

Cheyenne County receives grant

Cheyenne County is one of six western Kansas counties selected to be part of a \$1.5 million initiative. The initiative is aimed at improving their healthcare systems in ways that can be duplicated by medical providers in other rural areas that are challenged by shrinking populations, recruiting difficulties and mounting financial pressures.

Cheyenne County will receive \$37,500, and be required to allocate \$2,500 internally for year one of the project to work with a national consultant to develop improvement plans. Based on the plans developed, there will be an opportunity to receive additional funding to implement the plans.

Originally, Cheyenne County submitted the application as a joint county project with Rawlins County. Unfortunately, Rawlins County was disqualified due to lack of required county support.

A kick-off meeting was held for all local task force members in Wichita on Oct. 24 and 25 at the Kansas Leadership Center. The task force will meet six times over the next 12 months to discuss the counties needs and prepare a plan to submit for phase 2 of the funding.

The local Cheyenne County task force is comprised of: Judy Rockwood, hospital chief executive officer and director of nursing; Dale Patton, county

commissioner; Mila Bandel, county health nurse; Catherine Domsch, Bird City Century II Development Foundation executive director; Ryan Murray, emergency management director; Jeffrey Paulsen, Good Samaritan Village administrator; Janene Pippitt, Northwest Kansas Home Health director; Jannelle Bowers, emergency medical services director; Dr. Mary Beth Miller, provider; Reid Raile, emergency medical service vice president and hospital's information technology director; Jennifer Padgett, hospital's emergency management coordinator; Kary Jo Meyer, Majestic business manager; Brenda Hays, hospital's clinical nurse specialist; and Carol Sloper, hospital's information technology manager and project coordinator.

"We have tried to ensure that most aspects of health care are represented on our local task force," said Mrs. Sloper. "There are still other aspects of health care to consider, and we will be reaching out to other interested people in the community as the project gains focus and momentum."

Mrs. Rockwood stated that the task force has been given a blank slate to be creative in finding new approaches to the issues facing all frontier rural hospitals.

"We're in a community with a declining population and declining revenue. Every health provider in



RURAL HEALTHCARE taskforce members met with Kansas Leadership Center coach Darrell Hamlin at the pilot project kick off meeting in Wichita, Kan. on October 25. Pictured left to right: Ryan Murray, Kary Meyer, Jen Padgett, Darrell Hamlin, Jeffrey Paulsen, Jan Pippett, Judy Rockwood, Mila Bandel and Reid Raile. *Herald staff photo by Carol Sloper*

our community and region will have to be creative to make the best use of the limited financial and people resources in providing necessary health services. It will be essential that we prioritize the communities needs for health care, as there are not enough resources to do it all."

"It's very important that we collaborate together," said Mr. Murray, "to determine a way to keep our resources, both financial and people, within our community. If we wait for someone else to tell

us how to do this, we risk being forced into a regional model and we will face even bigger challenges having available resources to provide all cycles of health. My hope for this project is to improve pre and post hospital capabilities as well."

Mrs. Meyer indicated she was eager to join the task force to help make sure that all of the community voices are heard when considering our future with health care. "We need to identify and fill the voids. There are gaps in our

local health care that need to be considered."

"At the kick-off, we all agreed that communication is key to this project's success," said Mr. Raile.

The grants require that the improvement plans be based on data from community health assessments and performance evaluations of their healthcare systems.

"This is really an opportunity to have a very data-driven approach to looking at the long-term issues facing these health systems and to developing ideas for how to address them," said Kim Moore, president of the United Methodist Health Ministry Fund, the Hutchinson-based foundation that is spearheading the initiative.

The Kansas Health Foundation, the Sunflower Foundation, the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kansas Foundation, and the research arm of the Kansas Hospital Association also are providing funding.

The funders invited grant applications from "frontier" areas of the state - places where there are fewer than 10 people per square mile. Cheyenne County easily met the criteria with 2.4 residents per square mile.

"Our goal was to find four energetic, forward-thinking rural communities," Mr. Moore said. "We are very pleased with the results of our painstaking selection process."

There is no guarantee the groups selected for planning grants will get a second round of funding, officials said. Implementation grants of at least \$440,000 will only be awarded to groups that submit plans that have potential to take their health care systems to higher performance levels.

"We're not limiting communities except to say that hiring one new health professional

would not be a transitional or transformational change. We want something that really deals with the ongoing structure, the ongoing working environment and the culture of that health system," Mr. Moore said.

The funders are hoping that the grants will produce bold thinking about how to better integrate patient care in rural health systems, said Melissa Hungerford, vice-president of the Kansas Hospital Association. Today, she said, patients get lost even in small health care systems. Providers don't communicate to ensure the right kind of care is given at the right time in the right setting.

"This project will give communities the opportunity to figure out how to do that for their residents," she said.

Greg Bonk, a health care consultant with HMS Associates in Getzville, N.Y., will spend time in Kansas over the next year working with the four planning groups to analyze data and help craft improvement plans that change the health care landscapes in the respective communities.

"They must be well informed about the need for change and about the design possibilities for new organizational and service relationships," Mr. Bonk said.

The counties that will be involved in the three-year pilot project are: Cheyenne, where the local coordinator will be Carol Sloper; a collaboration of Osborne, Phillips and Smith counties with local coordinator Christiane "Criquet" Cole; Clark County, including the Minneola and Ashland hospital districts, with coordinator Dr. Dan Shuman; and Kearney County, where the coordinator will be Heather Combs Platter.

The Gardner By Kay Melia

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The seasonal change is at hand. Those of us who love to grow things are becoming less amiable as the tomato vines turn black, the buffalo grass turns brown, and the leaves drop off the trees. Mother Nature reminds us in so many ways that we all need to pay attention to the changing of the seasons. There is much work to be done now as we perform the duties that will make the next growing season as delightful as the one just concluded.

So, as I head for the garden this weekend, I must go there with thoughts of renovation, rejuvenation, and preparation. After all these years of gardening, I still approach the autumn change of season with a sense of inspiration to do what I can now to make next year's garden better.

It all begins with the garden soil.... nothing more, nothing less. For 40 years now, my garden plot has served me well, but only because I have added

the nutrients it must have to produce the things I want. It has done its job for years. It's time for me to continue to do mine!

Here's my schedule. First, I will clear the garden of dead vines and old plant life. I will pull the tomato and pepper vines and put them in a separate pile. I will either burn them or haul them to the landfill when they are dry. All the other dry debris will be raked into small piles and thoroughly shredded with the push mower.

Then comes the fun! By hook or by crook, I will obtain two or three pickup loads of good clean trash free leaves, and spread them about two inches deep over the entire garden. Any kind of dry barnyard manure would be nice, too, or rotten silage or old hay or straw. My plot is larger than most, so I'll have to do some scrounging, and I will. Most homeowners will be delighted to haul you their leaves, maybe for the promise of a couple of cantaloupe or a small bag of green beans next summer.

Just be sure the leaves do not contain locust beans or small tree limbs or other undesirable foreign matter.

Just as soon as the leaves are down, it's time to plow. With my rototiller, or someone else's, I will plow in those leaves and other residue as deeply as I possibly can.

That's it. After I have planted my garlic and other essential bulbs or roots, I will go back in the house and stay there for the winter. I won't go back out there until about March 3. I will take my shovel with me and I will turn over a shovelful

of rejuvenated garden soil and be joyfully amazed at what a delightful bed Mother Nature and I have created for the new planting season.

The above procedure, or some similar effort right now, is not only desirable...it is absolutely necessary, and I cannot emphasize enough the great value it gives to my garden!

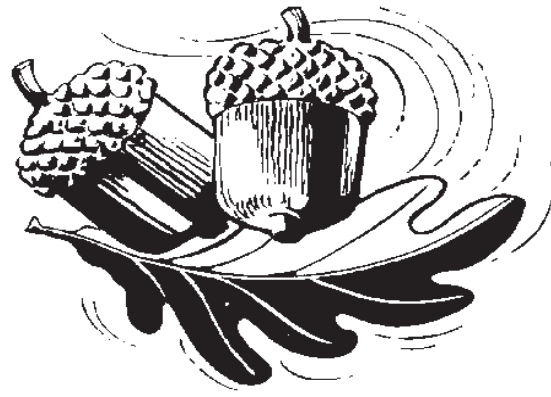
And with that, and with thoughts of thankfulness to you all, this space becomes void of further gardener thoughts. Please have an astonishingly happy and healthful winter!!

Amish dinner planned

The Bird City Fire Department is planning an Amish Haystack dinner as a special event to honor Dave Hickert, Ned Smith and Dan Bowers the firefighters who have retired in the past few years. The date for this event is Sunday, Nov. 10, from 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at the Legion hall. After the meal and honorary event, the fire department will be open for an open house to those who have never had the opportunity to tour the facilities.

Those wondering what a haystack dinner consists of - the person starts with taco meat and adds potatoes, lettuce, tomatoes, cheese and lots of other garnishes of their choice. It sounds crazy, but those that are familiar with haystacks say they are delicious.

The meal will be a free-will donation, and the funds will be used for purchasing garage door openers and other miscellaneous equipment. Century II has offered to match the funds taken in.



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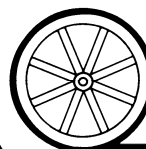
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