

## CONNECT TODAY

IN MIDLANDS, PAGE 3B

A roundup of community events.

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## LOTTERIES

## POWERBALL

**Saturday, May 22:** 19-20-40-47-57. **Powerball:** 29. **Power Play:** 2. No jackpot winner. **Jackpot for Wednesday, May 26:** \$190 million.

## MEGA MILLIONS

**Tuesday, May 25:** 5-14-17-19-24. **Megaball:** 25. **Megaplier:** 4. **Jackpot for Tuesday, May 25:** \$64 million.

## NEBRASKA

**Pick 5 — Tuesday, May 25:** 1-6-24-25-35. **Tuesday, May 25:** 1-6-24-25-35. **Jackpot for Wednesday, May 26:** \$146,000.

**MyDaY — Tuesday, May 25:** 9-27-76.

**2by2 — Tuesday, May 25:** red 10-13; white 11-15.

**Pick 3 — Tuesday, May 25:** 9-5-0.

## IOWA

**Cash Game — Tuesday, May 25:** 9-10-12-30-31.

**Hot Lotto — Saturday, May 22:** 8-12-19-24-30. **Hot Ball:** 7.

**Pick 3 — Tuesday, May 25:** midday 9-3-6; evening 8-1-2.

**Pick 4 — Tuesday, May 25:** midday 9-9-5-1; evening 3-5-0-7.

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## Valuations: Both counties meet state officials' requirements

Continued from Page 1

State law calls for valuations to be 92 percent to 100 percent of sales prices. But among houses that sold recently, only about half hit that target.

Sarpy County Assessor Dan Pittman said it's inevitable that valuations might not match recent sales prices because county assessors use past trends to adjust valuations.

"We're following trends," he said. "We're going to lag it about a year."

Both Douglas and Sarpy County passed muster with state officials who examine county valuations. The state compares sales from July 2007 through June 2009 with the new valuations set in 2010.

The World-Herald's analysis

is based on more recent sales, including some houses that sold after the counties set the latest valuations. It's a better test than the state's system to show whether the new valuations match current sales prices. But county officials say they couldn't predict some of those sales.

"You're looking at a crystal ball that I didn't have," said Barry Couch, chief deputy assessor in Douglas County.

Couch said some valuations are too high because of distress in the housing market, such as foreclosures and houses that take many months to sell.

One house in Eagle Run in northwest Omaha sold for \$215,000 in March — well below the new \$249,100 valuation, even though valuations in the

area had been reduced this year. Couch said such sales suggest that more reductions in Eagle Run might be needed in 2011.

"If this keeps going this way, I'm probably going to have to drop it again," he said.

Housing prices are showing "slippage" in some parts of the county, Couch said, but home values in other areas are holding or even increasing.

Pittman, the Sarpy assessor, said he hasn't seen evidence that house values have continued to decline.

"From what we're seeing, things are starting to stabilize a little bit," he said.

The World-Herald analysis found that Douglas and Sarpy valuations are about equally accurate. But the two counties continue to differ in their approach

to valuation changes.

Sarpy changes nearly all valuations every year.

Douglas changes only about one-third of its valuations annually, targeting subdivisions with the least accurate valuations.

Morrissey said he has to prioritize because he doesn't have enough appraisers to set new valuations for every property.

The World-Herald found that the unchanged valuations in Douglas County were far less accurate than the ones that Morrissey changed.

Among Douglas County houses with reduced valuations this year, 61 percent met the state goal of 92 percent to 100 percent of sales prices. Among those with increased valuations, 69 percent hit the state target.

But among the county's houses with no change in valuation, only 36 percent fell into the ideal range.

Morrissey noted that county assessors set valuations based on broader market trends, not through a detailed analysis of individual houses — and usually without seeing a house's interior, which can make a big difference in value.

He noted that property owners have the right to protest their valuations next month. Those who do can present additional information to the County Board of Equalization, which can adjust valuations.

"If they think the value's not fair, they should protest," Morrissey said.

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## Yearbooks: Elkhorn an exception

Continued from Page 1

for 16 percent of its students. Northwest had 168 (15 percent) and Central 800 (34 percent).

A typical hardcover yearbook costs about \$45 pre-ordered and \$55 if ordered later.

Historically, schools have ordered extra books to make sure everyone got one. That can cost schools hundreds of dollars if books don't sell, so in a slumping economy, at least one school this year bought only as many books as it could pay for with students' money.

Bryan journalism teacher Janet Raddish said her school's principal started that policy after being left with 200 unsold books last year.

This year, Raddish sent letters to parents explaining the new policy. She pleaded with students to order by mid-January. She ordered 20 extra books just in case.

"One girl called, frantic, saying, 'Please, please, please save me a book,'" Raddish said. "And I still haven't seen her."

The 20 extras are still for sale.

One reason for the drop in sales is the increased popularity of digital cameras, said Madison High yearbook adviser Linda Lockhart.

"It's cheap. It's easy," she said. "You can put your photos on your computer, and you've got them forever ... in theory."

Yearbook advocates, however, say there's value in putting a year's worth of memories in a single volume that students can pull off the shelf and leaf through when they feel like it for the rest of their lives. And some people worry that going digital with such keepsakes isn't a good idea, especially when technology is ever-changing.

So while Benson digitized its yearbook this year, it didn't entirely do away with a printed annual.

"We were in the red every year for the yearbook," said Principal Lisa Dale. "We wanted to provide students with options rather than just a hardbound, expensive book."

Sales have always been low at Benson, which has about 1,400 students. Eight years ago, it sold as many as 400 books. Now it's lucky if 200 kids buy one.

This year, the school offered a digital yearbook on DVD, a softcover or hardcover mugshot book only, or both digital and print copies.

The DVD has video clips, still photos, music and senior photos with student quotes. The yearbook staff hoped that would mean more purchases. But it didn't work out that way — Benson has sold 120 DVDs, 120 hardcover books and 40 soft-



JAMES R. BURNETT/THE WORLD-HERALD

Natali Bianco, left, and Arika Gibbons page through Gibbons' yearbook at Bryan High School. Bianco didn't buy one. Yearbook supporters say the books never become obsolete, unlike some media technology.



Hoepfner

cover books so far this year — but they were way cheaper to produce.

And more inclusive, said Benson senior Ashley Hoepfner, 18.

We have everyone," she

said. "It's not just the students who play sports or are in clubs. Students who wouldn't normally get into the yearbook because they just go to school and then back home are in there hanging out with their friends, too."

Madison's Lockhart also liked the cost savings.

Last year, it cost her school \$8,000 to buy 100 yearbooks with 120 pages. She sold 65, for \$45 each (\$43 prepaid). This year, the DVD will be \$15.

Depending on the size of the school or university, "a good yearbook (well-produced) in mass costs the same as a small house," said Joel Davies, former Creighton University yearbook adviser. "In a time of shrinking budgets, it's hard to justify \$60,000 for a yearbook."

The price that students pay doesn't cover the cost of the book. Costs are offset through fundraising and ad sales. Every year Madison High tried to lower the cost of the books, but "it seemed like an impossible task," Lockhart said.

Raddish, meanwhile, cautioned against the DVD-only option. "That media is going to change," she said. "They're not going to have it to play."

We've seen floppy discs go from hard disc to zip discs and DVDs. We've seen vinyl, 8-tracks, cassettes, CDs and MP3s. So what happens when DVDs are played out? If you have a printed book, Raddish said, your memories are intact.

"When Facebook is gone," she said, "there will always be that hard copy."

And digital yearbooks aren't the answer for every school, Lockhart said. "I know of one school in western Nebraska who tried it two years ago, then went back to their traditional hardbound book."

The decline in yearbook sales isn't universal. Elkhorn High, for instance, sold more books this year.

"Our sales have risen considerably in the last three years," said journalism teacher Courtney Archer. "When I started six years ago, we ordered about 450 books. Last year, 775 books sold. This year, 975 Elkhorn students bought a yearbook."

She thinks color photos, marketing to parents and next year's opening of a second Elkhorn high school boosted sales.

Perhaps surprisingly, a man who makes his living in new media is cautious about eschewing printed yearbooks.

"I don't fault them for wanting to make an online version of their yearbook," said Jeff Slobotski, director of innovation and new media at the AIM Institute. "But I don't think you can completely do away with a print edition. There's a difference between everyday news and graduating high school. It's not a turning point in my life, but graduation is. It's nice to archive, to be able to reference and look back at those times."

Yearbooks are similar to scrapbooks and photographs. They're keepsakes.

"I still print photos," Slobotski said. "There's still something to be said about having something framed. I want to touch and feel and have those memories. We shouldn't be so quick to jump into the digital world."

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## MIDLANDS LAWMAKERS SAY IT'S A GOOD START

WASHINGTON — Several Midlands lawmakers support President Barack Obama's decision to send 1,200 National Guard troops to boost security along the U.S.-Mexican border. But some said it didn't go far enough.

**Sen. Mike Johanns, R-Neb.:** "While this is a positive step, previous National Guard levels at the border suggest the president's proposal will be insufficient. Border security requires an unwavering, long-term commitment from the federal government, both in terms of manpower and resources. Real immigration reform must start with strong, sustained border security and immigration enforcement."

**Rep. Adrian Smith, R-Neb.:** "While this is a good first step, we need a long-term, workable strategy to secure our borders."

**Rep. Jeff Fortenberry, R-Neb.:** "This is a curious response given the administration's earlier objections to assisting Arizona enforce its law. Illegal entry and uncontrolled borders are serious threats to national security as well as good immigration policy. Clearly, more enforcement support is welcome."

**Rep. Lee Terry, R-Neb.:** "I support President Obama's effort to send troops to the U.S.-Mexican border. Several years ago, President Bush sent troops there, and I supported him as well."

**Sen. Ben Nelson, D-Neb.:** "The president's proposal in response to the ongoing problems of illegal smuggling, drug trafficking and violence along the border is a positive first step. I'm looking forward to working with my colleagues over the coming days to see whether we can pragmatically strengthen this approach."

— Joseph Morton of The World-Herald's Washington bureau

## Border: Apprehension rates fall

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The moves come a month after Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano told a Senate committee that the U.S. border with Mexico "is as secure as it has ever been" and that crime rates on the U.S. side have declined, despite a spate of drug-related violence on the Mexico side. Republicans blasted her remarks, however, and have been demanding that the administration step up efforts to tackle illegal immigration and border violence.

Obama's announcement comes as illegal immigration is believed to be at its lowest level in years. Apprehension rates, considered the best indicator of illegal border crossings, have steadily declined over the past decade. With the economy floundering, the U.S. Border Patrol arrested 556,000 people last year, down from a high of 1.6 million in 2000.

But Republicans have been hammering Obama on the issue. In a letter to the president last week, Arizona Sens. John McCain and Jon Kyl called for sending at least 6,000 troops to the border. And polls indicate deep public dissatisfaction with the border situation.

A Gallup poll released May 5 found that two-thirds of Americans wanted the federal government to do a better job of securing the border.

Concerns about border security helped drive the passage of an Arizona law empowering local police to identify and arrest illegal immigrants.

Obama has been all but compelled to do something since Arizona's passage of the tough illegal immigration law thrust the border problem into the public spotlight. Indeed, Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer, a Republican, credited her signing of the controversial new law for

compelling Obama to act.

Signing the law, Brewer said, "clearly ignited the talk of action in Washington for the people of Arizona and other border states."

Obama argues that the answer to concerns about immigration rests in a new law that combines tough enforcement with a path to legalization for the estimated 12 million illegal immigrants living in the United States. President George W. Bush tried and failed to pass such a measure in 2007, and many observers say there is even less chance of it succeeding in the current election year.

Thad Bingel, who was chief of staff of U.S. Customs and Border Protection in the Bush administration, said, "The clear message from Congress and the American people is: Secure the border first, and we can talk about the rest of it later."

Republicans said Obama's announcement was a good step but an insufficient one.

"It's simply not enough. We need 6,000," McCain said Tuesday on the Senate floor. "The situation on the border is greatly deteriorated during the last 18 months."

In June 2006, Bush sent 6,000 National Guard members to Arizona, California, New Mexico and Texas. Their presence was meant to step up security while the Border Patrol expanded its ranks. Guard members stayed until July 2008.

Nebraska and Iowa Guard troops were among those deployed. Soldiers from Nebraska were in Arizona to work on maintaining aerial patrol helicopters. Iowa troops were in Arizona and California to assist with border operations.

This report includes material from the Associated Press.

## Szczepanik: 3 Brazilian men allegedly used family's bank cards

Continued from Page 1

shortly after the family disappeared.

Investigators used a combination of surveillance video and interviews to link the men to the illegal use of the bank cards.

"We've been talking to these people off and on for the last few months," Hayes said.

The three men arrested this week are Jose C. Oliveria-Coutinho, 35; Elias Lourenco-Batista, 29; and Valdeir Goncalves-Santos, 30.

Each was charged with one count of unlawful use of a financial transaction device over \$1,500. The charge is a felony, and a conviction carries a penalty of one to 20 years in prison.

Using the Szczepaniks' bank cards, the three men allegedly withdrew money from ATMs and purchased food and clothing.

None of the men was an authorized user of the accounts,

police said, and the men never had permission to use the bank cards.

Last week, Ricardo Gonzalez-Mendez, 28, was charged with giving police false information. Police said Gonzalez-Mendez, who also worked for Szczepanik, used an alias when they contacted him during the investigation.

Hayes said Gonzalez-Mendez also is expected to be charged with the illegal use of a financial transaction device. Police said he is an illegal immigrant from Mexico and was being held on \$100,000 bail.

The Szczepaniks disappeared from their Omaha home in December, and they were formally reported missing on Jan. 8.

The family lived in an apartment in the former Paul VI High School near 16th and Center Streets. Vanderlei Szczepanik helped renovate the property into a missionary school.

That project is what brought the family to Omaha from Brazil four years ago.

Szczepanik, described as a skilled carpenter, was hired to lead the renovation and moved his family to Omaha. They are members of the Florida-based Assembly of God Bethlehem Ministry, which bought the property.

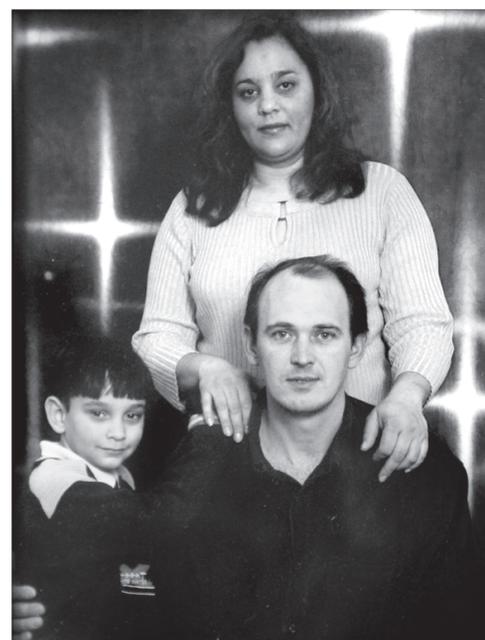
The project stalled as the economy worsened, and the Florida church officials cut Szczepanik's funding. He remained at the property but turned to other projects.

Omaha police eventually found Szczepanik's truck abandoned a few blocks from the apartment. Another of the family's vehicles had been left at a repair shop before the Szczepaniks were reported missing.

The city has started foreclosure proceedings on the apartment building that Szczepanik and his crew were renovating.

World-Herald staff writer Andrew J. Nelson contributed to this report.

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Vanderlei Szczepanik, his wife, Jaqueline, and son, Christopher, came to Omaha from Brazil. The three Brazilian men arrested this week are accused of running up charges totaling \$4,347 on the Szczepaniks' bank cards shortly after the family disappeared in December. The three men had worked for Szczepanik.

KENT SIEVERS/THE WORLD-HERALD