



RAIN SHOWERS DID not slow down the construction of the lagoon in Bird City. Several earth movers working together to pile up the dirt around the lagoon to create a berm. It is only the first step in getting this project completed.

Times staff photo by Linda Schneider



DURING THE FFA MEET held at Cheylin, Josh Keltz and Craig Busse take time looking over a pen of hogs. Along with the hogs, they will rotate to several more pens that contain

sheep and cattle. Josh and Craig will determine how the animals will market and characteristics that will make good breeding stock.

Times staff photo by Linda Schneider

Students learn about water cycle May 8-9

Fifth grade students at St. Francis Community Elementary School and Cheylin Elementary, as well as Rawlins County Elementary School, will be participating in the High Plains Playa Lakes Festival, to be held May 8-9.

The Festival is a fun way for students to become educated about the High Plains water cycle through the context of playa lakes. During a two-day program, students will be instructed in the main components of this unique water cycle: springs, creeks, draws, playa lakes, municipal wastewater treatment plants, and the Ogallala Aquifer.

Darryl Birkenfeld, a Nazareth, Texas, resident who is the coordinator for the Festival, explains why students in the region need to be knowledgeable about the water cycle. "Water is the lifeblood of human and natural ecosystems. Playas are a unique feature of the High Plains country, and they are a tool to teach students, adults, and communities about a healthy and functioning water cycle."

In recent decades, numerous scientific studies are demonstrating that Ogallala Aquifer

recharge is intricately tied to playa basins. Though long treated as a nuisance, playa lakes are not only important to wildlife, but for the long-term viability of the water cycle as well as human communities.

Four adult faculty members (along with approximately 10 teachers and adult sponsors) will supervise approximately 50 students working in learning activities, along with personnel from the Cheyenne and Rawlins County Conservation Districts. Using an indoor/outdoor format, students will spend 6 hours each day in 3-hour modules that involve science, biology, creative writing, art, photography, and local history.

The Playa Lakes Festival is presented by Ogallala Commons, and cosponsors include Playa Lakes Joint Venture, Kansas Alliance for Wetlands and Streams, the Republican River Riparian Partnership, Western Prairies Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D), and the two County Conservation Districts.

For more information, contact Darryl Birkenfeld at 806-945-2255.

Tax credits for the labor, delivery room are accumulating

By Karen Krien

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Kansas State Income Tax Credits to be used toward the labor and delivery room are accumulating, said the administrator when the Cheyenne County Hospital Board met on Thursday afternoon.

Les Lacy, administrator, said that \$141,700 of the needed \$180,000 had come in and, Kari Gilliland, board member, said she had delivered an envelope with an additional commitment.

Mr. Lacy said letters of support from the board and individuals are still needed. Letters should address the need for this project. The administrator is also seeking a Community Building and Development grant for the kitchen remodeling project. He asked to confirm that the board

was still in agreement to do the remodeling within the facility's existing footprint after their tour of the building. When the remodeling is done, the hospital's kitchen will be down for three to four months. The board was steadfast in their desire to avoid any addition to the building at this time.

He told the board that he had received a request from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment for an amended budget for the Primary Care Clinic Grant application which had been submitted last month. He said he had complied with the request and said this was a good indication that the hospital was in serious running for the grant.

This grant of \$140,000 will help with charity care, underinsured and uninsured patients. If the grant is received, a case

manager position will be put into place and the person will follow up with patients to assist them in being compliant with their plans of care.

Financial report

During the financial report, Mr. Lacy reported that the hospital was able to meet payroll and the first big bill run of the month on the billed cash flow.

The accounts receivable was up because the hospital had a good quarter. He noted that there is still an impact in this area due to implementation of the centralized billing office.

He said the hospital is expecting a receivable from the Medicare Program in early June. The accounts payable was stronger than last month and that was due in part to the improved cash flow from the inpatient volume being up.

Financial officer's report

Heidi Tice, chief financial officer,

reported that she had been with the hospital for 10 years. She has five people working in her office.

She talked about the new medical check which is made at the time of admittance. She noted that 18 families had applied for charity care. So far this year, \$16,473 was written off as charity care. The total charity care write off for last year was \$94,852.

"Medicare payments have been coming in regularly," she said. "It was a record first quarter for the number of patients using the hospital."

Great Plains report

In the Great Plains Health Alliance report, Jackie John, area director, had attended the American Hospital Association annual meeting in Washington, D.C., April 6 through 8. The small and rural hospital session was a major item of discussion.

Hospitals from California, Texas and Florida shared their experiences. One hospital had just been denied claims totaling \$4 million; another hospital had challenged 1,000 denied claims through the process to the administrative law judge and every denial had been overturned. These hospitals had not received the reimbursements at the time of the meeting but had incurred huge costs in legal fees.

She said that unfortunately, the recovery audit contractor will be allowed to keep the money they "claimed" as a recovery even though their findings had been reversed. There is a bill in congress, she said, asking for a moratorium on the program until an evaluation can be conducted and changes made in the program.

Hospitals, she said, do not disagree with the need to have a review process to make sure

certain claims billed to the Medicare program are legitimate, but believe this process is flawed.

Mrs. John said there was also discussion on the need for health care reform but those present, even though they thought it should be a top priority, would not see much action until after the presidential elections.

In other business

In other business:

- The board approved a nursing scholarship for Tammy Church. Mrs. Church is a certified nurses aide and will be going to Colby Community College.

- Patrick Delano, physician assistant, will be retiring in May. A reception will be held.

Next meeting

The next meeting of the hospital board will be held at 3 p.m. on May 22 in the clinic basement's meeting room.