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VOLUME 138
NUMBER 187

The Dakotas' Oldest Newspaper | **12 PAGES** | www.yankton.net

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Sheriff Says Arrests May Solve Many Area Thefts

Case Includes Victims From Six Counties

BY NATHAN JOHNSON
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Thousands of dollars worth of stolen property from the region has been recovered through an ongoing investigation by the Yankton County Sheriff's Office.

So far, the evidence collected can be traced back to burglaries committed in Beadle, Bon Homme, Clay, Hand, Hutchinson and Yankton counties in the last couple years, according to Sheriff Jim Vlahakis. He expects even more stolen property will be recovered before the investigation is complete.

Although the sheriff's office has been looking into the local crimes since they were committed, Vlahakis said the investigation really broke loose in November.

Last week, the *Press & Dakotan* reported that the sheriff's office arrested Travis Wayne Johnson, 25, Yankton, on charges of criminal entry of a motor vehicle, possession of marijuana, possession of drug paraphernalia, two counts of second-degree petty theft, three counts of third-degree burglary and four counts of grand theft.

Authorities said they had linked Johnson to three business burglaries that occurred in

Gayville and Mission Hill, as well as thefts that took place in the Gayville, Irene and Volin areas. The incidents occurred in 2011 and 2012.

Since then, the investigation has led to the arrest of Stephanie Wilkinson, 20, Yankton,

for possession of marijuana, grand theft, two counts of receiving stolen property and as an accessory to a crime.

Sheriff Jim Vlahakis said Monday afternoon that warrants were being sought to arrest two more males linked to the thefts, and more individuals may be apprehended before the investigation is complete.

The suspects so far were not a well-organized outfit, he stated.

"Some were together for the thefts. Some were taking the property and selling it for the others," Vlahakis said. "They've sold some of it at pawn shops. They've stored it at friends' houses. It just keeps blossoming out. That's how these things go if they've been at it for a while."

Items have been recovered

BURGLARY | PAGE 12



December is here and it couldn't be milder. Temperatures during the weekend crept into the 60s in the Yankton area, prompting many fishermen to hit the waters above Gavins Point Dam to try their luck. Although it cooled into the 50s on Monday (whipped along by some northern winds), it was still 15 degrees above normal for this time of year. Temperatures are expected to remain mild through Wednesday before cooling off toward the weekend. Some precipitation is also possible later in the week. For weather details, see page 2.

PHOTO: DAVE TUNGE/DAKOTA AERIALS

Ag Analyst Offers His Read On '13 Outlook

BY LINDA WUEBBEN
P&D Correspondent

"You have just lived through the worst drought in 56 years," said Steven D. Johnson, Ph.D., Farm & Ag Business Management Specialist, Iowa State University Extension. "I'm not clairvoyant; I do know you need to be careful as you look to 2013."

Farmers met at the Kelly Inn in Yankton last week to listen another crop forecast and management seminar presentation by Johnson. The morning presentation was sponsored by Farm Credit Services, South Dakota Corn Growers Association and Risk Management Agency.

"God is the only one who knows the future and he doesn't trade beans or corn," Johnson said with a laugh. "God owns the Board of Trade."

Nevertheless, Johnson gave his best bet for the crop year in 2013.

Last year, Johnson told farmers to lower their expectations and he came very close to the mark. But all bets are off this year as the drought has brought much uncertainty to next year's growing season.

He told the local farmers not to get caught up in forecasts. He himself doesn't believe there will be another catastrophic drought in 2013 because there have never been two major droughts back to back, he said. He advised to make decisions just as they have made them in the past for planting. Crop insurance will exist in 2013 just as it did in 2012. That program is firm.



PHOTO: LINDA WUEBBEN
Steven D. Johnson, Ph.D., a Farm & Ag Business Management Specialist with Iowa State University Extension, offered his prognostications on 2013 during a seminar held in Yankton last week.

The Farm Bill is not firm, and he sees Congress doing one of two things:

- The Farm Bill will be extended as for another year so they can iron out a suitable replacement. In February, farmers will apply for their direct payments and receive the amount in October just like this past year.
- The other option for the Farm Bill will be bundling it in the fiscal cliff package.

Along with experiencing the worst drought in 56 years, U.S. farmers planted the largest number of acres since 1937. He admitted he has never seen so many trees and vacant farmsteads disappear as this past year and the land tilled over for a crop. He also noticed South Dakota co-ops and elevators covering corn piles that are lying on the ground, which he believes is a first. In February and March, corn will be needed and at attractive prices for the seller.

ANALYST | PAGE 5

Midwest Economy Still Soft

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The economy in nine Midwest and Plains states likely will remain sluggish because of weakness in ethanol and food production, but conditions vary widely across the region, according to a report released Monday.

The overall economic index for the region remained in negative territory at 48 in November based on the monthly Mid-America survey of business leaders. The index was slightly better than October's 46.5, but any score below 50 suggests the economy will contract over the next three to six months.

Creighton University economist Ernie Goss said weakness in non-durable-goods producers, such as food and ethanol makers, combined with worries about the health of the global economy to slow business in the region.

The survey covers Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma and South Dakota. Goss said that in November businesses in Iowa, North Dakota and Oklahoma outperformed the rest of the region.

The survey of business leaders and supply managers that Goss oversees uses a collection of indexes ranging from zero to 100. Survey organizers say any score above 50 suggests growth in that factor while a score below 50 suggests decline for that factor.

The business leaders surveyed turned pessimistic about the econ-

ECONOMY | PAGE 3

Officials Offer Data On Neb. Early Voting

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — More than a quarter of people who voted in Nebraska during the Nov. 6 election chose to do so early.

The state Secretary of State's office says more than 800,000 people voted in the general election this year. That includes more than 200,000 early voters. More than 595,000 Nebraska voters visited the polls on Election Day.

The total shows more than 69 percent of people in Nebraska voted. That's just shy of Secretary of State John Gale's 71 percent prediction, and below the 70.2 percent who voted in 2008.

Man Arrested For Theft From Wind Farm

BY NATHAN JOHNSON
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A Yankton man has been arrested in connection with the theft of 1,920 pounds of copper wire from a wind tower farm in Knox County, Neb.

Jonathan Riibe, 21, was arrested Sunday by the Yankton County Sheriff's Office for possessing/receiving stolen property. According to the Knox County Sheriff's Office, it will also charge him with criminal trespass and theft by unlawful taking.

Knox County had received a report from the Crofton Bluffs Wind Farm on Nov. 29 that a large amount of copper wire had been stolen from one of its tower sites.

Yankton County Sheriff Jim Vlahakis said his office was contacted by Knox County authorities to see if a large amount of copper had been sold here.

"We checked a local salvage business, and the guy had brought it over and sold it," he said.

A media release from Knox County

Sheriff Don Henery said Riibe admitted to taking the copper and selling it on Nov. 30 to Yankton Metals for \$1,536. It was recovered the same day and the suspect was identified with assistance from the business.

"The Knox County Sheriff's Office would like to thank Yankton Metals for their help and cooperation in solving this case," Henery stated.

Follow Nathan Johnson on Twitter at twitter.com/AnInlandVoyage

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