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Policy change coming for prom escorts

By EARL WATT
• Leader & Times

A policy that prevented a member of the military from escorting his younger sister to prom at Liberal High School April 20 may be changing soon.

A YouTube video showing Courtney Widener's brother, Casey, standing at the end of the red carpet while his sister made her way to the entrance without him, and a letter to the editor from Courtney sharing her disappointment, set off a national firestorm that involved Fox News, CNN, Wichita television stations and a barrage of comments on social media web sites.

Both sides came together Monday afternoon to try to bring an end to the spectacle, and it included an apology to Airman Casey Widener from LHS Principal Keith Adams.

"I am sorry that Casey Widener was offended or dishonored in any way," Adams said. "That was not our intent."

Both sides received criticism from around the nation.

"There's one from New York," Adams said as he checked his e-mail on his iPhone while meeting with Widener, her parents, Superintendent Lance Stout and Deputy Superintendent Paul Larkin. The meeting was requested by Courtney and was facilitated by board member Tammy Sutherland-Abbott.

Neither side was attempting to discredit the other, and Courtney wanted to meet with her principal to bring an end to the criticism of him, the district and of her disappointment.

Adams agreed, and the discussion became a two-hour meeting that involved other parties including a television crew and other members of the media.

"We are willing to work and find a remedy to this," Stout said. "It is impossible to go back, but what we can do is make it better for the future."

Courtney's father, Roby, agreed.

"We want to move forward, and hopefully, if there is another situation that comes up like this, we can remedy it," he said. "The policy can remedy it."

The group discussed several ways that the principal can be given greater latitude in allowing those that don't meet the current guidelines, which does not allow anyone 21-years-old or older to participate in prom activities.

"We want the public to know we are not bickering," Roby said. "We want to defuse it and make it a positive for the community."

When Courtney's original request

See PROM/Page 3A

Former Liberal High School grad Casey Widener, left, stands at attention in his full dress uniform as an active duty airman in the U.S. Air Force April 20 as his sister, Courtney Widener, purple dress, walks the red carpet with a friend to the front door of LHS for prom night. Courtney was refused her request to have her 23-year-old brother who had just returned from duty in Afghanistan walk her down the red carpet to the doors. Her request was denied because of rules established a decade ago denying anyone 21 or older to be a part of prom. Principal Keith Adams interpreted that to include promenade, which is the walk to the door. A meeting Monday afternoon between the family and school officials has brought a consensus the policy may be changed in the near future. Photo courtesy Courtney Widener

PERFECT WEATHER FOR SINGIN' AND EATIN'

After enjoying some barbecue, children take to the swing sets and slides in the back of Stepping Stone Shelter Sunday afternoon at the Spring Sing Barbecue Thing fundraiser. For more photos of the event, see PAGE 3A. Courtesy photo

Dodge City gang member sentenced for attempted murder

• U.S. Attorney's office

WICHITA – A member of a Dodge City street gang targeted in a federal racketeering case has been sentenced to 10 years in federal prison for attempted murder, U.S. Attorney Barry Grissom said today.

Jason Najera, 29, Dodge City, pleaded guilty to one count of attempted murder in furtherance of racketeering. In his plea, Najera admitted that on Aug. 27, 2011, he used a knife to stab two men he mistakenly believed were members of a rival gang.

On that date, Najera accompanied co-defendant Humberto Ortiz when Ortiz went to a residence at 703 9th Avenue in Dodge City. Ortiz and Najera confronted some men they suspected of being members of the Surenos street gang. Ortiz was a member of Los Carnales Chingones and Najera was a member of Diablos Viejos, both of which were associated with the Nortenos street gang and considered Surenos their common enemies.

When a fight started, Najera used a knife to stab victims Gabriel Rivera and Carlos Ramirez. During the fight, both Rivera and Ramirez were stabbed, with Rivera's injuries requiring a life-flight to a hospital in Wichita.

In his plea, Najera admitted that as a member of the Diablos Viejos he was part of an ongoing criminal conspiracy involving the Nortenos street gang whose members used murder, robbery, assault and acts of violence to protect and expand their operations.

In January, co-defendant Humberto Ortiz was sentenced to 46 months in federal prison.

Najera and Ortiz were among 23 defendants indicted in 2012 who were charged under the federal RICO Act (Racketeering Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act.) The indictment marked only the second time federal prosecutors in Kansas have filed charges under RICO and VICAR (Violent Crimes in Aid of Racketeering).

Saints Booster Club final 2012-13 meeting features special guest

Please join the Saints Booster Club at noon Wednesday in room 229D for the final Saints Booster Club meeting of the 2013 school year. Before the Booster Club Meeting gets underway, we will have a very special signing/commitment ceremony from one of our Seward County student-athletes who will be attending the United State Military Academy and playing for the Army Black Knights next season. There will be time for pictures and an interview with the Booster Club meeting itself starting immediately afterwards. People who would like to attend the signing, but not the meeting are welcome to leave after the signing ceremony, or are more than welcome to stick around for the meeting if they would like to.

WEDNESDAY

College to host Allied Health Careers Camp

The Allied Health Division at Seward County Community College/Area Technical School will host an Allied Health Careers Camp from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., June 3-4, at the Epworth Allied Health Education Center, 6th and Washington in Liberal.
Students entering grades 9 through 12 will learn about Medial Assistant, Respiratory Therapy, Surgical Technology, Medical Laboratory Technician, Sports Medicine and Nursing.
The cost is $10, and students will receive a T-shirt and lunch.
Call 620-417-1401 to get signed up.

SIGN UP TODAY

Satanta Day will be on Saturday, May 11

The United Carbon Company group will meet between 1 and 5 p.m. Saturday, May 11, at the Satanta Senior Center on Main Street. Everyone is invited to bring photos and stories to share. Please inform relatives and friends.

SATURDAY, MAY 11

College's music dept. at college to present spring concert

The Music Department at Seward County Community College/Area Technical School will present its spring concert at 7 p.m., Thursday in the SCCC/ATS Showcase Theater, featuring Concert Band, Sound Express Show Choir and Singing Saints Concert Choir.
Tickets are $3 and are available by calling 620-417-1451 or coming by the office in the Shank Humanities Building, 1801 N. Kansas, Liberal. Courtesy card holders and students are free with a ID. However, due to limited seating, tickets must be picked up in advance.
Money raised will go the SCCC/ATS Foundation for scholarships.

THURSDAY

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