

# Judge Pratt takes oath of office in Oberlin

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Preston Pratt of Oberlin took the oath of office Friday as chief judge of the Kansas 17th Judicial Circuit, then after sharing punch and cake with friends, lawyers and court workers from around the district, sat down in the courtroom and got right to work.

A standing-room-only crowd of about 50 jammed into the courtroom of the Decatur County courthouse, filling the benches, the jury box and the counsel tables. One lawyer present said he figured at least half the attorneys in the district had come.

Justice Nancy Moritz of the Kansas Supreme Court drove out from Topeka to administer the oath. She said she'd spent the night with her brother in Hays, and arrived just in time for the 10 a.m. ceremony.

Justice Moritz, who has served on the high court only since January, said this was her first opportunity to swear in a new judge. She is the supervisory justice for courts in all of northwest and north central Kansas. A native of Tipton, she graduated from high school in Salina and went to college and law school at Washburn University.

She said it was a pleasure to be out in the west. "This is truly God's country," the justice said, "and Preston is lucky to get to be a judge in God's country."

Mr. Pratt raised his right hand and swore the brief oath of office, then took congratulations from the justice. She said she'd asked him about his remarks beforehand, and he'd told her he's a man of few words. She urged him to speak anyway.

"There are only two things I can guarantee as judge," he said. "The first is I'll try my best and do the

best that I can. The second is I will make mistakes... but I'll try not to make the same mistake twice."

With that, Justice Moritz signaled the new judge's granddaughter, Crystal Beinke, 6, to come forward with his robe. She handed it to her grandfather, but when the justice asked her to help him put it on, she demurred.

Crystal is the daughter of Chanse and Cristina Beinke of Smithfield, Neb. Also with them was their daughter Emily Torres, 11. Other relatives included Mr. Pratt's mother and stepfather, Lona and Jim Ball of Oakley, his wife Peggy and stepson, Brett Beinke, Smithfield.

Judge Pratt, who grew up in Oakley, graduated from the University of Kansas with a bachelor's degree and in 1993 from the KU School of Law. He has been with the firm of Hirsch and Pratt in Oberlin since, serving as deputy county and city attorney here and as county attorney for Logan County.

After the crowd shared food and conversation, court clerks from several of the six counties in the district—Decatur, Norton, Phillips, Smith, Graham and Osborne—brought out papers for the new judge to sign. Judge Pratt sat down at one of the counsel tables and got to work.

The district had been without a judge for about a month since the retirement of Judge Bill Elliott at the end of May. Though Judge Elliott did handle the regular motion days through the month, some paperwork apparently had piled up.

Judge Pratt said he will have an office in the courthouse here, plus the main judge's office at the courthouse in Norton. He will hold court in all six counties as needed, including the regular motion days. Tuesday, he was at work in Oberlin.



Newly-instated Judge Preston Pratt takes the Oath of Office as the Judge of the Kansas 17th Judicial Circuit. Issuing the oath is Justice Nancy Moritz of the Kansas Supreme Court. Pratt was sworn in at a ceremony in Oberlin on Friday.

—Telegram photo by Steve Haynes

## County

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to certain parts of the county and that problem has been somewhat alleviated after a transition in how the county departments were operated.

"Topper (Brent Cook, West District Commissioner) has approached us and asked us to take a look at the roads on the east side of the county," Miller said. "We had a landowner meeting to get input on

this decision and people are here today bringing us information we didn't have before. We will postpone making a decision until we re-evaluate whether or not it is the best decision to close the road."

A second public hearing on the matter has been scheduled for Monday, July 18 at the Commissioners' regular meeting. All citizens affected by the decision are encouraged to attend.

## Team

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themselves up for a run at the title in the future.

Shooters range from 8 to 15 years of age but are not allowed to compete in the national shoot two straight years. All of this year's shooters were young enough that they will be eligible in return in two years, providing that they continue to qualify at state shoots.

This year's shooters and their ages were: Cameron Heikes, 13; Dalton Vanover, 13; Trenton Sprague, 12; Justis Posson, 11 and Scott Sansom, 10. Alternates were James Berry, 12 and Dallas Gosselin, 10.

## Hospital

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is set at 80 mill, which generates nearly \$3.5 million in tax revenue for the county. Miller said that property valuations increased by almost 10 percent this year. With the valuation increase, the county would generate \$240,000 more than last year, even with the same mill rate.

That slight increase, though, doesn't begin to cover the budget increases that are needed for county entities. "It's a big decision what to do with the mill levy," Miller said. "That \$240,000 doesn't go very far when the state is telling us we have to spend more money to accommodate more mandates."

Over the next several weeks, the Norton County Commissioners will be hearing and considering budget requests and deciding whether or not to increase taxes and determining how to distribute those tax dollars.

This younger Norton team actually had a higher score than last year's Blue Jay marksmen, who also placed ninth. It was a very competitive shoot with scores of most top ten teams higher than last year.

The Norton shooters had no bad positions, shooting steady in all four, and also did well in the written test of gun safety.

On Saturday, Norton tied for sixth in the prone position, the easiest of the four and was tied for eighth after standing, the toughest position.

The final two positions were shot on Sunday. Norton tied for fifth with an outstanding score from the sitting position, which placed them eighth overall at that time. At this point, Norton was just ten points out of fourth place.

A ninth place finish in the kneeling position, the second hardest, and seventh place in the written test placed Norton ninth overall.

With a total shooting and test score of 2336, Norton was just 17 points out of fifth place.

Norton had two shooters who received special recognition during the Awards Ceremony on Sunday evening.

Cameron Heikes was the individual runner-up from the prone position with a 99.07 x 100 and received the silver medal.

James Berry was the alternate champion in standing with a score of 94 and runner-up alternate aggregate with a 476, which also included a perfect 100 on the written test, for which he received a certificate.

"I'm very proud of these youngsters for making the top ten," said coach Archer.

"They shot well as a team and also did very well on the written test. They did their very best in a highly competitive national shoot and everyone in the community should also be proud of them."

Cameron's assistant coach this year was Shawn Gosselin and Chandra McKenna was the classroom instructor.

A complete story with pictures will appear in next Tuesday's Norton Telegram.

## Huelskamp

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tainty over the future of the United States government, citizens at the townhall meeting most clearly wanted to know what is next for northwest Kansas. Huelskamp reported that he believes

the solution to the debt crisis is employment security for rural Americans.

"We need more jobs," he said.

The Congressman said he believes a major boost to jobs in Kansas could come from tapping

into energy development at home instead of abroad.

"We have tremendous untapped resources," he said. "The energy sector has tremendous potential for growth and we can produce more energy than we do."

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**Correction:**

Due to reporter error, the photo outline with the construction photo on page 2 of the Friday, July 1 edition of the Norton Telegram incorrectly identified the project as a T-Works project. The project is actually a Kansas Department of Transportation project and not affiliated with T-Works. The Norton Telegram apologizes for the error.

*The Norton Telegram will correct or clarify any mistake or misunderstanding in a news story. Please call our office at 877-3361 to report errors.*

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