

Priority #1



JAN KATZ ACKERMAN/Colby Free Press

Quinn Aumiller, Hoxie, shovels out after a snow storm passed through the area on Sunday and dumped nearly 6 inches of snow. The snow started early. and ended in mid-afternoon leaving residents to shovel out before their work week on today.

No opposition present at hearing on Kansas Open Records Act

TOPEKA (AP) — Senators have heard no opposition to a proposed change in the Kansas Open Records Act that would require the full disclosure of public employees’ compensation.

Supporters and legislators call the measure the “Lew Perkins Provision,” named for the University of Kansas athletic director. Several media organizations, including The Associated Press and the company that publishes the *Lawrence Journal-World*, won a lawsuit against the university last year requiring it to disclose Perkins’ compensation package.

The proposed change would place into state law the Douglas County District Court ruling, which required the disclosure of all compensation records, even those from anonymous gifts and other, private sources.

Ralph Gage, chief operating officer of The World Company, which publishes the *Journal-World*, told the Senate Elections and Local Government Committee that full disclosure was the public’s right.

Donation means new life for church

LARNED (AP) — The Escue Chapel CME Church building was slated to be razed. But an anonymous donation has meant new life for the 99-year-old building.

“It’s amazing how things work out, isn’t it?” said Escue Chapel Pastor Tony Hill.

The church was moved Friday to the Santa Fe Trail Center Museum grounds, where it will be restored, director Ruth Peters said. She said the anonymous donor contributed money to move and restore the structure.

The church was organized in 1885 by the Rev. William Escue with his wife, Maggie. Parishioners started meeting in homes before building the church in 1886.

In May 1985, the Escue Chapel building needed major repairs, so the congregation bought and moved into the former Pentecostal Church, said Billie Broils, trustee board president. The Escue building sat empty and abandoned.

Former Pastor Johnny Augmon, who started preaching at Escue in 1971, grew up as a church member. He surveyed the 20 or more members who gathered Friday to watch the church being moved. They stood in clusters or sat in cars as the flatbed truck loaded with the weathered, wood-frame building pulled onto the street and headed south.

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“The citizens of the state have the right to know how much their state officials are being paid, and by whom, and for what,” Gage said.

Gage said The World Company spent \$40,000 in legal fees to gain access to the records, while the university spent approximately \$27,000. Gage said fighting for access to records in court is not only costly for individuals and the media but also for taxpayers, who end up financing the public agencies’ defense.

The proposal also was supported by the Kansas Press Association and the Kansas Association of Broadcasters, both of whom helped developed the language in the bill in consultation with the state attorney general’s staff.

The committee took no action on the bill. The chairman, Sen. Tim Huelskamp, R-Fowler, gave no timeframe for advancing the bill for debate in the Senate.

Another proposal before the committee faced criticism, however. It would require any private or nonprofit organization receiving at least 50 percent of its revenues from government sources to open their records to the public.

Representatives of contractors,

health care providers, engineers and architects said they could be forced to jeopardize their businesses by divulging proprietary information.

Jerry Slaughter, a lobbyist for the Kansas Medical Society, said physicians and hospitals receive much of their income from the state and federal governments, reimbursing them for services they provide to elderly, disabled or low-income patients. Paperwork for those programs already is a burden, he said, and opening records could force many providers to quit providing services.

Chip Wheelen, a lobbyist for the Kansas Association of Osteopathic Medicine, proposed amending the bill so that it applied only to non-profit organizations.

Other opponents, including representatives of chambers of commerce and the tourism industry, said disclosing how much money is spent to lure a business or convention could endanger efforts to attract economic development to a region in a competitive market.

In other action, a bill taking the first step toward consolidating the governments of Topeka and Shawnee County advanced in the House.

How to contact our reporters:

Editor Patty Decker —
pdecker@nwkansas.com
(785)462-3963
Tisha Cox —
tcox@nwkansas.com
(785) 462-3963
Jan Katz Ackerman —
ackermanjk@ruraltel.net
(785) 675-2155

Hoxie woman decides time right for town hall meeting

By Jan Katz Ackerman
Colby Free Press

HOXIE — An old fashioned town hall meeting will allow Hoxie residents a way to identify positive attributes and plan for the future of the community.

Organized by Hoxie resident Cindy Eller, the meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m. on Wednesday, Feb. 16, at Bowen Scout House located one block east of Main Street on Sheridan Ave.

“The purpose of this public forum is for citizens to come together in an open, positive format to identify the positive attributes of Hoxie. This will give all the citizens who wish to participate an opportunity to be a part of positive planning for the community,” Eller said.

Despite the community being split over an ongoing battle between hospital trustees and one of its local doctors, Eller said the community planning meeting is not being organized to discuss the hospital.

“This (meeting) will give us, the citizens, a time and place to come together and focus on the good things we have in our small, but potentially vibrant community,” Eller said.

She said for those people who call Hoxie ‘home,’ and plan to continue to do so, the meeting is an opportunity to focus on the “positive attributes, or enhancing or increasing the good things about Hoxie.”

Eller left Hoxie in 1975, and returned in 1998, where she and her husband, Jan, now enjoying watching their grandchildren grow up.

Eller said she is emphatic that she will not sit back and watch the community continue to focus on negatives, such as a hospital which is facing closure unless it can turn around financially in a very short time.

“The decline of rural America is evident. I believe if a community does not work together to recognize the positives (it) has going for it, that

decline will occur at a much faster rate,” she said.

While insistent she is not the “guru leader that has the answers,” Eller has organized the meeting as a way to look at the town’s future.

“All communities, big and small, have their ‘issues,’ but if groups expend their energies focusing on the positives and being proactive rather than reactive, we can make a difference,” Eller said.

She said she is not afraid to be the person to open discussion about Hoxie’s future.

“If we do not step up to the plate and be the catalyst for change to occur, who will?

“I welcome and encourage everyone to attend, jump on board, and be a part of a better tomorrow,” she said.

“I am hoping this will be the first of other community meetings with no chiefs, just a lot of Indians trying to maintain and improve our community,” Eller said.

Deadly U.S 50 in Kansas claims two more lives over the weekend

GARDEN CITY (AP) — Many people who regularly drive on the state’s deadliest two-lane highway know how dangerous it can be.

Duane Rector, who uses U.S. 50 when he travels the 60 miles from his home south of Syracuse to Garden City for doctors’ or other appointments, has rearranged his schedule so as not to get caught in busy traffic.

“I will either stay later or leave earlier,” Rector said. “It scares me when I see people just whipping in and out of traffic and not paying any attention.”

U.S. 50, which runs in Kansas from the Colorado border to Emporia, recorded its second and third fatalities this year on Friday and Sunday.

In Sunday’s accident, Sean Michael Swanson, 19, of Brewster, died about 7:40 a.m. when his car crossed the center line about two miles west of Cimarron and collided with a bus, according to the Kansas Highway Patrol.

Killed in Friday’s accident was Todd Svitak, 40, of Pilsen, a passenger in a 1989 Dodge van that van

crossed the center line west of Peabody and struck a westbound semitrailer head-on, said Marion County Undersheriff Randy Brazil.

According to accident records, 97 deaths happened on U.S. 50 from 1999 to the end of 2003, more than any other two-lane road in the state.

Interstate 70, which is longer and carries nearly five times as much traffic in Kansas, also recorded 97 fatalities during that time period. The third-most fatalities, 80, occurred on U.S. 54, which carries nearly twice as much traffic as U.S. 50.

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