

Weather

Rainy

Today **54** Tonight **33**

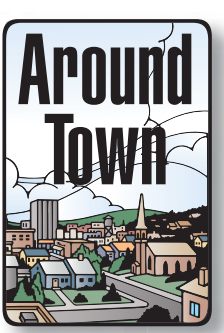
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Sports

Eleva-Strum's Rich Roginski going out on top. **1D.**

City/Region

Retired teacher uses skills to care for husband. **1B.**



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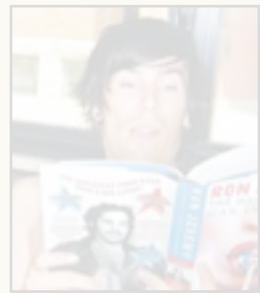


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TOMORROW



Getting Out

An Eau Claire woman plays grandmother to rare whooping cranes.



High cost of fuel burns school budgets

Diesel prices have increased more than \$1 a gallon in a year, a big financial hit for area districts

By **Candy Czernicki**
Chippewa Falls News Bureau

The wheels on the bus have to go round and round for area schoolchildren regardless of gas prices, and that's putting a dent in some districts' budgets.

The price of diesel fuel, which most buses use, in the Eau Claire area has risen from an average of \$2.99 a year ago to a current average of \$4.12 a gallon, according to www.fuelgauge.com.

Diesel fuel costs have risen like the price of regular unleaded gas, which hit a record \$3.46 this week in Eau Claire and is expected to climb higher as summer approaches.

Dealing with higher fuel costs is an added concern for many districts facing tight budgets.



Martin

The Bloomer school district spent \$55,000 on diesel fuel for buses from September 2006 through March 2007. This school year, at mid-April, it already has spent \$68,000, Superintendent Doug Martin said.

"Unfortunately, it sounds as though things aren't going to stabilize," Martin said. "Part of the problem is you have kids who are geographically at all four corners of the district."

"The alternative is to have extra-long routes, but that keeps kids on buses a lot longer."

See **FUEL**, Page 2A

How About 600 Miles Per Gallon?

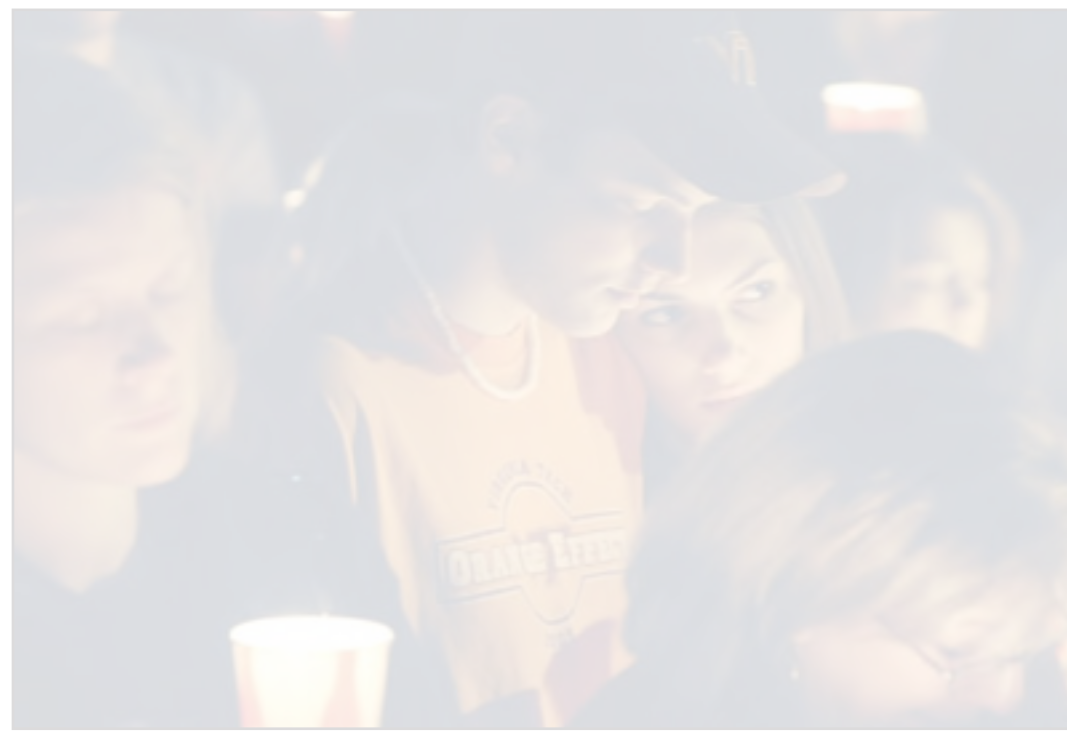
UW-Stout's Technology Education Collegiate Association will host its 16th annual Wisconsin Supermileage Challenge on Friday and Saturday.

The competition challenges high school and middle school students to apply science, technology, engineering and mathematics skills to build vehicles that get the most miles per gallon of gasoline. The event record is about 600 miles per gallon.

A display of all vehicles will be at 7 p.m. Friday at the Dunn County Fairground.

The competition will begin with practice runs at 8 a.m., Saturday at Stout Technology Park. The challenge runs are scheduled between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m.

VIRGINIA TECH: ONE YEAR LATER



Students held candles Wednesday night during a ceremony marking the first anniversary of the shootings on the campus of Virginia Tech in Blacksburg. Thirty-two people died in the campus assault. Associated Press

Bells toll in Blacksburg

By **Sue Lindsey**
Associated Press

BLACKSBURG, Va. — A sea of people clad in maroon and orange, some with heads tearfully bowed, others with arms interlocked, paid tribute Wednesday to the victims who died a year ago in the nation's worst mass shooting in modern history.

The accomplishments of each of the 32 people echoed across the drill field, a litany of what they had done and planned to do before a student gunman killed them in

Victims of massacre remembered

classrooms and a dormitory.

Austin Cloyd had an iron will. Caitlin Hammaren loved playing the violin. Emily Hilscher was a skilled horsewoman. Daniel Alejandro Perez Cueva dreamed of bringing people together and making the world peaceful.

"The world was cheated — cheated out of the accomplishments that were sure to come from these extraordinary lives," Gov. Timothy M. Kaine told the crowd.

See **TECH**, Page 2A

Death penalty foes dealt huge blow

Lethal injection ruled 'humane'

By **David G. Savage**
Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON — A national drive to halt the death penalty met defeat at the Supreme Court on Wednesday when the justices ruled that lethal injections, if properly administered, are a "humane" means of executing a condemned prisoner.

By a surprisingly large 7-2 margin, the court rejected a constitutional attack on the main method of carrying out the death penalty across America. Its ruling cleared the way for executions to resume after a seven-month delay.

Since October, officials and judges in several states have put executions on hold while awaiting the outcome of the Kentucky case decided Wednesday.

The court's opinion by Chief Justice John Roberts confirmed there is strong support for the death penalty among the justices and an unwillingness to tolerate endless delay.

See **COURT**, Page 2A

How does your garden grow?

With automated sprinklers, hopefully well

By **Andrew Dowd**
Leader-Telegram staff

New sprinklers being installed in a downtown Eau Claire park are designed to reduce water use whenever the weather does the job for them.

Moisture sensors in a device controlling automatic sprinklers at Wilson Park will shorten watering cycles on overcast, cool or rainy days if the grass, trees and flower beds already are wet.

"What it does is look at weather

conditions and monitors the cycle the water is on," said Phil Johnson, city superintendent of park maintenance.

The city sets a time the sprinklers will come on every other night. If the controller's weather station detects moisture, the duration of those watering cycles will be reduced. During dry spells, the controller cannot extend watering periods, Johnson said. They would have to be adjusted by employees.

See **SPRINKLERS**, Page 2A



Staff photo by Dan Reiland
RainMaster Lawn Systems employee John Stricklin dug around tree roots in Wilson Park on Wednesday to install a new sprinkler system. The Eau Claire Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department is paying \$9,000 for the new equipment, and officials hope weather-sensing technology controlling the sprinklers will save on water and labor.

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Celebrities

Bruce Springsteen, left, and Max Weinberg of the E Street Band performed Oct. 29 at the Los Angeles Sports Arena. Springsteen on Wednesday endorsed Democratic Sen. Barack Obama for president.



Associated Press

Springsteen in Obama's backing band

WASHINGTON — Rock star Bruce Springsteen endorsed Democratic Sen. Barack Obama for president Wednesday.

In a letter addressed to friends and fans posted his Web site, Springsteen said he believes Obama is the best candidate to undo "the terrible damage done over the past eight years."

"He has the depth, the reflectiveness, and the resilience to be our next president," the letter said. "He speaks to the America I've envisioned in my music for the past 35 years, a generous nation with a citizenry willing to tackle nuanced and complex problems, a country that's interested in its collective destiny and in the potential of its gathered spirit. A place where '... nobody crowds you, and nobody goes it alone.'"

The bard of New Jersey is known for his lyrics about the struggles of working-class Americans

Springsteen did not directly mention Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, Obama's rival for the Democratic nomination, in his letter but appeared to take issue with her recent criticisms of comments made by Obama about working-class voters in small towns in Pennsylvania and controversial statements by his pastor.

Actress reveals breast cancer battle

NEW YORK — Cynthia Nixon has joined forces with the breast cancer organization Susan G. Komen for the Cure and is going public with her own battle with breast cancer.

Nixon, who is reprising her role as Miranda in HBO's "Sex and the City" in an upcoming movie, had a lumpectomy two years ago and underwent 6½ weeks of radiation. She also helped her mother battle breast cancer.

The Dallas-based Komen foundation is known for its Race for the Cure events. Nixon will serve as an ambassador for the organization and will share her cancer experiences in a series of Web videos.

TODAY'S BIRTHDAYS

- Singer-guitarist Pete Shelley (The Buzzcocks), 53.
- Actor Sean Bean ("Lord of the Rings"), 49.
- Singer Maynard James Keenan (Tool), 44.
- Singer Liz Phair, 41.
- Actress Jennifer Garner ("Alias"), 36.
- Singer Victoria Beckham (the Spice Girls), 34.

From news services

Correction

An article in Wednesday's edition incorrectly stated the position Colleen Bates was re-elected to the Eau Claire County Board. Bates was named the board's first vice chairwoman.



The Leader-Telegram strives for accuracy in all stories. But if mistakes occur, a correction will be printed. Contact Editor Don Huebscher at 833-9216 or Local News Editor Gary Johnson at 833-9211 for assistance. E-mail them at don.huebscher@ecpc.com or gary.johnson@ecpc.com.

Lotteries

The winning numbers for Wednesday are:

- Powerball: 11-16-18-21-51**
- Powerball number: 16**
- Power Play number: 10**
- Estimated jackpot: \$91 million
- Megabucks: 5-7-19-34-37-48**
- Estimated jackpot: \$1.0 million
- SuperCash: 8-15-16-18-27-34**
- Daily Pick 4: 7-2-3-3**
- Daily Pick 3: 7-7-9**
- Badger 5: 6-7-9-17-19**

Estimated jackpot for today's drawing: \$113,000

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USPS 166-560
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701 S. Farwell St.
P.O. Box 570
Eau Claire, WI 54702
Periodicals postage paid at Eau Claire, WI
Published daily and Sunday by Eau Claire Press Co., owned by Graaskamp and Atkinson families. Editorial direction by The Eau Claire Leader-Telegram
Postmaster: send address changes to Leader-Telegram, P.O. Box 570, Eau Claire, WI 54702

Fuel/Elk Mound planned for higher prices

from Page 1A

"At this point, we're just seeing where we are at the end of the year and seeing where we can go next year. There may be some things we have to work on."

Dennis Geissler, superintendent of the Colfax school district — a largely rural district of about 850 students — said his district has its own 10,000-gallon fuel tank.

"We'll have to take a good, hard look at transportation and decide how much it will affect everything," Geissler said. "I noticed when I filled up the tank last time, I swallowed hard. It cost more than \$24,000 for that tank, the most we've ever had to pay for it."

The tank gets filled three



Walsh

to four times a year and serves 12 buses, Geissler said. The state Department of Public Instruction has increased the district's transportation aid in an effort to help with costs, Geissler said.

But as much of an expense as fuel is, "We're more concerned about the overall costs of everything in the future," he said. "Everything is going to go up — delivery of supplies, costs of making those supplies. Then how does that affect your budget?"

In Elk Mound, Superintendent Ron Walsh ex-

pected gas prices to be higher this year and budgeted for it.

"I'm glad I did," he said.

He plans to do the same for next school year. "I think it's going to be a constant worry" in the years to come for school districts, he said.

Elk Mound also has a 10,000-gallon tank, and its buses burn through two of those a year. With the price of diesel up about \$1.13 in a year, that's more than \$20,000 of extra expense for the district, Walsh said, money that otherwise could have been used for educational purposes.

Chad Trowbridge, Chippewa Falls school district business manager, said that while fuel costs have been on the rise since 2002, "the growth has been fairly sta-

ble, so it smooths out a lot of peaks and valleys."

Chippewa Falls locks in prices at the national average from Oct. 1 of one year to Oct. 1 of the following year, Trowbridge said, and the bus company reimburses the district for the difference.

In Menomonie, district business services manager Marleen Clark said she had budgeted for extra fuel costs this school year.

"Our budget is OK," Clark said. "If it goes up a great deal more we may not have enough in there, and (the difference) will have to come from our fund balance at this point of the year."

Czernicki can be reached at 723-0303 or candy.czernicki@ecpc.com.

Sprinklers/Volunteer work will be reduced

from Page 1A

The device is intended to reduce water consumption in the park by about 40 percent, he said.

The new system cost \$9,000 from the city Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department's capital improvement budget, which is a 50-50 mix of city general fund dollars and hotel room tax revenues. It's just one project in the \$300,000 annual budget for park improvement.

Wilson Park's new sprinklers also are expected to reduce the workload for park employees, who will be stretched thinner this summer than before.

"We're not hiring people that normally would be hired in a very busy time for us," Johnson said.

Budget cuts eliminated 12 of the 22

to 23 positions usually hired for June through August for park maintenance.

New sprinklers also will reduce work for volunteers who started planting flowers last year at Wilson Park located downtown.

Between 6,000 and 7,000 flowers were planted in 2007 by the Clover Express 4-H Club of Altoona.

"There was a lot of time spent watering down there," said Dawn Kroehn, an adult co-leader of the club.

A different volunteer family tended the new flower beds each week, which usually meant a few trips to the park for watering and weeding.

The new "smart controller" system will be a huge improvement from volunteers spending about two hours to run hoses, set up sprinklers and water the

park, Kroehn said.

The club expects to plant up to 7,000 plants again this year to replace last year's annuals and add to the flower beds, she said.

The system at Wilson Park is the first being installed in a city park and the only one currently in their capital improvement plan. If the new system proves cost effective, Johnson said the Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department might propose expanding it to other parks.

"Hopefully we can use this in all of our park systems that are using city water for irrigation," he said.

Dowd can be reached at 833-9204, 800-236-7077 or andrew.dowd@ecpc.com.

Court/Only Ginsburg and Souter dissented

from Page 1A

"We begin with the principle ... that capital punishment is constitutional. It necessarily follows that there must be a means of carrying it out," Roberts wrote. "Some risk of pain is inherent in any method of execution -- no matter how humane -- if only from the prospect of error in following the required procedure."

Roberts said the court would not allow a theoretical risk that a future execution would be botched to stand in the way of carrying out the death penalty.

He also set a high bar for future challenges to carrying out the death penalty. To win a halt to an execution, defense lawyers must show there is a "substantial risk" that the condemned prisoner will suffer "severe pain," the chief justice said. And they have yet to show such evidence, he said.

"A state with a lethal injection protocol substantially similar to the protocol we upheld today would not create a risk that meets this standard," he said.

Agreeing with Roberts, Justice Samuel Alito added a note to say the court should not allow "litigation gridlock" to "produce a de facto ban on capital punishment."

Justice Anthony Kennedy also agreed with Roberts.

Justices Clarence Thomas and Antonin Scalia said they would go further and reject all challenges to an execution method unless it is "deliberately designed to inflict pain."

Justice John Paul Stevens, who will be 88 years old on Sunday, Stevens voted with Roberts to reject the challenge to lethal injections, since there was no evidence that Kentucky's approach is badly flawed.

Justice Stephen Breyer agreed for much the same reason.

Justices Ruth Bader

Ginsburg and David Souter stood alone in dissent. They said they would maintain the hold on executions because Kentucky "lacks the basic safeguards" to ensure the inmate dies a painless death.

Since the 1970s, all of the 36 states that carry out the death penalty have abandoned electrocutions or the gas chamber and switched to lethal chemicals. Most rely on a three-chemical cocktail that includes an anesthetic, a paralyzing drug and a heart-stopping chemical.

Last year, defense lawyers

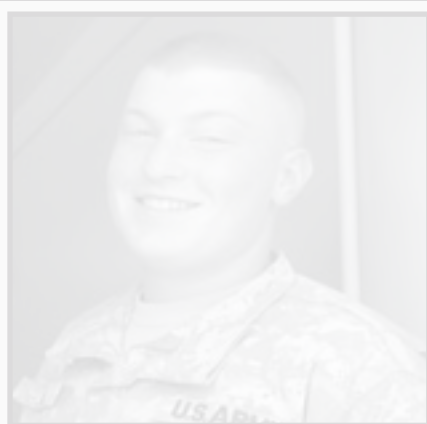
appealed on behalf of two Kentucky inmates and argued that the court should say it is unconstitutional "cruel and unusual punishment" to subject prisoners to an "unnecessary risk" of pain. Death penalty foes were cheered in the fall when the court agreed to hear this challenge.

Had the Supreme Court agreed with the challengers, its ruling could have stopped executions indefinitely. Prison officials would be hard-pressed to prove a dying person would not experience some pain.

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COMING THIS WEEKEND



A Memorial High School graduate returns home Saturday — almost a year after being severely injured in Iraq.



Environmental experts say western Wisconsin has made gains in water and air quality in the 38 years since the first Earth Day, but they say challenges remain.

