking program grows

The Associated Press

GRAND ISLAND — A simple wink and a smile, and some adult has encouraged some teenager to have a beer, guzzle some wine, slam a shot.

That's dangerous for the teenager and anybody on the road he or she chooses to drive home on.

The growing Think B4U Wink program wants to make sure adults understand the consequences of their perhaps unwitting encouragement.

On its Web site, the program says:

"Some adults believe underage drinking is no more than a harmless rite of passage into adulthood. ...

"Think Before You Wink wants to make sure you understand the consequences of your actions. If you believe underage drinking is harmless or that your kids arent listening to you, youre wrong."

Think B4U Wink is the brainchild of the Hall County Sheriff's Department and started in August 2003 with 21 agencies in nine counties.

As of Sept. 30 this year, 65 agencies in 36 counties were participating, said Rodger Williams, a retired Hall County sheriff's captain and project coordinator.

Williams expects 10 to 20 agencies will join Think B4U Wink before the third grant year ends on Sept. 30, 2006. This year's program was supported by a $49,605 grant from the Nebraska Office of Highway Safety.

The program supplies agencies with educational materials, including two videos, and uses 19 donated billboards.

It also gives agencies access to additional manpower for saturation patrols and alcohol compliance checks.