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THE NORTON TELEGRAM

Blue Jays triumph in Mid-Continent League Basketball Tournament.

Tuesday
January 27, 2004

Norton, Kansas
Home of Kathy Thibedeau

Briefly Boosters meet Wednesday

The Norton Blue Jay Booster Club will meet at 7:30 p.m. on Wednesday in the NCHS cafeteria.

Norton girls basketball coach Kevin Jilka, boys basketball coach Doug Reusink and wrestling coach Bill Johnson will report on their team's most recent competition and preview upcoming games and matches.

Refreshments will be served. All fans of Norton Community High School sports are invited.

Pain managing workshop Friday

There is no reason to live with unmanaged pain, according to Dr. Robert Twillman, pain management program director for the University of Kansas Medical Center.

Dr. Twillman will give a free workshop including a question and answer session from 3-4 p.m., Friday, Jan. 30, at Norton Manor, 213 Horace Greeley Ave. Contact Hospice Services at (800) 315-5122 or Georgia Briery at Norton County Hospital, 877-3351 for more information.

The workshop is sponsored by the Kansas LIFE project, Hospice Services, Norton County Hospital, Phillips County Caring Community, Norton County Caring Community and Rally Points.

Crow, coyote contest Feb. 7

The Norton County 4-H Shooting Sports will be holding the annual Coyote and Crow Calling Contest as a fund raiser on Saturday, Feb. 7.

Participants must be registered by 6 p.m. on Friday, Feb. 6.

For more information or to register, contact John Baker at 877-3253, Rick McChesney at 877-2606, or John Gall at 877-3937 or 877-3990.

Weather Forecast:

Tonight — Partly cloudy with lows around 13. **Wednesday** — Mostly cloudy with highs in the upper 20s. **Wednesday Night** — Partly cloudy with lows around 15. **Thursday** — Partly cloudy and warmer with highs around 40. **Thursday Night** — Partly cloudy with lows around 13.

Howell report:

Friday High 63, Low 23
Saturday High 40, Low 26
Sunday High 38, Low 9
2" of Snow
Monday High 18, Low 3
Week ago High 31, Low 23
Month ago High 53, Low 31
Year ago High 34, Low 19
January precipitation45 inches
Year-to-date precipitation45 inches
(Readings taken at the Paul and Pat Howell farm
10 Miles North and 1/3 Mile East of Norton)

Prayer

Heavenly Father, help us to live each day surrounded by your love. Help us to share that love with everyone we meet by setting good examples through our actions and our words. Amen



The small town of Lenora (above) got big attention when it was featured in a *New York Times* article about how Rural Telephone is helping to keep the town alive. Rural Telephone Chief Executive and General Manager Larry Sevier (below) said he was sceptical at first, but then after reading the article, thought it was all right.

— Telegram photos by Brandon Gay



Local business stars in Times feature

By BRANDON GAY

Lenora's Rural Telephone stars in a *New York Times* feature about how a local business helps keep a small town going.

The article, titled "In Kansas, a Growing Phone Company Helps Keep a Small Prairie Town Alive," featured Rural Telephone Service Co. and the company's role in Lenora's economy. Published Dec. 2, 2003, it was part of a series of articles by *The Times* that is examining the loss of population in the Great Plains and how entrepreneurship and family can help people who stay.

Larry Sevier, chief executive and general manager of Rural Telephone, said when the author of the article, Peter T. Kilborn, called him, he wondered why someone from *The Times* would be in western Kansas and how they found Lenora. He said his surprise was laced with a hint of suspicion.

"I didn't know if it was a serious article" Mr. Sevier said, "or if it was an article

where the people in New York needed a good laugh, and so they thought they would go out and interview people in the Midwest and talk about their decline."

In the end, Mr. Sevier said, he thought the company and the community were portrayed fairly.

"I thought he did a decent job," he said, "because my expectations were that they were going to be a little sarcastic about the area."

As for how Mr. Kilborn found Lenora and Rural Telephone, Mr. Sevier said it was somewhat of an accident.

"I think what attracted him to the area was that he was trying to do a story on the decline of western Kansas," he said. "I think he saw our dish farm in Edmond and wondered why a small town like Edmond, Kansas, with a population of 20 had this dish farm for cable television and someone said, 'well go talk to Rural Telephone in Lenora.'

"He came to Lenora and was just amazed (Continued on Page 5)

City is behind county's efforts to get landfill

By VERONICA MONIER

The City of Norton is fully behind Norton County's efforts in trying to establish a landfill.

At Wednesday's City Council meeting, Councilman Jerry Hawks said the county is having serious problems getting the permit for the new landfill and keeps running into obstacles involving the Kansas Department of Health and Environment.

He said the county got the contamination out of the ground from the previous landfill and then built an incinerator because it was the best way to go. Then the incinerator fell apart and now the county is having difficulties with getting a new landfill.

In addition to the problems the county is having, the city found out that Phillips County doesn't want to take Norton's trash on a permanent basis and that hauling the city's trash is just a temporary solution.

"I think it's time that we let the county know that we are behind them 100 percent," said Mr. Hawks. "They need to know that we support them and what they are trying to do, and that we will help them however we can, which includes contacting our legislators and letting them know our concerns."

In other business, the council:

- Increased the mileage reimbursement rate from 32.5 cents per mile to 37.5 cents per mile, which is the Internal Revenue Services going rate. Councilwoman Elaine Mann said maybe they should make the wording so that the city's mile-

age rate is set to fluctuate with the federal rate.

- Agreed to hold a public meeting on Feb. 18 at 5:45 p.m. and a public hearing on March 3 at 5:45 p.m. to discuss wastewater treatment improvements and upgrades to the existing wastewater facility.

- Retained Miller and Associates as the engineering firm for the wastewater system improvements project. An application to the Kansas State Revolving Loan Fund is being made for funding assistance.

- Approved Resolution No. 2-2004, authorizing the filing of an application with the Kansas Department of Health and Environment. The resolution says that City Administrator Rob Lawson is authorized to execute and file the application on behalf of the city for a loan to aid in the construction of wastewater treatment facility improvements.

- Heard that the Finance Committee will be meeting with Carol Wagner from Sunflower Electric Power regarding the city's firm power contract. This is an important meeting because the city's electric rates will be adjusted based on their proposal.

- Approved the job description of the swimming pool manager position.

They also agreed to pay the manager \$4,500 and the assistant pool manager \$2,500 for Memorial Day to Labor Day. The salaries will be evenly divided between normal paydays and distributed accordingly. The positions will not be eligible for overtime or any wages at the pre-

mium rate of pay, but the manager will be paid \$6 per hour for any work performed before the pool opens and for any clean up work after the pool has closed for the season.

- Heard from City Attorney Karen Griffiths that she will be getting a proposal from Scheetz Motor Company and Norton Development Corporation, which she will present to the council to finalize the sale of parts and manuals and the payment issues of the revolving loan fund.

- Will begin posting the council meeting minutes on the bulletin board after the meeting so the information will be available to the public if they want to know what was discussed.

- Approved the 2004 events calendar for the Norton County Horse Council.

- Approved the Bolts request to change the date of the first race at the Elmwood Park Speedway from March 13 to March 14. The date doesn't conflict with the horse council's schedule.

- Heard the Norton Manor Director Lacy Frack request for the council to allow them to build carports adjacent to the Manor. Mr. Lawson will meet with her to look at the project and make some suggestions for council approval.

- Approved Dan Hazlett's sidewalk request at 316 S. State Street. Mr. Lawson said once Mr. Hazlett was notified about the sidewalk, he came in immediately. He said the sidewalk has been barricaded at Mr. Hazlett's request until the city can get to it. The city will provide the labor for the (Continued on Page 5)

Area business helps Lenora employment

By KRISTEN BRANDS

Rural Telephone was incorporated as a co-operative, or "member-owned", company in 1951.

The company has over 11,200 access lines. Rural Telephone's main office is in Lenora, where over 110 people are employed. There are also branch offices in Hill City and WaKeeney. Hill City employees about 15 people, while WaKeeney employs about 10.

A subsidiary company, Nex-Tech, was formed in 1989. This de-regulated subsidiary provides competitive local and long distance telephone services as well as internet, cable television, web-hosting/development, and a variety of other services. Nex-Tech has over 10,000 access lines.

The main Nex-Tech office is located in Hays, providing office positions and technician jobs for about 90 people. Norton's Nex-Tech office has 6 employees, while the Osborne branch has three, a new Dodge City office has two, the Phillipsburg office has five, and the Great Bend location has six.

Compared to 1951, when Rural (Continued on Page 3)



Don Rowilson fascinated both the adults and the kids with his description of what life was really like for a cowboy 100 years ago during the Norton County Conservation District's annual meeting Saturday night at the Norton American Legion. — Telegram photos by Veronica Monier

Conservation District holds annual meeting

The Norton County Conservation District held their 58th annual meeting Saturday evening at the Norton American Legion.

The annual report for 2003 was given by Chris Harting. Mr. Harting said the district received \$9,500 from the county and \$9,500 from the state for wages and district operations. The state also contributed \$2,399 to fund administration and education of the Non-Point Source Pollution Plan.

He said Norton County continued to participate with other districts in the Northwest Kansas Conservation and Education Alliance, which looks for ways to increase funding for individual dis-

tricts by applying for grants as a group. They are also working together to sponsor the 2004 State Envirothon this spring as well as working on other educational programs for local youth.

Mr. Harting said that Norton County, along with Phillips, Rooks, Graham and Smith counties, held the second annual W.A.C.K.Y. (wildlife, agriculture, conservation knowledge for youth) day on Sept. 24. This program is directed toward all of the sixth graders in each of these counties.

The State Water Resources Cost Share Program was advertised in *The Norton Telegram* and on KQNK Radio in June, he said. Included in the district's program for cost sharing are terraces, diversion, livestock well, livestock pipelines, range seeding, pit ponds and feedlot and field windbreaks. Also included in the program are practices for water conservation in existing irrigation systems. A total of \$33,124 was allocated to Norton County and channeled out as cost share to Norton County landowners.

After receiving approval for the Non-Point Source Pollution Work Plan the district activated the plan by offering cost share to update failing septic systems, plug abandoned water wells, livestock pipelines, and ag waste systems for feedlots meeting the right criteria. Cost share funds of \$18,535.

Mr. Harting said the conservation district, in partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, issued and were approved for 18 EQIP contracts for Grazing Lands Health for a total of \$373,359 and was approved for seven contracts under the Water Quality/Confined Animal Waste in the amount of \$182,487 bringing a total of \$555,846 of federal monies into our county.

Donna Hale gave the financial report. Ms. Hale said as of Dec. 31, 2003 in the operations funds the balance forward (Jan. 1, 2003) was \$6,217.82; the receipts were: county allotment, \$9,500; state allotment, \$11,899; NPS wastewater grant, \$5,500; interest, \$57.97; and transfer from savings, \$2,745.60; for a total receipts of \$35,920.39; and the disbursements were: wages and withholding taxes, \$20,158.25; workers compensation, retirement and health insurance, \$2,142.63; operating, \$6,468.23; dues and audit, \$475; supervisors expenses, \$725.76; annual meeting, \$778.50; education and information, \$344.50; for a total disbursements of \$31,093.96; and a balance of \$4,826.43.

In the enterprise fund, the bal-

ance forward (Jan. 1, 2003) was \$4,828.29; the receipts were: sale of trees and weed barrier fabric, \$9,635.90; sale of marking flags plus tax, \$14.42; sale of grass seed and drilling, \$7,199.79; annual meeting reimbursement, \$1,461.30; miscellaneous, \$4,468.87; and plow rental, \$904.02; for a total receipts of \$28,512.50; and disbursements were: trees and weed barrier fabric, \$5,428.75; grass seed and drilling, \$6,251.48; sales tax, \$0.42; annual meeting and supervisor expenses, \$1,948.48; operations and dues, \$1,522.10; education and awards, \$194.04; and miscellaneous, \$6,409.34; for total disbursements of \$21,754.61; and a balance of \$6,757.98 with savings at \$83,871.62 for a total balance (operations and enterprise funds) of \$95,456.03.

Plaques and awards were given. The 2004 Conservation Award went to Doug, Keith and Naedean Whitney of Whitney Construction and Farms, Inc., while the 2004 Windbreak Award was given to Lynn and Debra Thiele.

Poster contest winners were: first and second grades — Marc Miller, son of Allan and Connie Miller, first place; Kolton Harting, son of Chris and Mindy Harting, second place; Katelyn Engelbert, daughter of John and Pam Engelbert, third place; third and fourth grades — Keziah Whitesell, daughter of Dave and Jolene Porter, first place; Rhees Carlson, daughter of Dale and Glenda Carlson, second place; Kurt Douglas, son of Pat and Julie Douglas, third place; fifth and sixth grades — Adam Myers, son of Jim and Jana Myers, first place; Kaid McKenna, son of Brian and Jennifer McKenna, second place; Jesse Gallentine, son of Doug and Kim Gallentine, third place. John Renner, son of Craig and Cheri Renner, honorable mention at the 2003 state competition.

Limerick winners were: fifth and sixth grades — Cherokee Marsh, daughter of Michelle Marsh, first place; Lacy Keilig, daughter of Mark and Kristy Keilig, second place; Jessica Reeves, daughter of Bruce and Beth Reeves, third place.

Essay winners were: fifth and sixth grade — Zoey Meyers, daughter of Travis and Casey Meyers, first place; Dakota Dreher, son of Ray and Jamie Dreher, second place; Kaylen Rossi, daughter of George and Sue Rossi, third place.

Nominees for the open supervisor position were Ms. Hale and Teresa Schulze. Ms. Hale was elected for a three year term.



City amends code regarding dangerous, vicious animals

(Continued from Page 1) sidewalk replacement, while Mr. Hazlett will pay for the cost of materials.

• Heard from Mrs. Griffiths that she had met with Allan Miller, John McClymont and

Mr. Lawson regarding the water service extension agreement for the water line to Prairie Land Electric. This agreement will be presented to the council for approval in the future.

Mrs. Griffiths said they also dis-

cussed areas of coverage since there is a possibility of annexation of some areas. Prairie Land would like to meet with the Finance Committee to talk about their concerns. Mr. Hawks said they should research what other cities have done

concerning rural customers.

• Adopted Ordinance No. 1526 after waiving the formal third reading. This ordinance amends section 2-213 of the city code relating to dangerous and vicious animals.

As technology moves in, people move back

(Continued from Page 1) that a town the size of Lenora would have a business that covered almost a square block."

Mr. Sevier said the reporter also was surprised that broadband Internet access was available in western Kansas because it still isn't available in the Washington area where he lives.

While the article focused largely on depopulation and Rural Telephone's role in fueling the northwestern Kansas economy, employees of the company say that's only part of the story. Many of them grew up in rural areas, moved away and then came back after the technology revolution paved the way to quality employment back home. Others wanted to escape the crime and traffic of big cities they had called home all of their lives.

There is the father who experienced the benefits of small-town life as a child and wanted the same thing for his children. There is the software support administrator who fled his Denver neighborhood for a safer place. A veteran who saw the world in the Air Force and said he didn't find a better place to live than western Kansas. And then there is the story of

David Kimbrell, who just wanted to find a way back home.

While the population of northwestern Kansas falls — *The Time's* article points out the sum population of 18 contiguous northwestern Kansas counties has fallen 17 percent in 20 years — these employees tell the story of why some want to stay.

"I finally found a way back home," Mr. Kimbrell said.

Mr. Kimbrell, a software development specialist originally from Goodland, had lived in Topeka for 10 years and he and his wife had always wanted to come back to western Kansas. Then three years ago, there was an opening at Rural Telephone.

Mr. Kimbrell said values were the biggest benefit to living in western Kansas.

"People's values out here are much different than they are in the bigger city," he said. "They're friendlier, easier to trust, just a number of things that all boil down to people."

While some of the employees with big-city backgrounds say they miss the convenience of the city and shopping, Mr. Kimbrell said he didn't miss anything.

"A person has to live in the city



Lenora and Rural Telephone go hand-in-hand. Both were featured in the *New York Times* article "In Kansas, a Growing Phone Company Helps Keep a Small Prairie Town Alive" which was published on Dec. 2, 2003.

— Telegram photo by Brandon Gay

to realize how much nicer it is to come back to something a little slower, a little less populated," he said. "It's just a breath of fresh air."

Mr. Kimbrell said the article in *The Times* was important because people needed to know that with technology, there are opportunities in rural areas now.

After packing up his car, his

family, his life, Timm Davis left Denver for rural life in Lenora. As he neared Lenora and drove the winding roads that twist and turn around family farms, he wondered "Where am I going to work at?"

Mr. Davis said he would have gotten a job pumping gas if he had to, but employment was not his primary motive in the move.

When crime hit his neighborhood and there was a murder down the street, he said, he decided it was time to move.

Mr. Davis found a job as a software support administrator at Rural and found the safety he was looking for.

"It's 100 percent safer," he said. "Kids can walk home from school unescorted. Your kids can play outside. Everybody watches out for everybody else here."

Paul Worchester, originally from Hill City, moved back from Omaha after finding a job at Rural.

"Because I was in the Air Force, I traveled all over the country," he said. "I lived in Alaska, Tucson, Omaha, Saudi Arabia. Once you see every place else, you keep comparing them back to home."

He has been married for 19 years and has moved 17 times.

"My wife says she's throwing away the boxes and we're not moving again," he said.

Mike Pollock, director of information services, said he hoped Rural could be part of reversing the loss of population discussed in the article. He said rural communities used to be isolated, but the technology is changing that.

"In Lenora, Kansas, you think you're moving back in time, but actually you're going forward."

Pollock said he worked in Manhattan before he started at Rural and said there was a greater sense of pride and teamwork at the firm because the people know each other.

"We want to work together every day," he said. "Because of the small town atmosphere, we share in our achievements as well as our tragedies."

Mr. Sevier said technology has changed Rural's landscape because it has made it possible for large companies to operate from rural areas.

"This is what a lot of businesses want nowadays," he said. "They want to be able to stay in a small community and yet can work large nationally, and they need high speed facilities to do that and good communications."

Mr. Sevier said the article has given Rural attention in the communications field across the country.

He said they received e-mails and phone calls from 50 to 100 companies commenting on the article, the company and the community.