

Court Upholds \$1M Award For Paralyzed Man

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — The Nebraska Supreme Court has upheld a decision to award \$1 million to a man who was paralyzed during a high-speed chase in Platte County.

The court ruled Friday that Brian Werner was an innocent passenger in the car driven by Joey Korth, who fled from a sheriff's deputy in October 2008.

According to the ruling, Werner was walking home from a bar in Humphrey when he saw Korth's car. Korth asked Werner to get in, and the two headed toward the town of Lindsay.

A deputy clocked the car at well over the 60 mph speed limit, and signaled for Korth to stop. Korth fled, reaching speeds greater than 100 mph before he lost control and flipped the car on a gravel road.

Juvenile With Pellet Gun Detained At S.F. Mall

SIoux FALLS (AP) — Sioux Falls police responding to a call about a juvenile carrying a gun inside Empire Mall says the person had a non-lethal pellet gun.

No one was hurt, and the unnamed juvenile is being questioned. Police Lt. Terry Mixell says someone from the mall called police Friday afternoon. By the time officers arrived, the juvenile was gone, but they were able to track him down nearby.

Mixell says the Airsoft gun shoots plastic pellets.

Tensions nationwide have been high since last week, when a gunman opened fire in an elementary school in Newtown, Conn., killing 20 children and six adults.

This Friday also marks the day that some believe ancient Mayans had prophesized the world would end, which has prompted threats that closed down smatterings of schools across the country.

Reward In Missing Cousins' Case Increases

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — A new reward fund was established Friday to help police make an arrest in the case of two eastern Iowa cousins whose bodies were found earlier this month.

A monthlong fund drive organized by the Cedar Valley Crime Stoppers raised \$20,500 through public donations and various fundraisers, including bake sales.

The money is available to anyone who wishes to remain anonymous but provides information that leads to an arrest in the case of cousins Elizabeth Collins and Lyric Cook. The girls, 8-year-old Elizabeth and 10-year-old Lyric, went for a bike ride July 13 in Evansdale and didn't return. Hunters found their bodies Dec. 5 in the Seven Bridges Wildlife Area, about 25 miles from where the girls were last seen.

The new reward is being offered in addition to a \$50,000 fund earlier established by law enforcement and \$100,000 offered by an anonymous private donor. The \$150,000 will be paid upon the arrest and conviction of the perpetrator. The additional requirement of a conviction means authorities may expect the caller to participate in prosecution and possibly testify at a trial to collect this money, Smock said.

Smock said calls continue to come in to his department and the CrimeStoppers hotline — 855-300-TIPS (8477).

Judge: Former Plant Workers Due Severance

RAPID CITY (AP) — A judge has ruled that 100 former Merillat particle board plant workers should receive severance pay the company promised but did not distribute when it closed its Rapid City plant in 2009.

The Rapid City Journal reports U.S. District Court Judge Jeffrey Viken awarded the 100 former employees a total of more than \$2 million.

Attorney John Dorsey says the pool of money could grow by \$860,000 if the judge later rules that interest accrued during the past three years should also be awarded.

About 50 former employees already settled claims for payments in mediation sessions.

Western Nebraska School Closes For Illness

ALLIANCE, Neb. (AP) — St. Agnes Academy in western Nebraska's Alliance has closed for the Christmas holiday early due to illness.

Scottsbluff radio station KNEB-AM reports that the school closed Thursday on the recommendation of a local doctor because of the spread of influenza in town.

The radio station says 12 of the elementary school's 137 students were sick Thursday. KNEB says several of the school's staff members, including the principal, have been sick.

South Dakota

Part Of Abortion Appeal Dropped

BY KRISTI EATON
Associated Press

SIoux FALLS — Planned Parenthood filed notice Friday that it is dropping its appeal of a legal provision that requires women seeking abortions in South Dakota to wait three days.

A law passed in 2011 required women in South Dakota to wait 72 hours before they are allowed to end a pregnancy — the longest waiting period in the country — but the provision had been temporarily blocked until the lawsuit filed by Planned Parenthood made its way through court.

Planned Parenthood of Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota said Friday that it was dropping the appeal of the 72-hour wait but will continue to fight another provision that requires women to undergo counseling at pregnancy help centers, which discourage

abortions, before they can terminate a pregnancy. The group filed a motion to dismiss that part of the lawsuit without prejudice, meaning they may decide to challenge it in the future.

A judge must still sign off on the dismissal. "This was not an easy decision for us to make by any means. We believe that this law is wrong and that it is disrespectful to women and it is completely unnecessary and for a host of reasons is ill-conceived," said Sarah Stoesz, the president of Planned Parenthood of Minnesota, South Dakota and North Dakota.

Stoesz said Planned Parenthood, which operates South Dakota's only abortion clinic in Sioux Falls, did not feel confident that the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals would have sided with them on the provision, saying the court has "ruled against women's interests time after time."

Churches Prepare Christmas Packages For South Dakota Prison Inmates

BY KRISTI EATON
Associated Press

SIoux FALLS — More than 3,000 care packages of fudge and Christmas cards will be delivered to the inmates at the South Dakota State Penitentiary in Sioux Falls, the Yankton Minimum Security Unit and the Mike Durfee State Prison in Springfield on Monday as part of an annual tradition.

For many of the inmates, it's the only present they'll have during the holiday season.

"Some of them don't have very many ties to the outside world anymore, so this is just sort of special. Some of the guys are already thinking about it a couple months ahead of time, wondering if we're going to do them again," said Rev. Steve Moerman of Cornerstone Prison Church at the state penitentiary.

The churches at the prison started offering the packages to inmates back in the 1980s, he

said. Starting in October, the churches start planning for the packages. The more than 8,000 fudge pieces are made by a variety of groups and they must follow a strict recipe. Hard candies, packages of peanuts and homemade cards — usually written by students in fifth grade or below — are also included, Moerman said.

"A lot of times the guys at the prison are sort of, you know, the idea of abandoned or cast aside or neglected and in some ways the fudge, though it's simple, is a way of saying that there's people who still care," Moerman said.

Inmate Jeff Howard said he and others are heartened by the gifts. Howard, who is serving a life sentence for first-degree murder, has been unrepentant, maintaining his innocence during the more than 30 years he has been in prison. But the Rev. Moerman said that even those who've done the unthinkable deserve love and acknowledgement come Christmas. The gifts are distributed

even to non-Christians.

"There is really excitement to get this stuff and guys really appreciate it," Moerman said.

Other inmates get through the holidays knowing they are creating gifts for children outside the prison, said Hope Johnson, the Corrections Program and Contracts Manager at the Department of Corrections.

About 20 inmates at the state penitentiary learn to knit stocking caps throughout the year, and around Christmas, the hats are donated to local agencies to be used as Christmas gifts. More than 2,000 hats and 1,000 mittens are being distributed to different agencies across the state, along with more than 3,000 wooden toys made by inmates using scrap lumber from the prison shops.

"In a roundabout way, we are giving back in the best way we have in prison," Johnson said.

Neb. Jobless Rate Drops For November

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska's unemployment rate dropped to 3.7 percent in November — the lowest it has been in four years, according to the Nebraska Department of Labor.

The preliminary jobless rate was down from October's rate of 3.8 percent and well below the 4.3 percent a year ago.

It also was less than half of the national rate of 7.7 percent in November. The national rate is down from October's 7.9 percent and last November's 8.7 percent.

The number of unemployed people in Nebraska was estimated at 38,091 in November. That's lower than the 39,254 in October and the 43,501 unemployed in November 2011.

In Nebraska's largest city, the unemployment rate dropped to 3.7 percent in November from October's 3.9 percent.

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