

# Commissioners look for options on insurance

By Tom Betz  
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City commissioners talked about various options to the existing extended health insurance benefit the city has where employees who have at least 10 years of service and leave and get up to three years health insurance either as a monthly payment or in a lump sum, and the city could face a liability of nearly \$200,000 if all those eligible took the lump sum payment.

City Manager Doug Gerber said as background the benefit was provided a number of years ago and felt it needs to be reviewed.

"We did some research on this and found 10 employees could be eligible," he said, "and the average is about \$20,000 for the three years."

At the previous meeting when the benefit issue had first been raised the commissioners asked Gerber to develop some options.

He said the first option is to leave it as it is, and the other extreme op-

tion is to take it out entirely.

Other options include adding an age for qualification, removing the lump sum option, change the benefit percentage, limit the coverage to the employee, change the number of years the benefit is available and change the years of service requirement.

He said any combination of these options could be done as well.

On limiting the benefit to the employee Gerber said the city has a four tier plan with the employee, employee and spouse, employee and children and a family plan. He said the employee portion if \$387 a month compared to the \$832 for employee and spouse.

He said changing the benefit from three years to two or one would cut the city liability by 33 percent for each year of reduction.

Commissioner Bill Finley asked if the staff know when this was originally set up and what the intent was.

Gerber said as he understood it

the benefit was added in the mid 90s, and his understanding it was to handle a personnel issue. It was sort of an incentive for some people to retire or consider retiring.

City Clerk Mary Volk said that was the purpose.

Mayor John Garcia asked how many qualify for this program.

Gerber said the city has about 10 who could qualify tomorrow. "If they want to," he said. "We do not want to pressure them. We do not want them to leave the city. This is a tough issue."

Commissioner Annette Fairbanks asked if there was a way to ease out of the benefit issue.

Gerber said if an employee is qualified they remain qualified, but if the benefit was eliminated those who do not qualify would not be eligible.

"You run the risk of upsetting people who are close to being qualified," he said.

"If I understand it if the person takes a lump sum and they get another

job they get to keep the money," Commissioner Josh Dechant said. "I feel the lump sum part needs to go. If some have that tucked away I don't want to take that away from them."

He said he would say if the people are eligible now the key is to remove the lump sum and do the employee insurance only.

He said it would create a two-tiered system with those who were employed before 2006 and those who have been hired since 2006.

"We have to appreciate the commitment of our employees," Garcia said, "but we have to find a system that when they retire we ought to do this on a single basis and keep the city from absorbing such a big cost."

"There are three things that jump out," said Finley. "I do not see how the city can maintain this. I would like to run some numbers with an increase in service years, maybe to 15, and we need to decide what this is for. If for retirement the gap be-

tween when they retire at 62 and the Medicare eligibility is three years.

"If they are KAPERS (Kansas Public Employees Retirement System) eligible they would not be eligible for this benefit. The benefit should bridge the gap between retirement and Medicare and be for the single employee policy.

"I would like to see some numbers on that idea. The last thing I want to do is take benefits away, but we cannot continue to do business this way."

Commissioner Chris Zimmerman said it was a tough decision, but he liked what Finley had to say. For a normal city employee would be tough to know what they are losing, but it has to be done. I do not have a good way to do this, he said.

"I do not want to say this has been a persistent problem," Gerber said, "but it might be come one if we had to pay out a large sum. Probably have had 10 take advantage for the years."

Commissioner Annette Fair-

banks said she agreed with Finley's thought process. She said his options are something the commissioners need to think about. She said removing the lump sum makes a lot of sense to her.

Garcia said it appears the commissioners are in agreement about removing the lump sum, and determine the years of service and how long to carry the single employee policy.

Gerber said he had thought about running some numbers, but wanted to wait for direction from the commission.

He said he could do that and bring some information back to see how it might work with the single employee policy.

Garcia said that was good and for Gerber to adjust the number of years of service to give them a look at that option as well.

## Good news at county shop

By Ava Betz  
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It was good news all around Monday morning at a brief special meeting of the Sherman County Commissioners.

Commissioners Larry Enfield, Max Linin and Cynthia Strnad convened the meeting at 6:50 a.m. and immediately went into executive session for five minutes. When they reconvened, they unanimously voted to hire Rod Roeder as the new county shop foreman.

They unanimously approved a motion shop business would be handled as a separate entity on its own for a six-month trial period, with Roeder reporting directly to

the commissioners.

County truck drivers, construction personnel and road grader personnel will receive a dollar-an-hour raise, effective "this paycheck" as a result of the last unanimous vote of the brief meeting.

"We looked at the wages," Commission Chairman Enfield explained, "and they were the lowest paid in the county. Yet they work in the most adverse conditions."

At 7 a.m. the commissioners recessed their meeting to reconvene at the county shop and announce the above news to county employees.

## 'Share a story' to visit Goodland library

Smoky Hills Public Television's Education Department is traveling to public libraries across central and western Kansas to share stories and books this summer with a stop planned in Goodland on Tuesday, June 21.

Leona Breeden, Director of Education at Smoky Hills said the eighth annual Share a Story program is free and a great summer activity for kids age 2 to 7.

Breeden will be at the Goodland Public Library at 10 a.m. on Tuesday to present a 45-minute program which includes a short video clip from a PBS children's television program, along with a related book and an activity.

The Goodland library has an

ongoing reading encouragement program through the summer, said Karen Gillihan, librarian. She is pleased to have the Share a Story program come to Goodland, however, because of somewhat limited capacity she is asking people to make prior reservations to attend. Call (785) 899-5461 to make a reservation for this great kids reading event.

Smoky Hills Public Television began its Share a Story project in 2003 in conjunction with PBS Kids' national program to raise awareness of the important connection between reading aloud to children and development of early literacy skills.



Magician Eric Vaughn shows the sack to his audience at the library on Friday morning so they can see that it is empty. Photo by Pat Schiefen/The Goodland Star-News

## Magician does tricks at library

By Pat Schiefen  
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The story hour room of the Goodland Public Library was packed with about 75 parents and kids on Friday morning for the magic show by Eric Vaughn. The magic show was part of the summer reading program.

Magician Eric Vaughn was assisted by his wife Kelly. He said he

started doing magic when he was about 10 years old. He got his first books on magic from the library.

Vaughn showed the audience a Rubix Cube and showed them an easy way with magic words to solve it.

He also made an egg disappear from a bag with the help of a girl from the audience. After making

sure it was gone he made it appear again. Vaughn explained that magicians used wooden eggs painted white.

Other tricks included tearing up a piece of white paper with the words white bunny rabbit on it, setting it on fire and having a smokey-colored

rabbit appear. To get the white rabbit he put the other rabbit in a wooden bucket and when he pulled it out it was a white rabbit.

The library always runs a reading program for kids out of school as well as its traditional story hour for kids younger than kindergarten.

## corrections

The Goodland Star-News will correct any mistake or misunderstanding in a news story. Please

call our office at (785) 899-2338 to report errors. We believe that news should be fair and factual.

### Thank you!

To the following businesses and individuals that donated to the Goodland Activity Center/Softball Fund, we express a sincere thank you. Without your support the Kaitlin Cochran Softball Camp would not have been possible. We appreciate your willingness to give to youth of this community.

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Dr. Matthew Uyumura provides ophthalmology services at the Wray Community District Hospital Specialty Clinic twice each month. He is certified by the American Board of Ophthalmology and is well published in his field. Dr. Uyumura is a graduate of Northwestern University Medical School and completed his residency in Ophthalmology at Fitzsimmons Army Medical Center. Dr. Uyumura performs eye exams and surgical procedures, including cataracts, at the Wray Community District Hospital. Contact his office in Greeley at 1 888-796-2020 to make an appointment.

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**MOTORCYCLES (sell at noon):** 2006 Yamaha Royal Star 1300 cc Tour Deluxe (Windshield, engine guard and saddle bags, only 6,730 miles); 2006 Yamaha V Star Classic 1100 cc (Windshield, engine guard and saddle bags, only 23,677 miles).

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**SHOP:** Mac tool box; Craftsman 14.4 drill; Floor jacks; Socket sets; Air ratchet; Craftsman chain saw  
Air bubble; Bench grinder; 20' Extension ladder; Small Stanley tool box; Hand tools; Craftsman lawn edger; Rockwell table saw

For more information contact Terry Richardson, Homestead Realty & Auction, 1023 Main, Goodland, KS. 785-899-2328 or 899-8094. Pictures on www.goodlandhomestead.com.

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