

Local

CRANSTON HEARING

The Nebraska Board of Parole will consider granting parole to Robert E. Cranston at a hearing Thursday at the Omaha Correctional Center. Parole hearings start at 9:30 a.m.

Cranston, an inmate at the facility, was sentenced in Hall County and is serving one year to 20 months for false reporting and possession of a controlled substance except marijuana.

Cranston began serving the sentence July 25, 2006.

GALBRAITH HEARING

The Nebraska Board of Parole will consider granting parole to Carolee Galbraith at a hearing Thursday at the Omaha Correctional Center. Parole hearings start at 9:30 a.m.

Galbraith, an inmate at the facility, was sentenced in Hall County and is serving one year to 20 months for second-degree forgery, along with second-degree forgery in Douglas County, possession of a forged instrument in Holt County and theft in Sarpy County.

Galbraith began serving the sentence July 25, 2006.

State

**BURWELL MAYOR
DUI**

BURWELL — The mayor of Burwell has pleaded no contest to a charge of second-offense drunken driving.

Mayor Rebecca Sondag's plea in Garfield County Court this week was part of a deal to reduce the charge from third-offense drunken driving, said Judy Simpson, clerk magistrate.

A Feb. 27 sentencing was scheduled for Sondag, who was elected in 2004.

She was arrested on April 14 in Burwell.

**ELKHORN
ANNEXATION**

LINCOLN — Elkhorn has lost what could be its last chance to avoid being swallowed up by the state's largest city.

The Nebraska Supreme Court ruled on Friday that Omaha's annexation of Elkhorn was valid, denying an appeal by the smaller city.

Omaha has argued that its westward expansion would be blocked if Elkhorn were not annexed.

Elkhorn has argued that its quality of life, services and small-town character would be lost if it were to become part of Omaha.

The fight began in early 2005, when Elkhorn said it planned to annex 21 subdivisions to give it a population of more than 10,000. That, under state law, would block Omaha from annexing the town.

The next day, Omaha announced that it intended to annex Elkhorn and adjoining subdivisions. Omaha's plan was approved March 8 — just a week before Elkhorn completed its annexation plan.

Douglas County District Judge Gerald Moran later ruled that Omaha's annexation of Elkhorn should be allowed and said Elkhorn's attempt to annex the surrounding subdivisions was illegal and improperly motivated.

The Associated Press

Calendar

HASTINGS

- ◆ **Alcoholics Anonymous**, 8:30 and 10 a.m., noon, 5:15 and 8 p.m. Saturday, 521 S. St. Joseph Ave.
- ◆ **Alanon**, 9 a.m. Saturday, The Kensington.
- ◆ **Celebrate Recovery**, 7-9 p.m. Saturday, Evangelical Free Church, 463-1441 for information.
- ◆ **"Flushed Away"**, 7:15 p.m. Saturday, Lied Super Screen Theatre at Hastings Museum.
- ◆ **Narcotics Anonymous**, 8 p.m. Saturday, 401 N. Lincoln Ave.
- ◆ **Sachtleben Observatory**, 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Wabash Avenue three miles south of U.S. Highway 6. Call (402) 461-2399 for more information.

Lotteries

WINNING NUMBERS

Thursday
Nebraska Pick 5 . . . 9-22-25-30-38
Jackpot: \$54,000
2by2 . . . Red 15-25, White 6-24
Nebraska Pick 3 . . . 7-8-3
Kansas Pick 3 . . . 9-4-6

District examining groundwater lawsuit

The Associated Press

HOLDREGE — The two incoming directors for Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District will help decide whether the district will sue North Platte Basin groundwater users, but a decision by the board likely won't come before April.

Board directors say Central's customers are limited in surface water irrigation for the third straight year while most upstream users in the North Platte Natural Resources District have no limits.

Legal counsel Mike Klein of Holdrege said Wednesday that lawyers are still figuring out options, including who to name in a potential lawsuit.

"Our current focus is specifically on the North Platte NRD," Klein said.

"Frankly, I think this board has been very patient in not taking action long ago."

Klein told new directors Robert Dahlgren of Bertrand and Martin Mueller of Ogallala that the case would likely end up in Nebraska Supreme Court.

Central's customers have a surface water irrigation limit of 6.7 inches per acre in 2007. The Pumpkin Creek watershed has limits of 14 inches per acre.

"I'd have sued a long time ago, if it was me," Director Doyle Lavene of Bertrand said.

The first meeting of the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program is scheduled for Feb. 7 in Denver. On the agenda for that meeting is a discussion of Lake McConaughy, which holds Central's irrigation water supply.

The governors of Nebraska, Colorado and Wyoming recently signed the Platte River Cooperative Agreement, which is designed to benefit the threatened and endangered species and provide water users in the Platte River Basin with coverage under the Endangered Species Act without giving up their access to federal water, land or funding.

To pay the \$317 million cost of the plan, the federal government would pay \$157 million in cash. Colorado plans to pitch in \$24 million in cash, and Wyoming \$6 million in cash. Nebraska doesn't have to pay any cash, but could — because of a substantial increase in irrigated acres since July 1, 1997 — end up having to take thousands of irrigated acres out of production. That would carry

a high price tag. The remaining \$130 million for the plan is not in cash, but is being contributed through water and land credits: The three states must together contribute 80,000 acre-feet of water at an agreed upon value of \$120 million. Nebraska's share of that water contribution will come through releases of the water in the already existing "environmental account" in Lake McConaughy. Wyoming and Nebraska also will contribute about 3000 acres of land, a \$10 million value.

If the program continues after 13 years, a total of 29,000 acres will be needed to fully accomplish the objectives of the program, but that acreage goal could change as the science is improved.

Hiding utility lines still a goal

SHAY BURK

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Hiding utility services lines in the downtown area is still the goal of Hastings Utilities and the city of Hastings.

On Thursday, HU's governing body, the city Board of Public Works, discussed options and the steps necessary to possibly move electrical lines and other utilities underground in downtown alleys.

In December, Randy Chick, Business Improvement District director, again approached the board about altering the alley utilities.

Chick has been instrumental in helping with the conversion of upper-floor levels of many downtown buildings into residences.

However, Chick told the board Thursday that having the necessary egress windows for escape in the case of a fire is difficult in some instances. He said there are transformers and electrical lines blocking many alley windows of downtown buildings.

That is why Chick wants to have the lines moved underground and the transformers put onto ground-level pads. The changes also would improve the appearance of the alleys.

The alleys he is focusing on are those between First and Second streets from Burlington Avenue to St. Joseph Avenue.

City Engineer Dave Wacker said he recently spoke with representatives from Dutton-Lainson Co., 451 W. Second St., who said they also would

like to have the utilities relocated in the alley behind their building between St. Joseph and Kansas avenues.

The alleys currently have electrical lines and telephone lines above the surface with sanitary and storm sewer underground.

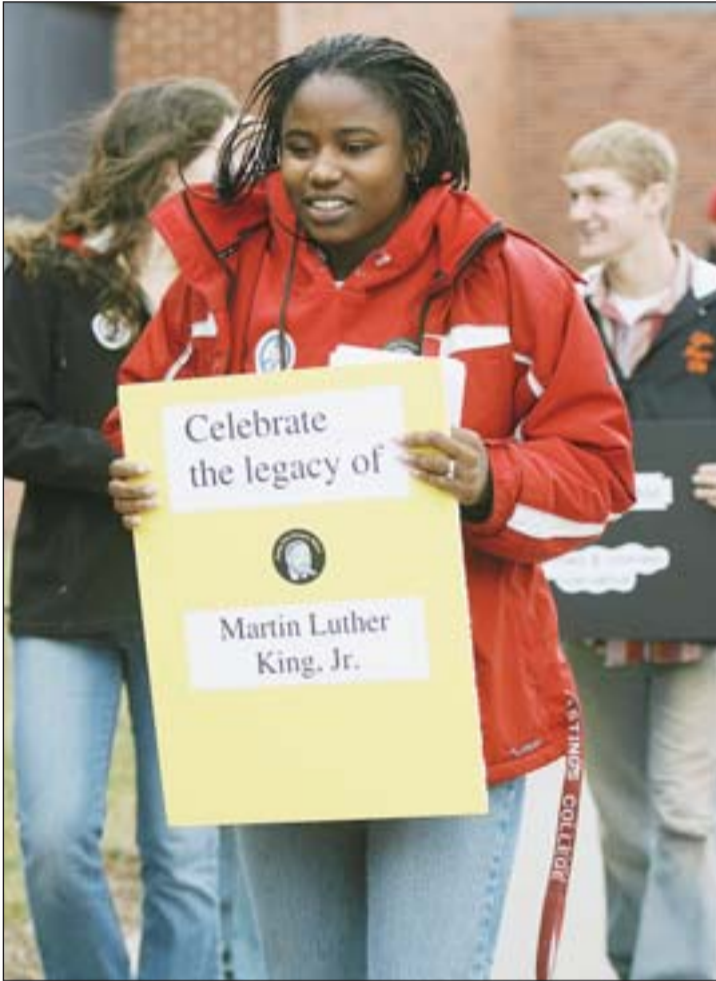
BPW member Willis Hunt said he believed the condition of the alleys was such that the pavement should be ripped up to allow for the utilities to go underground.

The downtown alley system last was repaved in 1979 after a gas line explosion.

The board plans to discuss the situation further and possibly have some cost information available at an April meeting.

On Thursday, the board also:

- ◆ Received an update on the recovery efforts since the Dec. 30 ice storm. Utilities Manager Marvin Schultes recognized several staff members who were instrumental in the cleanup and repair efforts.
- ◆ Honored all staff involved in the storm recovery efforts as recommended by the Merit Award Committee. Sherman Luhn also was honored for having donated five gallons of blood.
- ◆ Unanimously approved the U.S. Highway 6 Improvements Construction Agreement with AGP.
- ◆ Unanimously approved the agreement with Black and Veatch, of Kansas City, Mo., for the engineering design for coal-handling improvements at the Whelan Energy Center.
- ◆ Unanimously approved the real estate improvement contract for Underground Distribution System with Engel Construction for Lot 1 of Cimarron Meadows Subdivision No. 3.



AMY ROH/Tribune

Former Hastings College student Tamisha Rose participates in a march to St. Cecilia High School Jan. 16, 2006, in remembrance of Martin Luther King Jr.

College observing Martin Luther King Jr. Day

PRESENTATIONS AND COMMUNITY SERVICE ACTIVITY AMONG PLANNED HOLIDAY EVENTS

HASTINGS TRIBUNE
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Those wishing to honor Martin Luther King Jr. can attend events on the Hastings College campus commemorating the civil rights leader.

Monday is Martin Luther King Jr. Day, and HC will be observing the holiday with two presentations and doing community service.

At 10:45 a.m., Spencer Davis will speak in French Memorial Chapel. Davis is a professor of history at Peru State College and a specialist in African American history. Davis also is a co-founder and coordinator of the Black History Workshop of Zion Baptist Church in Omaha.

At 7:30 p.m., the Rev. Rosalie Smith Anderson will speak in French Memorial Chapel. Anderson is a Hastings native and

served as a licensed practical nurse for many years before answering a call to ministry. She is ordained as a United Methodist pastor.

Included in the Monday night's presentation will be performances by the Hastings High School Madrigal Choir and Concert Choir, under the direction of Chuck DeWall.

The activities were planned by the college's Omicron Delta Kappa leadership honor society, Multicultural Student Union and the Office of the Chaplain.

Also, HC students, faculty and staff will also be observing the holiday by completing community service projects throughout Hastings.

Kim Graviette, director of career services, is coordinating the projects. Participants will donate their time at Big Brothers Big Sisters; Catholic Social Services; Children's Ark Day Care; Crossroad Center; Hastings Museum of Natural and Cultural History; The Kensington; Pooh Corner Day Care; Hastings Family YMCA; and The Zone.

Bill would change state song

SEN. BURLING PROPOSES HASTINGS WOMAN'S SONG

The Associated Press

LINCOLN — Forty years after "Beautiful Nebraska" was named the official state song, the tune is facing a challenge.

The state song would change to an upbeat country tune, "I

Love Nebraska" by Ginger ten Benschel of Hastings, under a bill (LB345) introduced Friday in the Legislature.

Sen. Carroll Burling said he's not trying to pick on the old state song.

"It's a nice song. It's just, times have changed, culture changes," the Kenesaw senator said. "This song of hers fits with today's culture."

Jim Fras, a Russian refugee

who came to Lincoln in 1952, wrote "Beautiful Nebraska" in 1960.

According to the secretary of state's Web site, Fras said he was "lying in a pasture and words just came to me."

He wrote the song in an hour. State senators spent several legislative sessions debating the state song selection, and in 1967, "Beautiful Nebraska" was adopted on a vote of 31-4.

Hastings airport to turn on new lights

SHAY BURK

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The Hastings Municipal Airport should have new taxiway lighting by the end of the year, officials said Thursday.

In the next few months, the Airport Advisory Board plans to move forward with the bidding and construction process for a lighting project.

The board has been making arrangements for more than a year to build a new hangar at the airport; however, after a couple of snags with the Federal Aviation Administration, the board changed its plans.

The group decided to switch its focus to lighting at the airport after it learned of the poor condition of some of the airport's runway lighting systems.

In early December, the Nebraska Department of Aeronautics Board of Commissioners approved plans for four lighting projects.

Diane Hofer, a consultant with Olsson Associates in Lincoln, said the board could feasibly relocate the Automated Service Observation System and install new taxiway lights in 2007. The automated system, known as ASOS, is the National Weather Service's weather observation system.

She said preliminary plans for the lighting project should be completed by the end of

March, meaning the board could ask for bids by the end of April. Construction would start in mid to late May and be completed by the end of the year.

The board has been working for more than a year to move the ASOS from its current location just north of the maintenance building at the airport, 3100 W. 12th St., in order to build a new hangar.

While the board isn't planning to build a new hangar in 2007, Hofer said, the hangar project still is on the drawing board and cannot move forward at any time until the ASOS is moved.

Moving the ASOS and replacing the taxiway lights will cost about \$403,000. Of that cost, 95 percent will be covered by federal funding. The city of Hastings and the airport board will be responsible for the remaining 5 percent, a total cost of \$20,100.

The board also has three other lighting projects approved by the FAA and ready to be completed when funds are available.

Those projects include replacing the wind cost, runway end identifier lights and the guidance signs, all of which now are in poor or non-working condition.

Hofer said she expects those three projects could be completed in 2008.

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