

# Post-Gazette

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12 pages

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## Planning Your Calendar

### Ongoing Events

#### Mondays

□ **Al-Anon meetings** are held at 228 Spruce Street in V alley every Monday night at 8 p.m. For more information, call 359-2925.

#### Tuesdays

□ **Fresh Hope**, a Christian Support Group for those suffering from mood disorders and their loved ones, meets at 7 p.m. at Community of Grace Church, 3434 N. 204<sup>th</sup> Street in Elkhorn. For more information, call 402-763-9255 or visit [www.FreshHope.us](http://www.FreshHope.us).

#### Thursdays

□ **Homework Hangout** for grades 6-12 is held at the Elkhorn Branch Library from 3:30-4:30 p.m. in the meeting room. Bring in your homework and get it done early. A snack will be provided.

#### Saturdays

□ **Free Adult English Classes (ESL)** every Saturday with COPE at the Community of Grace Church, 3434 N. 204<sup>th</sup> Street from 10 a.m. to noon. A light breakfast is included. For more information, please call Jenny Jeffrey at 616-2330.

□ **A knitting workshop** run by Ginny Peters is held at the V alley Public Library, 210 N. Locust Street, from 11 a.m. to noon. For more information call Frankie, 359-9924.

#### Wednesday, April 14

□ **Elkhorn Valley Women's Connection** will host an "In the Pink!" luncheon at noon at Brookestone Meadows, 600 Brookestone Meadows Plaza, Elkhorn. Ruth Dorman, R.N., will give health tips. Guest speaker will be artist Susan Chermack. RSVP to 289-1692 or [evwc@cox.net](mailto:evwc@cox.net).

#### Thursday, April 15

□ The Bennington Public Library will host **Knitting & Crocheting at Your Library** from 4:30-5:30 p.m. Anyone interested in learning or sharing knitting and crocheting techniques is welcome. Attendees are encouraged to bring projects they are currently working on. Yarn, knitting needles and crochet hooks will be available for borrowing. For more information or to donate your extra yarn, hooks or needles, call the library at 238-2201.

□ As a prelude to National Volunteer Week April 18-24 the Bennington Public Library **BATS-Bennington Advisory Teen Scene** will tour Bennington Fire & Rescue to recognize and learn more about the important service provided by the all-volunteer fire department. All teens, grades 7th grade and up, are welcome. Meet in the community room (behind the library) at 6:30 p.m. For more information, call 238-2201, e-mail [lisa@bl.omhcoxmail.com](mailto:lisa@bl.omhcoxmail.com), or visit the BATS Facebook page [www.facebook.com/pages/Bennington-NE/BATS-Bennington-Advisory-Teen-Scene/130803200394](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Bennington-NE/BATS-Bennington-Advisory-Teen-Scene/130803200394).

#### Friday, April 16

□ **Husker Siding, Windows and Roofing**, 1406 Veterans Drive, Elkhorn, will host a grand opening of their new showroom. A pancake social will be held from 7 - 10 a.m. Food, cocktails and entertainment will begin at 4 p.m. The ribbon cutting and drawing for a 2010 Nissan Cube will be at 6 p.m.

#### Saturday, April 17

□ The **City of Bennington** will hold its annual **cleanup day**. Dumpsters will be located in the BAL/4-plex parking lot at 8 a.m. Volunteer opportunities include: cleaning up city parks, litter pick-up and beautification and community improvement projects. To schedule a project, contact the city office at 238-2375. No dumping of appliances, furniture or liquids is allowed.

□ The **Elkhorn Lions Club 2nd Annual Chili Bowl** will be held from 5-7 p.m. at Sempeck's Bowling & Entertainment, 20902 Cumberland Drive, Elkhorn. Proceeds go to purchase eyeglasses for Elkhorn students and other Club projects. Tickets may be purchased at the door

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Fire Ridge first grader Matt Scolan reads to Maggie, a classroom helper who belongs to his teacher, Cindy Gustafson.

## Dogs have their day: in school

by Mary Lou Rodgers

Every now and then a dog wanders into a school and causes a lot of excitement until it is captured and taken out again. The kids love it. For the teachers, it's a disruption.

Yet dogs brought deliberately into a school are proving to be an asset to students. In the Elkhorn School District, there are now three Golden Retrievers who are regular visitors to elementary schools and teachers are seeing the benefits. Two of the dogs are owned by teachers, and both dogs are named Maggie. What is unique about these dogs is that they wear a "cape" identifying them as trained Domesti-PUPS.

One "Maggie" belongs to Cindy Gustafson, who teaches first grade at Fire Ridge Elementary. Her dog is there once a week on what the kids affectionately call "Furry Friday." Maggie has a cushion near Gustafson's desk, where she spends a lot of her time. On the bulletin board above her head are drawings the children have made for her. The children take turns practicing their reading skills by reading to Maggie, who is an attentive, uncritical listener.

"She has a calming presence," Gustafson said. "And if the children are getting too noisy, I can say it hurts Maggie's ears and they get quiet."

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## Parents of fifth graders ask Bennington school board not to begin middle school concept in 2010-11

by Sandra Stenglein

The Bennington Public Schools' Board Room was overflowing with parents of fifth grade students for the April 5 Board of Education meeting. Parents came to address the Board members with their concerns about instituting the middle school concept in 2010 and moving the sixth grade to the secondary school building. Currently Bennington has two elementary schools for K-6 and a junior/senior high school for grades 7-12. Middle school is usually composed of grades six, seven and eight in a separate building.

In March, the Board began considering moving the sixth grade to as one option to relieve the overflow of students at Pine Creek Elementary School. Projected numbers presented to the Board in February indicate that the Pine Creek building, which was built to hold 450, students is expected to be full next year, due to an influx of 111 kindergartners. In order to keep class sizes small, options need to be considered to accommodate the overflow of students.

In addition to moving the sixth grade to the secondary building, the Board is considering two other options. One is to purchase portable

classrooms for Pine Creek, and the other is to have all sixth graders go to Bennington Elementary.

The April 5 Board agenda included discussion of the sixth grade move. Board President Bill Pulte explained to those gathered that in the instance of a public forum during Board meetings those wishing to address the Board must identify themselves and limit their comments to five minutes.

Superintendent Dr. Terry Haack opened the discussion by showing a Power Point presentation comparing the middle school concept philosophy and configuration with a traditional junior high concept.

Pulte explained to the audience that it has always been in Bennington's long range plans to convert to a true middle school concept. However, up until now, it has been thought that the conversion would not occur until Bennington had two or three elementary schools.

"We have not made any decisions at this point. This is just discussion. The Board is trying to deliver the best education possible for Bennington students, be fiscally responsible and retain the small school concept by keeping small class sizes," said Pulte.

The first one to speak was Pine Creek parent Emily Ryan. She said she is concerned about "shuffling" kids around, pointing out research that shows that transient students do not achieve as well as others. She became emotional talking about retaining the small community feel with the school within walking distance from her home and keeping sixth graders in an environment that prolongs the childhood experiences found in an elementary school.

Stacy Sothman, a Bennington Elementary parent and social worker by profession, echoed Ryan's concerns about prolonging the elementary experience.

"Don't make them grow up so fast. They are not ready to go up to the high school," said Sothman.

Shelli Oborny was specific about what she wanted her child to experience as a sixth grader. She spoke of the importance of giving students the chance to be the oldest in the school and to be a role model for the younger students. She said that the current class of fifth graders is looking forward to serving as safety patrol, to participating in sixth grade buddy day and sixth grade graduation.

Christian Smion, a Pine Creek parent who immigrated to

Bennington in 2009 from Denmark, expressed his concern about the academic impact another adjustment might make for his child. He noted that the decision to settle in the Bennington community was tied directly to the small school/small community environment.

Board President Bill Pulte again tried to assure parents that the decision the Board ultimately makes would have the least effect on students as possible. He said that the Board has spent hundreds of hours considering the options.

"The class coming is actually the smallest. Why do it now with them?" asked Pine Creek parent Jim Brown.

Board member Brad Renter, who also has a student in the fifth grade, said that he too has agonized over the problem from a personal standpoint. He said that the Pine Creek master plan was designed for three classes each for grades K-5.

"In 2009-2010 we ended up with five classes of kindergarten," Renter said.

He went on to acknowledge that the Pine Creek area is where the development is happening.

"The growth is faster than the district can plan and build," Renter said.

These comments led to several of the parents arguing that to begin the middle school concept in 2010-2011 is not allowing for adequate preparation. One parent recalled that when it was time for him to move to the secondary level, his class was given a lot of preparation, which included tours of the building several times during the year and being paired with student mentors to help with the transition.

"These fifth graders have not been prepared for the change," said parent Danita Diamond, who expressed her wish that the Board would take more time to plan.

Board member Darren Siekman told the audience that the Board knew that it would be an emotional topic and consequently wanted to have the discussion in an open meeting format.

Before closing the discussion, the Board voted to table any decision until they had considered all the comments made by those in attendance.

"Thank you for your attendance. Your input has been duly noted and will be taken very seriously. Understand that this is only discussion and the other two options are being considered as well," said Pulte.

## Elkhorn church to host open house of new addition

by Mary Lou Rodgers

Our Saviour's Baptist Church in Elkhorn is inviting the public to take a tour of the newly expanded building and meet some of the people who attend there. The church, which was built on Hopper Street in 1966, has undergone its second expansion and is now ready to better accommodate the growing congregation.

Our Saviour's will host an open house next Sunday, April 18, from 2:30 to 4 p.m. Visitors can take tours of the building and enjoy refreshments.

"Come in and take a look," Pastor Larry McDermott said.

There about 150 people affiliated with Our Saviour's, about twice the number of just a few years ago. With that growth came the need for more space. The members decided to add another 5,000 square feet to the original 8,000 square feet, on the east end of the building. "One reason for the addition is that there was a lot of stress on the existing building," Pastor McDermott said.

There was not enough space for Sunday School rooms, and the activity room in the basement was

very limited for Awana activities and games the youth could play. The old Fellowship Hall in the basement had drop ceilings, which often got damaged as the youth played ball. The lower level of the addition has an open ceiling with impact-resistant light fixtures and a larger floor area. The new area has numerous outlets along one wall to make it easy to set up tables and plug in serving dishes for various occasions.

With the young people in the new area, the old Fellowship Hall can now be used at the same time for counseling sessions, allowing for a quieter atmosphere.

Other objectives of the new addition were to put restrooms on the main level and bring the nursery and toddler rooms upstairs. That was accomplished, along with new office space and wide hallways with space to hang coats. Besides the nursery and toddler room, the main level now has space for the Pastor's adult class, his wife Magie's ladies' class and a class for young couples. The church also offers classes for preschool, grade school, junior high and senior high children.

"Now we can spread out a little



Pastor Larry McDermott and members of Our Saviour's Baptist Church in Elkhorn are hosting an open house Sunday so the community can see the new addition to the 44-year-old church.

bit," Pastor McDermott said. "Everybody is really happy with it."

Members pitched in to cover the cost, managing to raise about half the expense. The work came in under budget. In preparation for this expansion, the church installed an elevator three or four years ago on the recommendation of Pastor

McDermott, who is an electrical engineer and could offer help and advice.

Pastor McDermott came from Gothenburg, Nebraska eight years ago to lead the church. He has worked to get people involved in governing the church and believes it is good for members to be active

in ministries. There are many new members since he came.

"God has brought us a lot of good people," Pastor McDermott said. "It's a very good church."

Our Saviour's Baptist Church is located at 20230 Hopper Street. For more information about the open house or the church, call 289-4787.

# Dogs help at school

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Mrs. Gustafson has seen Maggie help students in other ways, too. One little girl would get overwhelmed and be in tears every time she faced a 100-question math test until her teacher let her sit by Maggie with the test on a clipboard. With one hand stroking the soft, resting dog and the other doing the problems, she would finish in five minutes.

The gentle dog has helped students from other classrooms as well. Gustafson recalls walking Maggie through the hallway one day and coming across a special needs boy who was having a "meltdown," lying on the floor and refusing to cooperate. "I told him Maggie needed to know how she should walk in the hallway and asked him to show her," she said. "He was up off the floor and walked back to class. It's just a different approach when all the regular stuff doesn't work."

Gustafson noted that knowing Maggie will be there makes the children more excited about coming to school, especially on Furry Fridays. "Maggie is as therapeutic to the staff as she is to the kids," Gustafson added. "She seems to know when someone needs to pet her."

The children also have to learn responsibility since they can't leave things lying around on the floor that might be dangerous for Maggie. Youngsters who are frightened of dogs learn they can be a friend, and they also learn animal safety skills and how to treat others as they interact with Maggie.

The children even write letters to Maggie and place them in the "Maggie Mailbox."

Maggie and the other two dogs in Elkhorn schools are not just any pets - they are specially trained dogs in a program called Domesti-PUPS. They had to go through extensive tests to determine their temperament and many hours of obedience training. Mrs. Gustafson's Maggie was certified as a Domesti-Pup in 2006 when she was one year old. In training, she learned to behave when loud toolboxes were dropped or when someone yelled. She learned to stand still around wheel chairs as they were moved around her.

Domesti-PUPS are used as Edu-Pups, like Maggie in the classroom; as Service-Pups, assisting people with paralysis and other medical conditions; as Petting-Pups, who visit patients in nursing homes and assisted living centers; and as Reading-Pups that assist children with speech or reading difficulties to enhance their motivation and learning environment. The pups are even used in prison and in faith-based pet therapy programs.



SuZanne Rogers shares her specially trained dog, Grace, with kindergartners in Kasey Steever's class at Hillrise Elementary as they learn how people and animals can help one another.

Michelle Ashley of Lincoln is the founder of Domesti-PUPS.

Besides Elkhorn, they are used in Omaha Public Schools, Omaha Catholic Schools, Millard, Papillion-LaVista, Lincoln and Glenwood, Iowa.

## Grace visits Hillrise

This past fall, Elkhorn resident SuZanne Rogers start taking her dog, Grace, to visit schools like Hillrise Elementary, where the dog assists special needs kids with her calm presence. Rogers also brings Grace into classrooms for special units. Recently, she visited Kasey Steever's Hillrise kindergarten class as they were learning about careers and volunteer work. She explained to them how people and animals can sometimes work together to help others.

SuZanne Rogers has two sons in Elkhorn - Sam is in fourth grade at Hillrise and Jack in sixth grade at Elkhorn Middle School. When Jack was in third grade, he had to spend time in Children's Hospital with a kidney infection, and that is where the family was introduced to therapy dogs. When they got Grace, SuZanne decided to take through the training so she could help soothe other children the way the dog at Children's helped Jack.

Their dog, Grace, went through nine months of training and passed a National American Kennel Club Canine Good Citizen Test, a therapy test, three months of on-site training and evaluation at schools and nursing homes, and finally graduated.

She has also brought Grace to various schools so that children can read to her. The dog helps the children to relax.

"It enhances their confidence in reading," Rogers said. "There is a ten-

percent improvement over that of reading to an adult."

Rogers said that even though Grace and the two Maggies are Golden Retrievers, many breeds of dogs are used for therapy. To keep the children from getting too noisy and excited as they see Maggie go by, Rogers encourages them to do a "finger wave" to greet her.

## Skyline's Maggie

Skyline Elementary students in Tracy Nielsen's kindergarten class look forward to "Maggie Mondays" and "Furry Fridays." This Maggie belongs to Mrs. Nielsen. She and her daughter, Abby, a sixth grader at Elkhorn Ridge Middle School, both went through training for Maggie as a Domesti-Pup and themselves as certified trainers. The Niensens got Maggie from the Nebraska Humane Society when she was 10 months old. During training, they took her to nursing homes, to visit veterans and to a summer reading program to make sure she would interact properly with children and adults.

In Nielsen's kindergarten class, the children appear to accept her as one of them. The week of St. Patrick's Day, as they sat on the floor by their teacher talking about magic and leprechauns, Maggie came over and laid down beside them. A little girl sitting next to her laid her hand on Maggie's soft fur, stroking her now and then as she listened.

When the children went back to their tables to color pictures, Maggie made the rounds of the tables and children would take a moment to pet her as she came by. Like Mrs.

Gustafson, Mrs. Nielsen has children read to Maggie to help develop their skills, and she invites children who have a fear of dogs to get to know Maggie. She said the children in her classroom are also aware that they have a responsibility for her.

Nielsen noted that, one time, when a child from another classroom was upset and stressed, she brought Maggie over to help.

"When he touched her soft head, I saw his body relax," she said.

When Maggie isn't "working," she retires to her kennel in the corner of the classroom.

For Nielsen, Gustafson and Rogers, having a dog who brings calmness and delight to students has been a rewarding experience, particularly as they see the children's ability to learn increase. The day of dogs being a disturbance may still be true when it's a stray, but when that dog is trained as a Domesti-PUP, teachers are finding they are a welcome addition to the classroom.

For more information about Domesti-PUPS, call 1-866-515-PUPS.



Fire Ridge teacher Cindy Gustafson brings her dog, Maggie, to school.

# Omaha neighborhood cleanup to begin April 17

Omaha citizens can now find out when and where this year's spring cleanup will be available for their neighborhood by calling 444-4636.

The highly successful Neighborhood Clean-Up Program will begin April 17 and will be conducted at events on six Saturdays during the months of April and May: April 17, April 24, May 1, May 8, May 15 and May 22. All cleanup sites will be open from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Disposal opportunities for bulky items or difficult to dispose of items such as chairs, couches, appliances and tires will be available in participating neighborhoods across the city. The program also offers the opportunity to dispose of large limbs and brush not eligible for the City's weekly yard waste collection. Each cleanup site will have vouchers available that will cover the disposal cost of tree limbs and brush at an off-site location that day.

Appliances, tires and automotive batteries will only be collected at one designated site each cleanup Saturday. These locations can be

obtained by calling the cleanup hotline at 444-4636. Full railroad ties will not be accepted at any cleanup locations.

In 2009, more than 1,300 tons of unwanted bulky items, 64 tons of scrap tires, and nearly 600 junk appliances were disposed of thanks to the efforts of the hundreds of volunteers. This year, 101 neighborhood groups will participate in the Neighborhood Clean-Up Program at 84 different locations throughout Omaha and all citizens are encouraged to participate.

"I applaud the work of our local neighborhood leaders who partner with the City and Keep Omaha Beautiful to make spring cleanup successful," Mayor Jim Suttle said. "I look forward to an outstanding effort this year as this program continues to be a great asset to neighbors and to the City."

The Neighborhood Clean-Up Program is a partnership between the City of Omaha, Keep Omaha Beautiful, Incorporated and supportive neighborhood and community groups.

## OMAHA CLEANUP SITES (Open from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.)

- Appliances** (only one site each Saturday)  
 April 17 - South High School - 4915 S. 24th Street, 68107  
 April 24 - Kiewit Middle School - 15650 Howard Street, 68118  
 May 1 - Walnut Hill Elementary School - 4355 Charles Street, 68131  
 May 8 - Lee Valley Park - 1210 N. 108th Street, 68114  
 May 15 - Hillside Elementary School - 7500 Western Avenue, 68114  
 May 22 - City Sewer Maintenance Facility - 6880 Q Street, 68117

- Tires and Auto Batteries** (only one site each Saturday)  
 April 17 - St. Vincent DePaul - 14330 Eagle Run Drive, 68164  
 April 24 - Caitlyn Magnet School - 12736 Marinda Street, 68144  
 May 1 - St. Richards Church - 4318 Fort Street, 68111  
 May 8 - Hillsborough Park - 136th and Boyd Streets, 68164  
 May 15 - Boyd Elementary School - 8341 Boyd Street, 68134  
 May 22 - parking long behind St. Adalberts Catholic Church - 3002 Wright Plaza, 68106

## West Omaha general cleanup sites

- April 24**  
 Faithful Shepherd Presbyterian Church - 2530 S. 165th Avenue, 68130  
 Kiewit Middle School - 15650 Howard Street, 68118  
 Spring Ridge Elementary School - 17830 Shadow Ridge Drive, 68130  
 Baseball diamond southwest of 168th and Lake Zorinsky
- May 8**  
 Deer Ridge Swimming Pool - 585 South 126th Street, 68154  
 Cottonwood Elementary School - 615 Piedmont Drive, 68154  
 Cul-de-sac at 14625 California Street  
 Bent Creek Park - 1232 North 164th Street, 68118  
 Standing Bear Elementary School - 15860 Taylor Street, 68116  
 Hillsborough Park - 138th Street and Meredith Avenue, 68164  
 Lee Valley Pool - 10605 Charles Street, 68114  
 Open field at 17056 Spencer Street  
 Ezra Millard Elementary School - 14111 Blondo Street, 68164



Skyline Elementary students in Tracy Nielsen's kindergarten class look forward to "Maggie Mondays" and "Furry Fridays."

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**156th & Hwy 36**

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