



KENT SIEVERS/THE WORLD-HERALD

At least Jocelyn Allen's ears are warm as she and other members of the Papillion-La Vista South High School band march outside Thursday in preparation for their trip to the Holiday Bowl in San Diego.

Band hopes NU goes to its bowl

BY KAREN SLOAN
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

The air was in the frosty teens Thursday morning as the Papillion-La Vista South High School band marched through a slick, snow-covered parking lot playing a medley of holiday tunes.

Trumpet valves froze up, hands cramped and tennis shoes slid on the icy pavement, but thoughts of sunny San Diego and a possible Holiday Bowl bid for the Cornhuskers helped the 230 students to gut out the frigid conditions.

The Titan marching band was selected last year to play at the Holiday Bowl in San Diego, but it was not until the Cornhuskers resoundingly defeated Colorado last week that it became a possibility that the football team could be headed to California as well.

A Holiday Bowl spokesman said this week that both Nebraska and Oklahoma are in contention for a bid. The bowl pits a team from the Big 12 against a Pac-10 team. Selections will be announced Sunday.

Band director Bill Kellett and his students are hoping Ne-

braska ends up at the Holiday Bowl.

Titan junior and trumpet player Adam Haynes is a huge Husker fan but has never been to a Nebraska game. He would love his first to be at the Holiday Bowl, where the band will be part of the halftime entertainment.

"It's really been the talk around here," Haynes said. "It would be great to have a Nebraska band there to support the team."

The band will begin a 26-hour bus ride to San Diego on the afternoon of Christmas Day.

Once there, it will participate against 16 other bands in a marching competition on Dec. 27, march in the Holiday Bowl Parade and play at halftime of the Dec. 29 game. If the band wins the competition, it will also perform its Beethoven-themed routine before the game.

The weeklong trip won't be all work, however. The students will have the opportunity to go to the beach, Universal Studios and Knott's Berry Farm amusement park in Los Angeles.

The Titan band was invited to attend the Holiday Bowl after a

See Band: Page 2

Girl, 12, got off bus but is missing

■ She was last seen Tuesday at 20th and Pinkney Streets, four blocks from her home.

BY TOM SHAW

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

A 12-year-old north Omaha girl last seen Tuesday remained missing today.

Amber Harris was supposed to go straight home after getting off a school bus about 5:45 p.m. Tuesday. But her family has not heard from her.

Her father, Michael Harris, said his daughter called him at 4 p.m. Tuesday on a friend's cell phone to say she was coming home on the late bus from Beveridge Magnet Center, 1616 S. 120th St.

She sometimes stays after school to get extra help on assignments or to help tutor other students, her father said. Amber is in the seventh grade.

"I told her on the phone to come straight home," Michael Harris said. "Then it started getting later and later and darker and darker and she wasn't home, so we called the police."

The bus left Beveridge at 4:30 p.m., said Omaha Public Schools spokeswoman Luanne Nelson. A videotape from the bus shows Amber getting off the bus at 5:41 p.m., she said. That was at 20th and Pinkney Streets, which is four blocks from Amber's home.

The bus stop she was supposed to use is at Lothrop Magnet School at 24th and Pratt Streets. The stop where Amber got off the bus was actually two blocks closer to her home in the 3200 block of North 16th Street.

Amber is about 4-foot-8, weighs 120 pounds and was last seen wearing light-blue jeans, a black-and-white windbreaker and K-Swiss shoes.

Her family says it's not like Amber to stay away from home for so long. Michael Harris said his daughter is told to come home after school.

Michael Harris said he and his wife were not angry with Amber over anything, and they have no reason to believe that she would run away. Amber lives at home with her father, her mother, Melissa, as well as two brothers and two sisters.

"We just went through Thanksgiving, and everything was fine," he said. "When she gets out of school she's super hungry, and she comes home for a snack and to do her homework."

See Missing: Page 2

Rainbow Rowell

Her column will resume Monday.



PHIL JOHNSON/THE WORLD-HERALD

Shereen Salfity, left, shows her anti-bullying booklet to a friend, Ziada Karbowski, today at Sunset Hills Elementary. Shereen was honored for her work. "I've seen a lot of bullying happen," she said.

Girl writes anti-bullying story

BY VERONICA STICKNEY
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Shereen Salfity remembers how the rumors made her feel.

Angry. Stupid. When classmates told lies about her, the Sunset Hills Elementary sixth-grader wasn't sure how to handle it. She didn't know anything could be done.

She does now. Shereen, 11, spent the summer helping put together a booklet with tips on how to handle bullies, especially those who engage in "relational aggression." That is a

type of bullying common among fifth- through eighth-grade girls that often involves eye-rolling, gossip, exclusion and teasing.

Standing up to the bully or telling a trusted adult are both good options, Shereen said.

The 32-page booklet offers other ways to deal with relational aggression and includes a list of Web sites and books to turn to for help.

The bulk of the publication is a story — written and illustrated by Shereen — about three girls who bully one another and a boy and teacher who help them change their behavior.

"I've seen a lot of bullying happen," said Shereen, who was honored during a presentation at her school this morning. "I hope to help out some people and send a message out because (bullying) still happens everywhere, and it's wrong."

Shereen was helped by Patricia Newman, a clinical child psychologist, who last spring visited several fifth- and sixth-grade classes in the Westside school district.

Newman heads a program she started called RESPECT (for Relationship Empowerment for Students, Parents, See Bullying: Page 2

Fixed costs key to plan for Medicaid

BY MARTHA STODDARD
WORLD-HERALD BUREAU

Talk about Medicaid

LINCOLN — Nebraska eventually will need a major restructuring of its Medicaid program to keep it affordable, according to an overhaul plan completed Thursday.

Nebraska most likely will need to switch to a program in which the state provides a fixed amount of funding to pay for health care for Medicaid recipients, according to the plan.

Such "defined contribution" plans are among the newest ideas for reining in the rising costs of health coverage for low-income children, families, the disabled and the elderly.

"We want to emphasize that the focus of reform is to serve people in the most effective and appropriate ways possible," said Dick Nelson, director of finance and support for the Nebraska Health and Human Services System.

"This is a step in the right direction to preserve Medicaid for future generations," he said.

The plan doesn't call for radical change immediately. Rather, it includes a mix of short- and long-term recommendations.

In Nebraska, Medicaid has grown from \$57 million, or 6.9 percent of general fund appropriations, to \$468 million, or 17.2 percent, over the past 20 years.

Projections show the cost growing to \$2.4 billion annually by 2025.

The short-term solutions could save Nebraska's Medicaid

The overhaul plan will be reviewed by a citizen advisory panel Wednesday.

The public can comment Dec. 15 at a public hearing before the Legislature's Health and Human Services Committee.

program about \$72 million in their first full year of operation, said Nelson, who helped put together the plan. About 42 percent of that savings would come from state general funds, the rest from the federal government.

A recommendation to emphasize assisted living and other home and community-based services for the elderly and disabled — rather than nursing home care — could produce about half of the projected savings, he said.

Many people speaking at public forums this fall urged such changes to help people stay in their homes and have better quality of life.

Many also opposed switching to a defined contribution plan, saying that would amount to health care rationing.

With defined contribution plans, states decide how much they will pay for the care of those qualifying for Medicaid. Patients then are given choices in how to use that money. The choices may include buying pri-

See Medicaid: Page 2

Mother keeps faith in face of setbacks

BY ELIZABETH AHLIN
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

When Yashika Johnson gets frustrated with her life, she turns to God.

"I think that's the only thing that keeps me going sometimes," she said.

Johnson, mother to Sarah, 11, and Royalty, 2, is a college graduate. She works for a temporary employment agency doing child care, but earning \$6 or \$7 an hour a few days a week isn't enough to support her children.

Johnson, 32, earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Nebraska at Omaha five years ago. After she graduated, she moved to Arizona.

She found a job working for the state but returned to Nebraska after only a year.

"It was kind of a lonely existence," Johnson said. "Even though I had a good job, I couldn't get used to it."

She hasn't been able to find a steady job that makes use of her education since she returned.

GOODFELLOWS

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Today's donations, Page 2

She wants to give Sarah a bicycle when she turns 12 on Dec. 16, but she's also worried about losing her minivan this winter.

To help with holiday expenses, she turned the Goodfellows holiday food program.

"That's a blessing for me and my family right there," she said.

But Johnson doesn't want anyone to feel sorry for her.

"I watch the news, and it makes my problems seem minute. I know (God is) going to take care of me and my kids."

Through the end of the year, Goodfellows is raising money for its year-round emergency assistance program and its holiday food program.



JEFF BUNDY/THE WORLD-HERALD

A Marine Corps honor guard carries the casket bearing the body of Cpl. Brian Zimmerman from Adair-Casey Community School after his funeral Thursday.

Marine's death haunts Adair

BY JOHN FERAK
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Back safe from Iraq, he dies breaking up a fight in his hometown.

ADAIR, Iowa — The town's water tower has a giant smiley face painted on it. A wooden billboard greets visitors heading into town, "Welcome to Adair, it'll make you smile."

On a chilly Thursday, warm smiles were few, however. Instead, many residents wore black suits and dark dresses. They pinned green ribbons that read "Z-Man" to their lapels.

At least 800 people packed the basketball gymnasium of Adair-Casey Community School, where services for Cpl. Brian Zimmerman, a hometown Marine, were held.

Zimmerman, 23, served two tours of duty in Iraq and re-

cently re-enlisted for four more years.

Zimmerman died last Friday, not at the hands of enemy insurgents, but as a result of a fight outside a bar in his hometown of 850, about 85 miles east of Omaha.

"A single act of inhumanity, a petty bar fight," a close friend, Marine Robert Rusnac, told mourners at Thursday's funeral. "This is such a horrible shock."

See Marine: Page 2

Briefly

METRO AREA

Two men arrested in shooting death

Two Omaha men who already are in jail apparently will face charges in connection with last month's shooting death of Jerry M. Trecek.

Johnny W. Powers, 30, and Bruce M. Schill, 19, were arrested Thursday on suspicion of first-degree murder and use of a weapon to commit a felony.

Trecek, 42, of Omaha was found dead shortly after 3:20 a.m. Nov. 21 just south of the intersection of 60th and Center Streets.

A blue 1982 Chevrolet van was parked nearby at a 24-hour carwash. Omaha Police Sgt. Teresa Negron said investigators determined that Trecek went to the carwash to meet someone.

When Powers and Schill arrived, an altercation occurred, resulting in Trecek's being shot and killed.

Powers, who lives at 1265 S. 15th St., was already in jail awaiting trial on charges of felony flight to avoid arrest. Schill, who lives at 4413 S. 32nd St., was in jail awaiting trial on an armed robbery charge. — Kevin Cole

Student expelled for semester

The seventh-grade boy who was suspended last month after he brought a wooden knife to school has been expelled for the rest of the semester.

The boy, a Morton Middle School student, told school officials that he carved the knife for Boy Scouts. He said he placed the knife in his pants pocket the night before school and didn't realize it still was there when he went to school the next day, Nov. 16.

School officials recommended a two-semester expulsion, said Luanne Nelson, a spokeswoman for the Omaha Public Schools. A hearing officer reduced the punishment to the rest of the semester.

Nelson said the hearing officer considered the fact that it was a wooden knife and was part of a Boy Scout project.

"But bringing it to school was still an infraction of the student code of conduct," she said. — Bob Glissmann

Puma reported near school

The report of a mountain lion near a Bellevue elementary school this morning added to the excitement generated by six reported sightings at Offutt Air Force Base on Monday.

Mark Langan, vice president of operations for the Nebraska Humane Society, said a 10-year-old girl reported seeing a mountain lion along the tree line near Fairview Elementary, just east of Tregaron Golf Course and southwest of Offutt. The girl's father called Langan.

That reported sighting brings the count to 47 that have been called in to the Humane Society since Sept. 29 in the Omaha area.

That total doesn't include six reported sightings at Offutt near military housing in the area of 25th Street and Capehart Road during the morning hours this week. — Abe Winter

Laptops touted for inspectors

A \$27,000 federal grant has enabled Omaha's code and zoning inspectors to function more efficiently with laptop computers, Mayor Mike Fahey said today.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development grant purchased 11 laptops that inspectors can use at inspection sites and in their cars. They will spend less time downloading digital photos and burning them to discs in their City Hall offices, Fahey said.

Kevin Denker, Omaha's chief code inspector, said the laptops will allow them to do much of that record-keeping in their cars.

He said the laptops, which already are in use, should save each of 11 inspectors an hour a day and will enable them to inspect more sites.

The grant also helped the Planning Department, which employs the inspectors, to buy eight more digital cameras and to improve some computers in the Planning Department's offices, Denker said. — Rick Ruggles

Keno employee gets probation

A former Big Red Keno employee was sentenced Thursday to five years of probation for her role in a scheme in which workers at the Omaha keno operation took money after figuring out a glitch in the game.

Douglas County District Judge John Hartigan Jr. also ordered Honoree J. McGinnis-Hurt, 39, to pay \$10,000 in restitution to Big Red Keno.

Her attorney, Christopher Lathrop, said McGinnis-Hurt has a gambling problem that prompted the theft.

The Carter Lake woman was one of four employees charged in the scheme. The other three are awaiting trial.

Prosecutors say they took advantage of a glitch that allowed them to place bets after the first five keno balls had dropped. — Todd Cooper

Car hits cruiser; officer injured

An Omaha police officer was taken to Methodist Hospital as a precaution Thursday night after being involved in a two-car accident near 13th and Cass Streets.

Officer Andrew Passo said the officer, whose name was unavailable, was northbound on 13th Street in a police cruiser about 9:30 p.m. when his car was struck by a Cadillac that was westbound on Cass Street.

Investigators determined that the driver of the Cadillac failed to yield for a red light, Passo said. The Cadillac driver, who was alone, refused medical treatment.

The accident is under investigation. — Kevin Cole

Event to defray transplant costs

A breakfast to help defray medical expenses for Krystle Quakenbush, who will receive a kidney from her mother next month, is scheduled from 8:30 a.m. to noon Sunday.

The fundraiser will be held at the IBEW Union Hall, 13306 Stevens St.

Krystle, 22, is just out of college and works as a dental hygienist. She receives dialysis three times a week, four hours each visit.

Shelley Camarillo, Krystle's mother, said the transplant is scheduled for Jan. 4.

Admission is \$5 for adults and \$3.50 for children ages 12 and under.

To make a donation to the fundraiser, call Shelley Camarillo at 981-1787. Donations also are being accepted for Krystle Quakenbush at any U.S. Bank branch. — Abe Winter

Council OKs pond for Bluffs store

A pond will be the main outdoor feature of the Bluffs Bass Pro Shops.

This week the City Council signed off on the pond feature east of the Bass Pro building. The company had proposed a large wetlands area at a lower cost but decided to go with the pond. — Tom Shaw

NEBRASKA

Students allegedly had sex at school

LINCOLN — Two students have been ticketed for public indecency for allegedly having sex in a hallway at Lincoln Southeast High School while about 15 other students watched.

A 19-year-old man and 17-year-old girl were ticketed Wednesday for the incident that allegedly happened Tuesday afternoon, said Officer Katherine Finnell, a Lincoln police spokeswoman.

A Lincoln Public Schools spokeswoman said that the students were punished but that confidentiality rules prohibited her from explaining specific consequences. — AP

Court orders new sentence for sex offender

■ An original prison term was based on a tougher law that was passed after the crimes were committed.

By LESLIE REED
WORLD-HERALD BUREAU

LINCOLN — The Nebraska Supreme Court today refused to give the Douglas County Attorney's Office a second chance at a plea bargain that turned out to be a better deal than expected for a convicted child molester.

Peter Alba, originally charged in October 2003 as a repeat sexual offender for sexual contact with two children in 1997, pleaded no contest to two counts

of first-offense sexual assault of a child.

The judge, the prosecutor and his public defender all thought the crime was a Class II felony, which carries a penalty of up to 50 years in prison.

Judge Michael Coffey sentenced Alba, 63, to 15 to 25 years.

However, it turned out that the crimes were committed in January 1997, before a new law toughening sentences for child sexual assault was passed. At

that time, the crime carried a penalty of no more than five years in prison.

The Attorney General's Office argued that Douglas County prosecutors should be allowed to re-negotiate the plea bargain because of the "mutual mistake."

But the Supreme Court declined to overturn the plea bargain and said Alba should be re-sentenced based upon the lower penalty range.

The unanimous opinion was written by Judge Lindsey Miller-Lerman.

Alba's attorney, Casey Quinn, said the sentence seemed strange when he reviewed the case after Alba contacted him after being sentenced.

Quinn said he believes a double mistake was made, because it is first-degree sexual assault on a child — which involves penetration — that carries a penalty of up to 50 years in prison.

Alba, however, pleaded no contest to first-offense sexual assault on a child — which involves touching but not penetration. That offense carries a penalty of up to five years in prison, even under current law.

"I can see how they made this error, I can see it plain as day," Quinn said.

Quinn said it's rare for the courts to make such a mistake. He's seen it only once before in 22 years as an attorney in Nebraska.

Regents want to rethink graduation rate targets

By BILL HORD
WORLD-HERALD BUREAU

LINCOLN — University of Nebraska regents on Thursday postponed setting graduation rate goals.

Regents said students' differing circumstances should be

taken into account. Some graduate easily within six years, but others work or serve long internships with the intention of taking longer.

The board asked administrators to offer ways to measure graduation progress besides comparing rates at the separate

campuses with peers.

The regents met to discuss yearlong strategic planning designed to set goals, find ways to measure progress and improve accountability.

In an effort to attract top faculty, the regents set a goal of achieving salary levels at the

midpoint of peers at all campuses by 2009.

Doing that would cost about \$44 million more per year.

"The quality of the faculty directly relates to the salary they are paid," said Harold Maurer, chancellor of the NU Medical Center.

Marine: Iraq vet met death on hometown street

Continued from Page 1

About 2:15 a.m. Thanksgiving Day, after leaving a downtown bar, Zimmerline noticed that tempers had flared between two friends on the town's main street. Zimmerline intervened, trying to play peacemaker.

"He stepped between them, and Brian got pushed," family spokesman Bob Rodgers of Mason City, Iowa, told mourners.

"That led to a fall. He hit his head and suffered a skull fracture. This fall turned out to be fatal," Rodgers said.

"I've heard many people ask, 'Why, why, why?' I've done it myself. How could God let this happen to us, how?"

Beau Reha, 23, who graduated in 2001 with Zimmerline, was arrested last week on suspicion of involuntary manslaughter. His family declined to comment Thursday.

Adair County Attorney Clint Hight predicted that it will be at least a week before he decides whether to file charges. Witnesses are still being interviewed.

At the funeral, Rodgers said Zimmerline told him that he joined the Marines because he wanted his life to make a difference for others.

"Did he?" Rodgers asked. "I say yes."

Rodgers told the packed gymnasium that Zimmerline was an organ donor, benefiting five seriously ill patients.

He told the crowd of Zimmerline's dedication to his country.

In July 2002, Zimmerline enlisted in the Marine Corps.

In 2004, he provided humanitarian aid to tsunami victims in Indonesia and Sri Lanka. In Iraq, he was a weapons specialist. He worked road security,

setting up roadblocks and searching vehicles. He also hunted for the "most wanted" among Saddam Hussein's regime and helped capture a high-ranking official.

In the coming months, Zimmerline had planned to settle into his new assignment: training Marine reservists in Des Moines.

The Rev. Annette Kruse of the United Methodist Church in Anita, Iowa, urged mourners not to be bitter or hateful.

"In the end, a tragic accident made the difference," Kruse said, then addressed his parents: "Kevin and Denise, you raised a son who had a heart for people, he found his place in the Marines, fighting for the rights and peace of all people."

After the funeral, classmate Blake Schnormeier, 23, talked about the loss of one of his best

friends.

"Brian was very well-liked. There was not anybody who didn't like him," he said.

"Beau, he was a good kid, too," Schnormeier said of Reha, another member from their graduating class of about 35 students. "He never meant to kill him. It happens. I'm sad it happened. I miss him (Brian) a lot."

Reha works at a fencing company north of Adair.

Marlene Wheatley, owner of Hair Unlimited, said both Zimmerline and Reha came from good families.

"As a small town, we stick together very well in tragic situations like this," she said. "Beau and his family are getting a lot of support. No fingers are being pointed."

"It was an accident that you can't take back. After today, we move forward."

Missing: Girl, 12, hasn't been seen since Tuesday

Continued from Page 1

Amber wiping makeup off her face. To her family, that means that she planned to go home because she likely would have left the makeup on to hang out with friends.

Her father said he didn't like Amber to wear makeup. He said the bus video appears to show

foul play was involved. He declined to say what theory police had for her disappearance.

Police spokesman Chris LeGrow said this morning that police have no evidence to suggest

Authorities are urging people with information to contact investigators at 444-5600, 444-5636, or to call 911.

Michael Harris said the bus video also shows a boy getting

off the bus at the same stop as Amber.

He said police have interviewed the boy. The boy said he went in the opposite direction as Amber. Amber was going toward her home, according to her father.

Band: Holiday Bowl bid for NU would be a bonus

Continued from Page 1

Playing for Nebraska fans did not factor into Kellett's decision to accept the invitation.

"I didn't have any clue that this was even a possibility until a few days ago," Kellett said.

If Nebraska is invited to the Holiday Bowl, the trip could be-

come a family affair for Kellett, whose sons Justin and Kyle both play in the University of Nebraska-Lincoln band.

Senior and drum major Jenna Hamilton is excited about the trip, regardless of whether the Huskers go. Many members of

her extended family live in San Diego.

"Some of them will come to the parade, and some will come to the game," Hamilton said. "Some of them have never seen me play before."

Medicaid: Major revisions to program proposed

Continued from Page 1

either go without care or put the financial burden on the low-income person, the health care provider or counties.

Nelson said the short-term steps recommended in the plan would not be enough to make the Medicaid program fiscally

sustainable.

He said the report doesn't specifically call for adopting a defined contribution plan, but those are the only ones currently available that have fixed costs.

The overhaul plan will be de-

livered to the Legislature and the Governor's Office today.

Nelson said the report calls for legislation to enact the short-term recommendations and to continue the policy discussion about restructuring Medicaid.

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Bullying: Booklet has tips

Continued from Page 1

Educators and Community Through Theater). It uses theater to teach students about relational aggression, dating violence, physical bullying and peer pressure.

She plans to hand out Sher-reen's booklet to elementary and middle school students

who see the play on relational aggression. About 30,000 copies were printed.

"These are lifelong issues," Newman said. "I hope (the booklet) serves as a stimulus for people to think about things differently and talk about them."



Omaha World-Herald

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Three friends of Amber Harris — from left, Brittney Patterson, left, La'Terra Patterson and Tyshae Windom — were among about 100 people at a candlelight vigil for the missing 12-year-old Tuesday at 20th and Pinkney Streets, where Amber was last seen Nov. 29.

KILEY CRUSE/THE WORLD-HERALD

Candles glow for missing girl

Amber Harris' family clings to hope that she'll be found

By KEVIN COLE

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Standing beneath an umbrella with tears rolling down her cheeks, Melissa Harris issued a plea to her missing daughter.

"I love you, Amber. I want you to come home," she said. "Mommy misses you. Daddy misses you."

Melissa Harris was speaking to her 12-year-old daughter, Amber Harris, who has been missing since Nov. 29.

Amber was last seen that day stepping off a school bus about 5:45 p.m. at the corner of 20th and Pinkney Streets, four blocks from home. The seventh-grader had taken the late bus home from Beveridge Magnet Center, 1616 S. 120th St.

About 100 people gathered at that same corner at 5:30 p.m. for a candlelight vigil. Fliers with Amber's picture were distributed, prayers were offered and songs were sung.

Omaha attorney LaVon Stennis Williams presented the Harris family with a \$1,000 check to go into a reward fund established last week by the family.

The \$1,000 donation from the Delta Epsilon Omega chapter of the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority increases the reward for information leading to the location of Amber to \$2,000.

Donations can be made at any First National Bank of Omaha branch.

Michael Harris, 40, said his family is confident that Amber will be returned to them soon.

"We have hope, and we're not giving up," he said. "Baby, we love you, and we want you home with us where you belong."

He said the two-week ordeal has been "a roller coaster" of emotion, but he was heartened by the "awesome" turnout despite gusting winds and driving rain.

Wesley Dacus, a teacher at Nathan Hale Middle School, said he braved the rain to attend the vigil even though he doesn't know the Harris family personally.

"My sympathy goes out to their family," Dacus said. "I think it's important that the parents know we are with them whether we know them or not." See Amber: Page 2

Override backs bill on prostitution

■ But a proposal to toughen penalties, supported over Mayor Fahey's objections, still faces many obstacles in the Legislature.

By JOSEPH MORTON
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Omaha has officially thrown its support behind a proposal to make felons out of habitual prostitution offenders.

But the mayor continues to oppose the measure, which faces a number of obstacles in the Nebraska Legislature.

The City Council voted 5-2 Tuesday to override Mayor Mike Fahey's veto of its resolution supporting State Sen. John Synowiecki's bill. His proposal would raise repeat prostitution offenses, which are now misdemeanors, to the level of felonies.

Synowiecki, of Omaha, plans to introduce the legislation in the session that starts in January.

"Our neighborhoods are suffering," Synowiecki told the council, referring to the damage that prostitution inflicts on an area.

The bill has various factors working against it, however.

This session of the Nebraska Legislature will be a short one, which can make it difficult to get any bill passed. The prostitution measure will go to the Judiciary Committee, considered a

tough body to move legislation through.

Committee Chairman Patrick Bourne of Omaha said the panel will take input at a hearing on the bill.

"I certainly understand the neighbors' desire to do something," Bourne said.

The proposal will have lots of competition for lawmakers' time. Hundreds of bills are introduced every session, and this year there will be debates on topics such as tax cuts, schools and sex offender residency.

Still, Councilman Jim Vokal urged the council Tuesday to support Synowiecki's legislation. He said it would help address a serious problem plaguing parts of the city.

Fahey disagrees.

His chief of staff, Paul Landow, said after Tuesday's meeting that turning prostitutes and those soliciting their services into felons is not a solution to the problem.

"The long-term fix is drug treatment, mental health counseling and job training," Landow said.

The exact language in Synowiecki's bill is a work in progress. See Prostitution: Page 2

Same-sex couples seek right to marry

■ Their suit argues that Iowa marriage law violates due process and equal protection guarantees.

By ELIZABETH AHLIN
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

DES MOINES — Jennifer BarbouRoske went into labor eight weeks early before delivering daughter McKinley, who had to go straight to the neonatal intensive care unit.

BarbouRoske and her partner, Dawn, sat together at the hospital day after day, waiting as the baby grew stronger.

Soon it occurred to Dawn BarbouRoske that she had no legal right to see the baby or participate in decisions regarding her medical care.

To the BarbouRoskes, that experience seven years ago brought home the importance to them of marriage.

They are one of six same-sex couples, including one from Council Bluffs, who are suing for the right to get married in Iowa.

The lawsuit, filed Tuesday in Polk County District Court, argues that a state law denying same-sex marriage violates the equal protection and due process provisions of the Iowa Constitution. See Marriage: Page 2

14 kids are a houseful

By MARION RHODES

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

The floors in Tricia Moore's living and dining room are spotless, the tables free of clutter.

No toys are scattered around the house.

All that, even though Moore, 37, is living with 14 children.

One of them is her granddaughter, 17-month-old Sade Neal. Two of them are adopted. The 11 others are Moore's biological children.

Her oldest, Sade's mother, Mattice Mayo, is 20. Moore's youngest, DeAndre, is 19 months old.

Moore is raising the children on the money she makes at her seven-hour-a-week job cleaning houses for the elderly and disabled and the child support she receives from her separated husband, who lives in California.

Moore and her children moved to Omaha four years ago. They recently traded their run-down, seven-bedroom, two-bathroom Section 8 home for a nicer five-bedroom, one-bathroom house.

Myshi'Ka, 17, said most of her siblings' toys stayed at the old house.

Six-year-old Alisa said she now has only a doll house, a Barbie doll and a toy car. Her brother Derrick, 6, claimed that he had no toys.

"I let my little brother have my car, so for Christmas, I wanna have Batman," he said, referring to the superhero action figure.

Goodfellows will help the family with a grocery voucher for a holiday meal. The World-Herald charity is raising money for its year-round emergency assistance program and its holiday food program through the end of the year.

"I always like to cook for Thanksgiving and Christmas," Moore said.

She said she is looking forward to turkey, ham, mashed potatoes and "store-bought



JAMES R. BURNETT/THE WORLD-HERALD

Tricia Moore has 13 children, two of them adopted, and a granddaughter living with her. Moore holds her youngest child, DeAndre, 19 months.

GOODFELLOWS



Donations may be sent to:

World-Herald Goodfellows
World-Herald Square
Omaha, NE 68102

Or donate at OMAHA.COM

Contributions today of \$8,499 boost The World-Herald Goodfellows total to \$168,053.71.

Balance forward \$159,554.71

- \$3,000 Boone Brothers Roofing.
- \$1,000 Bill and Leona Kern.
- \$500 In memory of Mike Drummy, by anonymous.
- \$360 John and Ruth Szarad.
- \$300 Fran and Louie Blumkin.
- \$250 Vann Realty Co.; in memory of Joe and Marjorie Konopik, by Gene and Lois Konopik, Plattsmouth.
- \$200 LaRue Coffee; Barbara F. Lashinsky; Tom and Pat Kielty.
- \$173 Emily, Anna, Carolyn and Laura Rouw.
- \$150 In memory of Capt. Joel Eric Cahill, by Martin, Anastasia and Eleonora Petersen; in memory of Mary Colleen Totusek, by Jeff Totusek.
- \$110 Matt, Kate and Beth.
- \$100

The Omaha Woman's Club; Grace Harada; the McCann family; Les and Heather Longmire, Holdrege; Mr. and Mrs. Tim E. Witty, Elkhorn; anonymous, Petersburg; anonymous, Schuyler; anonymous.

\$75 In memory of son Tjarbe, by John and Trish Rand, Missouri Valley, Iowa.

\$51 Linda S. Mohr.

\$50 Ronan and Carol Mickels; Rodney and Gemma Smyser; Aloys Transfer Inc., West Point; in memory of Harlan and Larry, by Vivian Norton, Imperial; in memory of cousin Sophie Amick, by Maggie, Grace, Jack and Charlie Neary and Joseph Houlihan; in honor of Jessie and Snapper, by Wanda G. Jackson; in memory of Tom, by anonymous, Howells.

\$35 Harriet O. Nutty.

\$25 Stan and Judith Wilson; Don and Kathy Piksa; Bernadine Montgomery, Papillion; Mr. and Mrs. Alan Woofler, Imperial; Doug and Pat Scott, Fremont; in memory of Jackie Clark, by William Clark; in memory of Boomer, by the Long children; anonymous, Essex, Iowa.

\$20 Nell and Albert Wilson; Dean and Heloise Bresley, Ord; Robert G. Smallfoot, Nebraska City; in memory of loved ones, by anonymous, Schuyler.

\$15 In memory of Pat Erlbacher, by anonymous, Honey Creek, Iowa; anonymous, Broken Bow.

\$10 JoAnn Perron; Jeanne Edwards, Papillion; Joe Baumert, Denver.

\$5 John J. Kersigo.

Today's total \$8,499.00

Total to date \$168,053.71

Gingerbread passion builds fragile beauty

Passion. For Eduardo Millan, it started with the cover of a magazine. He was 14 years old, at the grocery store with his dad, waiting in the checkout lane.

When Eduardo's eyes landed on the magazine, something inside of him stirred. He picked it up, he couldn't put it down. He had to have it.

Fortunately, his dad agreed to buy it for him — the holiday gingerbread issue of McCall's.

Fantasy.

That's why you build gingerbread houses, says Eduardo, now 37. As a child, he used to wish he could shrink himself small enough to climb inside a gingerbread house and explore.

Now the gingerbread houses he builds are so large and elaborate that a child almost could.

Eduardo built his first house the Christmas he bought the magazine, 1982.

The house was sloppy and crooked, and he iced on too much snow. But Eduardo's parents thought it was wonderful.

They took lots of photos. They made it their holiday centerpiece. His four brothers vied



Rainbow Rowell

for the chance to smash it when the holidays were done.

Romance.

Gingerbread is transient. It's fragile.

There's something tragic, Eduardo says, about pouring your heart into

a house, knowing that it won't last more than a few months. Knowing that it will end up in the trash. (It won't even be eaten.)

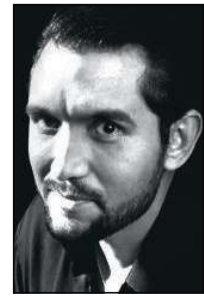
In the old days, at his family's house in San Diego, he couldn't even watch the house come down. "I'd disappear for three hours, and when I'd come back, the house would be gone. No questions asked."

But knowing that his work is born doomed just stokes Eduardo's creative fires. (Those fires are always burning. Eduardo also paints, sings and acts in local theater.) Every year is an opportunity to make his houses

See Rainbow: Page 2



MARCO ROSSETTI



The gingerbread houses created by Eduardo Millan, above, grow more elaborate each year. This year's, left, was so big that he had to move the furniture out of his dining room to make it fit.

Briefly

METRO AREA

South High student accused of assault

A male student at Omaha South High School has been arrested on suspicion of sexually assaulting a female student.

Omaha police arrested the male student Monday and booked him into jail. He had not been charged.

The 18-year-old, a junior at South, is accused of sexually assaulting a 17-year-old under a stairwell after class let out for the day. The incident occurred after 3 p.m., police said. The 17-year-old reported the matter to a police officer at the school the next morning.

The school staff immediately began an investigation, said Omaha Public Schools spokeswoman Luanne Nelson.

No witnesses had been found, making the investigation more difficult, Nelson said.

If a student is charged with a crime, she said, the student code of conduct requires expulsion.

The 18-year-old has not been in class since the incident was reported, Nelson said.

— Jennifer Greff and Michaela Saunders

Blaze damages Omaha home

A fire at an Omaha home Tuesday caused more than \$100,000 in damage.

Steve Cormack and his wife, Rocio, were in the house at 6906 N. 53rd St. when the fire started in the basement. They were outdoors when firefighters arrived.

Steve Cormack was treated for smoke inhalation at an Omaha hospital before returning to talk to firefighters. His wife wasn't hurt.

The fire, which was reported shortly after 8:30 a.m., spread to the siding, Battalion Chief Steve Ausdemore said. Investigators were trying to determine the cause of the fire. Damage estimates were \$70,000 to the house's structure and \$35,000 to the contents. — Abe Winter

Storm-tossed hound lost in Bellevue

One of the 43 dogs brought to Omaha for care after Hurricane Katrina was seconds from being secure in a Bellevue home.

But the 2-year-old hound mix, named Maggie, bolted from her new owners. Officials at the Nebraska Humane Society, which cared for the dog, are worried that it might freeze to death.

"This was kind of a pet project for people on our staff, so we're worried sick about it," said Pam Wiese, spokeswoman for the Humane Society.

The tan and black dog is thin and probably couldn't survive too many days or nights outdoors, Wiese said. The dog has no ID tags but has a microchip. Only one dog brought to Omaha after the hurricane remains at the Humane Society. Forty-one dogs have either been returned to their owners or adopted.

If you have information on Maggie, call the Humane Society at 444-7800. — Abe Winter

Bond issue will be on May ballot

Voters will be asked to approve a \$103 million bond issue under a series of ordinances unanimously approved Tuesday by the Omaha City Council.

The ordinances authorize the city to place the bond issue before the voters in May.

Officials have described the bonds as crucial to funding an updated capital improvement plan that includes sewer separation projects, park renovations and new road construction. — Joseph Morton

Cecil Hicks quits mayor's Cabinet

Cecil Hicks resigned as Omaha's city personnel director Tuesday to return to private industry at Woodmen of the World Life Insurance Society.

Hicks was part of the original Cabinet assembled by Mayor Mike Fahey in 2001. At the time, Hicks was the high-

est ranking black in Fahey's Cabinet.

Woodmen, where he previously worked, approached him to be director of operations within its human resources department, Hicks said. Hicks and his wife are expecting their first child.

Fahey plans to name an acting director for the Human Resources Department in January.

— C. David Kotok

Search is on for dog that bit boy

The Nebraska Humane Society is asking for the public's help in locating a dog that bit a 12-year-old boy Sunday night.

According to police, the boy was playing with his brothers in the backyard of his house near 45th and Fort Streets when a dog attacked him.

The dog was in the hedges and the other boys ran, but Elijah Miller, who is partially blind and partially deaf, didn't hear the dog.

Tiffany Miller said her son had to get more than 30 stitches on his face.

Mark Langan, vice president of operations for the Nebraska Humane Society, said animal control officers are looking for the black and brown dog of an unknown breed. If the dog isn't found in 10 days, Elijah will have to get rabies shots.

Those with information about the dog should call the Humane Society at 444-7800.

— Jason Kuiper

NEBRASKA

Web site brings holiday to troops

A Web site aimed at spreading holiday cheer to Nebraska troops serving overseas was launched Tuesday by U.S. Sen. Ben Nelson.

The site will host video greetings to the troops from family, friends and community members. Individuals can either e-mail a video greeting or stop by Nelson's Omaha office, where staff members can record a greeting and post it on the site.

"With all the debate in Washington over when to bring the troops home, we wanted to bring some of home to the troops overseas," said David DiMartino, a spokesman for the Democratic senator.

The site can be found at <http://bennelson.senate.gov/hometownstoheroes/index.cfm>. Nelson's Omaha office, at 7602 Pacific St., will film greetings until Jan. 15. Anyone interested is asked to stop by Monday through Friday, from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

— Tim Elfrink

IOWA

Accountability sought in lab mess

DES MOINES — State officials said they are working to determine who is to blame for the conditions that led to frozen pipes and \$250,000 in water damage at Iowa's new crime lab.

The \$52 million laboratory complex opened in June on the Ankeny campus of Des Moines Area Community College. Last Wednesday, water pipes froze and burst in two of the five buildings.

The metrology lab — a weights and measures facility used by the State Department of Agriculture — and a building used by the Iowa Department of Public Safety for criminal investigations had water damage, said Deb Madison-Levi, an Iowa Department of Administrative Services spokeswoman.

Earl Walls and Associates of San Diego served as a laboratory consultant for the preliminary design of the complex.

A joint venture between HDR Inc. of Omaha, Rock Island, Ill.-based KJWW Engineering Consultants and Cedar Rapids-based Shive-Hattery Inc. provided the architectural and structural, mechanical and electrical and civil engineering services for the 175,000-square-foot complex, Madison-Levi said.

A spokesman for Shive Hattery referred questions about the project to HDR. Calls to the company were not immediately returned Tuesday. — AP

The Record

MARRIAGE LICENSES

DOUGLAS COUNTY

- Tien M. Le, 46, and Chi X. Huynh, 46.
- Ryan J. Butler, 25, and Brandie M. Dunn, 23.
- Doran J. Post, 37, and Mary S. Gleason, 38.
- Michael A. Ballard, 49, and Jami E. Pollock, 29.
- Dale E. Leimbach, 52, and Rebecca S. Harnack, 46.
- David F. Preston Jr., 19, and Kymberlie A. Bennett, 19.
- Nicholas R. Petrick, 24, and Amy J. Kohls, 21.
- Matthew B. Boehm, 24, and Kendra D. Weigelt, 23.
- Doni G. Harris, 38, and Alissa L. Axford, 24.
- Roman Mejia Dimayuga, 22, and Anayeli Vargas Perez, 18.
- James B. Anderson, 74, and Judy M. Baumgart, 56.
- Jaime A. Hernandez, 43, and Xenia E. Polanco, 23.
- David A. Corbin, 37, and Cheryl L. Whitney, 41.
- Grant S. M. Foster, 22, and Sarah M. Lanphier, 22.
- Terry L. Klahr, 50, and Celmira Ortega-Decuena, 49.
- Anthony D. Bachmann, 19, and Elizabeth A. Morrissey, 20.
- Charles T. Shrum, 27, and Jacquelyn S. Davis, 30.
- Jose G. Barragan Diaz, 24, and Ana L. Agular Cisneros, 20.
- Donald K. W. Logan, 46, and Therese J. Smiley, 41.
- James W. Basile, 41, and Sheila S. Pedersen, 50.
- Terrelle L. Marion, 20, and KayLisha L. Taylor, 19.

- Jose A. Martinez, 29, and Maria de Lourdes Reyes-Juarez, 19.
- Christopher G. Johnson, 27, and Kebra J. Miller, 24.
- Tyrie L. Fant, 30, and Kamilah S. Cunningham, 28.
- Jose M. Ruelas, 79, and Valeria S. Moreno, 50.
- Larry J. Patton, 48, and Amy L. Hoile, 27.
- Cory C. Hurt, 23, and Nora R. Jacinto, 30.
- Kurt R. Krueger, 39, and Ambar I. Hidalgo Gonzalez, 31.

SENTENCINGS

Listing includes fines of \$100 or more, jail sentences or probation.

DOUGLAS COUNTY COURT

- Jacob Palermo, 21, 2007 Grandview Ave., Bellevue, \$150 fine for possession of marijuana, one ounce or less; possession of drug paraphernalia.
- Timothy J. Cubrich, 19, 1032 Homer St., \$300 fine for negligent driving.
- Travis L. Schuppan, 24, 1110 N. 29th St., \$600 fine, one month in jail for second-offense driving under the influence of alcohol; possession of marijuana, one ounce or less.
- Yun H. Howard, 55, 640 N. 46th St., \$100 fine for leaving accident, failure to furnish information.
- Joshua D. Sinsheimer, 20, 667 N. 59th St., \$200 fine for minor in possession of alcohol, giving false information to a city official.
- Lawrence Richardson, 56, 3014 N. 28th Ave., three months in jail for violating protection order, damage to property, disorderly conduct.
- Calvin C. Kendrick, 46, 3162 Arcadia St., one month in jail for driving during suspension.

Prostitution: Bill wording still being worked out

Continued from Page 1
gress. The most recent draft would make prostitution and its solicitation a felony after an offender's third conviction.

Councilman Franklin Thompson voted for the override only after receiving assurances from Synowiecki that he will look at revising the bill and make the fifth offense, not the third, into a felony.

Synowiecki said after the

council meeting that he plans to make that change to the bill.

Vokal and Councilmen Dan Welch, Garry Gernandt and Chuck Sigerson also supported the override. Councilmen Frank Brown and Jim Suttle voted against it.

Brown said he voted against the override because Synowiecki does not have funding lined up for rehabilitation of offenders.

The council also voted Tues-

day 6-1 to support legislation that would allow the city to seize vehicles used to solicit prostitution. Brown was the only councilman to vote against it.

Fahey has yet to decide whether to veto the council's support of the towing proposal, but it could be included in Synowiecki's bill.

Synowiecki said he will be looking for money for drug treatment and rehabilitation. He said he hopes that by the time

the bill is introduced, he will have Fahey's support.

Landow said the mayor is eager to work with Synowiecki on finding state funding for treatment but will not support legislation that raises prostitution offenses to the level of a felony.

In Iowa, prostitution is an aggravated misdemeanor punishable by up to two years in prison. The level of the offense does not change with multiple convictions.

Amber: Family thanks all who have helped search

Continued from Page 1
This is about all of us."

Melissa Harris, 42, thanked all those who have aided the search for her daughter, especially the police.

"I want to thank the Omaha

Police Department for the all the work and overtime they have put in," she said. "They are to be commended."

The search will go on, Melissa Harris said, no matter the weather or length of time her

daughter is missing.

"I'm exhausted, but we have to keep going," she said. "There could be a blizzard out here and we'd go on."

Amber Harris is 4-foot-8, weighs 120 pounds and was last

seen wearing light blue jeans, a black and white windbreaker and K-Swiss shoes.

Anyone with information about her whereabouts should call investigators at 444-5600 or 444-5636, or call 911.

Marriage: Six gay couples file suit in Des Moines

Continued from Page 1

"This case is exclusively about going to a government clerk and asking for a license to marry the person you love and want to spend your life with," said attorney Camilla Taylor, who represents the couples.

"This case is about government's obligation to treat everybody fairly."

Taylor is a staff attorney for Lambda Legal, a national gay-rights group.

Three of the couples spoke at a press conference in Des Moines about their reasons for joining the lawsuit.

They said although they want recognition for their long-term relationships, they also want government agencies, insurance companies, hospitals and employers, among others, to provide benefits equal to those offered to heterosexual couples.

"I just really want to be able

to protect my future family," said 31-year-old Reva Evans, a substance abuse counselor from Council Bluffs. "We believe that we should be treated fairly, like all the other couples that are currently legally married."

Evans and her partner, Ingrid Olson, 27, have been together for nearly eight years.

The other couples in the lawsuit are from Urbandale, Cedar Rapids, Decorah, Iowa City and Sioux City.

Former Iowa Solicitor General Dennis Johnson also is representing the couples. Johnson said he expects the case to reach the Iowa Supreme Court.

The Iowa Family Policy Center said the lawsuit is an attempt to circumvent the will of the people.

"It's obvious from the interest and attention around the country that everyday citizens care deeply about this issue and want

the opportunity to vote on it," said Chuck Hurley, the organization's president.

"It's not something that a few, frankly, autocratic, historically out-of-touch judges should be allowed to foist on the millions and millions of regular folks who care deeply about their families. That's what Massachusetts did. Now Lambda's asking the Iowa Supreme Court to do the same."

Iowans may get a chance to vote on the issue, but not for more than a year.

A bill that would allow voters to consider a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage passed in the Iowa House this year. But before it can be put before voters, the bill must pass two General Assemblies. The Iowa Senate rejected a similar amendment in 2004.

Iowa Senate Democratic leader Mike Gronstal of Council

Bluffs said although he opposes same-sex marriage and thinks most Iowans oppose it as well, the current law is sufficient.

"I am confident that the courts will uphold the current law," Gronstal said in a statement. "No further legislative action is necessary at this time."

Nebraska voters in 2000 approved a constitutional amendment banning marriage and civil unions for same-sex couples. U.S. District Judge Joseph Bataillon overturned the amendment, and that ruling is on appeal.

Bataillon's ruling did nothing to change the status of gay marriage in Nebraska. It was not allowed before the ban's adoption, and it remains against the law.

Lambda Legal is working on similar lawsuits in California, New Jersey, New York and Washington.

Rainbow: Gingerbread houses grow elaborate

Continued from Page 1
bigger, more fantastic, more perfect.

That's what this year's house is. Perfect.

And huge. He had to move the furniture out of his dining room to make room for it.

Eduardo has been fine-tuning his gingerbread and icing recipes for 23 years. His gingerbread walls are perfectly straight. All 66 windows are glazed and square.

You can't find a recipe or a blueprint to build a house like this. Eduardo adjusts his technique every year, based on trial and error. (Find his treasured gingerbread recipe at Omaha.com.)

His houses were relatively simple until 1986. That year, he was so taken by a house he saw

in a magazine — it was a gingerbread house contest winner — that he tracked down the winner and called to ask for advice.

She was surprised to get a long-distance phone call from an 18-year-old guy, asking about gingerbread. But when she realized that Eduardo was sincere, she started sharing trade secrets.

Emboldened by her advice, Eduardo got ambitious in 1987. His houses since then all look as if they could be found in the same spectacular neighborhood.

There are towers, double porches, balconies and showy stained-glass bay windows.

He starts planning his holiday house, sketching and making templates, as early as September. The actual baking takes

place the Friday after Thanksgiving.

This year, he worked from 7 a.m. to midnight that day, then every hour he had available for the next week and a half.

It wasn't enough. Next year, he says, he's going to take time off from his job as a technical support analyst at First National Bank so that he has six solid days to work.

Tradition

Eduardo has no sense of time passing when he's putting the house together. He even forgets to eat (which is something, considering how good his house smells, like cinnamon and ginger).

His mother used to bring him lunch. She would hold a plate of Thanksgiving leftovers under his nose until he snapped out of his creative fog.

Working on the house feels like painting or sculpting, Eduardo says. As he works, he thinks of all the houses that have come before, all the Christmases.


When the house is done, it stays in his dining room. Eduardo has never considered entering his work into a gingerbread show. He's afraid it would break.

He does invite friends to see it, and he sends photos home to his parents.

Before one year's house is done, he starts thinking about what he will do with his next house, how he can make it bigger and more beautiful.

There will always be a next house.

"When you've nurtured a passion this long," he says, "it just becomes a part of you."

The  that hasn't changed.

FIVE DAY FORECAST FOR THE METRO AREA

Today	Tonight	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday
Mostly cloudy 42° Wind: NW at 12-25 mph Sunrise 7:49 a.m.	Becoming partly cloudy 22° Wind: NW at 8-16 mph Sunset 5:04 p.m.	Times of sun and clouds 45°/27° Wind: SSE at 4-8 mph Sunrise 7:49 a.m. Sunset 5:04 p.m.	Chance of a shower 46°/28° Wind: ESE at 12-25 mph Sunrise 7:50 a.m. Sunset 5:05 p.m.	Clouds break for sun 48°/25° Wind: WNW at 10-20 mph Sunrise 7:50 a.m. Sunset 5:06 p.m.	Clouds and limited sun 48°/24° Wind: ESE at 12-25 mph Sunrise 7:50 a.m. Sunset 5:07 p.m.

REAL FEEL TEMP®

The exclusive AccuWeather composite index of effective temperature based on eight weather factors.

Highest today	30°
Highest Saturday	45°
Highest Sunday	34°
Highest Monday	40°
Highest Tuesday	36°

LOCAL ALMANAC

Omaha through 9 p.m. yesterday

Temperature

High	36°
Low	32°
Normal high	32°
Normal low	13°
Record high	61° in 1999
Record low	-20° in 1917

Hourly Almanac

Time	Temp	RH	Wind	Time	Temp	RH	Wind
5 p	36°	89	N7	5 a	32°	100	SW7
6 p	33°	95	N6	6 a	32°	100	SW3
7 p	33°	95	NNW7	7 a	32°	95	SW6
8 p	35°	92	N8	8 a	32°	100	SE9
9 p	35°	92	N10	9 a	32°	100	SSE12
10 p	35°	92	NNW7	10 a	32°	100	SSE10
11 p	35°	92	NNW8	11 a	33°	100	SSE14
Mid. 34°	96	NNW6	Noon	33°	100	SSE13	
1 a	33°	95	N7	1 p	34°	96	SSE14
2 a	33°	95	NW5	2 p	35°	92	SSE12
3 a	33°	95	CLM0	3 p	35°	95	SSE16
4 a	32°	100	SSW3	4 p	35°	92	SE14

*RH- Relative Humidity

Precipitation

24 hrs ending 9 p.m.	0.04"
Month to date	0.81"
Normal month to date	0.88"
Year to date	23.43"
Normal year to date	30.18"

REGIONAL WEATHER FORECAST

Nebraska Panhandle: Partly sunny and breezy today. Partly cloudy tonight. Breezy and turning warmer tomorrow with a mixture of clouds and sunshine. Times of clouds and sunshine Sunday.

South-Central Nebraska: Mostly cloudy and mild today. Partly cloudy tonight. Partly sunny, breezy and mild tomorrow. Clouds and some sunshine Sunday with a couple of showers possible.

North-Central Nebraska: Mostly cloudy today. Partly cloudy tonight. Breezy and milder tomorrow with partial sunshine. Considerable cloudiness Sunday with some snow or flurries possible.

Southeast Nebraska: Mostly cloudy today with a mild afternoon. Becoming partly cloudy tonight. Times of clouds and sunshine tomorrow; mild. Rather cloudy Sunday with a shower possible.

Northeast Nebraska: Mostly cloudy today with a few flurries. Becoming partly cloudy tonight. Breezy and mild tomorrow with times of clouds and sunshine. A shower possible Sunday; mostly cloudy.

Western Iowa: Mostly cloudy today with a few flurries in the north. Becoming partly cloudy tonight. Breezy and mild tomorrow with times of clouds and sunshine. Mostly cloudy Sunday with a shower possible.

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.

Chadron	44/17	Hyannis	44/19	Valley	43/23	Bennington	43/21
Ogallala	44/19	North Platte	48/14	Elkhorn	43/23	Omaha	42/22
McCook	55/17	Broken Bow	46/18	Springfield	43/25	Council Bluffs	42/26
						Bellevue	42/24
						Beatrice	46/23
						Rock Port	44/26

MOON PHASES



MIDLANDS CITIES FORECAST

City	Hi	Lo	W	Fri.	Sat.	
Alliance	42	17	pc	54	23	pc
Ames	39	25	c	39	24	pc
Cedar Rapids	38	25	r	38	24	pc
Columbus	45	17	c	47	23	pc
Des Moines	41	27	c	42	27	pc
Falls City	46	24	c	48	33	pc
Grand Island	47	21	c	47	25	pc

ROAD REPORTS

Dial 511 or these numbers:

City	Hi	Lo	W	Fri.	Sat.	
Imperial	49	23	c	50	25	pc
Kearney	48	21	c	48	24	pc
Lincoln	46	20	c	47	25	pc
Mason City	36	24	c	33	22	pc
McCook	55	17	c	54	24	pc
Norfolk	42	19	c	40	24	pc
North Platte	48	14	c	48	22	pc

RIVER LEVELS

City	Flood	Wed.	Yest.
S. Sioux City	30	9.53	9.46
Decatur	35	16.88	16.89
Blair	29	10.18	10.17
Omaha	29	10.74	10.71
Plattsburgh	26	12.27	12.45
Nebraska City	18	5.44	5.49
Gavins Pt.	1208	1208.30	1208.30

NATIONAL WEATHER FORECAST

Weather(W): s-sunny, pc-partly cloudy, c-cloudy, sh-showers, t-thunderstorms, r-rain, sf-snow flurries, sn-snow, i-ice

Shown are noon positions of weather systems and precipitation. Temperature bands indicate highs for the day. Forecast high/low temperatures are shown for selected cities.

National Extremes
High: 88° at Laredo, TX
Low: 9° at Gunnison, CO

WORLD CITIES

City	Hi	Lo	W	Fri.	Sat.	
Albuquerque	53	32	s	59	35	pc
Anchorage	30	20	pc	30	20	sf
Austin	70	37	pc	72	50	pc
Atlanta	60	46	s	60	42	pc
Atlantic City	50	27	pc	44	32	r
Baltimore	50	30	pc	46	34	r
Billings	38	23	pc	48	30	c
Bismarck	33	19	sn	32	13	pc
Boston	46	28	r	38	30	sn
Brownsville	84	61	pc	80	64	pc
Buffalo	32	24	c	34	26	sn
Casper	39	32	pc	50	30	pc
Cheyenne	42	27	pc	54	29	pc
Charlotte, SC	63	42	s	69	42	sh
Charleston, WV	46	36	c	48	31	r
Charlotte	58	40	s	60	38	sh
Chicago	38	32	r	38	28	sf
Cincinnati	49	36	c	44	28	r
Columbia, MO	48	31	r	47	33	pc
Dallas	68	40	pc	73	55	s
Denver	47	25	pc	60	30	pc
Detroit	36	30	c	36	28	sn
Duluth	25	22	sn	27	16	c

ROAD REPORTS

Dial 511 or these numbers:

City	Hi	Lo	W	Fri.	Sat.	
El Paso	64	40	s	67	44	pc
Eugene	53	44	r	50	40	sh
Fairbanks	6	-10	s	1	-12	c
Flagstaff	52	26	pc	47	32	sh
Fargo	29	17	sn	26	15	c
Green Bay	32	27	sn	35	21	sf
Helena	35	23	pc	43	20	c
Honolulu	82	68	s	82	70	pc
Houston	76	48	pc	72	52	s
Indianapolis	48	34	sh	40	28	sn
Juneau	38	30	r	37	28	sn
Kansas City	50	28	c	48	36	pc
Las Vegas	60	44	pc	60	47	sh
Little Rock	65	38	sh	63	45	s
Los Angeles	66	52	c	64	52	r
Louisville	48	38	c	49	34	r
Memphis	60	43	sh	60	46	pc
Miami	76	64	s	80	67	s
Milwaukee	35	31	sn	37	26	sf
Minneapolis	31	25	sn	33	20	c
Nashville	58	39	sh	52	33	pc
New Orleans	74	57	pc	72	60	c
New York	48	34	pc	42	36	r

WORLD CITIES

City	Hi	Lo	W	Fri.	Sat.	
Norfolk	51	36	s	56	40	r
Oklahoma City	60	34	pc	62	42	s
Orlando	72	50	s	78	60	s
Philadelphia	50	32	pc	46	36	r
Phoenix	72	42	pc	72	47	pc
Pittsburgh	38	32	pc	43	32	sn
Portland, ME	41	17	r	30	20	pc
Portland, OR	50	44	r	49	42	sh
Reno	52	39	sh	52	31	r
Sacramento	54	51	r	56	49	sh
St. Joseph	46	26	c	47	32	pc
St. Louis	49	34	r	49	34	pc
Salt Lake City	45	34	r	47	33	r
San Antonio	73	43	s	74	56	s
San Diego	65	54	pc	63	56	r
San Francisco	59	55	r	58	52	sh
Santa Fe	51	25	pc	54	28	pc
Seattle	48	42	r	49	40	sh
Tampa	72	56	s	76	60	pc
Topeka	50	25	c	49	35	pc
Tucson	72	42	pc	72	47	pc
Washington, DC	52	34	pc	48	36	r
Wichita	56	28	c	55	37	s

More money to remove lead sought in Iowa

DES MOINES (AP) — Two Iowa lawmakers say they will push for an increase in the amount of money spent to help low-income residents remove lead paint from their homes.

State Reps. Ed Fallon and Wayne Ford, both D-Des Moines, said Iowa should increase the amount spent on lead removal by about \$1 million.

The lawmakers said that could ultimately save taxpayers money by eliminating chronic medical problems linked to lead exposure.

About 7 percent of Iowa children have high lead levels in their blood. That is about four times the national average. In some older Des Moines neighborhoods, the rate is as high as 13 percent.

Fallon, who is seeking the Democratic nomination for governor, said he will propose legislation to increase money for the lead removal program when the Legislature convenes in January.

Ford has proposed similar legislation for several years, resulting in incremental increases in spending.

Lead can be ingested by children who eat paint chips or inhale paint dust from floors, walls and windows. High lead levels can cause kidney problems and brain damage, according to the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

It is believed that more than a third of Iowa children who have high levels of lead in their blood aren't tested because parents aren't aware of the problem.

Ford said some of the increase in spending should be used for education and testing. He wants all Iowa children to be tested for lead before they start school.

Des Moines revisits bowhunting buffers

DES MOINES (AP) — Bowhunters may be allowed to get closer to homes in selected residential neighborhoods to kill deer, which have become a pest to some homeowners.

The City Council may consider such a plan in response to complaints about deer that wander into neighborhoods, damaging trees and landscaping.

"It's becoming a very serious issue," Councilwoman Christine Hensley said.

Hensley has asked city park officials to re-examine the 200-foot buffer around homes in areas where experts say the deer population should be reduced.

She said the proposal raises safety issues, but that hunters who are allowed into the targeted areas would have to pass safety tests to get a special permit.

The deer population in some areas of Polk County has more than doubled in the past three years, despite controlled hunts to reduce the numbers.

The problem isn't just about trees and landscaping. The number of traffic accidents involving deer has jumped more than 65 percent in 20 years in Polk County. Statewide, 37 drivers have been killed in deer-car collisions since 1994.

A handful of Iowa cities, including Johnston, West Des Moines, Dubuque and Coralville, allow bowhunting in targeted areas. Council Bluffs considered a similar ordinance but delayed a decision.

Des Moines has allowed bowhunting in targeted areas since 1998, but only during specific times in late fall or winter. The current bowhunting season ends Jan. 10.

If the Des Moines City Council reduces the buffer zones, the change probably would take effect next year.

Willie Suchy, who specializes in deer control for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, said he is not aware of any accidental shootings by bowhunters in the past 25 years.

Vigil marks month since girl vanished

By JASON KUIPER
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Melissa Harris accepted hug after hug Thursday night. Fellow mothers and pastors took her hand and spoke to her in low tones near the front pew in Prince of Peace Church.

The church, at 7818 Raven Oaks Drive, was the scene of a vigil for Amber Harris, the 12-year-old daughter of Melissa and Michael Harris, on the one-month anniversary of Amber's disappearance.

"I believe she is alive," Melissa Harris, a streak of mascara smeared down her cheek, softly told a well-wisher.

Melissa and Michael Harris

sat in the front pew and listened to the prayers and pleas of various pastors from the metro area. A pair of poinsettias — a reminder of Christmas — were visible at the front of the church. It will still be Christmas, Melissa Harris said, whenever Amber comes home.

"It makes it easier," she said of the community's support. "It makes your spirit full."

Amber was last seen Nov. 29, when she stepped off a school bus at Florence Boulevard and Pinkney Street and headed to her home a few blocks away, at 16th and Spencer Streets.

Omaha police have said there have been no confirmed sightings of Amber since.

More than 50 people attended Thursday's vigil service to pray, sing and offer support. Pastors asked for Amber's safe return. The Rev. Thomas L. Smith Sr., pastor of Paradise Baptist Church, even offered his phone number, asking anyone who has Amber to call him and he would come get Amber and take her home.

"A chain has been broken in this family and it needs to be mended," he said.

Anyone with information about Amber is asked to call Omaha Police at 444-5636 or 444-5600. The girl's family has established a reward fund that has grown to \$2,800. Donations to the fund can be made at any First National Bank of Omaha branch.

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Burger King to miss loyal customer

Robert Devine always had it his way at lunch. His kids would try to talk him into something healthier or fancier, something *different*, but all Bob ever wanted for lunch was Burger King.

He had eaten there almost every day — Burger King is closed on Christmas — for the last 17 years.

The Devine family even started having their birthday parties and holidays at Burger King because that was the only place their father wanted to go.

When Bob died last week at 88, one of his favorite Burger King managers served as a pallbearer.

Why Burger King? The Devines wondered about that themselves over the years. The best answer seems to be, because Bob liked it.

He started eating lunches at Burger King after his wife, Dorothy, died in 1989. Dorothy had cooked every meal at home.

"Maybe he just didn't want to cook," said son Ed Devine. "Maybe he just didn't want to eat alone."

Bob, who retired from running the business office at Clarkson Hospital, quickly developed a routine.

He went to the Burger King at 108th Street and Mockingbird Drive every day at 11 a.m., and he always ordered the same thing. Two hamburgers, lettuce and tomato only. Diet Coke.

"He would always give us his order," said friend and pallbearer Gary Ratekin. "As if we didn't know."

Gary was an associate general manager at that location for the past few years. (He was transferred in January.) He talked to Bob for five or 10 minutes every day. They would talk about the news, the economy, about Bob's life and his family.

Everyone at Burger King knew Bob. "He was a legend long before I got to that store," Gary said. They knew him by his red cardigan, red cap, the booth he liked by the window.

They liked him so well, they didn't charge him extra for the lettuce and tomato.

In the last few years, Bob couldn't even be talked into eating at a different Burger King location. "Now, I'm home," he'd say when he walked in.

The rest of the Devine family, truth be told, got a little tired of burgers and fries.

Ed never thought it was healthy, eating so many hamburgers. "He told me he had vegetables: lettuce and tomato."

Bob's oldest daughter, Rosemary, was the only one who could get him to eat somewhere else, said Patricia Burge, the second of the six Devine kids. "She had a little more power."

After Rosemary died in 1998, Pat said, no one else tried to get Bob out of his routine.

If they wanted to have lunch with Bob, they went to Burger King. If they had something to celebrate, they went to Burger King. "We had birthday parties and holidays there," Ed said. "We brought in the New Year there many times."

One Thanksgiving, when the entire family went to Patricia's home in Kearney, Bob just couldn't imagine having turkey for lunch.

He took Pat aside and said, "I'd think I'd like to just get a hamburger." The family couldn't find a Burger King open in Kearney, so Bob settled for McDonald's. He wanted burgers for dinner that night, too.

Bob stopped driving last summer, and the big question, Pat said, was — how would he get his daily Burger King?

When they couldn't arrange for a family member to take him every day — a Burger King manager actually offered to pick Bob up and take him home — the Devines ended up hiring someone to help on weekdays.

"He knew what he wanted," Pat said. "We knew what he wanted. We wanted to keep him happy."

Omaha nixes county merger plan

■ The City Council votes down the megaboard proposal, while leaving the door open for future consideration.

By TOM SHAW
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

A megaboard for the City of Omaha and Douglas County is megadead, but the idea of one day merging the two governments remains alive.

The Omaha City Council voted unanimously Tuesday to kill a resolution calling for a merger of the council and the Douglas County Board.

Council President Dan Welch, however, said he and other councilmen would sit down with County Board members and Mayor Mike Fahey

next week to discuss the future of any city-county mergers. Fahey's office proposed the meeting even before the council voted down the megaboard proposal.

The proposal was approved by a majority of the County Board last week.

City Council members soundly rejected the concept, saying that such a merger would be illegal and that no details were given as to whether the move would save money.

The council instead passed its own resolution calling for mergers if they comply with the law, cut costs and create efficient operations.

That vote was 6-1, with Councilman Frank Brown voting against. After the meeting, Brown said someone needs to come forward with a real plan for merger.

Councilmen Garry Gernandt and Chuck Sigerson said constituents they spoke with were not wild about the idea of a combined board.

"This is another level of government that we do not need," Gernandt said.

Councilman Franklin Thompson said the Legislature needed to be involved with the issue of city-county merger. Thompson said the state law allowing for governments to form joint boards is unclear on issues such as voter representation and taxation.

The megaboard would have been made up of the seven City Council members and the seven

See Merger: Page 2

Pupils help Mr. Allan propose to Miss King



Dan Allan, a special education teacher at Millard's Norris Elementary School, proposed Tuesday to Kristen King, a preschool teacher, by having their pupils help.

Romance 101: Lesson learned

By VERONICA STICKNEY
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Kristen King told Dan Allan to surprise her. He did.

King, a preschool teacher at Millard's Norris Elementary, had no idea she would find her future husband on one knee when she entered his classroom Tuesday morning.

"I thought we were reading a story — that's all," King said minutes after the engagement on Valentine's Day.

Her left hand shook as she showed off her new half-carat, princess-cut diamond ring.

Allan, a special education teacher, had been planning the proposal for a month. He knew he wanted their students to help. So he knew he would do it at school.

A para-educator brought King's students to Allan's classroom, while Norris Principal Peggy Brendel side-tracked King in her office.

The children giggled and fidgeted as Allan arranged them into a group near the door. They practiced turning

around a sign that read, "Miss King, Will You Marry Me?" They were excited to be in on the secret.

Allan, 26, paced, hands in the pockets of black slacks. He flashed a few nervous, dimpled smiles and finally pulled the ring box from his left pocket, cupping it in his right hand.

He and King, 27, had picked out the ring at Nebraska Diamond three weeks earlier. But his sweetheart didn't know he had purchased it and wasn't expecting him to pop the question until next fall.

"It's been kind of a whirlwind," Allan said.

The two met last school year when Allan was a student teacher at Norris, but they really hit it off five months ago at the school carnival. King asked him to run the cotton candy machine with her.

Now, they are planning a June 23, 2007, wedding at Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church.

As for the story King was expecting?

The classes did read one: "Secret Valentine."



Phil Johnson/The World-Herald
Dan Allan and Kristen King... a match made at Millard's Norris Elementary.

Girl's bookbag may have been found

By KEVIN COLE
AND JASON KUIPER
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITERS

A bookbag that may belong to a 12-year-old Omaha girl who has been missing since Nov. 29 was found Tuesday near 21st and Lake Streets.

Omaha Police Sgt. Teresa Negron said someone called 911 about 5 p.m. to report that they had found the bookbag and believed it was the property of Amber Harris.

Police took the bag from the area about 10:45 p.m. They had been searching a wide area for evidence.

Officer Chris LeGrow, a police spokesman, said the bag was found in a container behind a house at 2115 Lake St. but did not say what was inside the bag.

Police searched that house, as well as an open garage next to the home and an abandoned house just to the west of it.

Police also searched an alley on the east side of the house, where a number of garbage cans were located, and a large open lot east of the alley.

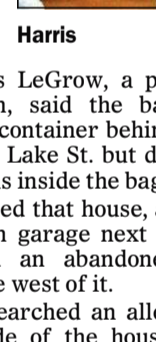
"We are investigating, but there's nothing else I can tell you," Negron said.

Amber was last seen getting off her school bus at 20th and Pinkney Streets, about 10 blocks from where the bookbag was discovered.

Amber's father, Michael Harris, said Tuesday that he was called to the area where the bookbag was found to look at it, but he said it was hard to tell if it belonged to his daughter because it was cold and dark out.

Harris said police would continue conducting their investigation and they hoped to know more in the morning.

Anyone with information can call (800) 78-CRIME or the Omaha Police Department at 444-5600. Reward funds for information about the girl now exceed \$13,000.



Harris

Lincoln school bond issue passes

By VERONICA STICKNEY
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Nearly 100 supporters of Lincoln Public Schools' \$250 million bond issue celebrated at district headquarters Tuesday night.

They were happy with the results of Tuesday's special election: 63 percent of voters — 23,455 for versus 13,677 against — gave their OK for the district to issue \$250 million in bonds and use an additional \$64.6 million it has saved for new construction, heating and air-conditioning projects and other renovations.

"It was a clear mandate, and it speaks to the quality of our

Bond vote

The \$250 million bond issue for Lincoln Public Schools passed Tuesday.

23,455 voters, or 63 percent, approved the measure.

13,677 voted no.

Inside

A measure on all-day kindergarten moves forward in the Nebraska Legislature. Page 8

community," said Dennis Van Horn, Lincoln's associate superintendent for business.

District officials will immediately start finalizing plans,

which they hope to present to the school board in the next two weeks.

First up likely will be Lincoln Southeast High School, Van Horn said. The 1950s building will undergo a major renovation, including a classroom addition, and receive new air conditioning and heating.

Peter Katt, an attorney and former school board member who had criticized the proposal, said he wasn't surprised it passed and didn't plan any further action.

"The voters spoke," he said. "They have authorized the board of education to spend \$250 million. I've spent enough of my time on this."

See Bonds: Page 2

Judge awards \$3,500 to owner of seven slain dogs

By ELIZABETH AHLIN
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

The police chief of Hamburg, Iowa, violated local law when he took seven dogs out to the country to shoot them, a magistrate ruled Tuesday.

Fremont County Magistrate Dennis James decided in favor of the dogs' owner in a civil lawsuit brought against the City of Hamburg and Police Chief Nick Millsap.

James awarded \$3,500 to the dogs' owner, former Hamburg resident Elizabeth Brock.

Millsap and the city are liable for the small claims judgment, which includes

\$1,500 for property damage and \$2,000 for "intentional infliction of emotional distress."

Brock, who had asked for \$5,000 in the lawsuit, said she was relieved that the ruling was in her favor.

"At least I got something for my anguish," she said.

Millsap declined to comment on the ruling.

Millsap could face a misdemeanor criminal charge for the shootings. The case is being investigated by the Pottawattamie County attorney.

The dogs were killed Sept. 14 after Millsap and Jarid Means, a Hamburg police officer,

See Dogs: Page 2

Late Ally Milder, Cabela's to be honored

By ABE WINTER
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

The late Ally Milder and sporting goods retailer Cabela's are being honored for their outstanding advocacy for children and families in Nebraska.

The Nebraska Children and Families Foundation will present the annual Grace Abbott Awards March 16 at the Embassy Suites in Lincoln.

Milder, who died last summer

at the age of 50, was a Republican candidate for the 2nd District U.S. House seat in 1990. She also was a director of government affairs for Union Pacific Railroad and chief counsel to U.S. Sen. Chuck Grassley on his Subcommittee on Courts and Administrative Practice.

The award particularly recognizes her advocacy efforts in the Nebraska Legislature, including passage last year of a bill that made high-quality pre-

school programs more available to at-risk 4-year-olds.

Cabela's, which is based in Sidney, Neb., is being recognized for its philanthropic efforts. Those efforts have included the Make-A-Wish Foundation, outdoor education projects at Lake McConaughy, and "Hooked on Fishing, Not on Drugs," a program designed to educate children about the dangers of substance abuse and promote healthy outdoor activities.

Company employees also donated to Hurricane Katrina relief through the American Red Cross.

The Grace Abbott Awards were created in 2003. Abbott, a Grand Island native, was instrumental in authoring federal policies in the early 1900s that still protect children from abuse and neglect.

For more information or for banquet tickets, visit www.NebraskaChildren.org or call (402) 476-9401.

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KILEY CRUSE/THE WORLD-HERALD

Among these people searching Sunday for clues to the Nov. 29 disappearance of 12-year-old Amber Harris are two of her teachers. They are combing an area south of Cornish Boulevard between 16th Street and Carter Lake.

Seekers of Amber clues return empty-handed

By MARION RHODES
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Melissa Harris watched with a sense of both resignation and reassurance as volunteers trickled into the Opportunities Industrialization Center on Sunday evening.

The Omaha building at 2724 N. 24th St. was the headquarters of a two-day search for clues in the disappearance of her daughter. Amber Harris, 12, has been missing since Nov. 29.

Whether searchers found any leads was uncertain Sunday afternoon.

"I couldn't tell you, honestly, whether or not we found anything that was truly valuable," said Brad Dennis, director of operations for the KlaasKids Foundation. The national group, which focuses on stopping crimes against children, organized the search.

Melissa Harris said none of the items that people showed her appeared to belong to her daughter.

More than 300 volunteers fanned out Saturday and Sunday to search northeast Omaha neighborhoods stretching to the outskirts of Carter Lake. Am-



Jeremy Tiede, left, and Ray Christo find a bag containing a dead cat west of Carter Lake on Sunday. Many volunteers wore pink ribbons made by Amber's mother. Pink, Melissa Harris said, is her daughter's favorite color.



ber's parents waited at the center for news.

"This part of it is very easy because it's very calm and reassuring," Melissa Harris said.

Searchers marked items they found — clothes, shoes, blankets — with orange tape. Investigators from the Omaha Police Department, which had recommended the search areas, were on hand to look at the findings.

Dennis said similar search efforts by his foundation have re-

vealed important leads in investigations.

To Melissa Harris, the most valuable clue so far in her daughter's disappearance was the discovery of Amber's book bag on Feb. 15 near 21st and Lake Streets.

Amber's parents were awed by the weekend turnout and the community support they continue to receive. "It's changed my whole outlook on life," said her father, Michael Harris.

A talent show at Omaha Cen-

tral High School on Saturday raised \$300 for a reward fund for information about Amber. The fund now exceeds \$19,000, Amber's mother said.

The family is planning another vigil at 6 p.m. March 14 at Trinity Lutheran Church, 6340 N. 30th St.

"We're gonna keep going," Melissa Harris said.

People with information about the case are asked to call (800) 78-CRIME or Omaha police at 444-5600.

OPD to aid neighborhood watches

March is Neighborhood Watch Group Month, and the Omaha Police Department is promoting a series of activities to get residents involved in crime prevention.

Activities will culminate with the annual Salute to Safety expo on April 22 at the Westroads Mall.

This month, meetings will be held at each of the city's four precincts to help residents start, strengthen or revitalize neighborhood watch groups.

The schedule:

■ Northwest precinct, to be held at Omaha Home for Boys Family and Youth Center, 4343 N. 52nd St., Thursday, 7 p.m., with Capt. John Friend and Bridget Howell, crime prevention specialist.

■ Southeast precinct, 25th and Vinton Streets, March 14, 7 p.m., with Capt. Mark Martinez and Ofelia Robles, crime prevention specialist.

■ Northeast precinct, 4316 N. 30th St., April 11, 6:30 p.m., with Capt. Denise Cousin and Stacy Henry, crime prevention specialist.

■ Southwest precinct, to be held at Westside High School, 87th and Pacific Streets, April 13, 7 p.m., with Capt. Dave Baker and Pam Ehrhart, crime prevention specialist.

A better 13th Street focus of workshop

Improvements to the 13th Street business district are the focus of a free public workshop Saturday from 10 a.m. to noon at Rebel2 Studios, 1217 S. 13th St.

The workshop sponsor is Omaha Main Street, a nonprofit organization advocating revitalization of traditional neighborhood business districts.

A panel discussion will include neighbors, property owners and representatives from local businesses, institutions and city government.

Workshop participants will walk along 13th Street from Pacific to Martha Streets to evaluate building appearances, safety and economic conditions.

1,000 spectacles collected for needy

Project Abre Los Ojos (Project Open Your Eyes) collected more than 1,000 pairs of used eyeglasses last month for needy residents of the Dominican Republic.

The project was coordinated

by a nonprofit organization of Creighton University medical students and doctors.

The response was so good, organizers are planning to sponsor an annual collection, said Dr. Jelyn Lu, who initiated the campaign after seeing the need while on a medical mission to the Dominican Republic.

PULSE to resume support meetings

PULSE is resuming its monthly grief support group meetings for mothers who have lost a child to homicide.

Free community meetings will be held on the first Tuesday of each month, beginning this week, from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the Omaha Public Schools' Teacher Administrative Center, 3215 Cumming St., in Room 5062.

Organizer Sadie Bankston said the nonprofit group plans to open future meetings to fathers, siblings and other relatives of homicide victims. Plans also call for seminars with the Omaha Police Department to improve dialogue between the police and relatives of victims.

For more information about PULSE, call Bankston, 706-1861.

Association meeting to feature speaker

The Joslyn Castle Neighbor-

hood Association will meet at 7 p.m. next Monday at the Cornerstone Mansion Inn, 140 N. 39th St.

The speaker will be Ron Schaefer, who will discuss long-range plans of the University of Nebraska Medical Center to move Saddle Creek Road to the west, from Dodge to Leavenworth Streets.

Maple Village meeting Thursday

The Maple Village Neighborhood Association will meet at 7:30 p.m. Thursday at Maplewood United Methodist Church, 3535 Maplewood Blvd.

On the agenda is the citizens' patrol report on neighborhood crime issues and trends.

Deer Park meeting focus is United Way

The Deer Park Neighborhood Association will meet at 7 p.m. Wednesday at the Sheet Metal Workers Union Hall, 3333 S. 24th St.

The program will focus on services provided by United Way.

Information for this column must be submitted two weeks in advance of publication. Mail to: Sibyl Myers, World-Herald, 1334 Dodge St., Omaha, NE 68102. E-mail to sibylmyers@cox.net, fax to 345-0183 or phone 444-1061.

More of what you want.

Salute to the Troops

NIE Week Activities

Newspaper in Education Week
MARCH 6 - 10, 2006

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Welcome to Newspaper in Education Week - a week when teachers around the world are encouraged to put away their textbooks and use newspapers as teaching tools.

This year's lesson plans are tied to the NIE Week Contest "Salute to the Troops." Each day this week we will explore one of the five branches of the military that our young men and women have joined to serve our country - the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, the Marines, and the Coast Guard.

NIE WEEK - Lesson 1
the ARMY

The Mission. The Army exists to serve the American people, to protect enduring national interests and to fulfill national military responsibilities. Its mission is enduring: to provide necessary forces and capabilities to the Combatant Commanders in support of the National Security and Defense Strategies. The Army is charged to provide forces able to conduct prompt, sustained combat on land as well as stability and reconstruction operations, when required. Moreover, the Army is charged to provide logistical and other capabilities to enable other Services to accomplish their missions.

According to www.army.mil, the United States Army was formed on June 14, 1775 when 10 companies of riflemen were authorized by a resolution of the Continental Congress. *The Army celebrates its birthday on June 14th each year which is also the same date _____ is celebrated. How old will the Army be in 2006?*

Today, the Army remains the largest branch of the military. The Office of the Secretary of Defense's most recent figures show that there were 497,584 active Army personnel as of November 30, 2005. The Army is known most for protecting and defending the United States and its interests by way of ground troops, armored tanks, artillery, attack helicopters, and tactical weapons. In addition to the active duty members of the Army, the Army Reserves and the Army National Guard were created for times of emergency and other needs. The main difference between the Reserves and the National Guard are that the Reserves are managed by the federal government while each individual U.S. state oversees its National Guard units. However, as you have learned during the Gulf War and the current war in Iraq, the President of the United States or the Secretary of Defense can activate and call the National Guard members into service during times of need. There are currently many Reservists and National Guard members from all over the U.S. serving in Iraq and elsewhere in the world.

During World War I and World War II, the term "infantry" was used frequently. *Look up the word in the dictionary to see what "infantry" means. What is the main mode of travel for the "infantry"?*

As a member of the infantry, discuss what you think would be your most important piece of equipment - either apparel or weaponry - and explain to your class why you think that your choice is the most important.

Ironically, the Air Force was originally a Corps of the Army and remained the Army Air Corps until 1947. It was as part of the Army that the Enola Gay was selected to drop the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan in August 1945. None of the crew knew they were carrying the atomic bomb until they were in the air on their mission. Did you know that the Enola Gay was built in Omaha and was handpicked from the assembly line in Omaha by Col. Paul Tibbets, the pilot of the atomic bomb mission? *Conduct research to find out how the name "Enola Gay" was selected as the name of the plane. Then look up the name of the company that built the "Enola Gay" in Omaha.*

Source information from: www.nebraskastudies.org and About.com U.S. Military site at: <http://usmilitary.about.com>.

Omaha World-Herald
Right here. Right now.

Look for Lesson 2 in tomorrow's paper!

Briefly

METRO AREA

'Wanted' segment to focus on Amber

Crews from the TV show "America's Most Wanted" are planning a trip to Omaha to tape a segment on Amber Harris, the 12-year-old girl who has been missing since Nov. 29.

The nationally syndicated show will be in town early next week.

Part of the filming will include re-creating Amber's last day at Beveridge Magnet Center. The show has permission from the Omaha Public Schools to film at Beveridge and on a Laidlaw school bus.

Luanne Nelson, an OPS spokeswoman, said the filming will not disrupt the school day.

Amber last was seen leaving a bus stop at Florence Boulevard and Pinkney Street and starting a four-block walk home.

Her book bag was discovered a month ago in a trash container outside 21st and Lake Streets. The bag was in good condition and contained some of her clothing. —Lynn Safranek

Third victim in SUV accident dies

A third person died Monday from injuries suffered in a weekend SUV crash.

Sherry Harris, 25, of Omaha died Monday morning at Creighton University Medical Center, Omaha police said.

Two others — driver Bennie Harris, 36, and Tyree Pope, 27, both of Omaha — died Sunday following a one-vehicle rollover accident at the U.S. Highway 75 and Storz Expressway junction.

All three had been thrown from the Chevrolet Blazer that left the roadway and rolled several times in a grassy median about 2:20 a.m.

Another passenger, Shontel Wells, 26, was taken to Creighton in critical condition early Sunday. No information was available on his condition Monday. A fifth passenger, 21-year-old Patrick Strong, suffered minor injuries, police said.

No one had been using seat belts, police said. —Susan Szalewski

Gas leak leads to Bluffs evacuation

A Council Bluffs neighborhood was evacuated Monday evening after a natural gas leak was discovered at a house at 3324 Avenue A, a fire official said.

No one was home at the time, Council Bluffs Assistant Fire Chief Matt Thomas said.

Someone reported the problem to the utility company, Aquila, which summoned firefighters about 8 p.m. Residents of about a dozen homes in a one-block area around the leak were evacuated for about two hours, Thomas said. Police blocked off traffic.

The leak was found outside the house, underground, directly below a meter, Thomas said. Electricity, gas, cable and phone service were cut off to the house and some of the surrounding homes to prevent igniting the gas, the assistant chief said.

Firefighters ventilated the house until it was safe to occupy. About a dozen firefighters helped at the scene, Thomas said. —Susan Szalewski

Phone donations to help soldiers

A tax-preparation service with offices in Omaha is helping to collect used cell phones as part of a national effort to enable soldiers stationed in

war zones to call home.

Although it's a year-round collection, the focus at the Omaha sites of Liberty Tax Service will be from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. today.

The Omaha sites are 3919 Cumming St., 84th Street and West Center Road, 90th Street and Military Road and the Kmart at 50th and L Streets.

The phones don't go directly to the soldiers; rather, they are sent to a Florida company — RMS Communications Group in Ocala — for recycling. In exchange, soldiers get phone cards of 100 minutes each, said Mike Long, a Liberty manager in Omaha.

The concept for the program, Cell Phones for Soldiers, came from two children in Norwell, Mass.

Liberty has collected more than 42,000 phones since 2004, Long said. —Abe Winter

NEBRASKA

Whiteclay stores keep liquor licenses

LINCOLN — Three Whiteclay stores will be able to continue selling beer, despite complaints filed by American Indians and others.

The Sheridan County Board of Commissioners passed a resolution Monday automatically renewing liquor licenses for the three stores in the town of Whiteclay, which is just across the border from the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota.

Alcohol is banned on the reservation, and activists have complained for years that selling beer in Whiteclay only exacerbates problems for the 15,000 Oglala Sioux living across the border. The reservation has one of the nation's highest alcoholism-related mortality rates.

American Indian activists and others rallied in Rushville last week to oppose the license renewals.

The commission could have required the three stores — Mike's Pioneer Service, Jumping Eagle Inn and State Line Liquor — to apply with the State Liquor Control Commission to have their licenses renewed.

But the commission, in its unanimous vote, cited a Nebraska Supreme Court decision that said a license must be renewed if the applicant is qualified to receive it, the store is the same as that which currently holds the license and the premises are suitable for the sale of alcohol. —AP

IOWA

Sale to preserve Loess Hills land

A piece of the Loess Hills is for sale, with the goal of preserving the property.

The Nature Conservancy is selling 45 acres donated to it by Neal and Izen Ratzlaff of Omaha. The Ratzlaffs gave the land to the conservancy with the understanding that the organization would attach a conservation easement to it before selling it.

Easements restrict development on property and are an increasingly popular tool to protect land.

Elizabeth Niven of the conservancy said the ecological value of the land will be studied before the easement is written and the land sold.

The tract, in northern Pottawattamie County, contains bur oak woodland habitat and some ridge line oak savanna. The area is targeted for protection because of its biodiversity.

The conservancy said it will use proceeds of the sale to protect additional land in the area. —Nancy Gaarder

The Record

SENTENCINGS

Listing includes fines of \$100 or more, jail sentences or probation.

DOUGLAS COUNTY COURT

■ Laura J. O'Brien, 21, 3820 Burt St., \$500 fine, one year of probation, five days in jail for driving under the influence of alcohol.

■ Thomas J. Vonriesen, 51, 9973 Hascall St., \$400 fine, six months of probation for driving under the influence of alcohol.

■ Charles Galvan Jr., 40, 4138 Orchard Ave., \$400 fine, six months of probation for driving under the influence of alcohol.

■ Megan T. Meachaley, 24, 5221 Walnut St., \$400 fine, six months of probation for driving under the influence of alcohol.

■ Mary A. Ramge, 50, 9329 Krug Ave., \$400 fine, six months of probation for driving under the influence of alcohol.

Buffett to GOP? He will for Osborne

By ROBYNN TYSVER
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Omaha businessman Warren Buffett is taking another stab at putting his financial acumen to work for a gubernatorial candidate, this time his old friend, U.S. Rep. Tom Osborne.

The pair announced Monday that the "Oracle of Omaha" would coordinate and oversee a wholesale review of state government operations if Osborne is elected governor.

Buffett, who served as an economic adviser for candidate Arnold Schwarzenegger when he ran for governor of California in 2003, also said he plans to switch political parties so he can vote for Osborne in the May 9 primary.

Buffett is a Democrat, while Osborne is in a three-way battle



for the Republican gubernatorial nomination against Gov. David Heineman and Omaha businessman David Nabity.

"It probably won't be a bad experience at all. I'll probably enjoy it," Buffett joked about his planned party switch.

Buffett also served in 2004 on a panel of economic advisers to John Kerry, the Democratic presidential nominee.

Carlos Castillo, Heineman's campaign manager, declined to comment on Buffett's agreement with Osborne. Nabity said he respects Buffett's business

expertise but thinks the investor was a poor choice to lead an overhaul of state government.

He noted that Buffett ran into early criticism as Schwarzenegger's financial adviser when he was quoted in a Wall Street Journal article as suggesting that property taxes were too low in California. Buffett later said his views were misrepresented and that his statements about the disparity in California's tax rates were taken out of context.

"Warren Buffett is a guy who doesn't mind paying high taxes, and he definitely does not feel the pain of high taxes. He's definitely not the guy I would put in charge of reform," Nabity said.

Performance audits of state government are a key talking point in the GOP race. Both Osborne and Nabity say they will appoint a team of business and

government people to look for ways to streamline and make government more efficient.

Heineman has said he supports such reviews but thinks they should be done by the Legislature, as they are now.

When Osborne was asked at a press conference about the governor's support of legislative reviews, Buffett asked to respond. He then indicated that outside help was needed for such a review to be credible.

"Self-graded exams are not the best in the world," he said.

Osborne said he plans to appoint teams of five or six people to conduct individual reviews of each of the state's major agencies during his first four months in office. Buffett will be in charge of overseeing and coordinating the various teams, Osborne said.

Governor stands alone in clash over debate

By ROBYNN TYSVER
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Gov. Dave Heineman could find himself in a debate of one if a squabble among the Republican gubernatorial candidates isn't ironed out within two weeks.

U.S. Rep. Tom Osborne and Omaha businessman Dave Nabity have agreed to participate in a March 26 debate in Lincoln,

sponsored by a student group at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Heineman refuses to take part because the proposed sponsor violates an agreement signed by all three campaigns, which said only accredited media groups would be allowed to sponsor any of the six governor debates, said Carlos Castillo, Heineman's campaign manager.

Instead, Heineman has

agreed to participate in a debate that same night sponsored by KLIN radio in Lincoln.

The first of the six debates is scheduled for 7 p.m. Sunday in the Strauss Performing Arts Center at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Nabity and Osborne said they agreed that the original arrangement among the candidates should be modified to accommodate the request from the Association of Students at

the University of Nebraska to sponsor the debate.

Castillo said neither he nor Heineman has anything against students but believe the original agreement should be honored.

"The major concern is that we said it's in the best interest that all debates be handled by independent media organizations. Everyone agreed. Everyone signed off on that. Now they want to change the rules," Castillo said.

Child: 'Murder of unborn' charge used twice before

Continued from Page 1

with assault and battery and disorderly conduct. The case was dismissed, however, because Lilly didn't show up to testify at his trial.

Prosecutor Shelly Stratman said Lilly was the only person who could identify Shackelford in court because she was the only witness. Shackelford had

left the area before police arrived that day.

Nebraska's fetal homicide law was passed in 2002. It provides for a criminal charge if a fetus dies when a pregnant woman is assaulted or injured.

Douglas County prosecutors have used the charge twice in homicides of pregnant women.

William Floyd was sentenced

to life in prison plus an additional 20 years for shooting into a house in October 2003. The shots killed 20-year-old Destiny Davis, who was several months pregnant.

In August, Bobby Moss was sentenced to 65 to 100 years in prison after being convicted of second-degree murder in the death of 17-year-old Michelle

Harlan and the manslaughter of her unborn child.

The law also was used in June 2004 in a motor vehicle case in which a pregnant woman's unborn baby died after a car accident. The woman survived.

The other car's driver was convicted of driving while intoxicated and causing the death of an unborn child.

Victims: Josh Paul survived fire with severe injuries

Continued from Page 1

Josh, who has cerebral palsy, was showing some improvement Monday, his grandmother said. A breathing tube had been taken out, at least for a while, and he could talk.

"He was just so happy to talk to his mother," Paul said. The children's mother, Amy Paul, decided it was too early to tell Josh about the deaths of his brother and sister.

Marian Paul thinks Jacob may have died trying to save his siblings, especially Josh, who had limited use of his legs.

Jacob had run to a neighbor-

ing house to seek help, then returned to his family's burning house, fire officials said.

Paul said she believes that Jessica also tried to protect Josh by covering him.

Amy Paul was not home at the time of the fire. She went out with a friend for the night, at Jessica's urging, Marian Paul said. Now the mother wrestles with the decision to go out that night, the grandmother said. "Their mom feels horrible."

Jessica and Jacob both had severe asthma, which may have contributed to their deaths, Marian Paul said.

Jessica had other medical problems. She was born with one kidney and dealt with the complications through much of her childhood, Marian Paul said. That meant missing school, so Jessica, like Jacob, was a sophomore.

Jacob was known for his smile and sense of humor. He enjoyed collecting Yu-Gi-Oh cards, going to the library and playing on the computer.

Jacob and Jessica's other survivors include two sisters, Margaret, 20, and Elizabeth, 22.

Funeral services were pending.

Funeral fund

A fund has been established at Security National Bank, 7805 Cass St., to help the family of Jacob and Jessica Paul with living and funeral expenses.

Beveridge Magnet Center also is raising money for the Pauls. Principal Cara Riggs said the school plans to buy gift cards that the family can use to buy food and clothing. Contributors can send money or gift cards to the school, 1616 S. 120th St., Omaha, NE 68144. Contributions can be addressed to Riggs.

Band: School board will vote tonight on resignation

Continued from Page 1

pending action. Clark, 43, had been at the high school since 1991. He did not return a phone call Monday.

Earlier this year, the school district asked several parents of marching band members about what happened to money collected for the band competition, said Donnell Pauley, parent of a band student.

All of the money collected for band competition admissions is supposed to be sent to the Iowa

High School Music Association, but the association did not receive any money from the 2005 competition.

In 2004, a similar competition at the school generated \$4,310 in admissions money, which was sent to the association.

Clark led about 65 members of the marching band to London for parade on New Year's Day this year. Some band parents also were asked by the district about travel arrangements for that trip, Pauley said. A signifi-

cant amount of fundraising was done for the trip.

Pauley said her husband was one of the people the district questioned. She and her husband went with their 16-year-old daughter on the London trip.

Pauley said Monday that Clark is an excellent band director and that she thinks he did nothing wrong.

She said the students and their parents were not informed by the district about Clark's res-

ignation offer. She said she heard about it from other band parents.

"It's just a real travesty," Pauley said. "The school is supposed to keep you informed about what's going on with your children, and we have been told nothing."

Ostrowski said a school administrator would visit with students and parent leaders of a band booster group later this week if the school board accepts Clark's resignation.

Cards: Program aims to give students a lesson about credit

Continued from Page 1

fer it this year, said Rachel Rezabek of the Treasurer's Office.

The program began in 2004 in New York, Kentucky, Rhode Island and Oklahoma. It has since expanded to schools in all 50 states, according to Citibank, which provides funding for the program.

The idea is to educate students before they get their first credit card or head off to college, where credit card offers flood mailboxes. More than 40 percent of college freshmen have a credit card, according to student loan lender Nellie Mae. The average credit card balance for undergraduate students is \$2,169.

"The increased availability of credit to young, less-experienced consumers has underscored the need for students to

understand how to use and manage credit," Ross said.

The program, called "The ABC's of Credit Card Finance," includes booklets for students and a teaching manual and computer presentation for teachers.

For senior Shelby Robinette, who has a credit card, the session was eye-opening.

"I didn't really know anything about interest rates, so this helps," she said. "I think I'll only use my card for emergencies now."

Students are urged to keep only one credit card and to read the fine print in credit card applications. They're advised to look for a card with no annual fee, a low annual percentage rate, a long grace period to allow plenty of time to make payments and low penalty fees.

Credit cards and college students

66 percent of undergraduate students have credit cards.

42 percent of students start their college career with a credit card. In their final year of college, 91 percent of students have at least one credit card.

Undergraduate students have an average credit card balance of \$2,169.

56 percent of college seniors have four or more credit cards.

About 24 percent of students use their credit cards to pay their tuition.

College students in the Midwest have the highest outstanding average balance, \$2,498, and the largest average number of credit cards, 4.76.

Credit card tips for students

Limit yourself to one credit card. Don't use your credit card to pay tuition. Student loans generally have much lower interest rates. Pay your credit card off fully and on time each month. Avoid exceeding your credit limit, taking out cash advances or using convenience checks, all of which can cost more in penalties, fees and interest. Be wary of annual fees and teaser rates when signing up for a credit card. Teaser rates are low introductory interest rates that may increase over time. Keep your credit card receipts so you know which charges should be added to your account. Immediately notify your bank if your credit card is lost or stolen.

SOURCES: Nellie Mae; Center for Student Credit Card Education Inc.





Amber death a homicide



Amber Harris was last seen alive Nov. 29 near her north Omaha home. There were no leads in her disappearance until her book bag was found Feb. 14.

Police confirm the remains found in a north Omaha park were those of the girl missing six months.

By Lynn Safranek and Jason Kuiper

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITERS

Nearly six months of hope were dashed Friday for the missing girl whose young face looked down from billboards and jumped off brochures.

Omaha police detectives informed the parents of 12-year-old Amber Harris that the remains discovered in a north Omaha park were those of their daughter.

The news crushed the parents, who had maintained unwavering faith that their Amber, the sassy girl who sang even while she swept the kitchen floor, would be found safe.

Police Chief Thomas Warren made the news official at a press conference late Friday afternoon.

"The remains have been identified as those of Amber Harris," a solemn Warren said. "At this point, we have not been able to determine how long the body has been in the park, nor are we able to determine the cause of death."

Amber's death, he said, is being considered a homicide because of the results of an autopsy and the condition of the

See Amber: Page 2



Amber's maternal grandparents walk toward the Harris home Friday to join other grieving family members. In the background, Dorothy Fant, a neighbor of the Harrises, hugs another mourner.

RUDY SMITH/THE WORLD-HERALD



"It's her, you guys," Melissa Harris tells reporters gathered in front of the family's home Friday afternoon. Friends and family soon arrived and consoled the crying Harris children.

RUDY SMITH/THE WORLD-HERALD

Inside

A planned vigil for Amber Harris turns into a memorial. Page 2

The Amber Harris case

NOV. 29, 2005: Amber Harris, 12, is last known to have been seen stepping off a school bus at Florence Boulevard and Pinkney Street and heading toward her home a few blocks away.

DEC. 5: A \$1,000 reward for information is established by family and friends.

DEC. 13: A candlelight vigil is held at 20th and Pinkney Streets.

DECEMBER: The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children lists Amber on its Web site as an "endangered runaway," a status based on her age and information given to the organization by Omaha police.

DEC. 29: A vigil to mark the one-month anniversary of Amber's disappearance is held at Prince of Peace Church.

JAN. 7, 2006: FBI announces that it is adding \$5,000 to the reward fund.

JAN. 10: Two billboards reading "Have you seen Amber Harris?" are donated by Waitt Outdoor and Lamar Advertising.

JAN. 29: A prayer vigil to mark the two-month anniversary of Amber's disappearance is held at Paradise Baptist Church.

FEB. 14: A book bag is found near 21st and Lake Streets. Amber's parents identify the bag, which held Amber's spare set of clothes, as their daughter's.

MARCH 1: A vigil to mark the three-month anniversary of Amber's disappearance is held at Morning Star Baptist Church.

MARCH 4-5: A national missing children's organization, KlaasKids Foundation, conducts a search. Nearly 200 people volunteer.

MAY 11: Unidentified human remains are found in Omaha's Hummel Park.

MAY 14: Autopsy begins on the remains.

MAY 15: DNA testing begins.

MAY 19: Detectives tell the Harris family that the remains have been identified as Amber's.



PHIL JOHNSON/THE WORLD-HERALD

Birgit Allen of Bellevue clutches pictures of her husband, Army Sgt. Lonnie Calvin Allen, who was killed Thursday near Baghdad, Iraq.

Widow treasures time with soldier

Sgt. Lonnie Calvin Allen's wife grieves in Bellevue over his death in Iraq.

By Tim Elfrink

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

She sat on her husband's childhood bed, his mother and father on either side, his brother standing nearby.

It wasn't a large bed, so when she clutched a photo of Army Sgt. Lonnie Calvin Allen to her chest and began crying again, Birgit Allen barely had to move to rest her head on her father-in-law's welcoming shoulder.



Lonnie Allen

"I was just glad every minute I spent with him, even if we argued, because it was the most wonderful time I've had," said Birgit, 23, as her father-in-law, Lonnie Allen, hugged her.

"At least I got to spend a little time with him. It wasn't a lot, but it was wonderful."

Lonnie Calvin Allen, 26, died Thursday near Baghdad, when a roadside bomb hit his Humvee, his family said.

Since August, Allen, who went by "Calvin," had been serving in Iraq with the 10th Mountain Division based at Fort Drum, N.Y.

Allen graduated in 1998 from Bellevue East High School, where he participated in football, track, basketball and wrestling. His athletic versatility said less about his natural ability than his resiliency, his brother said.

"He was stubborn. He got cut from the basketball team his

See Allen: Page 5

Autopsy today on body found in river

By Tom Shaw and Karen Sloan

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITERS

COUNCIL BLUFFS — An autopsy is scheduled this morning on the body of a woman found Friday in the Missouri River in southern Council Bluffs.

Police were alerted to the body about 10:30 a.m. Friday by a pest control worker who was spraying a cabin at 2917 Emil Lane in southern Council Bluffs, said Police Sgt. Jerry Mann.

The body, a white female, has

not been identified.

It was discovered along the Iowa side of the river a few miles south of Veterans Memorial Bridge. The bridge links Council Bluffs and south Omaha. The body appeared to have washed ashore near a small dock behind the cabin being sprayed.

The family of a missing Council Bluffs woman, Tracy Tribble, was awaiting word on whether the body was Tracy's. Tribble, 35, has been missing

See Body: Page 2



THE WORLD-HERALD



Police investigators work along a neighborhood boat dock where a woman's body was found Friday in southern Council Bluffs.

RUDY SMITH/THE WORLD-HERALD

Lawman oversees tough-love drug busts of 2 in his family

By Elizabeth Ahlin

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

A drug bust this week hit close to home for Sheriff Steven MacDonald in Fremont County, Iowa.

One of his daughters and a grandson were among 11 people arrested in connection with allegedly trafficking drugs around Sidney and Tabor, Iowa.

Lisa Ann Countryman, 41, and her oldest child, Kevin Daniel Countryman, 18, both of Sidney, were arrested on suspicion of sponsoring a drug gathering and possession of drug paraphernalia. Kevin Countryman was also arrested on suspicion of possessing marijuana.

Lisa Countryman said Friday she doesn't do drugs and said there was no basis for her arrest. She said her

son was not available for comment.

MacDonald said he thinks his daughter has been involved with drugs for years and said he tried to talk to her about it a few years ago.

"I forewarned her that if you don't make some lifestyle changes, we're going to be kicking your door in one of these days, and you're not going to like it," MacDonald said.

MacDonald, who said he author-

ized the investigation, did not go to his daughter's house when officers executed a search warrant Wednesday, but he was at the jail after her arrest.

"She was very tearful," MacDonald said. "It's a heart-wrenching thing, but I guess it's hard love."

Approving the investigation was "just part of the job," he said.

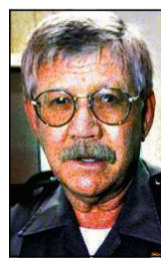
During the three-month investi-

gation, four officers arranged drug purchases and executed search warrants. MacDonald's only role was as the officers' supervisor.

Lisa and Kevin Countryman each spent one night in jail before posting bail.

Despite Lisa Countryman's assertions to the contrary, MacDonald said it had been obvious to him

See Sheriff: Page 5



MacDonald

Omaha weather



Chance of t-storms. High 84; low 51



Meet the 15 OPS teachers who won the Alice Buffett Outstanding Teacher Awards. Midlands, Page 3

A new Omaha hotel offers luxury overnight and day-care service for dogs and cats. Business



The Mount Calvary Marching Knights really know how to strut their stuff. Living

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50 cents

Digest



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Jim Henson and his wife, Jane, pose with some of the early ancestors of the Muppets — creatures from the "Sam and Friends" television show. The National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C., has opened a display about the puppets and Henson, who died in 1990 at age 53. Page 5

MAIN NEWS

Death penalty is issue in siege case

The likelihood of a guilty verdict for the only surviving hostage-taker in the 2004 Beslan school siege has turned the debate here to Russia's 10-year-old moratorium on the death penalty. Prosecutors and relatives of the 371 victims — more than half of whom were children — have asked the judge to ignore the moratorium. Others hope the defendant, if spared, will reveal who organized the attack. **Page 8**

MIDLANDS

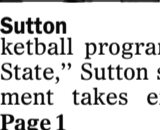
Abortions down in Nebraska

The number of abortions in Nebraska last year declined 11.5 percent from 2004, according to a report from Nebraska Health and Human Services. Physicians in Nebraska performed 3,173 abortions in 2005, 411 fewer than the previous year. The number of abortions in 2005 was half the number performed in 1990, when Nebraska reported a peak of 6,346. **Page 1**

SPORTS

Sutton retires with 798 wins

Eddie Sutton retired as Oklahoma State's basketball coach after a drunken driving accident ended a 36-year career highlighted by 798 wins and three trips to the Final Four. "This decision is about simply what's best for me and what's best for the basketball program at Oklahoma State," Sutton said. His retirement takes effect June 30. **Page 1**



Sutton

Peacock, a Popp and turkeys, too

A successful turkey hunt on a 500-acre Missouri farm near the Osage and Missouri Rivers involves a peacock and a retired coach named Soda Popp. "I don't know if he thinks he's a turkey or if the turkeys think they are peacocks," Popp says. **Page 12**

BUSINESS

New hotel caters to the furry crowd

A new hotel opened recently in west Omaha. It can accommodate about 200 guests and offers atrium rooms and luxury suites with extra amenities. Lambskin blankets cover the beds. Guests can enjoy pampering at a nearby salon

Friends, neighbors gather to mourn

■ A vigil becomes a memorial as people come to grips with the chilling reality of the death of Amber Harris.

By JASON KUIPER
AND ERIN GRACE

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITERS

It was planned as a vigil, but by late afternoon Friday it had turned to a memorial service as word spread that the remains found in Hummel Park last week were those of Amber Harris.

Faushia Weeden, Amber's classmate at Beveridge Magnet Center, wanted to show her support for the 12-year-old who sat by her in international and social studies classes.

She was one of about 50 people who came to Pulaski Park to pray and mourn. They held hands and circled the playground equipment in the park at 41st Avenue and H Street.

Then they walked to the outfield grass of the ball diamond and released pink and silver balloons that drifted into the sky as little boys played soccer on the infield dirt.

"She was my friend, and I was hoping she would be safe," Faushia said.

In Amber's neighborhood, others had held out that hope, including Dorothy Fant.

Fant said Friday that she will always remember the smiling little girl who never got a chance to grow up.

The retired hairdresser lives across the street from Amber



KENT SIEVERS/THE WORLD-HERALD

Pink and silver balloons containing Amber Harris' picture and description are released Friday evening at Pulaski Park near 41st Avenue and H Street. The event, planned as a vigil for Amber, became a memorial.

Harris' house. She can still see Amber's "cute little face." She can hear her call out still, "Hi, Miss Dorothy!"

What haunts her now is the chilling reality of Amber's final moments.

"It hurts so bad," said Fant. "I know there's some closure, but I wanted her alive. She was just a dear little kid, and we loved her."

Death had increasingly loomed as a possible end to the saga of the child whose face appeared on fliers, billboards and, each Thursday, on the cover of the Omaha Star newspaper under the headline: MISSING.

Still, when police announced the death Friday, Amber's former third-grade teacher was

struck by her own disbelief.

"Everybody talked about her like she was still alive," Shari Hess said. "That's all changed."

Hess had taught Amber — and her dad, Michael — during a 31-year teaching career at Lothrop Elementary.

She had kept vigil with Amber's parents on many evenings, including Thursday, when hope was still high.

Attorney LaVon Stennis Williams, who launched the family's first fundraiser for a reward fund and helped with the family's legal concerns, had shared that hope.

"Everyone was keeping faith that she would be located, she would be found alive," Williams said.

Those who didn't know Amber but had pitched in to help over the past several months expressed resignation Friday.

"Our hearts bleed for this family," said the Rev. Thomas L. Smith, pastor of Paradise Baptist Church, 2124 Lothrop St.

Paradise was one of several churches to hold prayer vigils for Amber.

Hess, Amber's third-grade teacher, is haunted by a life cut short.

"It's a little girl," Hess said. "She never got to grow up. She never had the chance to be somebody's mom. I don't think anybody can describe this any other way than it's a horrifying tragedy. A young, vital, sweet little girl."

Amber: Police have leads but no identified suspect

Continued from Page 1

remains found May 11 in Hummel Park. There are no suspects, he said.

Mayor Mike Fahey offered his condolences to the Harris family. "Amber Harris was a child of Omaha," he said.

Detectives gave the family the news they had hoped would never come.

A homicide detective and a detective from the special victims unit arrived at the Harris home near 16th and Spencer Streets shortly after 4 p.m.

Amber's father, Michael Harris, preceded their entrance, rushing into the living room from the front porch to warn his wife. "We've got to talk, babe," he told her. "The detectives are here."

It wasn't the detectives' first visit. Investigators stopped by the home periodically after the Hummel Park discovery to urge patience while DNA testing ran its course.

They dropped few clues about the possible identity, and Amber's mother, Melissa, continued expressing hope day after day that Amber would be found alive.

But this time was different.

The somber detectives left the home after 10 minutes, and the house was silent. After previous visits, Melissa Harris had emerged from the home to talk to reporters. This time, she did not.

Five minutes passed before Amber's 15-year-old brother, Justin, stormed out of the home, angry and crying. Michael Harris, choking on sobs, chased his son. Then Melissa Harris burst from the front door, looking in every direction for a sign of the two.

"Did he run away? Did he run away?" she said, frantic. She turned to reporters, gathered behind a fence dotted with yellow ribbons, and sobbed as she said, "It's her, you guys."

Justin and Michael Harris returned, and family and friends slowly trickled to the home. The

Help for the grieving

The Omaha Public Schools will have a crisis team and staff members at Beveridge Magnet Center today, beginning at 9 a.m., to meet with students. Amber Harris was a seventh-grader at the school at 1616 S. 120th St.

A crisis team will be at Beveridge again Monday when students arrive.

front porch that had served as a lookout for detectives became a place of grief, as friends and family consoled the crying Harris children.

As the family mourns, the police investigation moves ahead to determine what happened Nov. 29 after Amber stepped off a bus on her way home from school.

"We do not have an identified suspect," the police chief said. But the police do have a number of leads, he said.

Forensic, anthropological and archaeological experts are assisting with the investigation, as are forensic dentistry experts. They will determine how long the body had been at the park.

Warren said the skull was partially visible to the people who discovered the remains about 20 feet into the Hummel Park woods. Those people, he said, are not considered suspects and wish to remain anonymous.

An autopsy was completed Sunday, but police still are working on a preliminary cause of death.

In addition to DNA linking the remains to Amber, Warren said clothes found at Hummel Park also appeared to have belonged to the girl.

Warren defended the way Omaha police handled the investigation into Amber's disappearance.

The police asked the public for help finding Amber 26 hours after her parents reported her missing.

They released a photo of Amber, her physical description and a disclaimer: "Harris is not thought to be in danger, but due to the weather conditions and the age of the juvenile, assistance from the public in locating the juvenile is requested."

For days, police would continue repeating their belief that Amber was not in danger, saying there was no evidence to suggest an abduction had taken place.

Despite some criticisms, Omaha police will not change the way missing children cases are investigated, Warren said.

From the beginning, he said, the investigation was handled according to department policy. Nothing indicated that Amber was in danger when police first issued notice to the public that she was missing, he said.

Melissa and Michael Harris called police around 7 p.m. Nov. 29 to report their daughter missing.

Amber had called her father from a friend's cell phone to say she was coming home from Beveridge Magnet Center on the school's late bus.

A teacher who saw Amber said the girl appeared happy while she finished an assignment to make thank-you cards for her family and asked a custodian to unlock a classroom for a forgotten notebook.

Around 4:30 p.m., she and 19 other students boarded the bus for a 70-minute ride to northeast Omaha.

Near the end, Amber was seen on the bus surveillance tape wiping makeup off her eyelids and lips — a sign, her parents said, that she was preparing to come home, where wearing makeup wasn't allowed.

Amber asked the driver to let her off at Florence Boulevard and Pinkney Street, four blocks closer to home than her regular bus stop, Lothrop Magnet Center.

She got off the bus at 5:41 p.m. and walked a few blocks to

Lothrop Street, where she turned east toward her home.

It was the last anyone is known to have seen her.

That night, Omaha police searched the area around 24th and Lothrop Streets, near where Amber normally was dropped off.

In the months that followed, Melissa Harris fielded many press requests in order to keep her daughter's face in the public eye.

The family also answered hard questions about Michael Harris' 1983 rape conviction and periods of time that four of their six children have spent in foster care. Both parents said theirs was a happy home from which no child would want to flee.

Over time, anything that reminded the couple of Amber became difficult to face. Melissa Harris said she changed the station on the radio every time she heard Martina McBride singing "God's Will," a song that Amber had memorized and often belted out a cappella.

It also was hard to watch video footage of Amber stepping off her school bus on Nov. 29.

"Because she's just so real," Melissa Harris said earlier this week.

The first conclusive lead in the case was discovered on Valentine's Day when a man living at 2115 Lake St. found Amber's book bag in a cement mixer behind his home.

In the book bag were Amber's jacket, jeans and a bra.

Amber's parents believed the book bag was planted by someone, because it hadn't been there the night before and it showed no sign of wear from 77 days of winter weather.

Warren called that discovery "the biggest break in the case." The bag will continue to be processed for evidence.

Omaha police will continue following up on leads. Warren encouraged anyone with information to call Crime Stoppers at 444-7867.

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May 20, 2006 Vol. 141, Edition 199

Body: Missing woman's family plans to search today

Continued from Page 1

since May 3.

Tribble's father, John Gos-tomski, said the family was advised by police not to go to the scene of the discovery.

Tribble's stepsister Christine Gaines said the family asked police about the clothing on the body, the hair color and hair length, but investigators told them that the condition of the body made it difficult to determine those characteristics.

"We were hoping for at least some word on the identification," Gaines said. "We don't need to know the autopsy results now as much as whether it's (Tracy)."

The family still planned to go ahead with a massive search in Council Bluffs this morning to look for clues to Tracy's disappearance.

Other than gender and race, Mann declined to offer any further information about the body.

"We will continue our investigation here in Council Bluffs," he said.

The body was removed from the water shortly before 1 p.m. Friday and was being sent to the State Medical Examiner's Office in Ankeny, Iowa. The autopsy was scheduled for 9 a.m. today.

In another case, Jessica O'Grady, a 19-year-old sopho-

more at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, has been missing since May 10. The O'Grady family said authorities did not contact them Friday about the body found in Council Bluffs.

Police taped off a section of Emil Lane, as neighbors gathered to watch Friday.

This is not the first time that a body has washed ashore at Hunter Landing, a small, quiet neighborhood of riverside cabins near Gifford Road. Many of the cabins are seasonal homes, said owner Gil Hunter.

He estimated that about every 10 years a body is swept ashore.

Rich Petersen lives several

homes down from where the body was found.

"I've been here 42 years, and I think this is the fourth body that I can recall," said Petersen, who took time out from mowing his lawn Friday morning to watch as police worked along the shore.

When Debra Andrews heard from her brother, a Hunter Landing resident, that a woman's body had been found, her thoughts immediately turned to Tracy Tribble.

"I just hope it's not her," Andrews said standing outside the yellow police tape. "That's what everybody is wondering about. It's just so weird."

Omaha World-Herald



SUNRISE EDITION
FRIDAY, MAY 26, 2006

A N I N D E P E N D E N T N E W S P A P E R O W N E D B Y E M P L O Y E E S

Immigration showdown set

■ Legislation approved by the Senate goes far beyond the House plan.

By JAKE THOMPSON
WORLD-HERALD BUREAU

WASHINGTON — After weeks of passionate debate, the U.S. Senate on Thursday endorsed tougher border security, sanctions on employers, a worker ID card, a new guest worker program and a chance at citizenship for millions of illegal immigrants.

The landmark legislation, which won bipartisan approval,

marked a big victory for one of its key co-authors, Sen. Chuck Hagel, R-Neb.

The bill heads into an uncertain future in a showdown with the House, which already had passed an immigration bill limited to border security measures.

"This represents a very clear acknowledgment that we ... need to address immigration reform," Hagel said of the Senate's action. "I think the envi-

ronment is right — the winds, the barometric pressure of politics is right. And I'm hopeful and optimistic we will get a good bill."

Sen. Ben Nelson of Nebraska also played a role, as the lead Democrat pushing a bill that addressed only border security.

Nelson sounded a skeptical note as he branded the guest worker and citizenship provisions "amnesty" for those who are here illegally.

"The amnesty plan the Senate passed today will ultimately stall and with it delay any measures to secure our borders," Nelson said. "The political real-

Inside

Mexican President Vicente Fox tells California lawmakers that immigration reform will benefit both the United States and Mexico. **Page 4**

the country to possible terrorism.

The bill the House passed in December beefs up border control, proposes building a big fence along the U.S.-Mexico border and seeks to deport most of the nation's estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants. It has no guest worker or citizenship provisions.

But House GOP leaders have sent mixed signals lately about what kind of legislation they might support.

Congress is under pressure to produce an immigration bill this year, because of the pub-
See Border: Page 2

Outrage at short molester's probation

Attorney general promises appeal

Judge won't comment

By PAUL HAMMEL
WORLD-HERALD BUREAU

LINCOLN — Advocates for rape victims expressed outrage and Attorney General Jon Bruning promised an appeal after a 5-foot-1 child molester was sentenced to probation rather than prison, reportedly because of his small stature.

Angry e-mails and news media inquiries poured into Sidney, Neb., Thursday, two days after Richard Thompson, 50, was sentenced to two consecutive five-year terms of intensive supervised probation for two counts of sexually assaulting a 13-year-old girl.

"I don't care if he's three feet tall," Bruning said. "If you abuse children in this state, you will pay a price. Probation is too small a price."

"This judge made a mistake." A state prison official denied that short people are at any greater risk behind bars, although he acknowledged that convicted child rapists do face difficulties from other inmates.

"But we run safe prisons," said Steve King, spokesman for the Nebraska Department of Corrections. "An inmate, if they feel threatened, can request protective custody."

Cheyenne County District Judge Kristine Cecava declined to comment.

In announcing the sentence Tuesday, she said that although Thompson deserved a long prison sentence, the man described as weighing about 100 pounds was too small to survive long in the state penitentiary.

The judge said in court that it didn't appear that Thompson was a "hunter." A psychological examination concluded that Thompson wasn't a sexual predator. Cecava said she planned to craft a sentence that would keep him out of prison.

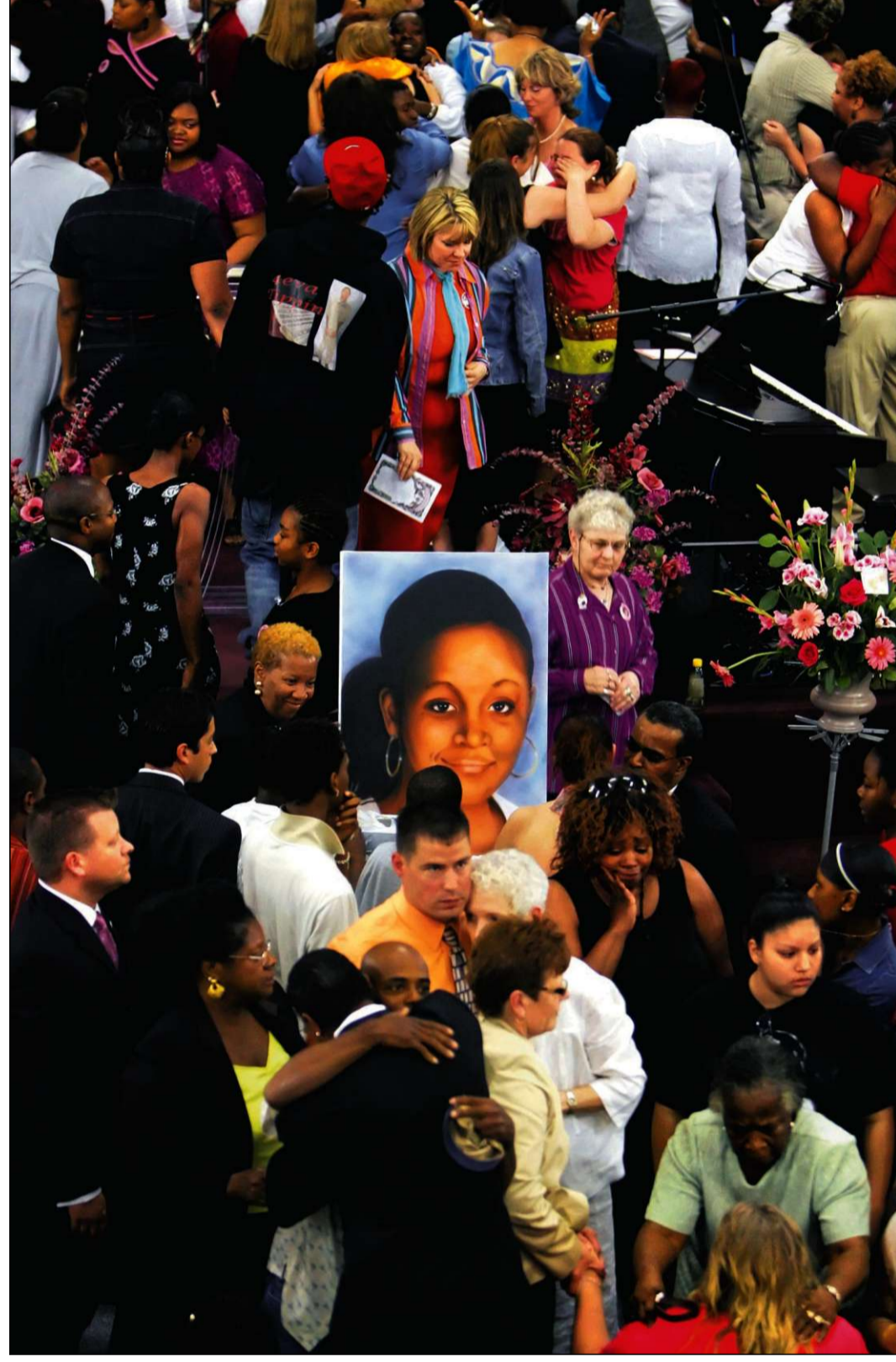
He was ordered to wear an electronic monitor on his ankle for 120 days, to never be alone with someone younger than 18, to undergo chemical tests and to receive frequent visits from probation officers.

He also was ordered to spend
See Sentence: Page 2



Cecava

AMBER HARRIS' LIFE REMEMBERED



Amber Harris' parents, at bottom, receive condolences at Thursday's memorial service.

Service draws large crowd united in grief

By ERIN GRACE
AND LYNN SAFRANEK
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITERS

Wearing dressy clothes and solemn faces, the Beveridge Magnet Center choir, minus one female voice, sang about dreams and a city called heaven.

In brave voices both high and sweet and low and newly changed, the classmates of Amber Harris paid tribute Thursday to their slain fellow choir member — in song and tears.

Facing a standing-room-only crowd of more than 500 people at Grace Apostolic Church, their grief mirrored the stricken expressions of an audience of family members, public officials and strangers.

All it seemed — from Amber's school principal to a recent hurricane transplant from New Orleans — had come to the church at 2216 Military Ave. to say goodbye to the 12-year-old girl whose disappearance

gripped the city for months.

Noting that the service fell on National Missing Children's Day, Marc Klaas, a national child abduction expert, called Amber "every child."

Bishop William Barlowe, pastor of Grace, called her "our Amber, not north Omaha's Amber."

"She's our Amber," he repeated.

A painting of the now-familiar school picture of Amber stood on a bed of white and pink roses near the altar. The photo adorned the service program and a handmade quilt that Beveridge Principal Cara Riggs presented to Amber's family.

A slideshow flashed other images: Amber as a baby, wearing a bathing suit in her favorite color, pink. And Amber, not more than 4, wearing a white dress with her legs crossed like a little lady.

She was, as mourners recalled her, a girl's girl. Someone who wanted to be a hairdresser or a
See Amber: Page 2



Melissa Harris, shown with her husband, Michael, told mourners her daughter's legacy starts now: "We will find who did this."

Enron guilty verdicts echo in Omaha

By JOE RUFF
AND STACIE HAMEL
WORLD-HERALD
STAFF WRITERS

Mike Boyle was mayor of Omaha in 1986 when Kenneth Lay moved Enron from Omaha to Houston after publicly saying he wouldn't. But Boyle said he feels no joy in Lay's fate.

The Enron chairman, along with former Chief Executive Officer Jeffrey Skilling, was

convicted Thursday of conspiracy to commit securities and wire fraud and faces at least 25 years in prison.

"No one's gleeful over this," Boyle said. "To go from the seventh-largest company in the nation down to this. This is a terrible ending."

The company's move to Houston was a blow to Omaha, because before merging in 1985 with Lay's Houston Natural Gas Co., InterNorth was an

important fixture in Omaha's business and civic life, Boyle said. After the merger, the companies became Enron.

Boyle said he went to Houston and met with Lay over lunch to make a final plea for the company to remain in Omaha.

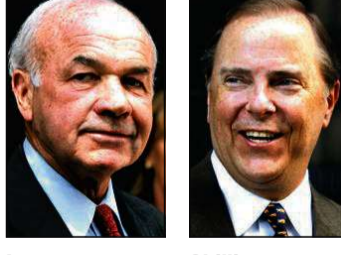
Lay was personable and focused, Boyle said. But Lay, pointing to a glistening silver tower in the skyline, said the City of Houston would give En-

ron free use of the building for three years, Boyle said.

Omaha probably couldn't match that kind of offer, though it could try, Boyle said he told Lay.

"It was a sinking feeling, really," Boyle said. "Enron was a very important part of Omaha."

Dale Te Kolste, 85, was chief financial officer of InterNorth before retiring in 1982. He said
See Enron: Page 3



Lay

Skilling

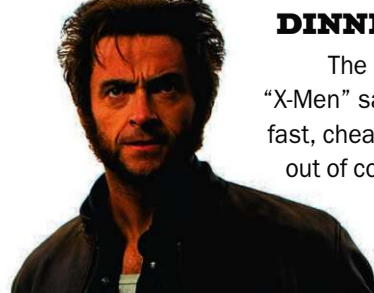
On Page 3

Kenneth Lay and Jeffrey Skilling face spending the rest of their lives in prison.

A timeline of Enron's history, including its connection to Omaha.

Omaha weather

Mostly sunny.
High 88; low 66



DINNER AND A MOVIE

The latest "X-Men" saga is fast, cheap and out of control.

The Scarlet and Cream Letter Club is the place for sports fans — especially Husker fans — to dine.

Living



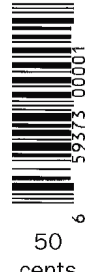
Coming Sunday

How much gas can you save by driving slower? Take a ride with us down I-80 as we find out.



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- Editorials 6&7B
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74 PAGES

Digest

MAIN NEWS

Bush orders sealing of seized records

President Bush intervened directly Thursday in a constitutional fight between Congress and the Justice Department, ordering records seized during an FBI search of the office of Rep. William Jefferson, D-La., to be sealed for 45 days. Bush said the material would be turned over to the solicitor general for a cooling-off period. **Page 7**

Researchers plot invisibility cloak

Imagine an invisibility cloak that works like the one Harry Potter inherited from his father. Researchers think they know how to do that. The keys are special manmade materials intended to steer light and other forms of electromagnetic radiation around an object, rendering it as invisible as something tucked into a hole in space. **Page 8**

Grave misconduct by Marines alleged

A military investigation into the deaths of two dozen Iraqis last November in the city of Haditha is expected to find that a small number of Marines carried out extensive, unprovoked killing of civilians, said congressional, military and Pentagon officials on Thursday. The possibility of murder charges against the Marines and the emerging details of the killings have raised fears that the incident could be the gravest case involving misconduct by U.S. ground forces in Iraq. **Page 10**

MIDLANDS

Long wait for adoption has ended

Rose and Philip Ross can proceed with their long-hoped-for adoption of Dylan. Dylan has been the center of the Rosses' life since he arrived in their Omaha home two days after he was born with methamphetamine in his system. He also has been at the center of protracted court proceedings over his future with Roy Townsend, the man whose pit bull mauled the genitals of Dylan's half brother. **Page 1**

Seat belts get extra attention

The extra troopers and police on the roads of Iowa and Nebraska this holiday weekend will be looking for more than speeders and drunken drivers. The Memorial Day weekend coincides with the national Click It or Ticket campaign. The two-week campaign runs through June 4 and is meant to increase the use of lifesaving seat belts. **Page 1**

SPORTS

Huskers beat Texas Tech

Nebraska beat Texas Tech 6-4 Thursday night at Bricktown Ballpark to stay unbeaten in the round-robin format and win back-to-back for the first time this month. Ace Joba Chamberlain earned his first win in six starts. Chamberlain struck out seven — including a tournament-record five straight from the fourth through sixth innings — and walked one. The fourth-seeded Huskers will meet top seed Texas at 1 p.m. Saturday for a spot in the Big 12 championship game Sunday. **Page 1**

Will NU-CU game need to change?

University of Nebraska Ath-

letic Director Steve Pederson will closely watch a decision by the Big 12 to consider having all its football teams play on Thanksgiving weekend starting in 2008. That move — and a new league TV contract in 2008 — could affect whether the Huskers play Colorado every year on the day after Thanksgiving. **Page 1**

BUSINESS

Doubletree is part of acquisition

The owner of downtown Omaha's Doubletree Hotel is being acquired by a private partnership. Local officials said it was too early to say what impact that might have on the hotel. Cleveland-based Boykin Lodging Co., which has interests in more than 20 hotels in 13 states, including the Doubletree, is being acquired for \$416 million by Braveheart Holdings LP. **Page 3**

Road protesters are arrested

Environmental protesters who camped out for more than a month to prevent the construction of a Canadian highway were removed or arrested Thursday, paving the way for Peter Kiewit Sons' Inc. to begin work on the Sea to Sky Highway. The project is part of the province's preparation for the 2010 Winter Olympics, which will be held in Vancouver. **Page 3**

LIVING

'Promise' yields exhilarating effects

Simply in terms of its visual poetry, the effects of image upon image of dazzling impossibility, "The Promise" is not to be missed. Written and directed by the mainland Chinese director Chen Kaige, "The Promise" mixes sword and sorcery, fable and romance, and armies of knights in acrobatic combat. **Page 3**

'Idol' helps push Fox to No. 2

"American Idol" kept a tight grip on viewers again last week, maintaining its hold on first- and second-place ratings as the stage was set for this week's finale. Along with a strong performance from "House," which ranked sixth, Fox was runner-up for the week in prime time, said Nielsen Media Research. CBS marked its 10th consecutive weekly prime time win. **Page 8**

FOR THE RECORD

Name: Mitch Gerstenkorn is the park manager at Lake McConaughy. His name was misspelled in Thursday editions.

Date: Memorial Day was first observed in 1868. The date was incorrect in Thursday's Go! section.

LOTTERIES

POWERBALL
■ Wednesday, May 24: 2-3-12-47-51. Powerball: 10. Power Play: 3. No jackpot winner. Estimated jackpot for Saturday, May 27: \$28 million.
NEBRASKA
■ Pick 5 — Thursday, May 25: 1-9-17-26-35. No jackpot winner. Jackpot for Friday, May 26: \$62,000.
■ 2by2 — Thursday, May 25: red 17-19; white 17-19.
■ Pick 3 — Thursday, May 25: 5-5-5.
IOWA
■ Cash Game — Thursday, May 25: 9-16-18-28-31.
■ Hot Lotto — Wednesday, May 24: 9-12-14-16-18. Hot Ball: 13.
■ Pick 3 — Thursday, May 25: midday 6-6-8; evening 7-0-8.
■ Pick 4 — Thursday, May 25: midday 8-1-0-9; evening 3-3-8-4.

Lottery results from other states are at Omaha.com.

Amber: More than 500 attend memorial service

Continued from Page 1
 singer when she grew up. Someone who offered hugs and smiles.

Someone whose quizzical smile gave her mother, Melissa Harris, the strength to speak Thursday after she entered the sanctuary in tears on the arm of her husband, Michael.

The couple had prodded authorities and the news media to keep their daughter in the public consciousness.

"If you look at Amber's portrait, she's saying, 'Do it for me,'" Melissa Harris said. "This is just the beginning, my friends. We start Amber's legacy right now. We will find who did this."

In his eulogy, Barlowe underscored that resolve.

"Don't you forever think that the blood, her blood, in Hummel Park is not speaking," Barlowe said, referring to the spot in the far north Omaha park where Amber's remains were found May 11.

"Any time innocent blood is shed, that blood is crying out."

Barlowe told the crowd, which included Omaha Public Schools Superintendent John Mackiel, Douglas County Attorney Stu Dornan and City Councilman Frank Brown, that Omahans need to examine their priorities.

"If it's not about the children," Barlowe said, "it's not about anything."

He then invited mourners to reach out to grieving children in their midst.

Within moments, the seats were empty and the aisles were full as a long procession of people moved toward the Harris family in the front rows and the children's choir on altar risers.



KENT SIEVERS/THE WORLD-HERALD
Members of the Beveridge Magnet Center choir paid tribute to their fellow choir member in song and in tears during the service.

The act proved cathartic. Amber's classmates broke down in sobs and hugged their teachers, their parents and one another.

Tears welled in the eyes of one mother, Nevia Washington, who came in purple medical

scrubs — she took time off her job in an ophthalmologist's office — to accompany her son, Brandon.

"It's a sad situation. It is," she said, shaking her head.

Brandon, who rode the school bus with Amber and will be 13 in

Border: Hagel plan seen as key to any compromise

Continued from Page 1
 lic's mood and looming midterm congressional elections. President Bush, who has campaigned for a comprehensive immigration bill, also could use a win to help shore up his low public approval ratings.

Backers of the Senate bill said the 62-36 final vote sends a signal to the House to be open to compromise.

A coalition of Senate Republicans and Democrats approved the broadest changes to immigration policy since a 1986 bill granted amnesty to 3 million undocumented immigrants.

For Hagel, the win was sweet. He began working on immigration in 2001 and introduced bills in 2004 and 2005.

During the past two weeks of debate, he haunted the Senate floor, met daily with about a dozen key proponents planning strategy and helped fend off opposing amendments.

He fought to preserve a compromise he crafted this spring with Sen. Mel Martinez, R-Fla., to set up a three-tiered plan to address illegal immigrants.

It will be the heart of the fight between House and Senate negotiators trying to work out a final deal.

The Hagel-Martinez plan allows about 7 million immigrants living in the United States for more than five years the chance to apply for citizenship — if they have worked here more than three years, pay a \$3,250 fine and meet other requirements.

A second group of several million who have been in the country from two to five years would have to apply for visas, leave the country and re-enter.

Senate immigration bill

Key elements of the immigration bill passed Thursday by the U.S. Senate:

More border patrol agents would be hired, along with more immigration and customs enforcement officers.

Border fencing would be quadrupled, and electronic surveillance enhanced.

Aliens with work authorization would be required to show a tamper-resistant identification card.

Guest workers would need to be employed to apply for a permanent residency green card.

Illegal immigrants who have been in the United States five years or more would have to pay a \$3,250 fine and back taxes, pass background checks, prove they have worked for at least three years, register for military service, demonstrate knowledge of English and American civics and work an additional six years.

Illegal immigrants who have been in the United States between two and five years would have to leave the country and return through a port of entry in order to obtain a temporary work visa. They would then need to meet the same requirements as those who have been in the country more than five years.

Illegal immigrants who have been in the United States less than two years would have to voluntarily return home or be deported.

The third group — made up of about 2 million people, here less than two years — would have to leave.

That provision attracted a coalition of more than a dozen Republicans and many Democrats who helped ensure passage.

Voting for the bill with Hagel was Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa. Voting against were Nelson and Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa.

Nelson and Grassley said the United States should secure its border first and deal with illegal immigrants later.

"I was burned once, in 1986, when I voted for amnesty, believing that it would solve our problems. Now we have a 12 million illegal immigrant problem. I'm not getting burned

again," Grassley said. "Not only do we have a glide path to citizenship, but it's a glide path with plenty of loopholes that don't meet the common-sense test."

Harkin, although a supporter of the bill, questioned how the three-tier system would be implemented and whether the second group of immigrants would come forward to accept temporary deportation.

"I don't know if it's workable," Harkin said.

Many House Republicans will strongly resist the Senate bill, said U.S. Rep. Jeff Fortenberry, R-Neb.

"I think the House bill had it right — our emphasis on border security, stopping human smug-

a few weeks, noted wistfully how things have changed.

"We picked her up every morning," he said.

Then, eyeing the throng gathered around the Harris, he added: "I'm actually glad everyone is here. It brought everyone together."

The mourners had streamed into Grace Apostolic in lines that sometimes stretched out the front doors.

Harry Eure came because he had stumbled upon a poem about missing children written by his late mother, Dorothy, a civil rights figure and neighborhood mother hen who had lived a block from the Harris home.

Clutching the poem, written in 1983, Eure pointed to his mother's typed print: "This tragedy in America has affected us all — black, white, red, yellow children, children all."

"She would have been so moved by this little girl," Eure said of his mother. "She used to always say there's too many kids missing in America."

Barlowe asked for prayers for Jessica O'Grady, a 19-year-old Omaha college student who was last seen May 10, and for the family of Tracy Tribble, a Council Bluffs woman whose body was found in the Missouri River last week.

Pinned to her pink blouse, Melissa Harris wore her daughter's photo and photos of two others: Polly Klaas, Marc Klaas' daughter, who was kidnapped and killed in California a dozen years ago; and Omahan Jason Jolkowski, who disappeared in 2001.

"I have to keep things going," Melissa Harris said. "We've got to save our kids."

gling, as well as stronger penalties against the unscrupulous who exploit the poor and vulnerable. I think that's the first priority," he said.

"I think there'll be a strong attempt to work something out, but right now the House has made a firm stand," he said.

Other Midlands House Republicans also expressed reservations about the Hagel-Martinez plan, with Rep. Steve King, R-Iowa, registering the strongest condemnation.

The House, said Rep. Lee Terry, R-Neb., does seem "set in stone" against any amnesty or guest worker plan.

Terry said he is open to a guest worker plan but not the rest of Hagel's approach — which he called amnesty — as long as there is serious border security enforcement enacted.

"Frankly, what I hear from my constituents is they don't think we'll do border security," Terry said. "That has to be the foundation of any bill."

Rep. Tom Osborne, R-Neb., said that in his western Nebraska district, "People don't like the idea of amnesty."

Hagel acknowledged "vast differences" between the two bills, but said they could be turned into an advantage.

He said the differences can be resolved and Congress can pass the most significant, far-reaching legislation he's seen in his 10 years in the Senate.

"It's clearly in the interests of our country, it is clearly in the interests of the Republican Party and is clearly in the interests of the president," he said. "I think the currents are running with us."

Sentence: Size shouldn't be factor, critics say

Continued from Page 1
 30 days each year in county jail during his probation, although those stays could be waived by his probation officer.

"Too short to go to prison?" was the headline in Wednesday's Sidney Sun-Telegraph newspaper.

"People are outraged that someone who committed this kind of sexual offense did not go to prison," said Jim Headley, the Sun-Telegraph's editor.

He said his office had been inundated with e-mails from across the country, including several from people who identified themselves as victims of sexual assault.

Headley, who covered the sentencing hearing Tuesday, said Thompson was a lifelong acquaintance. The editor said he shook his hand before the hearing, thinking that he wouldn't be seeing the man for a long time.

Officials with rape-victim counseling centers in Scottsbluff, Lincoln and Omaha all said the probation sentence — and the reasons for it — sent the wrong message to child victims of sexual assault.

"It sounds like the judge is

more concerned about the safety of the perpetrator than the victim," said Mary Larsen, director of the Women Against Violence program at the Omaha YWCA.

"I certainly hope the guy's height is not the sole reason he's not going to prison. If that's it, it's wrong," said Lorrie Wold, executive director of the Scottsbluff-based Capstone Child Advocacy Center, whose region includes Sidney.

State Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha, a frequent critic of judges, also said the sentence made no sense.

"The message should not be out there that if you are a certain height, you are immune from going to prison," Chambers said. He urged the attorney general or local prosecutor to appeal.

Thompson's court-appointed attorney, Don Miller of Sidney, declined to comment.

The prosecutor, Cheyenne County Attorney Paul Schaub, said he had not yet talked to the victim, now 14, and her legal guardian about the sentence.

"As a prosecutor, my greatest concern is the people who are

out of prison," Schaub said, referring to victims.

Schaub declined to comment directly on the sentence but said he wasn't "as shocked as other people" because of what he had read in the presentence investigation report.

That confidential report is prepared for a judge to provide background on the convicted person and aid in sentencing.

As part of a plea agreement, Schaub said, he agreed not to make a sentence recommendation but to agree with whatever was recommended by the local probation office.

Schaub and Miller declined to say if the presentence report recommended probation. That recommendation was not disclosed during the court hearing.

Thompson initially was charged with two counts of sexual assault of a child, a Class 3A felony that carries a potential five-year prison sentence. That charge involves sexual contact.

A third charge, sexual assault of a minor, a Class 2 felony, which alleges sexual penetration, was dropped in exchange for Thompson's "no contest" plea to the other two charges. A

Class 2 felony carries a penalty of up to 50 years in prison.

The type of probation ordered for Thompson is called "intensive supervised probation" or ISP. It provides an intermediate alternative between regular probation and prison, said Ellen Fabian Brokofsky, the state probation administrator.

"It is designed for people who are at risk (to reoffend) but can function in the community with some controls," Brokofsky said.

Don Douglas, who coordinates the ISP program in the Sidney region, said such offenders are visited by probation officers at least six times a month and are subject to random home searches and random drug tests.

Officers also visit the offenders' bosses or others who know them at least six times a month, Douglas said. Thompson works at a Sidney factory.

A new sexual predator law takes effect July 14. It carries a mandatory 15-year prison sentence for sexual assaults of those 12 or younger. The victim in this case, however, was 13.

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METROPOLITAN EDITION
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2007

AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER OWNED BY EMPLOYEES

Bagged meters a benefit to some

Contractors, others pay for privilege

Close access needed

BY MICHAEL O'CONNOR
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Scouting for a parking spot in downtown Omaha can frustrate even the most patient driver.

Frustrations can rise even higher when the driver spots an open space, but notices that the meter is covered by a white canvas bag with the words: No Parking Any Time.

The bags have become more common in recent years because of an increase in downtown redevelopment, the city says.

Contractors, electricians and others pay a daily fee for the bags, allowing them to essentially rent parking spaces from the city. Downtown companies also can request the bags for special events.

The city says it bags meters for contractors who have crews working on downtown buildings because they need close access to move equipment.

"It's to help people who are providing a service," said Lionel Oropeza of the city's traffic department. "It's not to give anyone favoritism."

When contractors have easy access, projects can get done more quickly and efficiently, he said.

The city also bags meters because of street construction, parades and other public events.

The bags are not available for personal use, such as by a downtown employee who wants a close parking spot.

The bags, which are locked onto a meter, can be requested by businesses and companies downtown that are having special events.

For example, handicap parking signs and regular meters were bagged periodically last week by the city at the request of Union Pacific. The parking spaces are adjacent to U.P.'s headquarters at 14th and Douglas Streets.

U.P. used the spaces for parking and for dropping off and picking up people attending events at its headquarters, U.P. spokesman Gene Hinkle said.

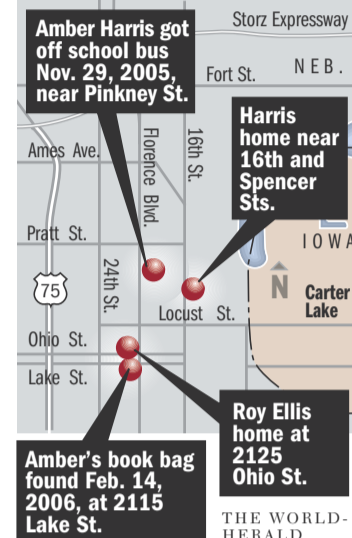
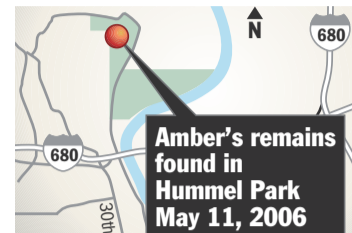
Oropeza said the city doesn't bag handicap spaces often.

There are seven handicap spaces around the U.P. building. See *Meters: Page 2*

Police: Book bag led to Ellis



Melissa and Michael Harris, the parents of Amber Harris, said today that the arrest of a suspect in her slaying does not bring closure to the family. Melissa Harris said: "I won't have closure until the day I die."



The Harris case

Nov. 29, 2005: Amber Harris, a 12-year-old seventh-grader, is last seen stepping off a school bus at Florence Boulevard and Pinkney Street and heading toward her home a few blocks away.

Dec. 5: A \$1,000 reward for information is established by family and friends.

Dec. 13: A candlelight vigil is held at 20th and Pinkney Streets.

December: The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children lists Amber on its Web site as an "endangered runaway."

Jan. 7, 2006: The FBI announces that it is adding \$5,000 to the reward fund.

Feb. 14: A book bag is found near 21st and Lake Streets. Amber's parents identify the bag, which held Amber's spare set of clothes, as their daughter's.

May 11: Unidentified human remains are found in Omaha's Hummel Park.

May 14: An autopsy begins on the remains.

May 15: DNA testing begins.

May 19: Detectives tell the Harris family that the remains have been identified as Amber's.

May 25: A memorial service is held for Amber at Grace Apostolic Church. Her burial is delayed while forensic experts analyze the remains.

June 14: Police announce that an autopsy has determined that Amber died from blunt-force trauma.

Aug. 4: Amber's remains are buried at Forest Lawn Cemetery.

Sex offender arrested in slaying of Amber Harris

BY LYNN SAFRANEK
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Amber Harris' book bag, discovered in nearly pristine condition in a trash bin a year ago, contained evidence that directly links the 12-year-old girl's slaying suspect to her homicide, Police Chief Thomas Warren said today.

Omaha police announced today that they had arrested Roy Ellis, a convicted sex offender, on suspicion of first-degree murder in Amber's homicide.

Ellis, 53, has been jailed since June on unrelated charges.

Amber, a seventh-grader at Omaha's Beveridge Magnet Center, disappeared Nov. 29, 2005, during her walk home from a school bus stop at Florence Boulevard and Pinkney Street. Her remains were discovered in May, half-buried in Hummel Park in far northeast Omaha.

An autopsy showed she died from blunt-force trauma to the head.

Hundreds of people joined in the search for Amber in the months before her remains were discovered, and billboards asked for the public's help in finding her.

Amber's parents, Michael and Melissa Harris, said today that Ellis' arrest does not bring closure to the family.

"It's not relief. It's just another part of the puzzle that's being solved," Melissa Harris said. "I won't have closure until the day I die."

Ellis is set to appear in court Tuesday afternoon. Prosecutors plan to seek the



Amber Harris



Ellis

death penalty against him.

Douglas County Attorney Don Kleine said today that Amber was killed purposely during the perpetration or attempted perpetration of a sexual assault. DNA evidence, a "very important" aspect to the case, links Ellis to Amber's homicide, he said.

Since his arrest June 2 on a domestic violence charge, Ellis has been the focus of the investigation into Amber's disappearance and death.

Ellis lived with his girlfriend just a block from where Amber's book bag was discovered Feb. 14 of last year. His house is less than a mile from the Harris home.

Chief Warren has long said the book bag provided investigators key evidence. Today, he said "evidence contained in the book bag" linked Ellis to Amber's homicide.

Inside the bag were Amber's jeans, bra and jacket.

Ellis had been in jail for two months when the book bag was discovered. He wasn't released from jail until late March of last year.

Investigators have a theory about who was responsible for placing the book bag in the trash bin, Warren said, but don't know conclusively how it ended up there.

Ellis was questioned about Amber's disappearance, but he "chose not to cooperate," Warren said.

Ellis' attorney, W. Patrick Dunn, declined to comment.

Ellis' girlfriend, Jean Fisher, said she still loves Ellis and doesn't believe he had anything to do with Amber's homicide.

"He didn't even know that girl," Fisher said. "Why would they think he would do something like this?"

"I do feel sorry for the Harris family," she said, "and I know this was hard for them to deal with. I feel for them. I really do."

Prosecutors plan to seek the death penalty against Ellis based on three aggravating factors: Ellis' history of terrorizing victims, that the homicide allegedly occurred to conceal a sexual assault or attempted sexual assault and the heinousness of the crime, Kleine said.

The Harris went to Kleine's office this morning to talk with him and police. They returned home about 9:45 a.m. and met with See *Arrest: Page 2*

Pay for unused sick time only part of Cass dispute

BY JOHN FERAOK
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

PLATTSMOUTH, Neb. — When Randy Wilkins resigned as roads superintendent Jan. 2, Cass County paid him \$22,000 for unused sick days and vacation time.

Just two weeks later, Wilkins again started drawing a paycheck from the county — this time as a full-time sheriff's deputy.

The payments to Wilkins were approved Jan. 2 by the Cass County Board, which was dominated by his supporters. On Jan.

15, two of those board members left office.

The new board members and two returning board members are raising questions about the payments, even though county policy allows employees under certain circumstances to be paid sick leave when they leave their jobs. The county typically pays unused vacation when an employee resigns.

"The whole thing looks like nothing but collusion and corruption, and I don't care who knows it," said Cass County Board Chairman Ron Nolte, who raised

See *Cass: Page 2*

Freshman ready to lead tax fight

■ Thomas White's push for property-tax cuts puts him in conflict with the governor's preference for income-tax reductions.

BY LESLIE REED
WORLD-HERALD BUREAU



Freshman lawmaker Tom White of Omaha promotes his property tax bill last week.

LINCOLN — Perhaps the biggest challenge to Gov. Dave Heineman's proposed income tax cut comes from a newly elected state senator who's sticking to his campaign promise to try to reduce property taxes.

Thomas Malloy White, 50, is a black-haired Omaha trial attorney who takes deep pride in his Irish roots. His great-grandfather was a coal miner. His fa-

ther is former Nebraska Supreme Court Chief Justice C. Thomas White.

The Democrat is in the vanguard of freshman lawmakers pushing property tax cuts.

While other tax plans have been offered, White's Legislative Bill 453 may be the first real flexing of freshman muscle in the Legislature's first post-term limits session.

Adding strength are his bill's 27 co-sponsors, including all but seven of the 22 first-year sena-

tors. And White has snagged a seat on the Legislature's Revenue Committee, which decides the fate of tax proposals.

"We all know we have only eight years, at most, to accomplish what we came here for," said Sen. Russ Karpisek of Wilber, one of White's co-sponsors.

"If we step on some toes along the way, that's not the intent. But dang it, we're going to do what we said we were going to do and what we want to do. Why wait?"

The toes being stepped on could be those of the governor.

Personally arguing for his income tax plan at a Revenue Committee hearing last week, Hein-

See *Taxes: Page 2*

Omaha weather



Low tonight 10.
High Tuesday 24.



Creighton's Pierce Hibma wins over fans with his hot-shot display against Drake. **Sports**



The resurrection of Texas A&M basketball under Coach Billy Gillispie has led to quite a home-court advantage. **Sports**



Biopharming — growing gene-altered plants to produce therapeutic drugs — shifts its focus away from corn. **Business**

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50 cents

Digest

MAIN NEWS

Budget includes hike for military

President Bush today sent a \$2.90 trillion spending plan to a Democratic-controlled Congress, proposing a big increase in military spending, including billions more to fight the war in Iraq, while squeezing the rest of government to meet his goal of eliminating the deficit in five years. Bush's spending plan would make his first-term tax cuts permanent, at a cost of \$1.6 trillion over 10 years. **Page 3A**

Another deadly day in Baghdad

Violence raked Baghdad today as an Iraqi general took charge of the security operation in the capital and Iraqi police and soldiers manned new roadblocks. At least 29 people died in bomb and mortar attacks across the city, 15 of them as they waited to refill propane cooking tanks in south Baghdad. **Page 4A**

Florida governor skips Super Bowl

Florida Gov. Charlie Crist, handling his first natural disaster since taking office last month, attended Sunday's church services in Lady Lake after last week's severe weather left 20 people dead and hundreds of homes destroyed. He canceled plans to attend Sunday's Super Bowl, which included a pregame moment of silence in memory of the storm's victims. **Page 6A**

MIDLANDS

Bellevue council eyes challenge

The City of Bellevue is questioning the legality of a proposition that two-thirds of Bellevue voters passed in November to shrink the City Council from 10 members to six. Five council members went into closed session at a Jan. 8 meeting to discuss litigation related to the proposition, according to meeting minutes. Ten days later, the city attorney sent a letter to the Nebraska Accountability and Disclosure Commission, requesting an opinion on whether the city may use public funds to challenge the proposition and to prevent it from taking effect at the end of 2008. **Page 1B**

SPORTS

Mavs have chance to finish in top four

With three weekends left in the regular season, perhaps the only remaining drama for the four elite squads in the Central Collegiate Hockey Association might be the order in which they finish. Notre Dame, Michigan, Miami and Michigan State lead the league and have pulled away from fifth-place UNO. But Mavs coach Mike Kemp says UNO still has a chance to earn a top seed. "So if we can take care of business and get a break here down the stretch, I think they're still reachable," he said. Every team in the CCHA covets a top-four finish under the new postseason format in which the Nos. 1 through 4 clubs earn a first-round play-off bye. **Page 1C**

Jays' ace pitcher honors commitment

Creighton pitcher Marc Lewis made a commitment to the Bluejays, and he's sticking to it. That's a big reason why Lewis passed up a chance to turn professional after a junior season in which he went 7-0 and earned All-Missouri Valley Conference honors. "Creighton has given me so much and done

so much for me. I just felt like I needed to come back to live up to my end," Lewis said. This season, Lewis holds the No. 1 spot in the pitching rotation and will start Creighton's season-opening game Friday against Gardner-Webb at a tournament in Rock Hill, S.C. **Page 6C**

BUSINESS

Jets out of Eppley California-bound

ExpressJet is trying to make trips to the West Coast easier, adding nonstop flights from Omaha to L.A./Ontario International Airport and San Diego International Airport starting in April and May. ExpressJet is striking out under its own brand after years as Continental Express, focusing on mid-size cities and avoiding the hub-and-spoke system. Officials planned to share more details at a press conference today. **Page 1D**

Corn may not be biopharming jewel

The biopharming movement may be passing on corn. Researchers say that genes put into plants can reproduce into therapeutic drugs, and test plots were planted in Nebraska in 2002. Later, fears of contamination prompted more stringent guidelines, and many farmers gave up. Now, scientists have shifted their focus to a plant that doesn't pollinate: rice. But some in Iowa and Nebraska are holding onto the hope that corn can become a success. **Page 1D**

LIVING

Cast of 'King' happy seeing Omaha

When the lights go down and the makeup comes off, the cast of "The Lion King" is pleased with the scene. The people of the Broadway touring show are getting acquainted with the city. "Everybody's more sane and happy here than we imagined," said Valerie Gebert, who originally thought of Omaha as little more than a "deep freeze." Drawing particular applause is the low-key atmosphere, restaurants, the zoo and the Old Market. **Page 1E**

Valentine's Day getting sweeter

Pastry chefs are turning up the heat on florists and candy sellers this year, hoping that a cookie bouquet can say what a dozen red roses can't. Bakers are counting on the tradition of spending that surrounds Valentine's Day, and they're putting their edibles on the shelves earlier than ever. From treats for the office to cupcakes for classmates, people of all ages are opting for pink or red frosting. But if the Season of Love isn't leaving you warm and fuzzy, Wheatfields is offering Get a Life cakes. **Page 1E**

LOTTERIES

POWERBALL
■ Saturday, Feb. 3: 12-13-20-33-42.
Powerball: 37. Power Play: 5. No jackpot winner. Jackpot for Wednesday, Feb. 7: \$27 million.

NEBRASKA
■ Pick 5 — Saturday, Feb. 3: 3-11-24-27-30. No jackpot winner. Jackpot for Monday, Feb. 5: \$82,000.
■ 2by2 — Saturday, Feb. 3: red 1-7, white 6-18.
■ Pick 3 — Saturday, Feb. 3: 4-6-5.

■ Cash Game — Saturday, Feb. 3: 1-6-11-31-34.
■ Hot Lotto — Saturday, Feb. 3: 2-8-17-19-37. Hot Ball: 11.
■ Pick 3 — Sunday, Feb. 4: evening 3-5-6.
■ Pick 4 — Sunday, Feb. 4: evening 7-6-7-4.

Lottery results from other states are at **Omaha.com**.

Arrest: Book bag is key, police say

Continued from Page 1
 returned home about 9:45 a.m. and met with reporters after the police press conference.

Melissa Harris said she dreads finding out the specifics of the events that led to her daughter's death, but she said the family needs to know.

The investigation entailed more than 100 interviews and long waits for forensic test results, Warren said.

"Quite frankly, up until this day, our investigators have been pouring their hearts into this case," Warren said.

Warren praised the diligence of the case's investigators, including Sgt. Trevor O'Brien and Detective Tom Rummel in the child victim/sexual assault unit and Sgt. William Jadowski and Detective Steve Henthorn in the homicide unit. Melissa Harris also thanked homicide investigators for their work.

Ellis has a long criminal history and had been in jail several times in the past few years. But he was out of jail when Amber disappeared.

From Oct. 18 until Nov. 3 of 2005, he was in jail for violating a protection order. He returned to jail Dec. 19, 2005, for another protection-order violation.

He remained in jail until his release March 28, 2006.

In June 2006, Ellis was ar-

rested and charged with terroristic threats and false imprisonment in connection with an incident that occurred nine months before his arrest and involved his ex-girlfriend, Antoinette Pollock. But after the arrest, officers' questions of him and his girlfriend focused on Amber.

After the June arrest, Omaha police searched Ellis' home for items related to Amber's disappearance, such as blood or bodily fluids, shovels or digging tools, a K-Swiss shoe, clothing, fingerprints and underwear belonging to Amber.

Ellis pleaded no contest Jan. 26 to witness tampering. The terroristic threats and false imprisonment charges were dismissed.

The witness-tampering conviction stemmed from a letter he sent to Pollock from jail. Ellis had tried to get Pollock to change her testimony or not show up for his trial on those allegations.

A judge declared last week that Ellis should be sentenced as a habitual criminal.

Under state law, a defendant can be declared a habitual criminal after a third felony conviction. Ellis has been convicted of nine felonies, including robbery and weapon use in 1973; robbery and weapon use in 1982; two counts of drug dealing in 1995; and two counts of sexual assault on a child in 1999.

Taxes: Sen. White not about to stay in shadows

Continued from Page 1
 man said it would provide long-term, fundamental changes to encourage investment and economic growth.

Heineman proposes reducing top income tax rates and broadening tax brackets so people can earn more before they have to pay the highest rates. He wants to repeal the estate tax and eliminate the sales tax on commercial remodeling labor.

Heineman also says his proposed budget includes help for those who pay property taxes because it would boost state aid to schools and local government to an average of \$1.2 billion per year, a record.

As an alternative, White would give \$500 — in the form of an income tax credit — to each household paying property taxes in the state.

White's proposal is estimated to reduce state tax revenues by about \$210 million per year.

That would eliminate most of an estimated \$300 million annual surplus and leave little room for Heineman's income tax changes, which are projected to reduce state revenues by about \$206 million per year.

The competing plans are a reflection of new lawmakers' strong commitment to property tax reduction, not a political power play, said Sen. Steve Lathrop of Omaha, a Democrat and co-sponsor of White's bill.

"It's not people trying to poke the governor in the eye," Lathrop said. "We talked to people at their doorsteps, and we've all just heard, 'Give us some property tax relief.' White has found a very workable idea to provide property tax relief."

A spokesman said the Republican governor is pleased that new lawmakers are offering tax alternatives.

"He thinks it's great we have so many ideas in the hopper," said spokesman Aaron Sanderford. "He recognizes that these are senators who ran in their own right and have their own ideas."

In a pre-session survey, 41 of the 49 state senators told The World-Herald that they supported tax cuts in 2007; 25 specified that they wanted to reduce property taxes.

Both the governor's plan, LB 331, and White's LB 453 are pending before the Revenue Committee, along with other tax proposals. Committee Chairman Ray Janssen of Nickerson said in the coming days the panel will try to come to agreement on "one or two ideas" to advance to the full Legislature for debate.

In the meantime, the governor is winning over some lawmakers.

Both Sens. Tom Hansen of North Platte and Tim Gay of Papillion, Republicans who co-sponsored White's property tax proposal, said they changed their minds after talking with Heineman.

Hansen said he signed onto the White bill without considering it carefully. He didn't realize it would cost so much, leaving little money available for agricultural property tax reductions, a higher priority for him.

Gay said he agreed to co-sponsor White's proposal because it would put cash in people's pockets and he wanted an array of tax-reduction options available.

A briefing on the Heineman tax plan came several days after LB 453 was introduced. Gay said he now prefers the long-term changes Heineman proposes.

White said he'd rather not buck the governor during his first year in the Legislature. But he can't keep a low profile when his working-poor constituents deserve to have their voices heard, he said.

"When you sit in the back and be quiet, the attention never gets there. By the time the candy dish gets passed to these guys, it's empty."

White's mother died of a heart attack when he was in the sixth grade, and White spent many hours watching trials in his father's courtroom. His father was a district judge in Platte County before being named to the Supreme Court in 1977.

White said being a judge's son taught him about standing up for his beliefs.

"I grew up in a blue-collar, meatpacking town, Columbus, and my dad was always throwing somebody's dad or brother in jail. Sometimes, they were less than thrilled with the application of the law. But I wasn't going to disappear because of it."

Meters: Bagging comes with a price

Continued from Page 1
 Even if the city bags signs for some of the U.P. spaces, persons with handicaps would still have access to at least one or two handicap spots, he said.

That was the case last week, Oropeza said.

Bob Stubbe, city public works director, said the city plans to review its policy on bagging handicap signs to ensure that disabled people still have good access.

Oropeza said the city's practice of bagging meters has been in place for more than 30 years.

On average per day, about 300, or about 9 percent of the 3,300 parking meters in the downtown area, are bagged.

Sometimes there are problems.

Occasionally people will remove bags from meters and move them to another meter to create their own private parking space.

The city has a list of all meters that are bagged, enabling parking enforcement officers to determine whether a bag has been authorized for a particular meter. All the meters downtown are numbered.

Also, unauthorized drivers sometimes will park at a bagged meter.

The city will ticket and tow those vehicles, usually after the contractor who requested the bag calls and complains.

It is illegal for an unauthorized person to park at a bagged meter, even during evenings and weekends when parking is free.

That irritates some drivers.

Cecelia Kuhns volunteers at the Orpheum Theater and said she gets frustrated when she sees open parking spaces that are bagged during evening events.

"(Parking) is tight," she said. She said the bags should be removed at night and weekends



KENT SIEVERS
THE WORLD-HERALD

when they are not being used by contractors.

The city says it doesn't have enough workers to remove bags at the end of the day and put them back in the morning.

The city also said contractors sometimes need to work on weekends and evenings.

Contractors requesting the bags pay the city \$15 to have them placed on meters and \$15 to have them removed, no matter how many bags are requested.

But the city does charge a per-bag fee for each day a bag is on a meter. The fee is either \$5 or \$10, depending on how much the city can generate on a meter if it were used by regular drivers plugging in coins.

The daily fee is about the same that the city would receive from the meter per day through use by a regular driver.

Along with the bags placed on meters by the city, there are also bags that individual companies keep. The companies place and

In the bag

The City of Omaha puts bags on parking meters for contractors and others working on downtown buildings. Downtown companies also may request the bags for special events. The bags essentially reserve the parking spot. Contractors and others using the bags pay a daily fee per bag and a fee for the city to place and remove the bags.

Five utility and phone companies have their own bags and pay the city an annual fee to use them.

The city also puts bags on parking meters for street construction, parades and other events.

Downtown has about 3,300 parking meters, and on average about 300 are bagged per day.

remove the bags themselves.

Five companies have bags and pay the city an annual fee.

Those five consist of phone and utility companies, such as the Metropolitan Utilities District, that have to make service and repair calls at or near downtown businesses, Oropeza said.

He said those companies might just need a bag on a meter for a few hours so their crews can make repairs at a business, and then move to another location downtown.

The city lets those companies place their own bags because it would be impractical for city workers to follow the crews around and place bags for them, he said.

Those companies pay the city a \$200 annual fee per bag. The companies have a total of 56 bags, generating \$11,200 annually for the city.

"We are not trying to make a killing on it," Oropeza said. "Just recoup some revenue."

Cass: Ex-roads chief back as a deputy

Continued from Page 1
 questions about the payments at last month's meeting.

On Tuesday, the board will take up the issue again and also plans to talk about Wilkins' pay rate in his new job.

Wilkins did not return numerous messages.

The calculations were handled by the County Clerk's Office, said former Cass County Board member Bob Clancy of Plattsmouth. Clancy sees no problem with Wilkins' sick leave and vacation pay or his new job.

"There's nothing in county policy that says you can't go to work for the county again," Clancy said. "Randy is very qualified. Cass County is quite fortunate to get someone with his expertise."

In November, the 50-year-old Wilkins announced plans to resign as roads superintendent before the newly elected County Board, now with more members critical of his projects, took office. Wilkins had served as a department head since 1996 and left earning \$54,000 a year.

Wilkins, who had been a part-time deputy for 6½ years, is being paid \$21 an hour as a deputy, by Nolte's estimate. That is nearly \$44,000 a year in wages, and Wilkins also is receiving benefits.

Wilkins and some County Board members have had a stormy relationship for years, most recently over the site of a new \$753,000 county garage. Wil-

Sick leave on Douglas agenda

The Douglas County Board on Tuesday will consider eight claims for unused sick leave submitted by former county employees.

Douglas County Attorney Don Kleine has recommended that the claims, totaling \$456,943, be denied.

kins spearheaded the selection of a site near Plattsmouth over the objections of some on the five-member board. The project is on hold because of a lawsuit filed by residents who want the garage built elsewhere.

Wilkins' law enforcement work caused a stir in 2004 after he issued more than 40 tickets to motorcycle riders for helmet law violations. In some instances, Wilkins confiscated illegal helmets; other times he refused to let riders continue on their way until someone brought them a legal helmet.

After fielding numerous complaints, the Sheriff's Office had Wilkins back off.

Now there are questions about Wilkins' taking payments for vacation and sick leave from the county after leaving one department and then beginning full-time work in another.

Wilkins was paid a total of \$22,000 for 415 hours of unused

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Omaha World-Herald

Senate crafts stimulus compromise

■ Nebraska's Ben Nelson helps get \$110 billion pared from the bill that, when passed, is intended to help jump-start the lagging U.S. economy.

By JOSEPH MORTON
WORLD-HERALD BUREAU

WASHINGTON — Sen. Ben Nelson of Nebraska brokered a critical agreement that is expected to lead to passage of a massive economic stimulus bill.

"We trimmed the fat, fried the bacon and milked the sacred cows," Nelson said on the Senate floor after the deal was announced Friday night.

During a long week of intense negotiations, Nelson and Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, emerged as the key dealmak-

ers for spending reductions in the bill. Their proposal strips about \$110 billion from the measure. No final vote was expected before Monday.

Nelson said the group had brought the size of the bill down to \$780 billion. Republican leaders said the price tag will ultimately prove to be higher.

As everyone took the customary post-deal curtain calls, Nelson was front and center.

When Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-NeV., took to the floor to announce the deal, he paid special attention to the

Nebraska Democrat.

"I want to express my appreciation to a senator on our side of the aisle, Sen. Ben Nelson, who took this difficult assignment on our side to come up with something that we could pass," Reid said. He also cited Collins, independent Joe Lieberman of Connecticut and Republican Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania.

"But for them, we would not be in a position where we could move forward to try to help the American people," See *Stimulus: Page 2*

On Page 4A

The nation lost nearly 600,000 jobs last month, the worst showing in a third of a century.

Regulators close two banks in California and one in Georgia.

MUST READ



Music, God and casinos

Church choirs aren't just singing from the pews anymore — you may find them spreading the Gospel at a casino or a pizza parlor.

Living

Basketball hopes bloom

Nebraska and Creighton both won road games Wednesday, and for the first time this season, there is reason for hope, Tom Shatel writes.

Sports

Style on a budget

A Silver City, Iowa, woman who enjoys thrift stores says she got a beautiful holiday party outfit for \$4.50.

Money

omaha.com

Review the week in World-Herald photos.

COMING SUNDAY

Private struggle

Signs of financial stress from the recession are showing as Omaha families try to come up with private school tuition.

Omaha weather

Partly sunny.
High: 54 Low: 26

Full weather report: Page 6B

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52 PAGES 50 CENTS

ROY ELLIS TO BE EXECUTED

Sentence brings tears, some relief



KENT SIEVERS/THE WORLD-HERALD



MATT MILLER/THE WORLD-HERALD

Roy Ellis, above, sits in the courtroom, waiting to hear his sentence Friday. Ellis was sentenced to death for the Nov. 29, 2005, abduction and murder of 12-year-old Amber Harris. The sentence brought tears to the eyes of Amber's mother, Melissa Harris, at top.

Relatives of Amber Harris, other victims stand witness

By TODD COOPER
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER



"I'm hoping she's looking down on this from somewhere."

Melissa Harris, mother of murder victim Amber Harris

The sun glaring off of his forehead, Roy Ellis gazed out a window in Courtroom No. 7 and swiveled his courtroom chair an inch to the left and an inch to the right.

Side to side, side to side, the 55-year-old methodically, robotically pivoted the chair as he listened to Douglas County District Judge Greg Schatz condemn him to death for the Nov. 29, 2005, abduction and murder of 12-year-old Amber Marie Harris.

Had he turned that courtroom chair a little farther Friday, Ellis could have seen the dead-end ahead, could have seen all the lives his life of crime has affected.

There, in the back row, was Antoinette Pollock, the former daughter-in-law with whom Ellis began an intimate relationship several years ago. Ellis once took her to Hummel Park — the same place he buried Amber — and beat and choked Pollock and threatened to cut out her tongue.

There, beyond a courtroom pillar, was Aisha Birge. Ellis repeatedly raped Aisha and his other stepdaughter, Aquanta, beginning when they were 13 and 12 — threatening both with a punch or a gun and eventually impregnating both.

There, to his right, was Douglas County Attorney Don Kleine. Kleine first prosecuted the 10-time felon in 1982 for robbery and gun use in

See *Ellis: Page 2*

Juror faces his part in deciding value of a life

By WES TAYLOR
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Nine months ago, the sentence was read aloud by the court clerk, John Friend, with a matter-of-fact cadence that seemed to undermine the weight of the words.

"... guilty ...," he said. I don't recall the exact phrases. I only remember that he spoke the word without hesitation, without any emphasis.

For some reason, when I considered it beforehand, I'd expected each syllable to be given a solemn weight, reflecting everything it meant. For Roy Ellis. For Amber's family. For the city.

But there it was. "Guilty." Simple as that.

* * *

I sat 5 feet behind Roy Ellis on Friday. In the nine months since my time with the jury, I'd forgotten many of the details of his case. The addresses and dates, certain names and figures. But the images — Amber's bones among the green of the forest, a mud-caked red sweater, faded and rotting — stayed.

Friday, District Court Judge

See *Juror: Page 2*

Editor's note

Wes Taylor was one of the 12 jurors who found Roy Ellis guilty last year of first-degree murder in the death of 12-year-old Amber Harris. After the jury was excused, the Omaha Benson and St. Louis University graduate wrote an account of his and his fellow jurors' experience. Now a World-Herald staff writer, Taylor was in the courtroom Friday when a three-judge panel sentenced Ellis to die.

A perfect storm for Midlands flooding?

■ Rain forecast for Monday will fall on half-frozen fields and iced-up rivers, creating runoff and possibly ice dams.

By NANCY GAARDER
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Al Dutcher doesn't like the look of the coming week — a rain-storm on the way; frozen rivers on the verge of breaking up; and waterlogged, half-frozen fields.

It's a perfect recipe for flooding.

Come to think of it, Dutcher, the Nebraska state climatologist, would probably be happy when the whole of spring is over. During the months ahead, he said, the flood threat could be worse than last year, when floods struck across the Midwest.

Flooding is a threat every spring, but next week, and this spring in general, the risk is "definitely above normal," said Dutcher, with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln School of Natural Resources.

Areas along the Platte, Elkhorn and Blue Rivers that typically are at risk of flooding should be on alert, he said. Residents in the Platte River Valley from Columbus downstream should pay attention to changing conditions, and those along the Blue River from Grand Island downstream should be on the lookout.

Storms forecast to begin Monday morning could bring a half-inch of rain or more across the eastern two-thirds of Nebraska, and up to an inch across much of Iowa, according to the National Weather Service. Isolated thunderstorms could bring greater amounts to some areas, forecasters said.

Think of it this way, Dutcher said: If temperatures were lower, the storm would probably produce 6 to 15 inches of snow.

"This is a pretty strong storm," he said.

Dutcher and Becky Griffis, meteorologist for the weather service office in Valley, point to a couple of factors that worry them.

"Rain this early on (river) ice is not normal," Griffis said. "We haven't had a situation like this in a long time."

The problem, she said, is that the warm weekend will thaw out some of that ice, making it easier to break apart. When the rains come, the volume of runoff could be so heavy that it will churn up that ice, contributing to jamming and "ice dams."

In Iowa, there is 18 inches of snow on the ground in Lake Mills, near the Minnesota border and 4 inches in the central part of the state around Des Moines.

A combination of snowmelt and heavy rain atop frozen ground could cause problems, said Kenny Podrazik, a weather

See *Flood: Page 2*

Connect today

IN COMMUNITY CONNECTION,
Pages 1-6D

Learn about fishermen who find anglers' oases on frozen lakes in the Midlands.

Find out what's happening at local schools. **Chalkboard**

IN MIDLANDS

Find out about the Jay Novicki Camp, which offers recreation programs for people with disabilities.

On Omaha.com

Click on Restaurant Reviews under Dinner and a Movie to read what World-Herald food writers have to say about your next dinner spot.

Entertainment

Watch the weather forecast and check out the current conditions, radar and satellite images 24/7.

Home Page**Lotteries****POWERBALL**

Wednesday, Feb. 4: 7-24-30-32-44.
Powerball: 18. **Power Play:** 4. No jackpot winner. **Estimated jackpot for Saturday, Feb. 7:** \$65 million.

NEBRASKA

Pick 5 — Friday, Feb. 6: 4-20-24-32-38.
One jackpot winner. **Jackpot for Saturday, Feb. 7:** \$50,000.

MyDaY — Friday, Feb. 6: 3-8-01.

2by2 — Friday, Feb. 6: red: 9-20;
white: 6-14.

Pick 3 — Friday, Feb. 6: 8-4-6

IOWA

Cash Game — Friday, Feb. 6: 10-12-14-28-30

Hot Lotto — Wednesday, Feb. 4:
5-9-19-35-36. **Hot Ball:** 11

Pick 3 — Friday, Feb. 6: midday 9-9-2;
evening 4-4-4.

Pick 4 — Friday, Feb. 6: midday 5-0-7-1;
evening 9-6-9-3.

Lottery results from other states are on Omaha.com.

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Vol. 144, Edition 108

Ellis: Sentence brings relief to Amber's dad

Continued from Page 1
the holdup of a Kentucky Fried Chicken.

There, in the back corner, were Omaha police Detective Tom Rummel and retired Detective Steve Henthorn — two of the investigators who spent countless hours staking out Ellis.

And there, filling the right side of the courtroom, were the parents and siblings of Amber, the seventh-grader Ellis snatched after she stepped off a school bus.

Melissa Harris leaned her head on Michael Harris' shoulder and handed him a tissue as they listened to Schatz detail their daughter's brutal death and Ellis' ultimate fate.

Schatz's voice broke a little as he described the last images of Amber alive — a school-bus surveillance videotape of a girl so young that, the judge noted, she could barely see over the seat in front of her.

The three-judge panel, which also included District Court Judges Michael Coffey and Patrick Mullen, ruled that the jury was presented with enough evidence to conclude that Ellis killed Amber during a sexual assault.

The judges found that Ellis' "especially heinous and cruel" killing of Amber and his "long and serious history of criminal activity" outweighed his pleas for mercy based on his contention that he has suffered mental illness.

"It is the sentencing panel's conclusion that the presence of these two aggravating circumstances is sufficient to justify imposition of a sentence of death," Schatz said.

With that, Ellis rose slowly, spoke softly with his court-appointed attorneys and shuffled out in leg chains. His was a look of resignation — a stark contrast to his stunned reaction to his guilty verdict. On that April day, Ellis' face dropped, and he took several shallow breaths while deputies ratcheted handcuffs around him.

On Friday, it was Ellis' victims who were exhaling as they shared a sort of bittersweet satisfaction, a relief tempered by their grief.

Aisha Birge burst through the courtroom door and let out a squeal.

Several Harris family members filed past the television cameras and shared long, tearful embraces.

Around a corner, Pollock sat away from the glare of the TV spotlights, and let loose her relief that Ellis' reign is done.

"Anybody he touches he destroys," Pollock said. "And it's always women and kids. You never see him taking on a man."

Asked what he would say to Ellis, Amber's oldest brother, Jeremy Swagerty, eyeballed a TV camera and said: "You should be embarrassed of yourself."

Swagerty, 23, who often



Melissa Harris looks at her 3-week-old granddaughter, Alaya, who Harris says has the smile of her late daughter, Amber. "Nobody would be able to hold this baby if (Amber) was here," she said.

KENT SIEVERS/THE WORLD-HERALD

On Omaha.com

Photos and video from Friday and a photo retrospective of the case

wears a shirt with his sister's school picture on it, said he relishes the times that friends, even strangers, come up and ask him about Amber.

He tells them how feisty she was — how she was the only sibling who could give him as much grief as he dished out.

"She used to drive me nuts," he said. "But what I wouldn't give right now to have her around."

Other family members couldn't help but lament that Amber likely would still be here, had Ellis been held accountable for his previous crimes. In 1999, a judge sentenced Ellis to three to six years for the repeated rapes of his two stepdaughters. That decision allowed Ellis to be on the street when Amber got off of the school bus.

"That's the key word — avoidable," said Kevin Nickens, Amber's uncle. "This all could've been avoided."

Nearby, Michael and Melissa Harris urged parents to be vigilant, to scout out sex offenders in their neighborhood through the Nebraska State Patrol's Web site, to watch out for neighborhood children.

Both Harris said they don't expect to see Ellis any time soon. An appeal is automatic.

And Nebraska currently has no means of execution — a fact that Ellis' attorneys already have raised as they have challenged the constitutionality of Ellis' punishment.

With all that in mind, the Harris said, they fully expect

On Omaha.com

Photos and video from Friday and a photo retrospective of the case

Ellis to die of old age before he is put to death.

"Still, I'm relieved," said Michael Harris, who is as soft-spoken as his wife is outgoing. "I didn't think I would be this relieved, but I am."

"There's some justice today."

Kleine and Chief Deputy Douglas County Attorney Brenda Beadle echoed that.

"The satisfaction about this is that Roy Ellis can't hurt anybody else," Kleine said. "That he won't be able to prey on young women, children, young girls, rob people."

"He deserved what he got."

Unfortunately, Kleine and Beadle said, the sentence doesn't restore the one thing the Harris deserve:

Their bright, feisty daughter — her dad's "little pistol" and her mom's "Amberlina."

The 12-year-old who was the first one up in the house, belting out whatever song was in her head.

The 12-year-old who loved school and learning and had calmed the feisty part of her personality so she could help tutor other students.

The 12-year-old who seemed to change outfits three times a day and who once shrieked when her uncle made her gut a fish.

The 12-year-old who was

artsy and stubborn and spunky and sweet and all those conflicting traits of adolescence.

The 12-year-old who would curl next to her mom at night and talk about life or friends or simply drift to sleep.

The girl who would be 15 now — and who would have doted on, and no doubt hogged, her oldest sister's new baby, Alaya Marie.

Marie, of course, was Amber's middle name.

Alaya is a variation of a name that means "to ascend."

"Nobody would be able to hold this baby if (Amber) was here," said Melissa Harris, her 3-week-old granddaughter sound asleep on her shoulder. "I don't want to use the word 'bittersweet,' but it kind of is."

"Every moment is marked with the question, 'What would Amber be doing if she was here?'"

Fortunately, Melissa Harris said, their family is beginning to focus more on the quality of Amber's life, rather than the cruelty of her death.

But even the good memories compound the longing.

"You always think, 'How am I going to live the rest of my life without her?'" Melissa Harris said. "I'm hoping she's looking down on this from somewhere."

"Today was more for Amber than it was for us. This was justice for Amber."

World-Herald staff writer Bob Glissmann contributed to this report.

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Juror: No easy answer in determining justice

Continued from Page 1
Greg Schatz described the evidence we had heard. He repeated the details of the case we had decided. He talked about our judgment of guilt, our finding of "aggravating circumstances," and how those choices affected him and the two other judges in their decision on Roy Ellis' fate.

His hourlong presentation brought back, razor-sharp, all that I had let fade in my memory.

But what wasn't returning was the certainty. Any confidence that I'd done the right thing now was based mostly on the fact that I'd already done it. I question my actions. I helped bring him to this point.

* * *

Three days after our verdict was read, we re-convened to decide if Ellis were eligible for the death penalty. Until that point, I hadn't let myself consider this part of our obligation.

It was, to me, a question of conscience. And it was my conscience I was asked to ignore.

The fact is, I can find no satisfying moral or spiritual reasoning behind the death penalty.

To kill is wrong. To kill one who kills is wrong. The value of life is not dependent on circumstances.

I have opposed a state-enforced death penalty for as long as I can remember.

A system that uses humans to judge humans is by definition flawed. We make mistakes, as evidenced with the Beatrice Six.

You can't rescind a death penalty once enforced.

But I'm a hypocrite. I admit that.

Had it been my child who was murdered, I might see fit to mete out punishment with my own hands. I would violate my own beliefs.

In the name of justice, we

were asked to put our beliefs aside. The death penalty wasn't at issue. We were asked, simply, to answer three questions:

■ First, did Ellis have a violent history?

■ Second, was this crime especially heinous?

■ Third, was the murder committed in order to hide the commission of another crime?

Yes — unanimously — or no, and you are excused, Schatz had said. Yes or no.

There was no way to ignore Ellis' violent history. He used weapons in robberies; he raped his stepdaughters.

There was no doubt in my mind that what he did to Amber Harris was especially heinous. He raped that little girl. And she was defenseless when he killed her. We answered yes to Questions One and Two, and deadlocked on Three. We, the jury, were excused.

* * *

Friday, Ellis sat in the front of a crowded room, awaiting the most important moment of his life.

The rest of his life in prison, or death by execution?

Life or death. Yes or no. A simple question. One that he never would have faced without my input.

Schatz and his two fellow judges said Friday that Roy Ellis deserved to die for the murder of Amber Harris.

I don't disagree. But the fact that I played a part in it is a heavy weight.

I wondered how much responsibility I bear. Does complying with the letter of the law, as was asked of me, excuse the fact that I contributed to the death of a man?

It's a question no one can answer for me. How responsible is the pilot who follows orders to drop a bomb from a plane? Which strand in the noose bears the most weight of the corpse?

The ironic part is that, as I considered my part in the sentencing of Roy Ellis, I was doing what he never did.

I was thinking about the value of a life.

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Flood: We could have a real mess on our hands

Continued from Page 1
service meteorologist in Johnston, Iowa.

"That on top of all the frozen ground still and the snow depth across northern Iowa could potentially lead to some kinds of river issues," he said Friday.

Flooding in low-lying areas and ice jams along rivers are possible.

As of Friday, forecasters had not issued flood warnings in Nebraska or Iowa. Griffis said the weather service will con-

tinue to monitor the situation and will know more this weekend as the ice in rivers breaks up.

The reason runoff is such a problem, Dutcher said, is that fields are waterlogged from heavy rains last fall. In October, 5 inches of rainfall was common in parts of eastern Nebraska, with some areas seeing 8 to 11 inches — an amount that typically would fall from October through April.

With the ground saturated,

the rain will flow to low-lying areas.

"We could have a real mess on our hands," he said.

Dutcher said the flood risk likely will linger through the spring.

The issue isn't just flooding, he said, it's also the potential for delayed spring planting. If farmers can't get into their fields in a timely manner, crops will be at greater risk for other problems through the growing season, he said.

Dutcher said he only has to look at last year to see how damaging floods can be across the region.

The problem, he said, is that conditions are more ripe for flooding now than they were at this time last year.

This report includes material from the Associated Press.

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Stimulus: Senate, House must hammer out differences

Continued from Page 1
Reid said of the four senators.

The breakthrough came on a day when the U.S. Labor Department reported that 598,000 jobs were lost in January, the most since 1974.

The goal of the stimulus bill is to save or create up to 4 million jobs over the next two years, helping to offset the loss of 3.6 million jobs since December 2007, when the nation began its economic downturn.

With businesses shedding jobs and watching profits plummet, and with the Federal Reserve having slashed interest rates effectively to zero, many economists say a huge injection of government spending is the best hope for easing the effects of the downturn.

Nelson said the country is mired in "the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression," including job losses in Nebraska.

"One of the strongest Nebraska values is our work ethic," Nelson said. "But right now, a lot of Nebraskans just want to show up for work tomorrow or hope for a better job in the future."

Nelson said the stimulus bill accomplishes two important goals: major middle-class tax cuts and job creation.

It's not the first time Nelson has found himself in the middle of high profile legislative negotiations. He was part of the bipartisan "Gang of 14" that defused a showdown a few years ago over judicial nominations.

Nelson was ready Friday with a moniker for the group that hammered out the economic stimulus deal.

"I guess I can affectionately call all of us the 'Jobs Squad,'" he said.

Nelson had hoped to insert additional infrastructure spending into the bill as part of the group's negotiations, but he was unsuccessful. He said he wasn't giving up, however, and that the funding could be added in negotiations with the U.S. House or in future legislation.

Earlier in the day, advocates for boosting federal spending on education and health care tried to push back against the reductions Nelson's group was seeking.

Jess Wolf, president of the Nebraska State Education Association, said Nelson's heart was in the right place.

"We just would hope that they could look someplace else besides education," Wolf said.

Nelson said there is still a significant amount of education funding in the bill.

One of the largest reductions is the elimination of \$40 billion in "stabilization money" that would have been provided to governors with few strings attached. Republicans had derided that pot of money as a "state slush fund."

A variety of other programs were also trimmed, although details of many changes to the bill remained sparse late Friday. One of the negotiators, Sen. Kent Conrad, D-N.D., noted: "Education took a big hit here."

This report includes material from the Associated Press.

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