



The Wakefield Times

Lighting the way



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Wakefield City Council approves wastewater bid under projections

By Ryan D. Wilson
Publisher

The Wakefield City Council approved a multi-million-dollar wastewater bid at its July 6 meeting for its lagoon project that came in quite a bit lower than what they believed it would be in March.

The bid of \$2,189,462.98 to Ebert Construction out of Wamego was approved unanimously by the council, and includes an alternate that fixes a drainage issue in one existing cell. Fixing the problem so storm water drains around the lagoon instead of into it reduces operating costs by having less water to pump through the system. The bid also included some work on controls to a lift station.

The council reviewed other costs in addition for the bid, which includes \$298,000 for design engineering, \$270,000 for design supervision and other amounts for land acquisition, lawyer fees, geotech services and for Evergy to extend a power line, which brings the total cost estimate to \$3.35 million.

Most of this is covered by \$2.98 million in grants the city received from USDA, KDHE, Community Development Block Grants, which the council made the bid contingent on those funding agencies also approving the bid.

In March, the engineer of the project had estimated the total cost would be closer to \$4 million, but bids were “competitive” and came in under what they projected.

It’s possible the final cost may be a little less than the new estimate of \$3.35 million, as that included a 3% contingency and some costs the city won’t have to address – such as interest on loans they didn’t need. Some things they might use the contingency are overruns to a little extra that might not be necessary, such as obtaining enough rip rap so city staff wouldn’t have to mow around the lagoons.

Mayor Lisa Chrissovergis said the project has “been a really long process” and celebrated the end of it, especially given that the city got what she and other council members described as “couldn’t get a better bid.”

The council also gave the mayor and engineer authority to execute agreements and documents that will be necessary to get the project started. The project will start sometime in September and is anticipated to be finished in April. In other business:

– The council agreed to exceed the revenue neutral rate (RNR) for next year’s budget by levying the same levy they did last year – 35.581 mills, which exceeds the RNR only because there has been a slight increase in valu-

ation.

– The council heard a brief report on Wakefield Rec. Association activities, and gave permission for WRA to hold an end-of-the season pool party at the city pool. Parents are reminded that sign-up for WRA flag football and volleyball teams through the Clay Center Parks and Rec. Department will be going out soon.

– After a motion to donate \$20,000 out of the Alcohol Fund to the stage project by councilman Robert Bybee failed for lack of a second, the council agreed to discuss it on July 27. Other council members expressed a desire to wait until after other donations from that fund are made to the Birthday Bash Committee and Wakefield Pride and possibly as late as after the Gather For Good Match Day, which is set for Sept. 17.

– Chris Yenni and Melissa Sanchez have recently been appointed to the Library Board, which has another seat vacant.

– The council briefly discussed adding remote controls to garage doors at the fire station, and agreed to discuss it on July 27.

– Councilman Jared Reynier announced his house has sold and his resignation from the council is effective at the July 6 meeting. The city will advertise the vacancy and will discuss on July 27 filling it by the next regular council meeting.



Clay County Park joined in the Independence Day celebration with a parade of patriotically decorated ATVs, side-by-sides, golf carts and bikes on July 4. (Photo from the park’s Facebook group)

CLAY COUNTY SCHOOLS

USD 379 board agrees to exceed revenue neutral rate

By Ryan D. Wilson
Publisher

On July 13, the USD 379 school board voted to notify county clerks of their intent to exceed the revenue neutral rate after floating a few options.

Superintendent Brett Nelson reported that between expanding district boundaries to include Miltonvale and the part of USD 334 around Miltonvale and a large 10-year tax exemption coming off the books, the district’s total assessed valuation increased by several million dollars. When that happens, state aid tends to go down in the year following, but for the current year for which next year’s budget is based, it increases the amount per mill that is collected.

For the new part of the district

that is in Cloud County, the district was advised by the Cloud County Clerk to exceed the revenue neutral rate because the estimate of taxes coming in is “such a rough estimate,” Nelson said. He advised exceeding the rate with 7 mills levied for capital outlay.

Because of the increase in overall valuation, the revenue neutral rate came in at 47.942 mill, a couple of mills higher than last year’s actual tax rate, 50.664, but that doesn’t mean the average taxpayers taxes will go up because of the school district if they choose to exceed the revenue neutral rate, Nelson said. He recommended the district choose a rate close to last year’s, as patrons don’t like seeing the mill levy “yo-yo” up and down from year to year.

Before adjusting the mill levy for

capital outlay at 6.5 mills, which puts the mill levy at 49.625 mills, the board discussed the benefits of staying revenue neutral opposed to keeping the levy level or increasing it.

Board member Tracy Claeys said he’d rather give taxpayers a bit of a reprieve, even if it was just one mill for a year. Board member David Jermak said it would give them some “wiggle room” on where to make budget reductions when state aid inevitably goes down. Other board members said they didn’t want to see the budget change significantly, and motions for the capital outlay to be at 6 mills or 7 mills failed before the board settled on 6.5.

The board set a revenue neutral rate hearing on at the beginning of its Aug. 10 meeting, at 6 p.m.

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Completely eliminating property taxes a bad idea no matter how much we want it

By Ryan D. Wilson
Publisher

Republicans should pay attention to Philip Sarnecki, a Republican candidate for governor, who recently made headlines by proposing a radical solution: completely eliminate property taxes – not just those levied by the state, but by every local taxing entity in the state.

There is no question that Kansans need relief from property tax. Elderly homeowners are worried about property taxes pushing them out of their homes. Farmers, small businesses and others in the middle experiencing the biggest pinch are worried about just making ends meet.

But eliminating all property taxes would not only be disastrous, it simply won't make anything more affordable.

Most property taxes are levied by local governing bodies including cities, counties, school districts and other entities set up to provide services like fire protection or water. These entities get most of their funding from property taxes that would be difficult to raise another way.

Let's say the state succeeds in eliminating property taxes. To make up for it, local governments would have to make cuts or tax us in other ways – user fees, sales tax or income tax.

It goes without saying that none of us want to go without these ser-

vices. Perhaps they could run more efficiently, but I've never since any government setting out to be more efficient actually succeed in that goal.

User fees only bring in so much – ambulance runs, for example, only see a small fraction of what they bill out come in because most people never pay because they can't afford it. You can try raising taxes on public utilities and other user-based services, but you'd have the same problem you would have if you raise sales taxes – which is that people only have so much before they make adjustments by either consuming less or choosing to go without.

The biggest problem with sales tax is that it's very recessive – meaning the poor and middle class are the most adversely affected when it goes up. Consumers are already hurting because of inflation. Increasing sales tax to eliminate property tax would make everything that much less affordable.

Even if local governments go without property tax and are able to function by raising income or sales tax, I highly doubt voters really want property taxes eliminated just to see income and sales taxes skyrocket. They want lower taxes, not for it to be shifted elsewhere.

So what is the solution?

Sarnecki isn't the only candidate touting property tax relief – virtually every Republican candidate running for governor has their own idea of how to do it from complete-

ly gradually reducing them (which Ty Masterson proposes) to eliminating the 20 mills the state levies that goes to schools (which Secretary of State Scott Schwab proposes) to valuation caps (supported by many legislators running).

Caps on property valuation going up, a novel idea, isn't unreasonable. Taxes go up most often through this process that is supposed to be unbiased that local elected officials have no say in. It can arguably be unfairly manipulated through market trends when property is sold for more than it's worth. Caps could be a long-term solution, but right now they don't give relief to those currently hurting.

Cap and other solutions also create a budget nightmare for the Legislature and local entities with taxing authority, and again, these proposals don't actually make anything more affordable.

However, taxing those who can afford to pay taxes would work. The state can do that by adding income tax brackets for those who make significantly more than the average Kansan and tax them at a higher rate than everyone else. That's how it was done in the past.

Raising taxes on the wealthy – who can afford it more than anyone else – wouldn't just give the state room to give property tax relief to Kansans who really need it, in the long run it also benefits everyone. If the average person has more income, they have more to

spend on the things that made the rich wealthy, and more commerce helps grow the economy to expand the tax base that reduces taxes for us all.

But good luck in getting anyone in the Legislature to support that. Adding tax brackets taxing those making over \$100,000 a year or even \$250,000 a year means they would be essentially taxing themselves and their campaign contributors more. Heaven forbid they ever do that!

When Sam Brownback was governor, Republicans reduced the number of income tax brackets from five to three and a couple years ago they reduced those brackets to two, bringing us closer to a flat tax where everyone is taxed at the same rate regardless of income. On paper a flat tax sounds like a good idea, but in practice it really only benefits the very wealthy.

By cutting income taxes on the richest of Kansans, Republicans got us into the mess that led to high property taxes, increased sales taxes, higher utility charges and other policies that contributed to inflation. Trying to convince us they can get us out of it with the same bad idea when they cut income tax makes me wonder if communism isn't such a bad idea after all (and I say that tongue in cheek).

It's time for Republicans to come up with a real, serious solution, lest their voters come up with a radical solution of their own – like voting for a Democrat.

Baking soda/vinegar projects fun for children

By Lydia Kautz
Associate Editor

Is it weird to have a favorite chemical reaction?

Probably, but being weird can have its benefits and I just can't quit baking soda and vinegar.

You can do so much with it, after all. You can use it for everything from those baking soda volcanos that were a mainstay of school science fairs everywhere to the best natural drain cleaner in the world.

Just pound a cup or so of baking soda into your drain, dump a cup of white vinegar over it, cover the drain and follow it up with about a gallon of boiling water 15 minutes later. I haven't met a sink clog that wouldn't fix.

Usually, though, I use baking

soda and vinegar to teach child-accessible chemistry.

Recently, my library did something with baking soda and vinegar at a summer day camp for elementary-aged children.

I filled a small tote with plastic dinosaurs, seashells, rocks and other treasures I didn't mind having soaked with vinegar. I covered them with a thick layer of baking soda.

I filled small spray bottles with vinegar, put the bins in front of the students and let them go to town on them. After they were done, I let them each pull an item from the bin and wash it off in a bowl of water.

It was a quick, easy science experiment even a kindergartener could take something away from. The whole thing was a tad bit

messy, but we did it outdoors and because everything we used can also be used for cleaning, even wiping our hands on our clothes wasn't a big deal. I ended the day with more than a couple white smudges myself.

If anyone wonders, the end product of this project looks like vanilla ice cream. I don't recommend anyone try and taste it.

There were a couple bins left over at the end of the day, so we'll probably do it with our preschool story time crowd as well.

We do something along these lines about once a summer and it's always a big hit with the children.

It's easy to do at home too, as long as you don't add anything to the bins that you don't want smelling like vinegar for the next month and a half.

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The Wakefield Times

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Republicans touting Trump's endorsement still don't get it

By Ryan D. Wilson
Publisher

Perhaps they're thinking that by the time the General Election rolls around in November, voters on the left and the middle will have forgotten what they were endorsed by a madman who's still ruining our country.

But with Trump's disapproval rate at 60% as of last week (according to a poll by The Economist) – staying consistently near a record-low for months, candidates touting Trump's endorsement aren't just risking losing the General Election. It might also cost them the Primary in races being contested by other Republicans, which not only includes the governor's race, but also, three Congressional seats in Kansas.

Here's what Trump had to say about the Kansas candidates he's endorsed have said:

Trump posted on Truth Social that Kansas

Senate President Ty Masterson was a “fantastic candidate” for governor of Kansas and possesses his “complete and total endorsement.”

Trump also gave Senator Roger Marshall his “complete and total endorsement” and called him a “very strong advocate” for the people of Kansas and “a champion for farmers.” He said “Marshall will never let you down,” despite Marshall allowing the Trump Administration to cut federal programs benefiting Kansans and farmers.

Trump has also endorsed Rep. Tracey Mann (First District), and that endorsement read like Sen. Roger Marshall's; and Rep. Derek Schmidt (Second District), whom Trump called “an America First patriot and a true friend of MAGA.” Although he has yet to endorse any Republicans running for the Third or Fourth District, in 2017 he endorsed Rep. Ron Estes (Fourth District) and called him “a really good guy” in a last-minute endorsement

for a special election that looked like Estes might lose to a Democrat.

Each candidate receiving Trump's endorsement has said they are “honored” to have it, showing Kansans just how out-of-touch with reality and the rising unrest they are. Trump's endorsement used to be the surest ticket for victory for Republicans; but of late it has marked the end of many political careers, as most of those giving the endorsement outside of Kansas have lost the primary because of it.

As red as Kansas is, don't think that can't happen here too. Trump's endorsement will no doubt rally his most loyal supporters to stand behind whoever he endorses, but those candidates would have those votes even without Trump's support. The voters his endorsement will turn off are the ones these candidates should be concerned about, as droves of Republicans are now questioning their previous support of Trump.

Hamilton's early success indicates Kansans are hungry for an alternative

By Ryan D. Wilson
Publisher

Recently, a Methodist pastor from Johnson County, Adam Hamilton, raised eyebrows on both sides of the political spectrum by filing as a Democrat after exploring where he should start a campaign as an independent running against Sen. Roger Marshall.

The move prompted the Kansas Republican Party to accuse Hamilton of “masking a radical, left agenda” and Kansas Democrats to wonder whether he is liberal enough to survive the primary in an already crowded field of candidates seeking the Democrat nomination to challenge Marshall.

Both sides are right to be paying attention. As near as we can tell, Hamilton is the only true moderate running for the office. In the first couple of weeks of announcing that he is running as a Democrat, his campaign raised more than \$2 million.

Although he came on the scene late, Hamilton has already demonstrated he will listen to voters. The

reason he filed as a Democrat is because he heard over and over about potentially splitting the vote and giving Marshall an easy victory. We heard that concern voiced at listening tour stops in both Clay Center and Junction City, where both liberals and conservatives showed up to support a new alternative.

Hamilton's message to support people before politics and to look out for Kansans is an intoxicating one. So much so that we suggested he adopt “Make Our Country Kind Again” as his campaign slogan, which we are pleased to say that he liked the idea.

The early success of his campaign shows that voters are hungry for an alternative to the ones the Republicans and Democrats have given us – which is to either worship Trump or hate him.

Hamilton might also be Kansans' best hope in what is sure to be a radical shift in politics after the next election.

If we are going to survive, both parties need to look beyond Trump and the future of the country after

Kansas doesn't need any more paid-for politicians

By Ryan D. Wilson
Publisher

A recent visit by the running mate of a candidate running for governor reminded us the most important thing on the Primary Election ballot isn't any of the candidates running, but the Constitutional amendment that would change how district court judges and Supreme Court justices are selected in Kansas.

Through ads and other promotions, both sides have done a good idea of explaining their position – Republicans (and especially the most conservative of Republicans) want to make these positions more partisan by making them elected positions; while Democrats would prefer to keep the current system in place, which has been in play since another Constitution amendment was passed in the late 1950's after an unpopular governor got himself appointed as a Supreme Court justice through a series of resignations in 1957 known as the Triple Play.”

The reason for this coming up now after the current system has been in place for almost 70 years essentially comes down to abortion. The most conservative Republicans tried to get abortion completely banned in Kansas in 2022 with a Constitutional Amendment on the Primary ballot, which voters soundly rejected by an 18-point margin.

Republicans supporting the new amendment making judges and justices elected would like to believe it's about giving voters more of a say of who those judges and justices are. But it is really yet another attempt by the most conservative of them to subvert the will of the people and

get the abortion completely banned, because they hope the trend will be that voters will elect more conservative Supreme Court justices over liberal ones.

Judges and Supreme Court Justices especially are supposed to be impartial. That includes being non-partisan. Just as importantly, they should know and understand the law, apply it fairly and not be beholden to any one party or anyone who contributes heavily to their campaign fund. The current system does that with a nominating commission that provides three names to the governor, who makes the appointment.

Republicans behind the amendment would like to believe that these commissions are filled with nothing but liberals and lawyers, but that wasn't the case with the nominating commission for the 21st Judicial District that recommended John Bosch as district judge and John Magistrate as district magistrate judge. Only one or two on those commissions that included members from Clay and Riley Counties were lawyers – the rest were from all walks of life and most of them, conservative.

Kansas doesn't need to change how judges and justices are selected. Even Republicans supporting abortion bans should be wary of this change – as it will likely result in unintended consequences – not the least of which is money pouring into these campaigns from out-of-state and those wishing to to get away with a crime. A big contributor could literally get away with murder.

And the last thing Kansas needs is more paid-for politicians.

Letter policy for *The Times*:

The Times welcomes and encourages letters to the editor. Rules on submissions:

1. No profanity.
2. Libelous, slanderous or outright false information will not be permitted.
3. Keep it civil. No insulting other individuals, businesses or other organizations.
4. Letters endorsing political candidates will not be printed the week before an election.
5. All letters must be signed with submitter's name and hometown.
6. Letters may be edited for length.

We may ask the submitter to edit their letter to meet our guidelines, or reject letters that do not come from readers or from in-county residents, or to reject a letter for another reason not listed here. To submit a letter, please send it to newseditordispatch@gmail.com or drop off a paper copy to P.O. Box 519, Clay Center, KS 67432

County plans work on Kiowa Road despite not getting grant

Bob Wietharn, landowner, met with Clay County Commissioners on June 15 to discuss plans for Kiowa Road in front of his business following notification that the county was not awarded the grant for the project.

Wietharn stated he would be willing to pay 50% of the project cost with the county paying the remaining 50% up to a maximum total project cost of \$1 million or \$500,000 per party.

The grant program will reopen this fall and an engineer experienced with this type of grant application will need to be engaged. The state will provide a review regarding the unsuccessful grant application so the county can better prepare a new submission. The county, the Wietharns and state officials will all be invited to the review meeting though no date has been scheduled.

Wietharn stated that before any improvements can be made roadside ditches must be cleaned out as they are currently lower than the roadway. Commissioners asked what immediate actions he would like completed until the next grant period. Wietharn stated that beginning in July semi traffic will increase and the road rock will deteriorate into dust. He requested the road be graded immediately after rainfall to smooth out the washboard conditions.

Assistant Highway Administrator Jeff Germann, Highway Department foremen Ray Geer, Joe Strode and Troy Smith; and office manager Melissa Goff met with commissioners to provide the weekly report. Commissioners requested their thoughts following the resignation of Highway Administrator Bobby Shomper the previous week.

Germann stated he has been working on returning phone calls from residents. The bridge near the city limits at Broughton will be let for bids in July and the chip sealing project will be delayed until after harvest.

During the previous week the Department worked on replacing pipes removing storm-damaged trees unplugging several drainage pipes throughout the county repairing a bridge where the back wall had washed out replacing road closure barricades on a bridge closed after inspection, mowing roadsides and patching potholes.

Commissioners informed the group of their earlier discussion with Wietharn regarding the future plan on Kiowa Road. Wietharn suggested leaving the road as-is until after the grant review requesting only that the road be graded following rainfall to reduce washboarding.

The Highway Department staff suggested speaking with Jimmy Nichols to determine whether he would consider returning as the mechanic. The department is currently down two mechanics and one grader operator. Commissioners granted permission for those discussions.

Commissioners approved the Highway Department contacting Tyler Stark for electrical work in the shop and wiring for a grader yard located at 23rd Road and Buffalo Road.

Germann reported that Washington County has a bridge project located on the county line requiring shared engineering costs with engineering expenses split 50% Clay County and 50% Washington County. The bridge construction itself is fully funded. Commissioners granted office manager Melissa Goff authorization to sign off on most department bills with some requiring Germann's signature.

The City of Morganville has received permission from Carolyn Wohler to straighten the curve through her property on the west side of Morganville. Property descriptions and right-of-way boundaries will change ownership but no funds will exchange hands. The City currently has no

funds available for the project.

Several other items were discussed as follows:

- The damaged edger is with Double L currently working on repairs but no cost estimate is available.

- The annual mapping program renewal and whether it remains necessary.

- The roadside tank sprayer that Commissioners were previously informed that it was in Mr. Geer's pickup which has not yet been installed. Commissioners requested the sprayer be installed and utilized along county roadsides.

- Equipment requests for the 2027 proposed budget including a new excavator and mulching head. Mr. German noted the current excavator is needing to be replaced and the mulching head would greatly assist in tree removal operations.

Commissioners thanked highway employees for continuing to work together during the interim period while a new administrator is hired.

Also according to the unofficial minutes of the June 15 Clay County Commission meeting taken by County Clerk Kayla Wang

- Commissioners David Thurlow, Eric Carlson and Jerry Mayo met in a regular session beginning at 8 a.m.

- Commissioner Carlson requested that the wording on page 2 of the previous week's minutes be changed. The minutes were then approved as corrected.

- Jury pay of \$876.40 was reviewed and approved. Accounts payable in the amount of \$81047.99 were reviewed and approved.

- Commissioner Thurlow attended the Park Board meeting last week. Financial reports were presented. Commissioners decided to postpone the asphalt laying project at the park until later due to uncertainty regarding lake water levels which have risen significantly. The Park Board instructed Park Manager Chuck Arnold to report to the office for one hour daily to return phone calls and messages noting this as an important part of his duties.

- EMS Director Alec Trembath reported EMS remains extremely busy with emergency calls and out-of-town transfers. Staff recently worked with employees at Liberty Place renewing CPR certifications. Medic 4 has returned to service and will handle local runs since it will be the next ambulance traded in for a remount ambulance expected during the first quarter of 2027. Arrangements have been made to provide AED training for the City of Green on July 15. Painting of the EMS storage container is nearly complete and will provide useful storage space. Beginning July 1. EMS will be able to bill insurance for non-transport runs with a minimum charge of \$250. Trembath presented the proposed 2027 EMS budget. If approved, several PRN positions will need to be added to the January 2027 pay scale.

- Commissioners agreed to provide the following employees an additional \$2 per hour temporary pay increase during the interim period until a Highway Administrator is hired effective June 15, 2026: Assistant Highway Administrator Jeff German and foreman Ray Geer, Troy Smith and Joe Strode and office manager Melissa Goff.

- Sheriff Alan Benninga presented the proposed 2027 Sheriff's Department budget, which was left for commissioners to review. Patrol vehicle replacement was discussed and commissioners granted permission for Sheriff Benninga to seek bids for a new one. Discussion included comparison between purchasing an SUV versus a pickup.

- County Appraiser Danny Mesalles presented the proposed 2027 budget, which was left for

commissioners to review. Commissioners approved and signed a residential NRP application for a new dwelling located at 2627 Quail Road owned by Lloyd Incorporated / Jerri Humphrey.

- Commissioner Mayo made a motion directing County Attorney Brenda Jordan to draft a resolution establishing a moratorium on data farms within Clay County for a period of at least one year, which passed unanimously.

- Commissioner Carlson requested the County Clerk determine whether county insurance coverage exists for the damaged edger attachment and report back to them.

- Noxious Weed Director Whitney Baer presented her proposed 2027 budget, which was left for commissioners to review. Baer reported that the clutch has failed on the newest spray truck. After consulting Jared Bloom of Bloom Repair estimated repair costs are approximately \$3,250. Commissioners granted permission for repairs. Baer reported recent spot spraying operations in the southern part of the county. She will be sending letters to five landowners regarding excessive thistle infestations. Thistle growth is significantly worse than in previous years.

- Commissioners received information regarding the Kansas State Fair and the upcoming 250th Anniversary celebration. A giant Kansas map will be displayed in the Bison Barn featuring an area representing each county. Counties may purchase a pole banner for \$250 displaying the county's name and local representative/ Commissioners granted permission to participate.

- Tracy Myers Kathryn Doster-Tipsword of Grow Clay County introduced the new Grow Clay County Director Hannah Hasbrook to commissioners. Commissioner Thurlow stated the county remains interested in working together and invited Grow Clay County representatives to present future projects for possible county funding assistance. Myers presented the proposed 2027 Travel and Tourism budget noting several items had been removed due to lack of recent use. Tipsword requested permission to use the square for the annual Piotique Celebration and received permission.

- Landfill Director Rhonda Carroll and County Attorney and Brenda Jordan met with commissioners regarding a packet recently received from KDHE. Jordan stated the state determined that photographs submitted with recent violations were identical to photographs originally submitted in 2024, causing concern that problems have not been corrected and prompting another inspection. Jordan questioned Carroll regarding dates and times associated with photographs submitted to KDHE. Jordan stated the county is currently in very poor standing with KDHE. Carroll stated she may have mixed up the photos and submitted the same ones in 2024 and again in May of 2026. Jordan asked why photographs from two years prior remained on her desk. Carroll responded that it was an accident if she did submit them twice. All parties agreed to arrange a meeting involving the commissioners, two engineers, Jordan and Carroll in an effort to fully understand and resolve the issues. The date for this meeting will be set soon. Carroll reported that the rear window of the recycling truck had been broken out. Permission was granted for repairs. Ken Shivers contacted the county offering asphalt millings for \$6 per ton. Commissioners granted permission to purchase as much as needed. Carroll reported that the track has come off the skid steer and staff has been unable to reinstall it. Commissioners instructed her to contact Bruna Implement for repairs.

- Commissioners adjourned at 1:47 p.m.

County purchases right-of-way for upcoming bridge project

On June 22 landowner Gail Hauserman, and Brady Hedstrom, BG Consultants, met with Clay County Commissioners regarding right-of-way acquisition for the upcoming Broughton Road bridge project.

The right-of-way includes both permanent and temporary easements, with temporary easement rights returning after 12 months. Following discussion, Commissioner Mayo offered \$350 to Hauserman for the small section of ground that they would use as the right-of-way, which commissioners approved and agreed to compensate the remaining two landowners at the same formula rate of \$5,645.16 per acre for each of the right-of-ways purchased.

Assistant Highway Administrator Jeff Germann reported in the week prior the department hauled rock, graded roads, installed pipes, placed riprap, and worked in the shop.

Commissioners approved a request from a landowner on Sixth Road to concrete the end of a driveway at the landowner's expense to prevent washout.

Germann also reported damage to a county belly dump trailer after riprap left in a Bayer Construction loader bucket caused damage while unloading the rock on the road. Commissioners instructed him to submit the incident to KCAMP insurance.

Also according to the unofficial minutes of the June 22 Clay County

Commission meeting taken by the County Clerk Kayla Wang:

– Clay County Commissioners David Thurlow, Eric Carlson and Jerry Mayo met in regular session on June 22, 2026, at 8 a.m. The minutes were approved as printed. Payroll in the amount of \$142,201.29 was reviewed and approved.

– Commissioner Thurlow presented a map of the streets at Clay County Park regarding a request from Park Manager Chuck Arnold to lay one additional street with asphalt at an estimated cost of \$49,000. This would complete the asphalt project at the park. Commissioners approved moving forward pending the Park Board's approval.

– Linda Underwood asked for and received permission to use the Courthouse Square on Aug. 7 for Relay for Life.

– EMS Director Alec Trembath reported that EMS has completed 483 runs this year compared to 467 at this time in 2025. Trembath presented a three-year contract with Washington County for Clay County EMS to provide coverage for the Clifton area beginning Jan. 1, 2027, which commissioners approved and signed. Trembath also reported that several employees are interested in taking a six-week online course to become an instructor. This will allow them to teach different classes and provides them with useful training. He also discussed a request with the Clay Center City Council

regarding a waiver of registration fees for the EMS side-by-side since they teach CPR classes to city employees at no cost. He will wait to hear back from them.

– Emergency Manager Jim Bogart, presented the weekly report and discussed progress on the county's updated floodplain mapping project.

– County Health Director Dana Rickley presented the proposed 2027 Health Department budget, which was left for commissioners to review. Rickley also reported updates to the department website and announced that they have placed an employment ad for an RN Nurse to fill an upcoming vacant position.

– Sheriff Alan Benninga reported he attended the firefighters meeting in Wakefield last week. The plumbing project at the Law Enforcement Center has been completed. The new shower pans that have been made are ready for installation. The plumbing beneath the units will be replaced during the installation of the pans.

– Mike Rezkalla, CEO of Pawnee Mental Health, and Holly Chestnut, board member, presented their annual report and 2027 appropriation request. Pawnee Mental Health serves a 10-county area which covers 2,324 square miles. They provided services to 535 duplicated Clay County residents in 2025. Rezkalla reported that the 24/7 mobile crisis unit has been a huge success with two teams located in Clay Center. He requested a 10% appropriation

increase of \$7,374, bringing the total request to \$81,121. Commissioners will consider the request during 2027 budget discussions.

– Don Wright and Jay Behrends, from Clay County General Public Transportation, and Donna Lenhart, Clay County Task Force, presented their quarterly report. Wright announced his resignation effective July 1, with Behrends assuming his responsibilities. Public Transportation services continue to grow. Lenhart reported that the transportation program uses a large portion of the Task Force budget. The senior programs through the Task Force are available in Clay Center, Longford, and Wakefield. She also reported the Task Force will soon relocate to the new multi-generational building and thanked the county for continued support and use of the Grant Street facility. This works perfectly for them and is a great benefit for our community.

– Register of Deeds Susie Mall presented the proposed 2027 budget for commissioners to review. Mall discussed the difficulty of locating typewriters that are compatible with handling large-format documents. She stated that she would like to send her employees to some training next spring that would be very beneficial to them. Also, she will be watching for potential legislative changes that may affect her office.

– Commissioners adjourned at 12:55 p.m.

RIVER VALLEY EXTENSION DISTRICT

K-State Open House brings gardening research to life



**By
Brooke
Ohlde**
*Horticulture
Agent,
River Valley
District*

Imagine the possibilities – a lush green lawn that requires no water, a towering shade tree free from everyday disease problems, or a landscape dotted with vibrant pops of color from annual flowers that grow with minimal care. For 55 years, these are the kinds of horticultural projects that the John C. Pair Horticultural Research Center in Haysville, Kan., has been studying. Testing a wide range of plants – from trees and shrubs to turfgrass, fruits, vegetables, and even industrial hemp – their research helps identify and develop the best performing plants for Kansas.

Since 1971, K-State plant research-

ers at the Pair Center have looked for the greenest turf grasses, maple trees with the best fall color, the toughest evergreen trees, the most drought tolerant plants, and more in order to recommend the best plants to grow in the weather extremes of South Central Kansas.

To provide the public with an up-close, firsthand look at this research, the John C. Pair Horticultural Research Center will host a public Open House on Saturday, August 8 from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. The open house is designed for all ages of the community and will include tours, interactive booths, kid's activities, tram rides and more.

Tours of various research trials will be given throughout the day, and highlights include:

- No Irrigation Turfgrass Trials
- Recommended Trees For Kansas
- New Annual Flower Variety Testing
- Water-Wise Landscape Design Research
- Local Vegetable Variety Testing

• Mulch-Driven Soil Improvements

- Best Cut Sunflower Varieties
- Industrial Hemp Variety Trials
- Organic Sweet Potato Production
- Best Drought Tolerant Turfgrass

“The John C. Pair Horticulture Center is a one of a kind, nationally recognized research facility that betters our lives every day in ways most Kansans don't even realize,” said Abbey Draut, Horticulture Agent with the K-State Extension Office in Sedgewick County, and one of the event's organizers. “With the open house, we want to invite the community to come out and discover everything that the Pair Center has to offer in order to help them be more successful gardeners.”

The open house is scheduled as a come and go event. Admission is free. There will be time to see current research, talk to the experts, and get answers to gardening questions.

The public open house is being hosted by K-State Extension, the

Sedgewick County Extension Master Gardeners, and staff at the John C. Pair Horticultural Research Center. Further information about the event can be found on the event flyer.

Draut added that “whether you are growing trees, lawns, food crops, or flowers, the research conducted at the Pair Center not only supports the success of every home gardener, but also supports innovation and growth of local greenhouses, nurseries, sod farms, landscape companies, golf courses and parks across Kansas.”

An additional field day event will be hosted earlier in the week, on Thursday, Aug. 6, and is designed for members of the horticulture industry, including those working as landscapers, arborists, golf course managers, municipal park staff, sports field managers, and garden center employees. Additional information about the 2026 Kansas Turf & Ornamentals Field Day and online registration can be found here: <https://www.kansas-turfgrassfoundation.com/annual-ktf-field-day.html>

CLAY COUNTY COMMISSION

Next steps discussed for Kiowa Road grant

Clay County Commissioners met June 29 with interested parties about the next steps in applying for a state grant for Kiowa Road.

Bob Wietharn and Joe Wietharn, landowners, met with commissioners to discuss the recent state review of the grant application for the asphalt project on Kiowa Road. Schwab Eaton representatives also attended. The meeting was recorded if the Board would like to listen to the review.

Bob Wietharn stated future applications need a stronger title and a detailed narrative, noting the narrative is a critical part of the application process. He reported most successful applicants had applied multiple times.

Support letters from the current application can be reused for the fall application cycle. Of the \$32 million available during the spring application period, 47 applications were submitted and six were awarded. Wietharn requested that commissioners determine the county's financial contribution for the fall application.

Also according to the unofficial minutes of the June 29 Clay County Commission meeting taken by Kayla Wang

– Commissioners David Thurlow, Eric Carlson and Jerry Mayo were present for a regular meeting beginning at 8 a.m. The minutes were approved as printed.

– County Clerk Kayla Wang presented the proposed 2027 budgets for the County Clerk and Election Funds. The budgets were left with the Board for review.

– Interim Highway Administrator Jeff German reported Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks had inquired about right-of-way status between the county and KDWP and recommended the replacement of the bridge on Buffalo Road between Second and Third Road in the near future. The department is seeking bids from electricians to install lighting in the office and in the north 100 feet of the main building. Commissioners approved a transfer of \$100,000 from the Special Highway Fund to the Road and Bridge Fund. Highway Department crews spent the previous week blading roads, installing pipes, mowing roadside, and working in the shop.

– Commissioners went into executive session

under the non-elected personnel exception for 10 minutes beginning at 10:53 a.m. with Germann, office manager Melissa Goff and the county clerk to discuss job duties. Regular session reconvened at 11:03 a.m. with no action being taken.

– County Health Director Dana Rickley reported no applications have been received for the RN nurse position. Commissioner Mayo suggested advertising through Indeed. Rickley also reported issues with an air conditioning roof unit, which Carlson Heating and Air has been contacted to look at it. Clay County will partner with Republic County on a USDA WIC grant addressing blood pressure monitoring for expectant and postpartum mothers.

– Emergency Manager Jim Bogart reported the fifth-wheel camper has been moved to the landfill for disposal. He also reported work continues on floodplain permits for bridges, and a community floodplain meeting will be held in July regarding the updated floodplain maps.

– Sheriff Alan Benninga reported bid specifications have been sent out for the purchase of a patrol pickup. The bids were due Friday. The shower pans are completed and plumbing and welding installation will be scheduled. Sheriff Benninga requested permission to purchase a restraint device called "The Wrap" with helmet for \$1,659.12, which commissioners approved.

– Landfill Director Rhonda Carroll and former landfill employee Felicia Grove met with commissioners regarding personnel issues. Carroll stated that she was having issues regarding Grove's job performance. Grove expressed concerns with the treatment of landfill employees and communication within the department and later met with commissioners to further express concerns regarding the treatment by landfill management. Commissioners stated the position likely would not have been a good fit moving forward.

– Commissioners adjourned from the Courthouse at 10:55 a.m. and reconvened at the museum at 11 a.m.

– Museum Director Jeff Gaiser, Museum Treasurer Terry Perry and Museum volunteers Pat Gilbert and Linda Cunningham met with

commissioners at the museum. Gilbert presented information on the recent Children's History Camp that was held at Huntress Park, attended by 20 students in grades 4 through 8. She thanked the Board for their donation supporting the program. Gaiser gave a tour of the Red, White, and Blue Quilts exhibit and the 'Moments That Made Us' historical display in recognition of the nation's upcoming 250th anniversary.

– Commissioners adjourned from the museum at 11:25 a.m. and reconvened at the courthouse at 11:30 a.m.

– District Court Administrator Kathy Oliver presented the proposed 2027 District Court budget and left it with commissioners for review.

– Randy Gassman, of Pottberg, Gassman and Hoffman, met with commissioners to begin the first 2027 budget workshop and gather information for preparation of the county and Rural Highway budgets. Gassman will return next week with a draft budget for further review and changes.

– County Appraiser Danny Mesalles presented a residential NRP application for Steven Lilley at 1373 5th Road, Wakefield, which commissioners approved and signed. Mesalles and commissioners discussed data centers. At this time, no inquiries have been made regarding development in Clay County.

– Commissioners agreed unanimously to adopt Resolution 2026-06 establishing a moratorium on the acceptance, processing, approval, or construction of data centers and related facilities and infrastructure within the unincorporated areas of Clay County, Kansas. Additional discussion followed regarding the resolution.

– County Treasurer Christine Swaim presented the proposed 2027 Treasurers Budget. The next delinquent real estate tax sale will be held sometime in October. The date has not been set at this time. Swaim provided a report showing that the uncollected property tax is at 1.56% for the 2025 tax year and for the same time in 2024 it was 1.69%. Commissioners discussed investments and the interest that has been earned so far this year.

– Commissioners adjourned at 1:55 p.m.

Read the e-edition of

The Times
at union-dispatch.com



RIVER VALLEY EXTENSION DISTRICT

'All about hummingbirds' set Aug. 4

Join the River Valley Extension District in August to learn all about hummingbirds-- the winged, jeweled marvels that homeowners can enjoy in their own backyards.

Southbound hummingbird migration starts in late July and runs well into September, allowing homeowners a window of opportunity to invite hummingbirds into their yard. Guest speaker Chuck Otte will discuss

hummingbird feeding preferences, feeder maintenance, general hummingbird information and ways to make your landscape more attractive to hummingbirds.

Chuck Otte is a retired K-State Extension Agent. He served for 40 years as the Geary County Agent for agriculture and natural resources. A birdwatcher since childhood, Chuck is heavily involved in the Kansas birding

community, spending a great deal of time tracking bird sightings across the state. Chuck greatly enjoys sharing his birding knowledge and excitement with homeowners!

This presentation will be available at two different locations on Tuesday, Aug. 4. Join us at 3:30 p.m. at the Washington Public Library, or at 6:30 p.m. in the 4-H Conference Room at the Clay County Fairgrounds.

Commission discusses next steps for Kiowa Road

In his monthly report to Clay County Commissioners last week, hospital CEO Austin Gillard, reported progress on many of the hospital's goals.

Gillard first stated that a new physician will begin his family practice at Clay Center Family Physicians on Aug. 10. Clay County Medical Center is still working with the state on the \$2.536 million grant agreement that they were awarded for the purchase of a DaVinci Robotic Surgical System. CCMC is also looking forward to the arrival of the two new general surgeons that are employees of the surgical associates. They will each be on site one day a week at CCMC. Gillard stated that they are short on parking spaces for employees. They are looking into a design that would provide 26 additional parking spaces in the triangle west of the Medical Center. Dr. John Kelley will be retiring at the end of July, and Dr. Hein will be taking over as the Emergency Room medical director.

They are currently doing a small construction project in the basement for the IT department. Each IT Tech will have a small office of their own. CCMC is also applying for a health grant to employ two community health workers for five years.

Also according to the unofficial minutes of the July 6 Clay County Commission meeting taken by County Clerk Kayla Wang:

— Commissioners David Thurlow, Eric Carlson and Jerry Mayo were present at a regular meeting beginning at 8 a.m. The minutes were approved as printed. Payroll of \$141,982.37 and \$2,088,306.26 in accounts payable were reviewed and approved.

— Randy Gassman, of Pottberg, Gassman, & Hoffman held a budget workshop with commissioners for the County's 2027 budget. Several department budget requests were reviewed. Income and expenses for the county were reviewed. Gassman will return next week with changes and another draft budget.

— Commissioners signed and approved 2025 Escape Tax 38 and 39 in the amount of \$579.86.

— Interim Highway Administrator Jeff Germann and office manager Melissa Goff reported in the week prior, the department worked on a pipe on Fourth Road between Kiowa and Limestone Road, replaced old asphalt and built it back up to make it secure, bladed dirt roads, hauled dirt and rip rap to Frontier Road between Seventh and Eighth Rd., and replaced planks on a bridge with holes on the deck. Germann visited with Washington County about the bridge that Washington County re-

placed and Clay County owed for a portion of it. Clay County also replaced the bridge west of Vining, which Washington County owed for part of it. The amount owed by each county was close to the same amount, so Washington County will just pay for theirs and Clay County will pay for the one they did. Commissioners instructed Germann to communicate with County Attorney Brenda Jordan about the documents for Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks vacating roads and the drainage issue west of Morganville. Jordan was to research both of these projects and prepare documents for both. Germann reported that they have placed a service call to Murphy Tractor for issues with the excavator. He will report on repairs next week. Shilling Construction has taken samples of Redwood Road between 11th and 12th Road to see why there are spots showing up on the asphalt.

— Landowner Bob and Joe Wietharn shared more information that they have learned about on the state grant application. Joe Wietharn stated that he had visited with Brent Terstriep, District 2 Manager last week and found out that he is part of the grant selection committee and knew nothing of the accidents that had happened or the local funding involved in the project. Terstriep will view the project that the county and Wietharns will apply for the grant again in the fall on July 15, 2026 at 9 a.m.

— Commissioners went into executive session under the non-elected personnel exception for 10 minutes, beginning at 9:46 a.m. with the county clerk, Germann and Goff to discuss job duties. Regular session reconvened at 9:56 a.m. with no action being taken.

— County Health Director Dana Rickley reported that District Magistrate Judge John McNish had contacted Rickley about a new law and she will serve as a court-appointed liaison for the appointment of a guardian for an adult. Judge McNish estimated that this would take 10 hours per case for this position.

— EMS Director Alec Trembath reported the department continues to stay busy with emergency runs and out-of-town transfers and have 520 of them for the 2026 year. They had a good Fourth of July with no firework-related calls last week, but the heat-related calls are on the rise. They will be renewing CPR for first responders in the city of Clay Center. There should be about 25 in attendance. The department will be having their quarterly meeting to go over some of the runs and how they could change things or make it better.

— Morganville Mayor Rylee McDaniel and Morganville City Council woman Ashley Pfizenmaier requested a donation for Party In The Ville that will be held on Aug. 15. Commissioners agreed to donate \$700 out of the Alcohol Fund.

— Sheriff Alan Benninga stated that he will be extending the period for taking bids on a new patrol pickup since dealerships are in the middle of changing over to 2027 vehicles. He reported that he has ordered one of the wraps to try out when they have an individual that is hard to handle. Sheriff Benninga went into executive session under the non-elected personnel exception for five minutes beginning at 10:33 a.m. with commissioners and the county clerk, and Alan Benninga to discuss job duties. Regular session reconvened at 10:38 with no action

being taken. Commissioners agreed to perform a drug test on two county employees following the session.

— Emergency Manager Jim Bogart presented his 2027 proposed budget to commissioners, and the proposal was left for review. Bogart reported that the painting crew was starting to paint the ESA building.

— Landfill Director Rhonda Carroll, geologist Brad Wohler, and Schwab Eaton engineer Jared Brooks met with commissioners and discussed how to get in better standing with the staet. Carroll asked permission to call JP Electric for fuse box repair, take the white pickup in for repair estimate for it is making a noise, and purchase a new cable for the roll-off truck, which commissioners granted permission.

— Commissioners adjourned at 1:10 p.m.

Fall armyworms are back

By Lindsay Shorter

Riley Co. Agriculture
Extension Agent

I almost feel guilty typing out this week's headline—nobody likes being the bearer of bad news—but sometimes the growing season hands us challenges we'd rather not face. As many of you remember, Fall Armyworms were especially destructive late last summer and into early fall. Unfortunately, it looks like they're already making an early appearance this year.

Pheromone traps in southern Kansas—specifically in Kingman and Franklin counties—started picking up fall armyworms in mid-June, and counts have been climbing. That means it's time to begin weekly scouting in at-risk crops for the rest of the season. Catching these caterpillars early truly makes all the difference.

Fall armyworms don't overwinter here; they migrate north from tropical regions. Once they arrive, they're not picky eaters. They can damage Kansas crops, pastures, turf, and even home landscaping. The key is to treat when caterpillars are less than a half-inch long. Larger caterpillars are tougher to control and cause the most damage. Too often, we don't notice an infestation until it's already too late.

Here's a quick rundown of what to watch for:

Alfalfa — Seedling alfalfa can be wiped out by just 1–2 caterpillars per square foot. For 12-inch plants, 10–15 per square foot can cause severe loss.



A fall armyworm. Look for the y-shaped mark on the head to identify it. (Courtesy of K-State Entomology)

Corn — Whorl-stage feeding in early summer usually looks worse than it is and rarely affects yield. Bt corn may help prevent ear damage later on.

Sorghum — Whorl feeding is typically not a concern. But 1–2 larvae per head during flowering to soft dough can reduce yield by 5–10%.

Pasture/Brome — Treat when you find 3–5 caterpillars per square foot. Slow plant growth due to weather can increase vulnerability, so scout early and often.

Wheat — In fall, "window-paning" on early-planted wheat signals young caterpillars. Very late second-generation armyworms pose the biggest threat. If 25–30% of plants show damage, check frequently. Treat at 2–3 active larvae per foot.

For identification, look for the armyworm's signature marking: an inverted "Y" on the head. Once you spot that, you know exactly what you're dealing with.

CLAY COUNTY MEDICAL CENTER

CCMC welcomes two surgeons

Surgical Associates of Manhattan is expanding access to high-quality surgical care across north central Kansas with the addition of two general surgeons who will provide care at Clay County Medical Center (CCMC) through the longstanding partnership between the two organizations.

Joining Surgical Associates of Manhattan are Meghan Blythe Shriver, MD, and Valerie Binns, MD, both Kansas natives who are committed to delivering exceptional surgical care in rural communities. Their addition strengthens the collaboration between Surgical Associates of Manhattan and Clay County Medical Center, ensuring patients continue to receive advanced surgical services close to home.

"This partnership has allowed us to bring outstanding surgical specialists to the communities we serve," said Austin Gillard, CEO of Clay County Medical Center. "Dr. Shriver and Dr. Binns are exceptionally trained surgeons who share our commitment to compassionate, patient-centered care. Their addition enhances our ability to provide high-quality surgical services locally while continuing our strong relationship with Surgical Associates of Manhattan."

Dr. Shriver recently completed her general surgery residency at the University of South Alabama after earning her Doctor of Medicine with honors from the University of Kansas School of Medicine. A native of White City, Kansas, she also holds a Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Economics from Kansas State University, graduating summa cum laude.

During her training, Dr. Shriver was recognized as Intern of the Year and received the George J. Farha Award for Excellence in Surgery. She has contributed nationally to surgical education through the Surgical Council on Resident Education (SCORE) and has experience performing a broad range of general surgical procedures, including robotic-assisted surgery and hernia repair.

"I am incredibly excited to return to Kansas and serve a rural community," said Dr. Shriver. "Growing up in this state instilled in me a deep appreciation for the people and the importance of access to local healthcare. I look forward to building relationships with patients and providing high quality, compassionate surgical care."

Dr. Binns is completing her general surgery residency at the University of Kansas School of Medicine—Wich-



Drs. Valerie Binns and Meghan Blythe Shriver. She earned her Doctor of Medicine with Honors Distinction from the University of Kansas School of Medicine and holds a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering with a bioengineering specialty from Kansas State University.

Throughout her training, Dr. Binns has gained extensive experience in general surgery while earning certifications in laparoscopic and endoscopic surgery. She has also demonstrated a strong commitment to service through her leadership with the Wichita JayDoc Community Clinic, where she received the Medical Student Volunteer of the Year Award, and through mentoring future physicians.

"I am excited for the opportunity to practice in a community-focused setting and care for patients closer to home," said Dr. Binns. "Building relationships with patients and providing high-quality surgical care in a rural setting is incredibly meaningful to me, and I look forward to caring for patients at Clay County Medical Center as part of Surgical Associates of Manhattan."

Together, Drs. Shriver and Binns bring complementary skills, academic excellence, and a shared passion for serving rural Kansas communities. Their arrival expands the availability of general surgery services at Clay County Medical Center while reinforcing the commitment of Surgical Associates of Manhattan and CCMC to provide patients with convenient access to expert surgical care without leaving the region.

Both Dr. Binns and Dr. Shriver are expected to begin seeing patients at CCMC in August.

Hospital hires nursing director

Clay County Medical Center (CCMC) has announced that Kristen Srna, MSN, RN, has accepted the role of Director of Nursing and will begin serving the organization during the first week of June 2026.

Srna joins CCMC with a strong background in nursing leadership spanning critical access hospitals, regional health systems, and women's health services. She currently serves as Director of the Birth & Women's Center at Ascension Via Christi, where she leads strategic initiatives focused on quality improvement, staff engagement, leadership development, and interdisciplinary collaboration.

A passionate advocate for rural healthcare, Kristen has built her career around strengthening clinical teams, standardizing evidence-based care, and developing future healthcare leaders. Prior to her current role, she served as Obstetric Manager at Benefis Health System and as Inpatient Nurse Manager at Memorial Hospital.

"Kristen brings an incredible combination of leadership experience, operational knowledge, and passion for rural healthcare," said CEO Austin Gillard. "Her commitment to quality care, team development, and collaboration makes her an outstanding fit for our organization and the communities we serve."

Throughout her career, Srna has led numerous quality and safety initiatives, implemented simulation-based leadership training, and partnered with healthcare and community organizations to improve patient outcomes. She earned her Master of Science in Nursing from Western Governors University and her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Kansas Wesleyan University.

"I'm excited for the opportunity to join CCMC and become part of a healthcare team that is deeply committed to serving rural communities," Srna said. "I look forward to building relationships with staff, providers, patients, and the community while continuing to support a culture focused on teamwork, excellence, and compassionate care."



Kristen Srna

CCMC hires family practitioner

Clay County Medical Center (CCMC) announced last week that a new doctor has joined their team. Parkes Wolters is a family medicine physician with particular expertise in obstetrics and women's health.

Wolters is currently completing his Family Medicine Residency at Waco Family Medicine in Waco, Texas, and will be finished in July 2026. Upon joining CCMC, he will care for patients at both Riley Family Physicians and Clay Center Family Physicians.

With a strong commitment to



Parkes Wolters

rural and underserved communities, Dr. Wolters brings a passion for full-spectrum primary care. He has significant experience managing both routine and high-risk obstetrical cases, allowing him to confidently support mothers and babies through all stages of pregnancy, delivery, and postpartum care.

Wolters earned his doctor of Medicine from the University of Kansas School of Medicine—Salina, where he served as President of the Lukert Academic Society. He completed his undergraduate degree in biochemistry at McPherson College, graduating summa cum laude, and was a member of the men's basketball team.

Outside of medicine, Wolters enjoys spending time with his wife, playing golf and pickleball, reading, and exploring a variety of hobbies including hiking and vinyl record collecting. He is also an Eagle Scout.

"I love family medicine because it allows me to care for patients of all ages and build meaningful, lasting relationships," said Dr. Wolters. "I'm excited for the opportunity to serve rural communities and be part of CCMC."

Please join CCMC in welcoming Wolters to the CCMC team. Please call (785) 632-2181 to establish care or schedule an appointment.

Coach, musician, two teams inducted into Wakefield HOF

The Wakefield Alumni Association inducted two individuals, Ben Witty and Jean Rankin and two state championship cross country teams into the Wakefield High Hall of Fame at its recent alumni banquet.

Ben Witty already had a decade of teaching experience when he began teaching and coaching at Wakefield High School in the fall of 1982. With the Bombers, however, Ben found his permanent home. He continued teaching science and coaching in Wakefield until his official retirement in 2003.



Ben Witty

That "retirement," however, could better be described as a transition, as Coach Witty continued teaching on a part-time basis, and then eventually as a substitute, and coaching multiple sports all the way up to his passing in 2024. He was truly one of the most highly-regarded and beloved staff members to his students during his tenure at WHS of 41 years. Even though he was putting in an excess number of hours with the school and its activities, Ben displayed his civic-mindedness by serving on the Wakefield volunteer fire department for 30 years.

During his years as a Bomber, Ben mentored more than 1600 students and athletes. He coached football, basketball, and track in both high school and junior high, and with both boys and girls teams. In most years, he coached a sport in each of the three sports seasons. His influence on his students, and his commitment to their development and sportsmanship, was undeniable. To this day, anytime any of his basketball players hear the word "baseline," their thoughts automatically go to Coach Witty, and how, when they heard it from him, immediately realized it wasn't a suggestion, but rather a command!

Under his leadership, Wakefield teams achieved significant success, including multiple league championships, a regional championship, an undefeated season and, in 1988, Witty coached the Bomber boys track team to a 1A Kansas State Championship. However, more than wins and titles, Ben Witty's legacy was defined by his unwavering commitment to Wakefield's students, and his influence continues to be felt through those whose lives he shaped.

Ben was raised in Parsons, Kan., and graduated from Parsons High School in 1963. He received his associate degree from Parsons Junior College and his bachelor's degree in physical education from Pittsburg State University. He was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1968 and served in Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., until 1970. He then returned to Pittsburg State and got his master's degree in kinesiology.

Coach Witty began his teaching career at Piper High School in Kansas City, Kan., where he taught and coached for three years.

Then he had a two-year stop in Bucklin and another five years in Altoona, before landing in Wakefield. It was here that Ben and his wife, Janita, decided to stay, and it was here that they raised their three daughters, Amanda, Brook, and Cayla, all of whom are Wakefield High School graduates.

Jean Rankin went to Wakefield Schools for both elementary and high school, graduating in 1922. She displayed extraordinary musical talent from a young age. Even though her mother was an exceptional pianist, Jean gravitated toward the violin. Her talent was so evident that J. Abbie Hogan, a world-famous violinist living in Junction City, but no longer taking new students, agreed to make an exception for Jean. That is the same Abigail Hogan who would later become the owner and proprietor of Wakefield's Hogan Hotel and would become Jean Rankin's mother-in-law.

Jean continued to become more skillful, and was one of K.S.A.C.'s featured performers. K.S.A.C. is now Kansas State University. By the time she left the university in the mid-1920s, she had assembled the top female musicians in the Midwest and started her own all-female orchestra, an exceptionally progressive move for that time in history.

Jean's all-girl orchestra went through several names, but the two most notable were the "Brick Tops" (thusly named because all 14 members were redheads, some natural, some not) and the "Blue Belles." Jean's groups played extensively in large cities all over the country, including St. Louis, Louisville, Los Angeles, Boston and New York City.

This is how they were described by one publicist, "Nine charming young misses whose versatility and musical ability have placed them in the front rank of the better-known touring organizations. Strikingly costumed in blue and silver, perfectly staged. Under the direction of pretty, vivacious Jean Rankin, the Blue Belles offer the ultimate in diversified programs.....an attraction satisfying the extremes found in all audiences.....violin ensembles, harmonica choruses, harmony duets, old-time melodies, banjo choruses, dancing specialties, singing choruses, and jazz, a la Blue Belles in Jean Rankin's inimitable style."

Jean was skilled in all the stringed instruments. In fact, the Gibson Company, arguably the most famous guitar maker in the world, created the "Gibson Bass Banjo", at that time the world's largest playable banjo, exclusively for Jean Rankin.

STATE CHAMPION CROSS COUNTRY TEAMS: Last, but certainly not least, are the Wakefield High girls state champion-

ship cross country teams of 1984 and 1985. These two teams will be inducted together since many of the girls involved were on both teams. These two state championship teams are the only two Wakefield High School girls athletic teams to claim a state championship in any sport in the school's history.

On the team in 1984 were Michelle Sherbert Land, Patty Bergmeier Flickinger, and Gwyn Sharp Schree. Angie Steppe Adams, Chris Patterson Fritzsche, and Shannon McGeeney Visser. They were coached by Coach Skip Elser,

Individually, three of these runners finished in the top 10. Sherbert was ninth; Patterson, fourth, and Bergmeier was the overall state champion, winning the gold medal.

On the 1985 team were Kristi Kitchener Hinson, Angie Steppe Adams, and Gwyn Sharp Schreefer. Diane Wendelken, Michelle Sherbert Land, Becky Bergmeier Wood, and Shannon McGeeney Visser. Elser also coached that team.

Two placed in the top 10 individually, Kitchener was ninth; and Sharp, third.



Jean Rankin



1985 State Champions: (l to r) back row, , Becky Bergmeier Wood, Shannon McGeeney Visser, Diane Wendelken. Front row, Gwyn Sharp Schreefer (third place), Angie Steppe Adams, Michelle Sherbert Land, and Kristie Kitchener Hinson (ninth).
(Courtesy photo)



1984 State Championship Cross Country Team. Back row from left, Coach Skip Elser, Angie Steppe Adams, Chris Patterson Fritzsche (finished fourth), Shannon McGeeney Visser. Front row, Michelle Sherbert Land, Patty Bergmeier Flickinger (finished first as the state champion), and Gwyn Sharp Schreefer (finished ninth).

COMMUNITY BULLETIN BOARD

Around Town

► The Wakefield City Pool will hold a night swim 8:30 to 10 p.m. on Friday, July 31.

► The Wakefield City Council is looking for a resident to fill the Ward 4 seat until the term expires in 2030. Interested parties pay call the City of Wakefield at (785) 461-5886, send an email to cityofwakefield@twinvalley.net or attend the July 27 council workshop which starts at 6 p.m.

► The Wakefield Stage Committee has received nearly \$20,000 in donations! Help them reach their goal of \$150,000 to put a permanent stage in the city park for many more community events to come. They are hopeful to reach enough money to put a FEMA approved storm shelter for Clay County Park, that provides additional stage equipment storage at the back of the stage. To donate, mail a check to "Wakefield Stage Project" c/o Farmers & Merchants State Bank, 711 Elm St., PO Box 26, Wakefield, KS, 67487/

Around Clay County

► Don't miss the Clay County Rodeo, which is set for Wednesday, July 15, and Thursday, July 16, at 8 p.m. at the Fairgrounds Rodeo Grounds. Advance tickets are \$8 for adults and \$4 for kids; at the gate they are \$10 for adults and \$5 for kids. Get your tickets today from Mayo's, Ray's Apple Market or the River Valley Extension District Office.

► Clay County Commissioner Jerry Mayo, who is running for reelection, is hosting a "Get to Know your commissioner" meeting at 6 p.m. Wednesday, July 15, at the Clay County Museum.

► The Clay County Fair officially kicks off with a parade on Monday, at 7 p.m., beginning in front of Lincoln Elementary in Clay Center. Tyrone Kamphaus as grand marshal. Read more on upcoming Fair events on Page 8.

► Advance voting for the August Primary Election starts tomorrow, July 15, with in-person voting taking place during regular business hours at the County Clerk's office in the Clay County Courthouse until noon on Monday, Aug. 3.

ICYMI

• Waste Management requests that if you dispose of fishing line in one of their trash totes that you first put it in a gag..

• The price of a USPS First-Class Forever stamp increased to \$0.82 (up 4 cents) on July 12.

• On May 31, the Wakefield Booster Club Board selected as 2026-27 board officers:

President - Nick Gibson
Vice President- Amber Williams
Treasurer- AnnMarie Striggow
Secretary- Leigha Moenning
Other members include Keshia Williams, Carrie Crerand and Tiffany Avery.

If you are interested in joining the booster club they are always looking more members! Our next meeting will be July 19, 5:30 p.m., meeting place to be determined.

• A reminder that free sports physicals for all high school and junior high students and school entry physicals for kindergarten and pre-school are available at Clay Center Family Physicians until Sept. 30. Call (785) 632-

• On July 1, Wakefield's 18U "Pony" baseball team finished second in tournament play for their last game of the season. They played five games in five nights, fighting their way back after losing their first game of the tournament on June 28. They beat JC Gray 17-5 in the first game to move to the championship game where they gave their fans a great last inning battling and scored 4 runs but unfortunately lost 5-8.

• The WFW Post No. 7774 invites veterans to be part of a Veterans Rally at the Statehouse in Topeka at 10 A.m. Thursday, July 16. Following the rally, veterans are invited to a free lunch after the rally at 11 a.m. at Topeka VFW Post No. 150, 3110 Huntoon St., Topeka.

• The Clay County Treasurers' Office is in the process of preparing the list of unpaid 2025 real estate taxes for publication. Any unpaid 2025 real estate taxes must be paid no later than July 31, 2026 to avoid publication and the additional \$16 fee that is assessed. Reminders were mailed to on or around June 1, 2026. If you are unsure if your 2025 taxes are paid in full, call the office at (785) 632-3282.



► Signup for the Birthday Bash 10K or 1-mile Fun Run through a link on the Birthday Bash Facebook Page. Half of all proceeds will go to benefit Wakefield School.

► Registrations for the Birthday Bash Car Show will take place 9 a.m. to noon on Aug. 28 at the City Park, with awards to follow at 2:30 p.m. For more information, contact Chris Visser at (785) 461-4554. If you'd like your vehicle to be in the parade, contact Betsy at ablbeau3@gmail.com.

► The Wakefield Birthday Bash is currently looking for vendors and parade entries for its 157th annual Birthday Bash set for April 27 to Aug. 27. You can sign up through links on the event's Facebook Page.

Museum Notes

► This is the tornado system that first struck outside of Wakefield before traveling on to Topeka on June 1966. Information about this tornado is included in the town's history on the lower level of the museum. Who has memories of this dramatic event?



► During the summer, the Wakefield Museum, 605 6th St., is open Thursday through Sunday from 1 to 4. Read more about what's happening there, on Facebook as "The Wakefield Museum Association."

About this first edition:

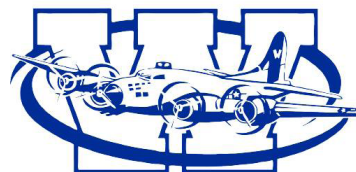
This is what *The Wakefield Times* would like as a once-a-month newsletter, which we anticipate will likely be the format during the summer months.

While school is in session, there is enough support for this publication to publish twice a month as a free publication with more content devoted to Wakefield, including school news and other community events, which will be our goal in the first year of operation.

With enough support (at least 100 paid subscribers, this publication could grow to become a weekly. Should that occur, those signed up to have *The Times* e-mailed to them will be notified asking if they'd like to continue as a paid subscriber.

Thank you for your support!

-- Ryan D. Wilson, Publisher



BOMBERS CALENDAR

TUESDAY, AUGUST 4

7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. — Enrollment for 2026-27 school year

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 4

NOON to 8 p.m. — Enrollment for 2026-27 school year

MONDAY, AUGUST 10

6 p.m. — USD 379 School Board meeting, Stuart Administrative Center

MONDAY, AUGUST 17

First day of fall sport practices

TUESDAY, AUGUST 18

First day of school
NOON — Early dismissal

WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 24

CCCHS Jostens ring orders due 9 a.m. — CCCHS FFA at Abilene

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