

Gas leak, election begin list of top stories

TOP STORIES, from Page 1

at the end of the school day. The Sherman County Rural Fire Department was paged out to help at 3:13 p.m. The Police Department assisted in providing traffic control and an ambulance was put on standby at the church. Also assisting were the Goodland Public Works Department, Sherman County Emergency Management, the Sherman County Health department and the National Weather Service.

The American Red Cross sent an emergency response vehicle with food as well as four volunteers from Hays.

Black Hills Energy continued to work on the leak into the night. Lights were set up to allow them to continue working after dark.

Residents in the block south of First National Bank, from 11th to 12th from Broadway to Caldwell, were allowed to return home at 5 p.m., but homes on the 10th to 11th Street remained evacuated due to the plume from the gas line.

The all clear was given at 7:45 p.m.

7 Fire department issues came back to the forefront again later in the year, but with a different result. Sherman County was moving ahead with plans to build a new fire and ambulance station. The original plan was to utilize ground on the west side of Goodland that the county already owns and build the ambulance bays and administration offices first so the Emergency Medical Services department could move in when the county takes it over in January, and then add on fire truck bays later.

Then the city proposed allowing the county to remodel the Wolach Building, which at times had been a grocery store and a manufacturing firm, into a fire and ambulance station. The fire board had long had its eye on the building, which would be larger than the proposed new building, enough space to house the city and rural fire departments as well as the ambulances.

The issue came down to cost.



The temporary pipe seen in the background was put in over the gas leak in the alley behind First National Bank in October to disperse the gas into the air. Firefighters were on scene to help in case of an explosion or a fire.

The city would provide the building, which was structurally strong, and the county would pay for the remodel. It took several months to get final numbers, but the remodel came in cheaper than doing a new building.

Writing up a contract between the city, county and fire board took more time, with negotiations going back and forth. Final approval on the agreement came in late November. The county approved a bid from Miller Construction, who said they could have the ambulance portion complete enough to move in the department director and the ambulances in February. The remodel will be complete sometime this summer.

6 A continually developing story throughout the year was changes in the U.S. Postal Service due to a crippling loss of revenue over the past decade. The main local impact of the losses will be that the Goodland out-of-town mail is being shipped overnight to North Platte, Neb., for sorting. It was being sorted in Colby.

Colby is one of seven plants in Kansas on the "hit list" for closure. Others are in Hays, Salina, Dodge City, Hutchinson, Liberal and Topeka. Mail sorting for most would be moved to Wichita, but Topeka's would go to Kansas City, Mo., Liberal's to Amarillo, Texas, and Colby's to North Platte.

As part of the overall plan, the Postal Service hopes to change the standard for delivery of First Class

mail from overnight to three days, depending on distance, to two to three days regardless of distance.

The current system is designed to get mail moved overnight within about 200 miles, said Brian Sperry, a spokesman for the service in Denver. After realignment of the network, he said, the service would plan to deliver mail within three days anywhere in the country. That means a letter to the person next door would go to North Platte for sorting the day after mailing and be delivered by the second or third day.

Roy Reynolds, processing plant manager for the Omaha district, said the service had planned on closing the plant in North Platte, moving the work to Cheyenne, Wyo. That was nixed when officials found out the

building in Cheyenne would have to be expanded.

The North Platte facility kept its 50 jobs. *The North Platte Telegraph* reported Thursday that the plant would not need to add any jobs to cover Colby's mail volume, but it would add a position to take on mail from Alliance. Elsewhere in Nebraska, the plants in Grand Island and Norfolk will close, costing 101 jobs at those plants.

Distance could also be a factor in the decision. North Platte is only 145 miles from Colby, while Denver is 235. U.S. 83 connects the two towns, and is seldom closed in the winter, unlike I-70. And the consolidation would preserve north-south mail connections in the area.

"As we conducted the study," Sperry said, "we decided that North

Platte made more sense (than Denver)."

In Washington, Tonda Rush, chief executive officer of the National Newspaper Association, and a national authority on postal operations and regulatory cases, said newspapers have pushed for a plan to allow entry of presorted mail at "hubs" where trucks will exchange mail, even if the regional plants are closed. Otherwise, she said, newspapers will have to leave the mails and find some other way of delivering their product.

We have been told at the headquarters level that they will do that," she said. "The hub operation would help save the quality of mail service for everyone, not just newspapers."

The service is going to have money problems until it gets control of its labor costs, she said.

"Labor is 80 percent of their costs," she said. "It's a person-heavy operation."

Nationally, the service hopes to get down to about 250 plants. Of 264 operations studies for closure, it says, six are on hold, 35 will remain open like North Platte and 223 will close or be scaled down.

"The building (in Colby) will remain open and continue to function as a post office," Sperry said.

This means that all the basic services will stay in place, and people can still mail letters from Colby. Most letters will take the same time to deliver, he said, because the post office maintains a standard of being able to deliver a letter anywhere in the country in one to three days.

There will, however, be two fewer employees working at the Colby office, after the consolidation process Sperry said. In Colby, Postmaster Jean Johnson said the post office might already be down to the number of employees who should be working after the consolidations. The service tries to reduce the number of employees through attrition — retirements and resignations — and not layoffs.

Immigration exhibit opens at Fort Hays

Most Kansans can trace their heritage to another part of the world.

This is the unique story told in "Americans by Choice: The Story of Immigration and Citizenship in Kansas," a new exhibit opening Thursday, Jan. 3, at Forsyth Library on the Fort Hays State University campus.

Some came in search of a better life for themselves or their children. Many came to join families or friends. Between 1865 and 1880, Kansas attracted immigrants at a faster pace than anywhere else in the United States. The state's population grew from 107,205 in 1860 to 1,428,108 in 1890, thanks to the irresistible promise of a better life through land and jobs.

In 1870, 13 percent of Kansas' total population was foreign-born. Employment opportunities, a lower cost of living and the ease of integrating into communities in a meaningful way continue to attract many new immigrants.

Today, 6 percent of all Kansans are foreign-born. And, each year, the U.S. District Court for Kansas conducts about 20 naturalization ceremonies where people who have completed the requirements for citizenship take the Oath of Allegiance and become U.S. citizens.

Beginning Jan. 3 the exhibit will be open to the public from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed on weekends and on Monday, Jan. 21. New hours will begin on Tuesday, Jan. 22, when the exhibit will be open from 7:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday to Thursday, 7:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and 1 to 10 p.m. on Sunday. Admission is free. The exhibit will close Wednesday, Feb. 20.

The exhibit illustrates the paths to citizenship taken by Kansas settlers from around the world over the past 150 years and personalizes the story of immigration and citizenship — who came, where they came from, why they came to Kansas and why they chose to become U.S. citizens. It features photographs, documents, quotes and interactive books describing major laws affecting immigration and naturalization over the past 150 years, the consequences of those laws and how they directly affected the life of a Kansan.

The exhibit was commissioned by the U.S. District Court for the District of Kansas to highlight the court's role in the naturalization process. A permanent exhibit of the same title is installed at the Robert J. Dole Courthouse in Kansas City, Kan.

"I speak for every one of the judges on this court," said the Hon. Kathryn H. Vratil, chief judge, "when I say that participating in naturalization ceremonies is one of the highlights of our professional life. It helps us reaffirm and refocus ourselves on the values that we hold very dear to our hearts as American citizens."

From 1931 to 2010, more than 75,000 new citizens were naturalized in Kansas, an average of 2,400 a year.

The exhibit was developed by Jean Svadlenak, a museum consultant based in Kansas City, Mo., with more than 35 years of experience in history.

"I have been captivated and inspired by the people I've met through this project," Svadlenak said. "Their personal stories give meaning to immigration and citizenship facts and figures. Working on this project has given me a deeper appreciation for my own American citizenship."

For information, contact Patty Nicholas, archivist at the library, at pnichola@fhsu.edu or by calling (785) 628-5901.

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