

WITH HEARTFELT THANKS

Ten-year-old Macy spent months waiting for a transplant. Three weeks after she received her new heart, she was home in Omaha celebrating Christmas with her family. **MIDLANDS**



Omaha World-Herald

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10 hot spots for dining

Our restaurant reviewer chooses her favorites from the many eateries she visited in 2008.

Living

Kitt's career spanned six decades

Cancer claims sultry singer-actress Eartha Kitt, who captivated her fans and sang "Santa Baby."

Living, Page 2E

Morning paper for all

All World-Herald subscribers are receiving a morning paper today during this holiday week. Our Circulation customer service hours are 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. today.

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Click on Movie Reviews for advice about what to see. **Entertainment**

COMING SATURDAY

Recycle those trees

Find out where to leave your Christmas tree. **Community Connection**

Omaha weather



Partly sunny, windy and milder. **High: 45 Low: 21**

Full weather report: Page 5B

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PROPERTY TAXES

Successful protest far from last word

2004

For a home near 132nd Street and West Dodge Road, the Douglas County assessor sets a valuation of **\$201,500**

In a foreclosure sale that summer, Troy Hodge buys the house for **\$180,000**

2005

Assessor values the property at **\$293,000**

That summer Hodge appeals to the County Board and wins a reduction to **\$210,000**

2006

Assessor raises the valuation back to **\$293,000**

The County Board lowers the value to \$252,400, but Hodge appeals to state and, after a home inspection, county agrees to **\$210,000** (July 2007)

2007

Assessor sets home's valuation at **\$252,400**

Hodge appeals and, after a second inspection, the county settles for **\$210,000** (Dec. 2008)

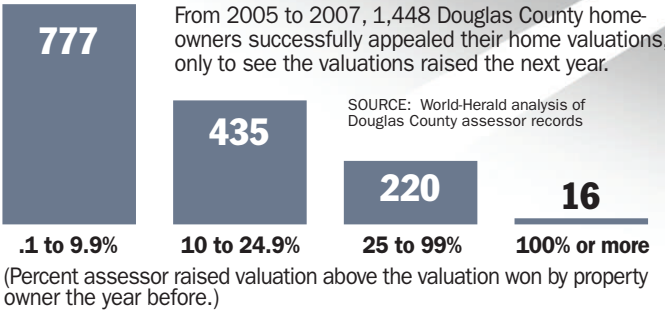
2008

Assessor sets valuation at **\$294,000**

Hodge's appeal is pending before the state. Assessor will agree to **\$210,000**

The ups and downs of the valuation process

Winning appeal doesn't end valuation battle



Some in Douglas County have had running battle with the Assessor's Office about property values

By TOM SHAW
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Troy Hodge lives in west Omaha's Heavenly Acres neighborhood. But since buying a house there in 2004, his experience with the Douglas County Assessor's Office has been less than blissful.

Hodge won multiple appeals to lower the home's tax valuation, yet the assessor kept raising the value back up.

Hodge contends that aggressive valuation methods, poor county record-keeping and red tape locked him in a seemingly endless valuation battle.

"I wouldn't say I have an obsessive personality, but I haven't slept nights," Hodge said. "I'm sure I've put in over 100 hours" compiling appeals.

Hodge said his appeals have cost him time and money, including having to take off from work. Not protesting, however, would have cost Hodge's family an extra \$1,800 a year in property taxes.

Hodge isn't alone. Since 2005, the valuations on about 1,450 residential Douglas County properties were increased the year following successful appeals by the owners, according to a World-Herald analysis of property records.

County Assessor Roger Morrissey defends the practice of raising certain valuations after successful appeals, saying property values have to reflect the reality

See Protest: Page 2



RUDY SMITH/THE WORLD-HERALD

Troy Hodge in front of his home near 132nd Street and West Center Road. He was locked in a four-year battle with Douglas County over the home's taxable value. Hodge is with his children, Hayden, 4, left, and Zach, 5.

"I wouldn't say I have an obsessive personality, but I haven't slept nights. I'm sure I've put in over 100 hours (compiling appeals)."

Troy Hodge

New climate report signals big sea change

THE WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON — The United States faces the possibility of much more rapid climate change by the end of the century than previous studies suggested, according to a new report led by the U.S. Geological Survey.

Looking at factors such as rapid sea ice loss in the Arctic and prolonged drought in the Southwest, the new assessment suggested that earlier projections may have un-

Scientists say rising levels from melting Arctic ice will accelerate more rapidly than expected, while the U.S. Southwest bakes.

derestimated the climatic shifts that could take place by 2100.

However, the assessment also suggested that some other feared effects of global warming were not likely to occur by century's end, such as an abrupt release of methane from the seabed and perma-

frost, or a shutdown of the Atlantic Ocean circulation system that forces warm water north and colder water south.

But the report projects a sea level rise during that period greater than what other researchers have forecast, as well as a shift

to a more arid climate in the Southwest by midcentury.

The survey, commissioned by the U.S. Climate Change Science Program and issued this month, expands on the 2007 findings of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Thirty-two scientists from federal and nonfederal institutions contributed to the report, which took nearly two years to complete. *See Climate: Page 2*

MENOPAUSE

Hormones remain an option for some

■ Short-term use of low doses can lessen the risk of cancer, doctors say.

By MICHAEL O'CONNOR
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Shirley Hogan sweated so much at night that her pajamas stuck to her.

The Omahan took hormones to control the night sweats and hot flashes brought on by menopause, even though doctors told her that the medications increased her risk of breast cancer.

"I told (them) I'll take the risk," she said after weighing the drawbacks against the benefits.

It's a choice that many women struggle with.

A new analysis of a large federal study confirms that the combined use of estrogen and progestin increases the risk for breast cancer, local doctors say.

But they emphasized that the new findings shouldn't deter women from talking with their doctors about taking the hormones. For some women, taking low doses for a short duration can be a safe way to control menopause symptoms.

"If you take (hormones) away from them, they have a pretty miserable life," said Dr. J. Christopher Gallagher, professor of medicine at Creighton University School of Medicine.

The new findings, presented at a national symposium this month, have not yet been published in a peer-reviewed medical journal, so they should be considered preliminary, said Dr. Rowan Chlebowski, the lead researcher.

The analysis is of data from the Women's Health Initiative. It was a federal study that tested estrogen and progestin pills that doctors long believed would prevent heart disease, bone loss and many other problems in women after menopause.

In the study, about 16,000 women were randomly assigned to take either a combination of estrogen and progestin or dummy pills.

The main part of the study was stopped in 2002 when researchers saw higher risks of breast cancer in women who took the

See Hormones: Page 2

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