



The Forum

OF FARGO - MOORHEAD

LATE EDITION

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INFORUM.COM

WACHT FOUND GUILTY OF MURDER

Jurors took two hours to decide on 'overwhelming' evidence in decapitation case

By Stephen J. Lee
Forum Communications Co.

COOPERSTOWN, N.D. – The jury here took only two hours, including a catered lunch, to decide Tuesday that Daniel Wacht was guilty of murdering Kurt Johnson 16 months ago.

The swift verdict, on the seventh day after Wacht's trial opened, came on what would have been Johnson's 56th birthday.

"It's fitting," said Johnson's younger brother, Corey Johnson, when asked about the juxtaposition, halting to bridle his emotions. "We miss him. It makes it hard on his birthday."

Wacht, 31, was to be returned today to the Stutsman County jail in Jamestown, where he's been since being arrested Jan. 5, 2011, at work in Cooperstown.

State District Judge James Hovey said he will sentence Wacht at a later date. The maximum sentence is life in prison without parole.

Johnson was last seen alive

WACHT: Back Page



Wacht



Johnson

“

It's in my blood. I love farming. I love serving God and serving people and helping out.

– LEVI WIELENGA, railroad conductor from Sioux City, Iowa, who helped plant crops Tuesday for the Klemetson family Tuesday

Lending a helping farmhand



Dave Wallis / The Forum

Farm Rescue volunteer Levi Wielenga from Sioux City, Iowa, checks a planter during a stop for more corn seed Tuesday as volunteers planted the crop for Matt and Staci Klemetson on their farm northeast of Ulen. The Klemetsons are dealing with Staci's advancing cancer.

Volunteers help plant crops for family coping with wife's cancer

By Marino Eccher
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ULEN, Minn. – With his wife battling cancer and five children to look out for – the youngest of whom is 2 years old – Matt Klemetson has a lot more to worry about than planting corn.

On Tuesday, a few neighbors and friendly strangers stopped by to help pick up the slack.

Four volunteers from Farm Rescue took on the job of planting 300 acres of corn at Klemetson's farm, freeing

him up for a hospital visit with his family. They'll also plant 300 acres of soybeans.

The Klemetsons are one of about 40 to 50 families the organization helps each year. Based in Jamestown, N.D., Farm Rescue operates in

Minnesota, the Dakotas and eastern Montana.

Bill Gross, Farm Rescue founder and president, said it gets families through rough times, alleviates the burden on neighbors, and helps local economies by keeping farmers from going out of business.

Gross, a pilot by trade, was on-site Tuesday. He doesn't get to all Farm Rescue outings, but attends as many as possible.

Some families, like the

Klemetsons, apply for help themselves. At other times, friends and neighbors reach out on their behalf.

"Oftentimes, farm families have a difficult time asking for help," Gross said. "They're pretty independent people, used to working on their own."

A handful of local supporters joined volunteers from out of state Tuesday. A group of women from a local church brought lunch, snacks

HELP: Back Page

Bluestem wants \$2.1M debt cleared

School board leery of group's proposals

By Helmut Schmidt
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FARGO – The Bluestem fundraising group is proposing the Fargo School District pay off \$2.1 million in bonds on the Bluestem Center for the Arts, as well as forgive that debt.

Dave Olig, president of the Bluestem board of directors, also asked the school board Tuesday that his group be allowed to delay the start of repaying a \$2.74 million

BLUESTEM: Page A3

INSIDE TODAY'S FORUM

SHESAYS: Gentle hands, good recipe secret to spectacular scones. **PAGE B1**

VARIETY: MSUM alum returning to F-M for new show at Rourke. **PAGE C1**

SPORTS: Despite early fear about competing in college athletics, Concordia's Thompson one of MIAC's best jumpers. **PAGE D1**

Births	A13
Business	A12
Classifieds	C5-14
Comics	C2
Crosswords	C2, C13
Metro/State	A5-11
Obituaries	A13
Opinion	A4
SheSays	B1-6
Sports	D1-5

Today's weather



Partly cloudy
Details, D6



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F-M has fiction fever

'Hunger Games,' 'Fifty Shades' most requested at libraries

By Tammy Swift
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FARGO – If local library waiting lists are any indication, Fargo-Moorhead readers are looking for the bruised, the sad and the bawdy in their fiction these days.

Suzanne Collins' young-adult dystopian novel "The Hunger Games," a Jodi Picoult story on assisted suicide called "Lone Wolf," and "Fifty Shades of Grey," the first installment in E.L. James' erotic-fiction trilogy, have racked up the most hold requests from library patrons.

INSIDE

Read local reactions to "Fifty Shades of Grey," **PAGE B3**

Hold requests represent the number of people on a waiting list for a certain book. In general, local libraries order one new book for every four hold requests, say staffers at Lake Agassiz and Fargo libraries.

"The Hunger Games," the dark tale of a love triangle set in post-apocalyptic times, has remained the most sought-after book in

BOOKS: Back Page

Chamber forms support group to lobby for Air Guard base

By Sam Benshoof
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FARGO – The Fargo Moorhead West Fargo Chamber of Commerce has formed a support group to protect the part-time Air National Guard base here, Chamber President Craig Whitney announced at a press conference Tuesday.

Defense funding proposals in Congress deny Fargo's base at Hector International Airport the

four C-27 jets it was scheduled to get by early 2013. The canceled jets mean North Dakota's would be the only Air Guard in the country without a manned mission.

Whitney, who is chairing the support group, said the cuts would have a significant effect on the Fargo-Moorhead business community, citing a more than \$70 million direct economic impact on the area.

"The impact that losing a

flying mission could have on us is crucial to the business community," he said. "We're going to do as much as we can to protect the National Guard base here in Fargo."

To convince Congress to restore funding, the Chamber has contracted Gen. Paul Weaver, the retired former director of the guard, as a consultant to lobby for the base in Washington, D.C.

Weaver said Tuesday that

congressional committees in Washington are currently discussing the C-27 issue, and that it's difficult to predict how long it will take for a resolution to be made.

But, Weaver said, if common sense prevails, there's still a chance the jets could end up back at Hector.

The C-27 "could be stationed in no better place than Fargo-Moorhead," he said.

Readers can reach Forum reporter Sam Benshoof at (701) 241-5535

BOOKS

From Page A1

the Moorhead and Fargo library systems for weeks – with a total of 245 requests for the book as of Monday.

"In my humble opinion, that book has been popular for the last two years and exploded in popularity when the movie came out," says Janelle Brandon, public information/marketing director at Lake Agassiz Regional Library.

The second most requested book in Fargo-Moorhead libraries is "Fifty Shades of Grey," which has garnered 159 total hold requests. That's up from 121 requests last week.

Brandon says she believes one reason the S&M-tinged book has done so well nationally was because it was initially offered only as an e-book, which allowed women to read it more discreetly.

However, "Fifty Shades" does not make the top three most requested digital titles at Lake Agassiz. Instead, those top three spots are occupied by Kathryn Stockett's "The Help," "The Hunger Games" and Janet Evanovich's "Explosive Eighteen."

Waiting to read

Top 10 books by number of hold requests

Fargo Public Library

Book	Holds
1. The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins	89
2. Catching Fire by Suzanne Collins	68
3. Fifty Shades of Grey by E.L. James	51
4. Mockingjay by Suzanne Collins	49
5. The Lost Years by Mary Higgins Clark	35
6. Guilty Wives by James Patterson	31
7. Calico Joe by John Grisham	28
8. Lone Wolf by Jodi Picoult	25
9. Stay Close by Harlan Coben	23
10. Kill Shot by Vince Flynn	23

Lake Agassiz Regional Library

Book	Holds
1. The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins	156
2. Fifty Shades of Grey by E.L. James	108
3. Lone Wolf by Jodi Picoult	77
4. 11th Hour by James Patterson	71
5. Loving #4 by Karen Kingsbury	64
6. The Last Boyfriend #2 by Nora Roberts	42
7. Stolen Prey by John Sandford	35
8. I, Michael Bennett by James Patterson	32
9. Road to Grace by Richard Paul Evans	27
10. Cinnamon Roll Murder #15 by Joanne Fluke	25

Sources: Fargo Public Library, Lake Agassiz Regional Library

The Forum

The only other book that makes both library systems' "top 10 holds" list is best-selling author Jodi Picoult's "Lone Wolf," with 102 Fargo-Moorhead patrons waiting to read it.

This can boil down to a considerable wait when fac-

toring in the average three-week period, or longer; that a patron might check out a book.

But staffers say library patrons don't seem to mind the wait – even in an instant-gratification era in which a reader can instant-

ly access almost any digital title.

Elizabeth Madson, collections manager at Fargo Public Library, says it's no surprise that during times of economic downturn, public library use and circulation increase significantly.

Circulation at the Fargo Public Library has increased more than 14 percent from 2006 to 2011, Madson adds.

Madson also believes the "waiting game" allows the avid reader to work through other books on their lists while waiting for that hot best-seller.

"Patrons are willing to place hold requests and wait for a specific title because many patrons are reading a variety of books in relation to their numerous interests, and with so many titles on their 'to-read' lists, they always have something they're reading while waiting for that specific title," Madson says.

Brandon agrees. "It is rare that we get a negative reaction from customers who are on a waiting list to read a good book. It's like Christmas – the suspense is sometimes a major part of the fun and surprise."

Readers can reach Forum reporter Tammy Swift at (701) 241-5525

HELP

From Page A1

and refreshments.

Kenneth Chyle, a first-time volunteer this year, traveled 1,100 miles from Kentucky to get here.

Chyle, a retired farmer, said it's rewarding to give back.

"It's just about being able to help," he said.

Levi Wielenga, a

railroad conductor from Sioux City, Iowa, carved a week out his work schedule last year to volunteer, and took more time this year.

"This is right up my alley," said Wielenga, who grew up on a farm. He came here with his wife, Carol, and their 6-month-old son, Lincoln. They've been on a volunteering swing to several farms over the past few days.

"It's in my blood. I love farming. I love serving God and serving people and helping out," he said. "As long as they don't call

me back to work, I'm going to stay up here and play farm."

Readers can reach Forum reporter Marino Eccher at (701) 241-5502

WACHT

From Page A1

apparently inebriated about 10 p.m. New Year's Eve 2010 being helped by Wacht into Wacht's van outside the Oasis Bar in downtown Cooperstown. Friends began searching for Johnson on Jan. 2, and by Jan. 5 state crime investigators had found his severed head buried in a crawl space in Wacht's basement.

That horrible ending was an injustice to his brother's memory and his character, said Corey Johnson, who lives in southern Minnesota.

"My brother was a good man. He has three wonderful kids who he loved dearly. He loved life," he said.

People from across the country who knew Kurt Johnson through his professional work in Washington, D.C., and across North Dakota have called with condolences the past year, Corey Johnson said.

The jury got the case about 11:35 a.m. Tuesday, after testimony from 31 prosecution witnesses and two defense witnesses over six days.

Hovey called back the seven men and five women within a few minutes to give them more detailed instructions on how to view exhibits in the courtroom, if needed.

Just before noon, the jury went back to its deliberation room, ordering a lunch catered in.

By 2:15 p.m., the jury notified court officers it had reached a verdict.

"It was very difficult," jury member Linda Cross said of the deliberation and about the trial that began with jury selection April 16.

She lives in Hannaford and works in Cooperstown. She didn't know Wacht or Johnson, but knows many people who knew Johnson, who grew up in the community and returned several years ago.

"We had three or four polls," Cross said of the

jury's deliberations. Each time one or two weren't sure, she said.

"We tried to be fair to both sides," she said. "But there was so much evidence that tended toward Daniel. It was just so overwhelming."

The strange and grisly murder seems so at odds with the quiet, farm-centered community an hour's drive from either Fargo or Grand Forks, Cross said.

The verdict doesn't answer a deeper question, she said: "How somebody can do something like that to another person."

Griggs County State's Attorney Marina Spahr met for a long time behind closed doors with Johnson's family and said she would not comment today on the verdict.

Wacht's defense attorney, Steve Mottinger, walked from the courthouse to the law enforcement facility where Wacht had waited for the jury's verdict.

Johnson, an expert on highway transportation and a researcher in recent years with North Dakota State University's Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute, grew up on a farm southeast of town with his brother Corey and sisters Karen and Kristie.

There are many Johnson relatives here, and many friends who talk about what a good guy Kurt Johnson was.

"This doesn't bring him back," said Nathan Lunde, a cousin who attended the trial Tuesday. "But it's good justice was done – as far as on this side."

A farmer and cattle producer along the Sheyenne River east of town, Lunde was close to Johnson from the start.

"We grew up three miles apart," Lunde said. "We went to high school together, played hockey together, skied together," he said, pausing, overcome with emotion. "We didn't get to grow old together."

Stephen J. Lee writes for the Grand Forks Herald

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