



David Schlegel (above) operated a Toyoda horizontal C.N.C. milling machine to make an avionics part. The machine is one of Natoma's new pieces of equipment purchased as part of the expansion. Pam Harper (right) prepared to press a tiny pin into a small avionics part.

— Telegram photos by Veronica Monier



Company prepares for more business

By VERONICA MONIER

Natoma Corp. of Norton is preparing for more business with plans for expansion. The plans, which are just now getting underway, include an additional building, more employees and new machinery.

The new building, which will be just west of the original one, is going to be 21,600 square feet and connected by a walkway, said Gail Boller, the company's owner and manager.

Mr. Boller said Natoma, which is a contract manufacturer of high precision machine parts for aircraft avionics, medical and laboratory instruments and environmental companies, is unique in western Kansas.

"No one else does what we do out here," he said. "All the other companies that manufacture precision parts are in eastern Kansas."

Mr. Boller said lately, customer demand has outgrown what the facility can do. Keeping up with demand is the main reason for the expansion.

"We have a choice," he said. "We can either expand or we can go backward."

The old facility has been added onto twice in the 20 years the company's been in Norton, he said. With each new addition, there were inconsistencies. The new building, he said, will allow Natoma's work to flow.

They will still use the old building, mainly as office and maintenance space and for shipping and receiving.

With the expansion, Mr. Boller hopes to add at least 10 new employees within the next 24 months to the 45 Natoma already has, with room for more.

With few exceptions, every em-

ployee has learned to be a machinist after working at the company, Mr. Boller said. It takes about two years going through the company's program before an employee is considered a skilled machinist.

The expansion is being financed through a Rural Telephone revolving loan fund and First State Bank and will cost around \$300,000 without new equipment, he said. After new equipment is bought, the cost, he said, will total around \$1 million.

"We need new equipment to produce more and meet customer demand," he said. "We haven't been seeking new customers and have had to turn some down. That's why we're expanding—to meet new demands from customers, old and new."

"Anything under \$100,000 is cheap. It's got to be the best and the

fastest. You get what you pay for and these machines more than pay for themselves."

Natoma has bought two new machines so far this year and has another one coming in July. They are anticipating buying another two or three before the end of the year.

Mr. Boller said they're hoping the physical part of the expansion will be finished at the end of July or August and then will move the equipment to the new building after that.

He said they are planning to have an open house this fall to celebrate the expansion and Natoma's 20th anniversary in Norton.

"We'd be missing a real opportunity if we quit growing," he said. "The time is right, the money is right and the work is there."



Brett McKenna

Senior gets salutatorian honor late

After rechecking senior class grades, Prairie Heights High School discovered that it had two salutatorians instead of one.

It was discovered after graduation that Brett McKenna's grades put him in a tie with Grant Bailey for the No. 2 spot in the Jennings Class of 2004.

Mr. Bailey was the acknowledged salutatorian and talked at graduation, but Mr. McKenna also deserved the honor, Jennings school officials said this week.

"Due to unforeseen circumstances, it was discovered after graduation that Brett was also a recipient of the salutatorian award at Jennings High School," a note from the school said.

"We would like to apologize to Brett and his family for this error. We wish to congratulate Brett on this accomplishment."

Mr. McKenna was not only an outstanding scholar, he was involved in sports lettering, in football, basketball and track, Coyote Club, Boy Scouts, band and speech. He is a member of the Catholic Youth Organization and FCCLA.

He plans to attend Kansas State University and major in accounting. Brett is the son of Mike and Joan McKenna.

Advocate group asks commissions for 2005 money

By CYNTHIA HAYNES

Representatives of the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) visited with the Norton County commissioners on Monday with a request for money for next year.

Kristal Stanton, executive director and only employee of CASA, said that her group is made up of volunteers, who help children.

Joining Ms. Stanton and the commissioners were Magistrate Judge Debra Anderson and Norton County CASA board members Elaine and Joan Mann.

The advocate service is different from the programs offered by Ju-

venile Justice Authority, Ms. Stanton said, in that the children served are not necessarily in trouble with the law.

The advocate service here serves the 17th Judicial District, she said, which includes Norton, Decatur, Smith, Osborne, Phillips and Graham counties. Last year the advocates had 33 cases, six of them in Norton County.

The advocate service costs between \$21,000 to \$25,000 a year, Ms. Stanton said. Last year the six counties paid \$9,000 of that.

Elaine Mann said that in the past the program has been helped with money from the United Methodist Foundation, but that money has

run out.

While grants are available to buy Christmas gifts and help with other direct benefits for the children, when it comes down to fundamental expenses like telephone and Internet services, there are no grants, Ms. Stanton said.

Judge Anderson said that the advocate workers are of great help to the court — more so than Social and Rehabilitative Services workers in many cases — because they work directly with the children.

"Sometimes the CASA worker is the one point of stability in their (children's) lives," Elaine Mann said.

Ms. Stanton pointed out that all

advocate workers are court appointed.

"I think we could serve more cases but we have a shortage of volunteers," she said.

Volunteers must be trained and certified, she said, and because of the required background checks and new government regulations the checks must go through Topeka now instead of the local police. This will cost the service \$150 a volunteer, she said, which will be

hard on the budget.

Commissioner John Miller asked Judge Anderson if she couldn't help get the background checks and she said she would look into it. She said she didn't know if she could help or not but she would see what could be done.

"Everybody is just looking out for the children," Ms. Stanton said.

The commissioners said they would look at their budget for 2005 and see what they could do.

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