

Nebraskan among 3 deaths from spinach

E. COLI VICTIM IS 84-YEAR-OLD WOMAN FROM SARPY COUNTY

JOSH FUNK
The Associated Press
OMAHA — An elderly Nebraska woman died of an E. coli-related illness in late August after eating fresh spinach, bringing to three the number of people who have perished in a nationwide outbreak of the bacteria, health officials said Friday.

The woman, who lived in Sarpy County, ate spinach contaminated with the same strain of E. coli that has sickened at least 190 other people around the country, state health officials said. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention confirmed that the woman's death was linked to the outbreak. Bill Marler, a Seattle lawyer who represents the Nebraska woman's family, said her name was Ruby Trautz, and the 84-year-old died of acute kidney failure.

Marler represents more than 90 other people who became sick after eating tainted spinach, and his firm has filed six lawsuits. Natural Selection Foods LLC and Dole. Trautz' son-in-law also became ill with E. coli in late August, bringing to 11 the number of Nebraska cases linked to the national outbreak. Dr. Tom Safranek, state epidemiologist, said that because the two people became ill before

news of the tainted spinach broke in mid-September, these latest cases might not have been linked to the national outbreak if their family hadn't sought answers. "Once it made the news, the family started thinking about it, and they realized they were part of this outbreak," Safranek said. When Trautz' family went to clean out her fridge, they found the spinach and took it to a lab for testing. When that lab found E. coli, the spinach was sent to state labs for additional testing,

and that's how the death was linked to the national outbreak, Safranek said. The Nebraska cases linked to the national outbreak were reported in the following counties: Cass, two; Douglas, two; Lancaster, one; Sarpy, five; and Saunders, one. State officials said seven of the cases required hospitalization. The news of the Nebraska death came a day after Idaho health officials confirmed that a 2-year-old boy had died from eat-

ing contaminated greens. Tainted spinach also killed an elderly Wisconsin woman. Last week, the Food and Drug Administration lifted a two-week consumer warning on fresh spinach. On Wednesday, the FBI searched two California produce companies for evidence of possible environmental-law violations. Agents sifted through records for indications of whether the spinach producers skirted proper food-handling procedures.



TONY HERRMAN / Tribune

The Minden Evangelical Free Church and city of Minden are working together to prepare Sarah's Field for youth sports.

In memory of Sarah

MINDEN COMMUNITY, CHURCH SUPPORT PLANS FOR MEMORIAL BALLPARK

TONY HERRMAN
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MINDEN — Sarah Kovacs lived here just three years, but she left an indelible mark that still is being felt. Sarah died from heart failure caused by Wegener's Disease May 27, 2005, the day after her eighth grade school year ended. She was 14. She moved to Minden with her parents, Frank and Sharyn, when Frank finished his post-doctoral work at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst in summer 2002 and took a chemistry faculty position at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. Sharyn is a registered nurse at the Kearney County Health Services hospital in Minden. "We didn't realize till she passed how many lives she touched," Frank said. A few months after Sarah died, the Minden Evangelical Free Church, which Sarah attended with her par-



TONY HERRMAN / Tribune

Sharyn and Frank Kovacs hold a picture of their daughter, Sarah, at their Minden home. Sarah died in May 2005 of Wegener's Disease.

ents, became involved with the 40 Days of Community campaign created by the Rev. Rick Warren of Saddleback Church, a Lake Forest Calif.-based mega church. For their campaign, members of the Minden church decided to take land the church owned in town and at one time had planned to use for a new church building, and instead make it available to the community for T-ball, softball and baseball games. Early in the process, church officials voted unanimously to name the land after Sarah. "We were trying to find ways to reach out to the community of Minden and give back, and the idea of doing a large project came up," said Jerrod Ridge, Sarah's Field

Committee chairman. "We decided to develop a large piece of ground the church owned but was sitting idle." The church has been in its current spot at 1310 W. First St. for more than five years. Selling the Sarah's Field land would have helped the church to pay off construction costs. The church received offers on the property, Ridge said, but because of zoning issues the land never was sold. "This is what we are supposed to do with the land," Ridge said. The 10-person committee was brainstorming names for the project when Sarah's Field was mentioned. "Almost immediately somebody said, 'Let's pay tribute to Sarah Kovacs,'" Ridge said. "It really was

just God speaking through the group. It was a fantastic idea, and we could get the community behind it, too." The idea was approved unanimously by the field committee, and then Ridge took the idea to Frank and Sharyn Kovacs. "We were very moved by it," Frank said. "For us that was a little bit of a surprise. Jerrod Ridge came to us and said they wanted to name it after Sarah and they wanted to know if that is OK. Of course we were honored." Once the field is complete, it will include a sign that will have Sarah's testimony on the back and include her signature, which Sharyn said was uncommonly legible, as the Sarah in "Sarah's Field." **Please see SARAH/page A8**

EPC costs increase for HPD

CITY SPENDING MORE AFTER LOSS OF ACUTE BEDS AT HRC

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Since the Hastings Regional Center quit providing acute treatment in 2004, Hastings Police Department officials estimate they have spent \$30,000 more to place people in emergency protective custody. **Thoren**



"It ties up your resources," Hastings Police Chief Larry Thoren said. "It's **Please see HPD/page A7**

Scandal a life lesson for Hastert

FORMER WRESTLING COACH IN MATCH TO KEEP JOB

LAURIE KELLMAN
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A lesson from Dennis Hastert's years as a high school wrestling coach: There's no one to blame but yourself if you get pinned. The speaker of the House appears to **Hastert**



Please see HASTERT/page A7

Breaking MPH record worth \$1,000

RACER, ORGANIZERS OFFER BOUNTY IF LAP TIME IS BETTERED

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Shane Turpin has a challenge for some of the best bikers in the country. Beginning with this weekend's Motorcycle Racing Association event at Motorsport Park Hastings, there is a \$1,000 bounty for beating Turpin's MPH motorcycle lap record of 1:29.2. "It's taunting the top level

racers to come out," the Salt Lake City resident said. "If you break it great. If not, maybe next time. It's a challenge. It creates heated battles. "It'll be awesome; I can't wait." Turpin is a five-time — and current — Utah Sport Bike Association and MRA No. 1 plate holder and a four-time American Motorcycle Association/Champion Cup Series national champion. He also owns the motorcycle track record at all seven Colorado courses and at the new \$90

million Miller Motorsport Park in Salt Lake City. He will compete in six events this weekend. Both Turpin and George Anderson of Hastings, managing partner of MPH, believe a new record will be set this weekend. "Some time after lunch (Saturday), if the tires, the track and weather are good, then that lap record is going to fall," Anderson said. The \$1,000 challenge was the idea of Dean Rumpfola, owner of the TrackAddix rac-

ing organization and MPH motorcycle advisor, not long after Turpin set the MPH record a couple of weeks ago. "We were talking one day and he said 'you have the track record, I'll put up a \$250 bounty for the track record,'" Turpin said. "I said that's a pretty good idea, I'll put in \$250, also, and then George doubled it." By taking the 2.1 mile track in 1:29.2, Anderson said Turpin's average speed was more than 90 mph and exceeded 145 mph at one point. **Please see MPH/page A8**



BRENT McCOWN / Tribune

Shane Turpin (14) of Salt Lake City will feel a lot of pressure this weekend at Motorsport Park Hastings with a \$1,000 bounty to anyone who can beat his course record.

Weather

Hi: South winds around 88 15-25 mph.
Lo: 55



Art by Macy Huffaker, 10, Hawthorne Elementary

Nation

MAN KILLS FAMILY

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Four children were found dead in a public housing complex Friday after a man walked into police headquarters and said he had killed his family. The man, who had been living in Oregon, had an argument about

the children with his estranged wife before he attacked her with a blunt instrument, said Lt. Col. Phil Turner. "We believe she was assaulted first and then the children killed," Turner said. The children's mother, 29-year-old

Fatuma Amir, suffered injuries that were not life-threatening and was speaking to investigators, he said. Said Biyad, 42, went to police headquarters around 9 a.m. and told police, "I've just killed my family," Turner said.

The Associated Press

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Sarah: Minden building ballpark in girl's memory

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"It was nice they wanted to do that," Sharyn said. "It is a way the community would remember her."

Also, about a year ago, committee members took the project to Minden City Administrator Brent Lewis and Parks Superintendent Dennis Lammers.

With just the American Legion baseball field and two fields for little league baseball and softball, Minden teams were short of fields.

"Of course we were excited because it would be another area provided to citizens for recreational activities," Lewis said.

The field will be leveled and new grass will be planted. New fencing will be put in place and in the months and years to come. It was used for T-ball games this past summer.

Future projects also include permanent rest rooms, a concession stand and parking.

As part of the agreement, the church will pay to maintain the field.

AT HOME IN MINDEN

Sarah played a lot of sports: cross country, track, and basketball for her school and city league softball and soccer.

"She ran cross country with my son," Lewis said. "I think she was (a good athlete). She was dedicated."

The walls of the Kovacs home are filled with pictures of Sarah and her drawings.

The family hasn't watched television for years, but Frank and Sharyn said Sarah loved movies.

As a fan of black-and-white movies and bluegrass music — she was learning to play the mandolin — Sarah was not a typical teenager, her parents said.

"In some ways she was closer to adults than to youth," Sharyn said.

Sarah was a part of the Minden Community Players with Frank. Together, they were in the casts of "Fiddler on the Roof" and "The Music Man." She was cast in her first speaking role in "Olson's Revenge," which ran the summer Sarah died.

The players dedicated the show to her, and have since named their scholarship after her.

"That was very nice, it was very touching," Frank said. "People in this community have been very supportive as we struggled with this."

Together, Sarah and Frank would perform at local nursing homes — a tradition the family began while still in Massachusetts.

Frank would play the guitar, and Sarah would sing with him.

Each time, Sarah would not leave without shaking the hands of her audience members.

"She didn't shy away from contact," Frank said.

When Frank was tired or hesitant, Sarah was the catalyst who got him going.

Frank and Sharyn wanted to do something that would make Nebraska unique for Sarah, so by raising money through selling items on eBay, they turned the basement of their home into a movie theater, purchasing a projector, screen, sound system and sheet rock.

For Frank's birthday in early March, Sarah decided to make a music video of the songs she loved to sing with her father. So Sarah and Sharyn donned costumes and filmed themselves performing songs Frank and Sarah would sing together.

Those included songs by Judy Garland, Nickel Creek, Brooks Williams, and the Soggy Bottom Boys' "Man of Constant Sorrow" from the movie "O Brother Where Art Thou."

The Kovacs women wore overalls and beards and performed the song in front of the Coen Brothers movie projected on the screen.

"It's the way we remember her," Frank said of the video.

Once Sarah died, he began looking for the last photo of her.

It was a photo from her birthday April 7, about a month and a half before she died. She held the copy of "The Incredibles" her parents gave her and the green "Happy Easter" birthday cake she picked for herself from Baskin Robbins.

STRONG FAITH

Wegener's Disease is not curable, but it is treatable, and it is not usually fatal, Sharyn said.

When Sarah first became sick, doctors thought she had

an ear infection, so she was treated with antibiotics.

Sarah had been treated in Kearney, but late Thursday, May 5, she — along with Sharyn — was airlifted to Children's Memorial Hospital in Omaha. Within a few hours she was intubated. She was diagnosed with Wegener's Disease that Sunday.

It wasn't until doctors diagnosed the disease that Sarah was given the steroids she needed to control it, but by then it was too late.

It was the fact Sarah's lungs filled with blood, preventing oxygen from circulating to her heart, that eventually caused her death.

Doctors attempted to clear her lungs, but each attempt would damage the lining of her lungs and cause her heart rate

to decrease to the point that she flat-lined.

"We both have a very strong faith in God, and Sarah did, too," Frank said. "This present world is not the end of our existence. Our belief that God would take care of Sarah is very strong."

Both Frank and Sharyn witnessed signs of God's love the day Sarah died.

For Frank, it happened as he was driving into Omaha.

"I was praying a lot and crying a lot, and I was behind a truck that had written in the dirt on the tailgate 'I love my daughter,'" he said. "I remember the immediate thought that came to me was 'I love her, too.' I felt maybe it was a little message to me. I don't believe God did this, but I believe He allowed it to happen."

sales. "They were not just purchasing things, but brought things to the church to sell — even people who were not members of church," Ridge said.

This past summer, the church worked concessions at baseball games, raising more than \$1,000.

"Of course, we've gotten very excited about it as things have progressed," Frank said.

As word about the bazaar got out, people from throughout the Minden community donated sale items. About \$3,000 was raised with that project.

"I've done rummage sales before, and they really don't raise that much money," Frank said. "It was pretty impressive for a small community."

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BRENT McCOWN/Tribune

Shane Turpin poses with his motorcycles Friday at Motorsport Park Hastings. Turpin holds the course record, and MPH will give \$1,000 to anyone who can beat his time this weekend.

MPH: \$1,000 offer table for lap record

Continued from page A1

Turpin arrived in Hastings Tuesday so he could set up his canopy and trailer, change the oil in his bikes, adjust gear ratios and prepare mentally.

"I met Shane a month ago," Anderson said. "He has a lot of fun in what he's doing. He's on top of everything. He's meticulous in setting up and measuring."

From February through October, Turpin, 38, is on the road for two or three weeks each month.

"I've been traveling most of my career," he said. He has been racing for 18 years.

More than 125 competitors from all different classifications will be competing this weekend. Of those, Turpin said about five have the chance to break his record.

"The track and facilities are awesome," he said. "I have been received with open arms. The people here are awesome."