

First MPH event might be postponed

SHAY BURK

sburk@hastingstribune.com

While plans are on schedule for Motorsport Park Hastings, developer George Anderson is leery that the track will be ready for its first event in July.

On Tuesday, Anderson met with organizers for the track's first event and others associated with the track to review the final design before major construction starts in a few weeks.

It's a fight against time and weather for Anderson now as he waits for the asphalt to be laid and hopes the weather will hold out.

Anderson said Stroman Land Leveling of Juniata is now completing dirt work for the track and should be finished within the next week. At that time, Werner Construction Co. of Hastings will start laying the

asphalt and should be finished by the end of June.

Normally, it would take an additional three to four weeks for the asphalt to properly cure before races could take place, but Anderson is hoping the weather works in his favor. With warmer temperatures, as are usual in Nebraska in July, Anderson said the asphalt would cure faster and allow the races to go on as scheduled.

Otherwise, the timeline would go past the date scheduled for Anderson's inaugural event July 22-23, when the Rocky Mountain Vintage



Anderson

Racing (RMVR) would bring about 120 vehicles to the track. Anderson would then have to postpone his first event.

"It's just critical that the weather holds right now," Anderson said. "Based on the weather and things, there is a chance they will need to reschedule their event."

The 2.3-mile track will feature a number of turns and curves with tire barriers, gravel pits and thousands of feet of guardrails and special corners for both motorcycle and car racing.

While the July race would be Anderson's first on asphalt, he conducted the first-ever national Sports Car Club of America RallyCross event at the track on dirt in October 2005.

For now, Anderson is just hoping Stroman Land Leveling will finish prior to the July 1

deadline, allowing the asphalt a little more time to cure.

Roger Hively, president of RMVR, said his organization set the July date for its first event in November 2005 and is confident everything will be finished by July 21, the day practice starts.

After visiting the track Tuesday, Hively said he is just excited for his group to get out and race.

"We can't wait," he said. "We want to be here so badly."

While rescheduling the event isn't a major problem for Hively, it could set Anderson's entire schedule into a tailspin.

If the event isn't able to take place July 21-23, then Anderson might not be able to have his second event, either.

The Motorcycle Roadracing Association is scheduled to visit

Hastings July 29-30 to race bikes that can reach speeds of 150 miles per hour.

Anderson said Roadracing Association requires that cars race on a track and leave rubber marks before motorcycles race on cement. Without the RMVR race, no racers would go on the track before the motorcycle event.

Anderson said the Roadracing Association also wants to see the RMVR give the track their approval before racing on it.

Even with the odds against him, Hively is still hopeful his event will go on as planned in July. He said he's excited for a new track close to his organization's hub in Denver.

In the last year alone, the group has lost use of three tracks because of economic development, he said. With

events in California, New York and Florida, Hastings is a much shorter trip for the group.

Hively wasn't the only one excited about the new track during Tuesday's meeting.

Jerry Doctor and Mark Walker with the Nebraska division of the Sports Car Club of America, who have both been involved in the project since the beginning, said they are promoting the track everywhere they go.

Doctor, the state's competition chair, said people always look confused when he said a great new track is being built in small-town Nebraska.

"We've been telling them all along, 'You come out to one race and you'll never ask, why Hastings, Neb.? again,'" he said.

2 of 3 college grads go into debt

NEBRASKA'S LOAN AVERAGE SMALLER THAN MOST

DEVLIN BARRETT
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Nearly two of every three undergraduate students are going into debt to go to college, owing an average of more than \$19,000, most often to the government.

Among a dozen states sampled, New York students averaged the largest loans, while those in Oregon and Minnesota were most likely to have borrowed.

About 65 percent of students who graduated in the 2003-2004 school year did so after getting student loans, according to the Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics.

For students who took out loans, the average debt was \$19,202. Of that sum, \$17,022 came through federal loan programs.

The agency focused on 12 large, medium, and mid-sized states, but did not compile enough data from the other 38 states to create reliable statewide averages.

The figures show:

- ◆ New York had the highest average loan amount, \$20,838. Georgia and Minnesota followed. Of the dozen states studied, those with the smallest loan average were Nebraska, Delaware and

California.

- ◆ In Oregon and Minnesota, three of every four undergraduates got loans. Officials in both states said that was due to budget cuts.

State dollars "are covering less and less of the cost of higher education, and we've had several years of double-digit tuition increases," said Melinda Voss, spokeswoman for the Minnesota state college and university system.

Jacqueline King, an analyst at the American Council on Education, said she was surprised by the figures for Georgia, which has a college scholarship program designed to make higher education more affordable.

King said she believed the government's figures for federal student loan amounts are statistically reliable because they are based purely on government records, while the total debt amount is based on students' understanding of their future obligations.

The overall amount of student loan debt soared in the mid-1990s but has been relatively flat in recent years. King said she expects it to rise again after Congress voted to increase the limits on student borrowing from the federal government.

According to the College Board, private lending for student loans has exploded in the last decade, jumping from \$1.3 billion in 1993-1994 to \$10.6

billion in 2003-2004. Government lending for that year was \$56.8 billion.

The biggest change, though, may be in the cost to take out government loans.

A general trend of historically low interest rates is ending, and the new government loans will have a fixed rate of 6.8 percent. If rates keep rising, students with the old variable rate loans could end up paying as much as 8.25 percent.

Figures for the 12 states:

- ◆ California: 56.4 percent of undergraduates taking out student loans, \$17,266 average total loans, \$15,259 average federal loans.

- ◆ Connecticut: 62.4 percent, \$17,990 average total loans, \$17,143 federal loans.

- ◆ Delaware: 56.1 percent \$16,473 total, \$12,946 federal.

- ◆ Georgia: 65.4 percent, \$20,767 total, \$18,505 federal.

- ◆ Illinois: 63.2 percent, \$18,788 total, \$16,594 federal.

- ◆ Indiana: 61.1 percent, \$19,112 total, \$17,566 federal.

- ◆ Minnesota: 76.3 percent, \$20,312 total, \$16,406 federal.

- ◆ Nebraska: 71.8 percent, \$16,200 total, \$15,373 federal.

- ◆ New York: 67.2 percent, \$20,838 total, \$17,603 federal.

- ◆ Oregon: 76.5 percent, \$17,772 total, \$16,641 federal.

- ◆ Tennessee: 70.9 percent, \$19,949 total, \$17,852 federal.

- ◆ Texas: 64 percent, \$18,508 total, \$16,624 federal.

- All states: 65.6 percent, \$19,202 total, \$17,022 federal.

Museum curator to lead tour of Guide Rock area sites

BETH BOHLING

araun@hastingstribune.com

GUIDE ROCK — The site of an old Pawnee Indian village south of here, where Lt. Zebulon Pike and his soldiers found the Pawnee in September 1806, will be the destination for a Kansas tour group June 10.

The expedition will be led by Richard Gould, curator of the Pawnee Indian Village Museum near Republic, Kan.

Pike had been ordered by the commanding general of the U.S. Army to contact the Pawnee and make friends of them.

Gould said he wanted the people of northern Kansas to be familiar with the Guide Rock site. He added that Nebraskans would be welcome.

Originally, it was thought that Pike found the Pawnee at the Republic site, and a monument there erroneously identifies it as the place where they met. In the 1930s, a dig near Guide Rock uncovered evidence that that was where the

meeting occurred.

On the upcoming tour, Gould also will be pointing out the location of that village and the rifle pits that Pike had his soldiers dig there.

Speaking at the site will be Howard Johnston of Hastings, who as a teenager helped with the dig that uncovered the village.

Gould said people should meet at the Pawnee Indian Village Museum at 9 a.m. Saturday for the trip. Those for whom it would be more convenient may meet the group at 10 a.m. at the Barcelona Restaurant in Guide Rock.

After touring the site, the group will return to the Barcelona for lunch. Advance registrations are requested.

In the afternoon, the group will visit Pa-Hur, "the rock that guides," for which the community is named. Trappers and Pawnee Indians used this vast rocky bluff as a guide when crossing the prairie.

State plans highway landscaping

The Associated Press

LINCOLN — Part of the reason grass has been planted alongside Nebraska's highways is to keep dirt from blowing and limit weeds, but highway landscaping is often much more than mere ground cover.

Safety is the primary concern of the folks who plan what's planted beside the highways across the state, said Art Thompson, highway landscape architect for the Nebraska Department of Roads.

The department may use bushes, shrubs or trees to accent an important sign, block sun glare on signs or hide distractions.

They have created living snow fences — lines of bushes or shrubs — on state rights of way or nearby pasture land to keep snow from drifting onto the highway.

They have built berms or planted bushes and trees to shield drivers from oncoming headlights.

Nebraska officials decided decades ago it was best not to try to outguess Mother Nature and began using native and drought-resistant grasses more than 30 years ago, Thompson said.

Today, native is the "in" word across the country as more states turn to native plants. Nebraska established a limited mowing policy in the late 1960s to reduce maintenance costs and create additional wildlife habitat, particularly for pheas-

ants, he said.

The state routinely mows only the shoulder, for visibility. Every three to five years the entire right of way is mowed, which takes the place of natural burning, Thompson said.

In drought years, private landowners are granted permits to mow rights of way and bale the hay for livestock.

In 1971, the state figured the limited mowing policy saved about half a million dollars in maintenance costs a year, Thompson said. That's more than \$18 million in savings over the years, not counting inflation.

Mumps: 57 cases confirmed

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South Heartland then makes sure information is disseminated to local entities.

"We use it locally to let them know what is our local stand, whatever the situation," Crawford said.

According to the HHS Web site, the number of new cases being reported decreased significantly since the end of April.

Crawford said that decrease could be because school is out now, limiting the association with large groups of people. It also could be because it has already made its way through the population at risk of contracting the illness. She said officials are "cross-

ing our fingers that it is slowing down."

"Just because the numbers have decreased does not mean that it's not still here," she said.

The disease, commonly a spring illness, could return next year, state epidemiologist Dr. Tom Safranek said.

After a mumps outbreak in Iowa in December 2005, about 2,600 cases of mumps were reported in 11 states, most bordering Iowa, according to the Centers

for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta.

State numbers began climbing in mid March.

Crawford suggested people check their mumps vaccination records.

Individuals 30-60 years old should have received one dose, and those 30 and younger should have received two doses.

"Right now we're receiving fewer reports than we did a month ago, so we're hoping they are going

down in numbers," she said.

Mumps infections are caused by a virus and are spread most often by airborne transmission — mucus from a cough or sneeze — from an infected person. The most common symptoms include fever, headache and swollen salivary glands.

Mumps can lead to hearing loss and even to meningitis, which is an infection of the covering of the brain and spinal cord.

Mumps deaths are rare.

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