

Notice

Publisher Tom is out of the office due to some concerns, primarily with eyesight, and consequently will not have columns in today's, nor Tuesday's newspapers. He hopes to resume these in the Friday, July 31 issue. He regrets his absence but also feels to ignore this problem would be akin to turning off the light bulb permanently in one eye. "Thanks for your understanding," he said.

Conservation board sets record straight

During our regular monthly board meeting this week, a discussion came up pertaining to the article in the newspaper of July 7, titled, "Conservation office seeks budget hike."

The board, as well as myself, felt a need to write a letter to correct statements made in the article which were incorrect and misleading about our County Conservation District. We feel that we owe it to the public since they are the people that we work with and for on an everyday basis, to clarify our purpose and goals as a Conservation District (which we felt were confusing in the newspaper article).

To start with, the Norton County Conservation District did request \$15,000 from the Norton County Commissioners for our 2010 Budget. This is the same amount that we requested last year. In balancing their budget last year, the commissioners were able to allocate \$12,000 for our District. Taking an overview of our program and needs last year, we felt that \$15,000 would be an amount that would be workable to meet our needs while continuing to promote conservation in the communities in our county. Looking at our program again this year, we felt that we would request the same amount as last year due to our goals being the same as last year.

To answer the question asked by the news reporter, "what do we do with our funds?", we work with the local citizens and students through educational programs to promote and help implement conservation practices which will promote the missions and goals of our county.

One of our largest educational programs we work with is our WACKY (Wildlife, Agriculture, Conservation Knowledge for Youth) Day, which is a project that we have done for seven years. The Conservation Districts from Phillips, Rooks, Graham, Smith, Osborne and Norton work together to put on this event. We host approximately 400 6th and 7th grade students at this event which is held at Kirwin Lake. This group of Conservation Districts has won both state and national awards for student involvement with this project.

Other educational activities that the Norton County Conservation District has sponsored this year include:

- Ag in the Classroom
- Kids Conservation Round-up
- Water Jamboree
- Water Festival (had water testing available for private wells)
- Poster Contest
- Annual Meeting
- Tree Day
- Lawn & Garden Show
- County Fair Booth
- Norton County Head Start
- Bankers Award Winners

Additional programs that we participate in are cost share programs. We have a state cost share program which through our Water Resources, we are able to cost share on such practices as terraces, terrace re-builds, livestock wells, pipelines, range planting, grassed waterways, windbreaks, tanks, etc.

Through our NPS program, we cost share on septic systems, well plugging, critical area planting, etc. We have cost shared on 12 failing septic systems in 2008 and to date have eight on contract to be completed in 2009. Septic systems become a failing system due to age (a needed update or caved in due to age and moisture).

Last year the Norton County Conservation District working along with NRCS and FSA through programs such as State Cost Share, EQUIP, CRP, and CCRP brought funds into Norton County totaling \$1,331,635.

Our District continues to promote and administer an effective conservation program by working with NRCS in the implementation and completion of conservation practices countywide.

Thank you!

Norton County Conservation District
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THE NORTON TELEGRAM

ISSN 1063-701X
215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton, KS 67654

Published each Tuesday and Friday by Haynes Publishing Co., 215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton, Kan. 67654. Periodicals mail postage paid at Norton, Kan. 67654.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Norton Telegram, 215 S. Kansas, Norton, Kan. 67654
Official newspaper of Norton and Norton County. Member of the Kansas Press Association, National Newspaper Association, and the Nebraska Press Association

Nor'West Newspapers
Dick and Mary Beth Boyd
Publishers, 1970-2002
Incorporating the Norton County Champion
Marion R. Krehbiel, editor



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Moffet project might put Norton on map

Some issues come fraught with emotion. Such it is with the Moffet Station renovation project. Both sides put forth valid arguments, each have good people supporting their particular view but only one will prevail.

When we moved to Norton, my husband was enthralled by the building at the center of this controversy. He always believed it should be the site of an art gallery. He isn't usually one to want to preserve buildings, in fact, he felt the family farm house should be bulldozed rather than renovated as our son and his wife have done so wonderfully.

So what is the answer? When out of state guests come to visit us they always remark on the things not seen in their own communities, for example brick streets, the courthouse square and buildings with unique structural qualities. When my mother traveled to England she marveled at the truly old buildings and how revered they were by the people. In this country the trend is to demolish old buildings and replace

Phase II Mary Kay Woodyard



them with a new structure.

Often it comes down to funding, but in this case the money is there to preserve this landmark. It will not be funded by taxpayer money and although the economic director will oversee the project, that will occur whether it is a new or old building. Grant money has been awarded and matching funds through a memorial are available.

This project will honor an individual who truly believed in the goodness of Norton. Bill Sharp's influence can be seen in a variety of ways. Truth be known, without him Norton would be lacking in many areas. He helped fund numerous start-up businesses when the banks would not provide the funds. He

actively supported the BB Gun Team, Norton Theater, Pheasants Forever, Big Brothers Big Sisters just to mention a few. Bill and Bud Kelling advanced New Age Industries to become the largest private employer in Norton County for many years.

No one person is ever the 'face' of a community; people work together to strengthen neighborhoods and enrich our lives. The Moffet Station is old, dilapidated and in need of great repair, but those obstacles never stopped Bill Sharp from believing in the potential. If the funds are there to renovate, at no cost to the taxpayer, then with the blessing of Bill Sharp's family, let's proceed.

One of Bill Sharp's good friends said, "His positive attitude was the biggest and best thing he ever gave to Norton." Let's follow his example and work with Economic Development and the existing plans to positively impact our community. Who knows, Moffet Station might just put Norton on the map.
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Health Care: Rural America's heartbeat

My parents are 92 and 93 and still live in my hometown of Plainville, Kansas, a town with a population of 1900. My Dad has morning coffee with Keith Unrein, our local pharmacist, and Dr. Sanchez paid a house call on my Mom when she slipped and bumped her head a few months back. This sense of community is what I love about my hometown and other small towns across America and this is why the current health care reform debate is so important to me. If we want a future of strong small towns across the country, Congress must address the unique health care needs of rural Americans when crafting health care reform legislation.

Democratic congressional leaders and President Obama have vowed to pass a comprehensive overhaul of the health care system before the August congressional recess. I believe this debate is long overdue, but I am troubled by the rapid pace that reform legislation is being crafted. Under this arbitrary deadline, I am concerned that the unique health care needs of rural Americans will be neglected. On Friday, I met with Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius to list my concerns.

While health care is vitally important for rural communities, the greater crisis facing rural America is

Capitol Views

Rep. Jerry Moran



access to care. It does not do someone any good to have an insurance card when there is no medical professional to administer care. Several reforms are crucial to increase health coverage and access. First, we need to adjust Medicare reimbursement levels to ensure that rural health care providers are receiving payments equal to urban provider levels. Demographics show that rural residents have greater inherent health risks and, without adequate reimbursement, these individuals will not have access to the health care providers they need. Additionally, federal boards that set health policy, like the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission, must include sufficient rural representation to ensure an equitable balance between rural and urban providers.

Second, the current medical workforce shortage must be attacked. The National Health Service Corps, a program that incentivizes medical professionals to practice in medically

underserved areas through scholarship and loan repayment programs, needs to be expanded. We must support workforce development initiatives to address the current shortage of primary care physicians, nurses, and other medical professionals and encourage these professionals to provide critical services to our aging rural population.

Third, we must improve care options for rural Americans. Rural Americans must have access to mental health care, disease prevention and wellness initiatives, and quality cost-effective home health and long term care services.

Fourth, we need to encourage the development of high-speed broadband networks to connect rural hospitals throughout the nation. A reliable broadband network is required to digitize health records and transmit medical data, resulting in streamlined costs and reduced medical errors. Electronic health records and broadband infrastructure will improve patient care by connecting rural communities with specialists in urban areas.

Rural Americans face a unique combination of health care factors and challenges and rest assured that I will continue to fight to make sure that our children and grandchildren have the opportunity to raise their families in the communities that many of us call home.

Try your hand at a letter to the editor