

THE NORTON TELEGRAM

WEBSITE: nwkansas.com

10 PAGES

Tuesday

February 3, 2009

Norton, Kansas

Home of Wesley Whitney



Norton native Michael Sprigg is shown recently winning another wrestling match for his Army team. See story Page 9.

- Courtesy photo

Briefs

Booster Club to meet Wednesday

The Norton Blue Jay Booster Club will meet at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday in the high school cafeteria. All fans of Norton Community High School sports are invited to attend and hear reports from boys basketball coach Doug Reusink, girls basketball coach Kevin Jilka and wrestling coach Bill Johnson. You do not have to be a member of the club to attend.

Vets representative to town next week

A Veterans Service Representative for the Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs will be at the Norton City Office next Monday from 1-2:30 p.m. to assist veterans and their families with veterans' benefits.

The Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs is a state agency that provides free assistance to veterans and their families with veterans' benefits. Appointments preferred, walk-ins accepted. Call 785-625-8532 for information.

Weather

Forecast:

Tonight - Partly cloudy with a low around 16. East wind around 5 mph becoming south. Wednesday - Sunny with a high near 55. South wind between 5 and 10 mph. Wednesday Night - Clear with a low around 25. South wind between 5 and 10 mph. Thursday - Sunny with a high near 64. South wind between 5 and 10 mph. Thursday Night - Partly cloudy with a low around 31.

Kingham report:

Fri., Jan. 30..... Low 24, High 55
Sat., Jan. 31..... Low 27, High 66
Sun., Feb. 1..... Low 21, High 44
Mon., Feb. 2..... Low 19, High 47
(Readings taken at the Kingham farm 9 miles northwest of Norton)

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for those who offer us guidance and protection. Thank you for loving us and wanting what is best for us. Amen

Senators keep eye on bill

Local prison may have escaped closing

By TOM DREILING
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Word Monday afternoon from the office of 40th District State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer is that the budget bill — the House Substitute for Substitute Senate Bill 23 — was now in the House after being passed out by the House Appropriations Committee.

The bill, according to Sen. Ostmeyer's secretary, Judy Crapser, is on General Orders awaiting debate by the full House membership. It was not known Monday when debate would occur.

The substitute bills restored some of the funding the original Senate bill had cut, from 3.4 percent to 1.5 percent.

Ms. Crapser assured patrons of the 40th District that Sen. Ostmeyer, and Sen. Janis Lee, of the adjoining 36th District, are watching the bill's progress "with all the interest you would hope for."

The uncertainty surrounding the status of the Norton Correctional Facility, originally said to face closing on April 1, set the community of Norton and the surrounding area on pins and needles the past several days.

Thanks to a state official's reaction to Republican budget-cut proposals, Norton was abuzz with talk about the possible fate of its state prison and nearly 270 state jobs.

By Friday, a House committee had restored part of the cuts from a Senate bill, and officials said the prison and one in Winfield would stay open. Final action will depend on how the two houses settle their difference, however.

Secretary of Corrections Roger Werholtz threatened the closing in a letter to employees assessing the impact of proposed \$9.3 million cuts his department faced under the bill the Senate passed last week. He concluded that closing some facilities, including prisons at former state hospitals in Norton and Winfield, might be in order.

Other cuts could include an end to supervision of parolees and to all rehabilitation programs, he said.

One area legislator said it would never happen, however.

"The Norton facility is not going to close!" said state Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, a Grinnell Republican who represents the 40th District of northwest Kansas. The senator hoped he could say the same thing for the Stockton honor camp — already targeted for closing — but wasn't as sure as he was about the Norton facility.

Norton City Council faces busy agenda on Wednesday

The Norton City Council will meet on Wednesday in the city building at 5:30 p.m. A busy agenda awaits.

Among items on the agenda are: reviewing building/demolition permits for Sara Smith to tear down a trailer at 407 South Street, and Vance Poage for \$50 to add a wood frame addition to a garage at 1111 N. Norton Ave.; Police Chief Pat Morel will discuss patrol cars; City Administrator Rob Lawson will give his report; council member Kim Snyder will give a parks committee meeting report; council member Elaine Mann will give a utility committee meeting report; council member Jeff Otter will give a personnel committee meeting report; council member Donna Foley will give a public works committee meeting report; and council member Toby Kuhn will give a public safety committee meeting report.

All city council meetings are open to the public.



Cub Scouts Jonathan White, 1st place, lower left, Philip Boutwell, 4th place, upper left, Trenton Sprague, 1st place, upper right, and Seth Henrickson, 2nd place, lower right, raced their cars against each other during the Pinewood Derby on Saturday afternoon. Standing behind the cub scouts are, from left, George Boutwell, Tim Bashford, April Bashford, Shawn Wiltfong and Ed Witt.

- Telegram photo by Brandy Leroux

Norton Church becomes race track

By BRANDY LEROUX
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Eighteen Norton area Cub Scouts gathered to race their cars on Saturday at the First United Methodist Church in Norton for the Pinewood Derby.

First place went to Trenton Sprague, second to Seth Henrickson, third to Jonathan White, and fourth to Philip Boutwell. Alex White won an award for the best design, and Adam Baughman won the

slowpoke award.

The Cub Scouts were given a block of pine wood with two notches to hold the wheels, four plastic wheels and four nails. The finished car had to use all nine pieces, could not exceed five ounces in weight, seven inches in length and 2 3/4 inches in width. Other than that, the Cub Scouts could design their car however they wanted, and paint it with whatever design they liked.

Dale Carlson, who helped with the derby, brought several of the cars he had made in the past, to include a bullet-shaped car and a tank.

Ed Witt, a member of the Norton Lions Club, built the track used for the derby about 10 years ago. The Lions Club is the sponsor of the Norton Cub Scouts.

The Cub Scouts held the first Pinewood Derby in 1953, and most of the rules and regulations remain the same.

Businesses in Norton lay off 26 so far

By BRANDY LEROUX
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Several businesses in Norton have laid off employees as a result of the economy's down turn. The number in Norton stands at 26 and at least one other firm has cut hours.

"It's been in the back of our minds since October," said Gail Boller, President of Natoma Corporation. "It's been a gradual deterioration, and a lack of new orders. We had a back-log of orders last fall, and now we are caught up on them."

In November 2008, Natoma Corporation laid off five employees. This time it is 8. September 11 was a harder time for Natoma Corporation, which makes mostly parts for the aerospace industry.

"We had to cut the size of the company in half," said Mr. Boller. "It was a year before things turned back around."

Mr. Boller said he doesn't see things improving in the next month or two, and in fact, thinks it'll be six to 12 months before the outlook starts improving.

"We will stay open," said Mr. Boller. "We are in much better financial condition than we were during 9/11."

As far as more layoffs, Mr. Boller said they are evaluating the situation each month as it comes, and making decisions

then.

Other area businesses, who don't rely so much on orders from customers, are not having such a hard time.

"For the most part, we're doing okay," said Allan Miller, Chief Financial Officer of Prairie Land Electric Company. "We don't have any layoffs scheduled, and in fact, we have more work scheduled. We're only about 40 percent finished with repairing damage from the ice storms."

"I think we'll be okay over the next couple of years. We'll feel the impact if businesses in the area close down, or when variable costs change."

Mr. Miller said the company is looking into lowering costs and becoming more efficient, and said they probably won't be filling any positions that come open. They will, however, be raising rates, due to costs rising which the company can't absorb anymore. Mr. Miller said the last time Prairie Land raised their rates was in 1992.

Rich Miller, Chief Executive Officer of the Norton County Hospital, said January was a busy month for inpatient care, and the hospital does not foresee any major changes planned in the number of staff or their hours.

"Health care services are needed," said

Mr. Miller. "No matter what, we need to be here for the people."

Mr. Miller said the hospital had already been seeing the impact from the economic issues before this month.

"The number of uninsured patients had risen, as well as deductibles and co-payments, and people losing health insurance from their work or losing their jobs before all this happened this month," said Mr. Miller.

"It's something we have to monitor as time goes on, including federal and state funding, like Medicaid and Medicare reimbursement changes. But we've made some plans to be able to weather the storm."

Valley Hope Association employs about 100 people in the Norton area. Company wide, they have locations in seven states and employ more than 650 people. At this time, they are not cutting back, but in fact hiring.

"As far as our business milieu, our patient census varies, but typically we are not hit with sudden declines or spikes as a direct result of the economy itself," said Kathy Erbert, Corporate Contract Administrator for Valley Hope. "We can say that we are still going strong, just as we have for more than 40 years."