



American Profile

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Shifting Ties:
Oakland Bolts
Summit League

PAGE 8



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Yankton County Commission

No Blame In Failure To Assess Levies

BY NATHAN JOHNSON
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The Yankton County Commission was told Tuesday that blame can't be assigned to any one person for why requested taxes were not collected for two local townships.

Representatives of Utica Township and Volin Township had first shared with the Yankton County Commission that the Yankton County Auditor's Office had not implemented their respec-

tive property-tax opt-outs a couple months ago.

In response, the County Commission asked Russ Olson of the South Dakota Department of Legislative Audit to investigate the matter to determine what had happened. Olson presented his findings Tuesday.

"What I did was review the records and documentation in the county auditor's office, had a discussion with the South Dakota Department of Revenue and met with officials from Utica and

Volin townships," he said.

"When I looked at the situation, it isn't necessarily that the townships did anything wrong or that the county did anything wrong — a lot of it came down to communication," Olson continued. "We had a failure in people to have the communication and ask the questions."

Utica Township approved an annual opt-out of \$45,000 that was to take ef-

COUNTY | PAGE 3

Inmate Gets Death Again For Killing Of Guard

Berget Sentenced Again By Judge After Being Denied Jury Hearing

BY KRISTI EATON
Associated Press

SIoux FALLS — A South Dakota inmate was sentenced to death for the second time on Tuesday for his role in killing a prison guard during a failed prison escape two years ago.

Rodney Berget, 50, was initially sentenced last year in the April 2011 slaying of Ronald "RJ" Johnson, who was killed on his 63rd birthday. The state Supreme Court overturned the sentence this year, ruling that Circuit Judge Brad Zell improperly considered a statement Berget made to a psychiatrist. Berget then sought a new sentencing hearing in front of a jury.

But Zell denied that request and re-sentenced him to death, South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley said in a statement.

"The heinousness of the crime, as well as Berget's extensive criminal history, hopeless chance of rehabilitation and multiple attempts of escape leave no alternative but to protect the public through imposition of the death penalty," Jackley said.

Jackley said his office would ask that the execution take place within six to eight months, as required by South Dakota law.

Berget's lawyer, Jeff Larson, told The Associated Press he could not comment without first speaking with his client.

Berget and Eric Robert, 50, both

pleaded guilty in Johnson's slaying. Prosecutors said the two struck Johnson with a pipe and covered his mouth with plastic wrap during a failed escape from the state prison in Sioux Falls.

Robert had asked Zell to sentence him to death, and Zell found there was at least one aggravating factor to warrant the death penalty. Robert was executed in October. A few months after Robert's sentencing, Berget waived his right to a jury trial and appeared before Zell to be sentenced.

Berget was serving life sentences for attempted murder and kidnapping when he tried to escape with Robert, who was serving 80 years for a kidnapping conviction.

The two men attacked Johnson while he was alone in the prison in an area where inmates work on upholstery, signs, custom furniture and other projects. Robert put on Johnson's uniform and tried to move a large box, which Berget was inside, toward the prison gate. But the inmates were caught before leaving the prison.

A third inmate was sentenced to life in prison for his involvement in the escape attempt.

The prison made more than a dozen procedural changes after Johnson's death to improve security and safety. Johnson's widow, Lynette Johnson, has filed a wrongful death lawsuit against the state, the Department of Corrections and several DOC officials.

On The Big Screen

Freeman Native Lands Spot In Blockbuster

BY DEREK BARTOS
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What do Robert Downey Jr., Gwyneth Paltrow and a Freeman native have in common?

All three are featured in the film "Iron Man 3," which opened this past weekend. The highly anticipated movie was tops at the box office, pulling in \$175 million in weekend ticket sales.

Elliott Graber, a 2009 University of South Dakota graduate who now lives in Los Angeles, plays a White House techie official in a scene with actor Don Cheadle.

"I was fortunate to get a little face time on the big screen," Graber said in a phone interview with the *Press & Dakotan*. "The whole thing was a great experience."

While he didn't have any lines, Graber said he thoroughly enjoyed working with the actors, as well as the film's director, Shane Black.

"The production was great," he said. "I was truly impressed — working with a group of that magnitude with that much talent. It was stunning to watch and be a part of."

Graber said he believes he got the part via materials he submitted online through promotional services, which he uses along with auditions to find roles.

"I'm always promoting myself to get work. Out here, you have to fight to make it happen," he said. "I was very fortunate. I think the director saw me and liked my look, and thought I'd be good for this role. It was just the luck of the draw. You just never know what you're going to get out here."

"Iron Man 3" is not the first popular production in which Graber has been involved, as the actor also appeared in an episode of "Modern Family" earlier this year. In the ABC comedy, he played the role of a younger version of actor Ty Burrell's character, Phil Dunphy.

"I'm just very honored and feel very thankful for (these opportunities)," Graber said. "And I've had so much support from people back home."

Growing up in Freeman, Graber was active in music and theater, focusing primarily on the

GRABER | PAGE 3



COURTESY PHOTO
Elliott Graber, an actor originally from Freeman, recently hit the big screen with an appearance in the film "Iron Man 3," which opened last weekend. Graber plays a White House techie in a scene with actor Don Cheadle.

Wet Spring Brings Tough Start To Corn Planting

BY JIM SUHR
AP Business Writer

ST. LOUIS — John Reifsteck looks out at his muddy 1,800-acre central Illinois farm and wonders when he'll get to plant.

Like so many other Midwest growers who were praying for rain during the recent drought, he's now pinning for enough sunshine and heat to dry out his soggy fields as the deadline approaches for deciding what he can even plant this year.

It's a troubling scenario playing out across America's breadbasket, where the U.S. Department of Agriculture says just 12 percent of the nation's cornfields have been planted. That's about a quarter of what would be planted by this date over the previous five years, and it marks the slowest start in decades in some states.

The numbers have been even worse in the biggest corn-producing state, Iowa, where only 8 percent of the corn crop is in the ground, down from 62 percent the same time last year. The USDA says it's the slowest

planting pace since 1995 in Iowa, which was socked by a snowstorm last week.

It's a stark juxtaposition from a year ago, when farmers jumped on an early spring and by this time had 69 percent of the corn planted, weeks ahead of schedule. Then by June, the drought began what became a summer-long intensification, although better crop technology still helped U.S. farmers reap one of

CORN | PAGE 11

Our Towns | Yankton County

Irene-Wakonda Superintendent Sees Major Changes During Tenure

BY RANDY DOCKENDORF
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IRENE — Standing in the hallway after school, Irene-Wakonda superintendent Larry Johnke was approached by a student who gave him a hug.

The sign of affection reflected the tight-knit feeling of the Irene-Wakonda district, which enrolls 300 students. The camaraderie also reminds Johnke that only a few days remain before he retires after 43 years in education, the last 23 years here.

"We have two weeks of classes left," he said. "I have only two more board meetings. And I have

only one more graduation, to see these young ladies and gentlemen walk across the stage."

Johnke sees his final commencement exercise — and all the ones before it — as more than just a ceremony.

"One of the most satisfying things is watching the seniors graduate," he said. "You realize these students are successful and that the district has done a good job of preparing them for whatever lies ahead."

Johnke has seen dramatic changes during his

JOHNKE | PAGE 11



RANDY DOCKENDORF/P&D
Irene-Wakonda Superintendent Larry Johnke (right) offers congratulations to secondary principal Dave Hutchison, who will take over the district's reins when Johnke retires next month after 43 years in education.

U.S. Home Prices Up 10.5 Pct. In Past Year

WASHINGTON (AP) — A survey shows U.S. home prices rose 10.5 percent in March compared with a year ago, the biggest gain since March 2006.

Core Logic, a real estate data provider, said Tuesday that annual home prices have now increased for 13 straight months. Prices are rising in part because more buyers are bidding on a limited supply of homes for sale.

Prices increased in 46 states over the past year — 11 of them posting double-digit gains. And when excluding distressed sales, which include foreclosures and short sales, prices rose in every state. A short sale is when a home sells for less than what is owed on the mortgage.