

FEATURE STORY

Nondaily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

Eudora News

David Oaks

Well written story that grabs you from the start and holds your interest to the very end.

SECOND PLACE

Basehor Sentinel

Nicole Kelley

Great story that is well put together. A lot of information and background packaged in a reader friendly way.

THIRD PLACE

Baldwin City Signal

Jimmy Gillispie

Fun story to read. Well put together. Great use of interesting direct quotes.

FEATURE STORY

Nondaily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Russell County News

Justin Ashlaw

Nice story on Kara Hollinger turning 100 by Ashlaw. Features on a well crafted and informative story.

SECOND PLACE

Atchison Globe

Mary Meyers

Meyers's story is well-written and informative. Good detail.

THIRD PLACE

Washington County News

Tom Parker

Parker used great - touch on Butters story detailing his trails over the past 14 years.

By Justin Ashlaw

Russell has seen its fair share of changes over the last 100 years. Russell has seen buildings go up and buildings torn down, with residents coming and going. One resident has seen the change and has been here in Russell for over 100 years.

Kora Hollinger has lived in Russell for more than 100 years. She remembers when the lot in between second and third street had only one house on it. Her family's.

She has seen the chickens and cows on the lot be replaced by building after building.

"I saw when Fossil Street was nothing but brick pavement. I've seen them pull it up and put cement pavement," Hollinger said. "Not many people know that Fossil Street was brick at a time. I do. I've lived in this same house since 1963."

Hollinger was born Feb. 22, 1905 in Dorrance. She is the daughter of the late Minnie and Henry Linden-Meyer. The couple later moved to Russell in 1908.

"They were the nicest parents I could have asked for," Hollinger said.

She had two brothers, Fred and Clarence, and two sisters, Cadie and Carolan.

Hollinger graduated from Russell High School in 1921 in only three years. She played basketball for the Lady Broncos when they placed second in the state.

"The only reason we placed second in state was the fact it was our third game of the day," Hollinger said. "We faced that exact same team the following

year and we stomped them."

After graduating RHS, Hollinger attended Washburn University in 1921 to study and play music. She later left Washburn and returned home to Russell. In the same year, Kora Linden-Meyer was asked out by fellow RHS graduate Lloyd Hollinger. The two would later marry in 1927.

Lloyd Hollinger owned Hollinger Drug Store, which was located in downtown Russell. "I knew of Lloyd for awhile. We graduated high school the same year and he lived right down the street from me," Hollinger said. Kora Hollinger later attended business school in Salina. Hollinger started her secretary work with many of the local oil companies. She was responsible for recording their oil logs. She later worked for area law attorneys, keeping track of their records.

The couple had their first son, LA, in 1933, and in 1935, had their second son, Blaine. At the time, the country was in a severe economic down turn.

"I remember the 30s was a difficult time for Russell," Kora Hollinger said. "Lloyd helped out a lot of the residents, giving them loans in the form of cash assistance. We were very fortunate."

The economic uncertainty later would change when the United States entered World War II.

"Lloyd was all set to serve in the war when the following day, the United States declared victory," Hollinger remembered. "It's weird but I can't recall a single family member who has

served in the military."

The Hollingers were a very Christian-based family. They attended church at Otterbein Methodist Church, Russell, where Kora played piano and organ until she retired at the age of 90.

Blaine and LA went on to graduate from RHS and attended the University of Kansas School of Medicine. Blaine went on to practice medicine in Texas, while LA practiced medicine in the Kansas City area.

"I remember when they went on to graduate from KU that I apologized for being too strict on the boys," Kora Hollinger said. "I remember LA told me that if it wasn't for us being strict, they wouldn't be where they are." After the boys left, Kora and Lloyd spent more time together. Lloyd closed the Hollinger Drug Store after being opened for more than 40 years.

The two celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in 1977. Two years later, Lloyd passed away.

"He was a good man and not a minute goes by that I don't think about him," Hollinger said. Hollinger spent as much time as she could with her remaining family members. Blaine went on to practice medicine in Texas while LA practiced in the Kansas City area.

In 1993, LA passed away at the age of 60.

Kora Hollinger still enjoys many things in life. She is a huge University of Kansas fan. "I love KU, I never miss a game," Hollinger said. When told a friend was a K-State fan, she replied "I'll kill him."

Just joking, they're okay in my book. They're second to the Jayhawks."

Hollinger commented no matter where her son Blaine is, he will always call her and tell her when the games are on. Hollinger still flies at the age of 103. She recently flew down to Houston, Texas over the holiday season to see her son, Blaine Hollinger, and her grandchildren. Hollinger doesn't mind discussing politics.

"The guy I liked the least was Clinton. I couldn't believe the things he did in office and the things he did in his office; it was a disgrace," Hollinger said. "I think Bush did the best he could with what he had (when asked about President Bush)." Hollinger calls herself a "bridge maniac" and can play the game for hours. She remembers playing bridge with Bina Dole, Senator Bob Dole's mother.

"The last time I spoke to Robert was when he called me on my 100th birthday. My family had a celebration at the Dole-Spector Center. He phoned me and wished me a happy birthday. I told him he should be here, it's his place," Hollinger said. Hollinger occasionally participates in her granddaughter's radio show in the Kansas City area. Her granddaughter, Ann Butenas, hosts a radio show call "KC Metro Woman Live". The two discuss not only Kora's life but her opinions of life.

Butenas is currently writing a biography of Kora's life which will be released in April 2009. The two will also be releasing a collection of compact discs

entitled "Conversations with Kora".

Kora Hollinger has lived an amazing life which is far from over. Although Hollinger has a tough time remembering faces and dates, there are some memories she will never forget. "I've been very fortunate all my life (when asked how she manages to keep herself going). I've been more than lucky. I've had no serious sickness or accidents," Hollinger said. Kora Hollinger has seen a lot in her 103 years, without even leaving the block.

FEATURE STORY

Nondaily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Miami County Republic

Brian McCauley

Great story telling! I felt like I was there. Good use of flashback. Also great conclusion. Nice use of quotes. The story really built as you read. Nice job.

SECOND PLACE

Johnson County Sun

Mark Dewar

Great, well-rounded story. You got a wide range of perspectives, which really kept the story interesting, and it was touching.

THIRD PLACE

Shawnee Dispatch

Caroline Boyer

I was really engrossed in this story, and it's one that needs to be told. Very moving. Nice job.

By Brian McCauley

With powerful gusts of wind howling around them, flashes of lightning illuminating the sky and heart-pounding claps of thunder echoing in the darkness, Alexis Shaw of Paola grabbed her 3-year-old daughter, Annabelle, and 1-year-old son, Gavin, and scurried into a McDonald's restroom in Marietta, Okla., last week.

At first, Alexis had her children take shelter underneath a large granite sink, but she quickly changed her mind, worried about the weight of the counter. Flustered, and with her mind racing, she pulled out her cell phone and snapped a picture of her two children.

Looking back on it now, she chuckles, but at the time, she figured that if anything happened, somebody might find the phone and realize where they were. Now, the picture, which shows Annabelle covering her ears because of the deafening thunderclaps, is a lasting reminder of one of the scariest nights of their life.

As the storm strengthened, someone alerted Alexis that everyone was getting into the restaurant's walk-in freezer. So she grabbed her two children, who were barefoot from their car trip, and packed themselves into the freezer, hoping for the best.

Just a few hours earlier, McDonald's was the last place on Alexis' mind. She and her two children were on their way home to Paola after visiting family in Tucson, Ariz. The trio of travelers left on Feb. 9 and stayed the night in El Paso,

Texas. When they prepared to hit the road the next day, Alexis had to make a decision. She called and talked to her husband, Clay, who wanted her to avoid driving north through New Mexico because of the possibility of her running into a snowstorm in the mountains. The obvious route, then, was to travel through Texas, but Alexis couldn't shake the warnings she was sensing.

"I had this bad feeling about going through Texas," she said.

Still, Alexis decided that it was the right decision to head back home via the Lone Star state. She first started realizing that she may be facing some unusual weather when she stopped to get gas in Abilene, Texas.

"I smelled the ocean," Alexis said. "There was a lot of wind, and it was warm and moist. I thought to myself, 'I shouldn't be smelling the ocean this far inland.'"

Alexis called her husband again, who looked up the Doppler radar on the Internet. He informed her that some tornadoes had hit throughout Oklahoma, including one near Edmond, where Clay's uncle lives, but he was okay.

Alexis kept trudging north, past Fort Worth and toward the Oklahoma border. Just before the border, Annabelle needed to go to the bathroom, so Alexis reluctantly stopped in Gainesville, Texas, where they spent about a half hour visiting Wendy's and Starbucks. Alexis now realizes that the stop may have saved their lives.

The delay put her back on the road at about 8 p.m. Feb. 10.

Things quickly turned from bad to worse when the wind strengthened, pushing her car, and rain started pelting down. Alexis also could see a lot of lighting in the distance. She called her husband once again, who quickly brought up the radar. His reaction did not ease Alexis' worries.

"Oh my God," he said.

A giant storm front was moving toward her position on I-35 from behind and another was directly in front of her. Tornado warnings were everywhere.

"I was screaming, 'I told you I had a bad feeling,'" Alexis said.

She quickly found a local radio station with weather reports while she grabbed a small travel map of the state.

"All of the towns they mentioned were right around me," Alexis said.

She saw a sign that said Marietta was 8 miles away and Ardmore was 30 miles away. She floored the engine, and admitted she was topping 90 miles per hour in her rush to get to cover. There was nowhere along the highway to take shelter.

"I remember praying to myself, 'please God take me, but let my kids be OK,'" she said.

Finally, she made it to Marietta and was shocked to see the small size of the town.

"It was basically a Pizza Hut and a McDonald's," she said. "Pick your poison."

When she pulled into McDonald's, she started to see debris flying around.

"It was mainly branches of trees," she said.

When she tried to open the car door, it quickly slammed shut in the wind. A husband and wife parked nearby helped Alexis get her children into the restaurant, where she quickly strapped her son into a rolling booster seat.

It wasn't until they were packed into the walk-in freezer that it all started to hit Alexis.

"We were waiting for the tornado, and I started crying," Alexis said. "It was the longest 10 minutes of my life."

Shortly before 9 p.m., the people assembled in the freezer could hear from the television, which was left blaring in the next room, that Marietta was in the clear. Alexis also learned that Lone Grove and nearby Ardmore, where Alexis likely would have stopped if she hadn't taken that 30-minute stop earlier, were devastated by the tornado.

After informing her husband that she and the kids were okay, Alexis continued her trip north into the eerie darkness.

"All of the power was out," she said.

She estimates she saw about 40 emergency vehicles going south to help victims as she continued north, desperately trying to get to Edmond, north of Oklahoma City. She finally made it, and stayed there that night. The next morning, she didn't have to go far to see the devastation from the previous day's tornado. About three miles from Clay's uncle's house, homes were destroyed, buildings were gone and insulation was strewn throughout trees.

When she finally got home to Paola and read news reports about the nine deaths attributed

to the tornado, all she could do was think, "Thank God I'm alive."

Her children, on the other hand, stayed somewhat calm throughout the experience.

"She (Annabelle) calls them big storms and little storms," Alexis said. "I tried to explain to her it was a big storm."

When Annabelle walked into her Paola home and saw her dad, she said with a smile, "We saw a really big storm."

"That's the understatement of the century," Alexis said.

FEATURE STORY

Daily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

Iola Register

Susan Lynn

Wow! What a story. What a great way to turn a story about history into something amazing. The story of a man's demons lead him to bomb three saloons is tragic. Then when it carries into the next generation is more amazing. It was good to talk to some family members. There's probably more stories here. Some skills were shown in telling story.

SECOND PLACE

High Plains Daily Leader

Jessica Crawford

Interesting story of the amazing coincidences of Japanese identical twins reunited after 50 years. Nice job of covering a lot of time and presenting interesting details without including too much.

THIRD PLACE

El Dorado Times

Robin Nixon

Great lead. I'll be honest, this isn't much of a story. IT was just so skillfully presented, I had to pick it over better stories. This is a nice job of finding something interesting about an ordinary event. There are always stories like this in the community that don't always get told. The quotes provide good insight into the man's personality.

By Susan Lynn

Judy Brownback is coming around to accepting Iola's celebration tonight of Charley Melvin, the Mad Bomber. Brownback, of Blue Mound, is Melvin's great-granddaughter. Melvin's explosive antics of 1905 have had wide-ranging repercussions along the Melvin family lines, including bouts of depression and alcoholism, Brownback said.

The city's sesquicentennial committee and other organizations are observing tonight the July 10, 1905 bombings of three saloons as a landmark occasion in Iola's 150-year history.

Brownback's visit to the Register on Wednesday helped flesh out Melvin's character.

"He was crazy, yes. A religious zealot, yes," Brownback said.

Born in Chicago, Melvin was raised in Bates County, Mo., across the Linn County line. As a youth he had a vision that God selected him to "strike the rum power a blow," he told his wife, Etta, in a letter.

For many years he nurtured that vision, confident of God's purpose for him, which "has been given to but few people on this earth ... but I am one of that few. I have been led by the spirit of God in the pillar of fire, just as truly as ever Moses was led by God."

Melvin's committal to insane asylums and purchase of firearms were all part of a divine plan, he wrote. But it was after a drunken spree — "for the purpose of learning and studying the drink

problem — and perhaps the hellacious hangover, that Melvin became clear of purpose.

"I was so mad I decided to kill every jointist in town, or die in the attempt."

By the time of the 1905 bombings, Melvin had had a string of stays in asylums. His stint as a teacher was short-lived and he and his young family lived meagerly by vegetable truck farming. Charles and Etta had eight children. A daughter, Athol Marie, starved to death at age 1 1/2 from a diet of primarily green beans, Brownback said, another indication of Melvin's belief "that God will provide," though their garden could not. Another child, Lee Melvin, died at birth or shortly thereafter. The family moved to Iola around 1900, according to birth records, with the last three of their children born here.

Melvin was 42 at the time of the bombings. After the explosions he fled town and was on the lam for more than a month. Authorities found him in Iowa. He was found guilty of his crimes and sentenced on Sept. 15, 1905 to prison for a maximum of 15 years. He languished in the state penitentiary for nine years until, at death's door, he was released. He died two months later of "tuberculosis of the bowels," at his sister's in Falls City. Melvin was not sent to Iola, Brownback said, because of the family's dire financial straits and the possible ill feeling the townsfolk held toward him.

Melvin's vendetta on Iola drinking establishments "was very traumatic" for the family,

Brownback said.

His daughter, Naomi, grandmother to Brownback, tried to commit suicide and was institutionalized twice in Wichita, she said.

Melvin's son, Tim, suffered from alcoholism and also spent time at the mental hospital in Osawatimie.

Daughter Penny died of a botched abortion in Coffeyville, bleeding to death.

And grandson Walter Earl Walton also suffered from alcoholism.

One daughter's career also was likely influenced by her father. Veva Frances became a nurse in a psychiatric hospital in California. Veva was born eight months after the bombings.

Melvin's notoriety "was so hard on the family," Brownback said, forcing the older children to support the family at early ages. Etta took work taking care of others' newborns from 1909 to 1938.

Etta Melvin carefully recorded the names of the 183 babies she took care of in a small book. She also recorded the names of the doctors who delivered them. Baby No. 49 was Iola's June Elizabeth Thompson, now Toland, born June 19, 1914.

FEATURE STORY

Daily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Hays Daily News

Nick Schwien

One of several submittals by same author; well done examination of the importance of small town school districts. Good photos - solid writing.

SECOND PLACE

Garden City Telegram

Shajia Ahmad

A gem! Great story that looks back on an infamous crime and capturing the memories and story of someone in the know. These are the stories that can be lost forever and the reporter captured a vital voice.

THIRD PLACE

Dodge City Daily Globe

Claire O'Brien

A gem! Great story that looks back on an infamous crime and capturing the memories and story of someone in the know. There are the stories that can be lost forever and the reporter captured a vital voice. In this case, the story is one of our veterans. So, important to tell their stories before they are gone forever.

By Nick Scheien

The players sat in the locker room, dripping with sweat fresh from victory.

Their leader, their head coach, walked back out of his office and looked at the members of his team. Those who had battled so courageously and victoriously just minutes before.

Suddenly, a pitter-patter started to fall outside. Then a more constant, heavy rain unleashed after holding off for most of the game.

The drops dripped off the top of Quinter High School onto the cement landing outside the football team's locker room. It was the beginning of a storm, or at least another night of rain in northwest Kansas.

Greg Woolf, the head coach of the Bulldogs, took a deep breath and exhaled.

The locker room was quiet.

The Bulldogs, one of the top teams in Eight-Man, Division I in the state, were about to face a storm - but not outside.

None of the players on the team knew Mother Nature had opened her eyes and began pouring tears down on their little portion of the world. Neither did the coaches.

The storm they were about to face was different, unexpected.

Woolf, a mountain of a man and a former football player himself, opened his mouth and began to speak as his eyes reddened and his heart became heavy.

"You guys know my priorities are always God, my relationship with Jesus Christ, my family, teaching and you guys," Woolf

said. "And I love you guys."

There was a pause, then a few more words.

The pitter-patter on the ground no longer was outside the door.

It was inside the locker room, on the floor in the form of tears from the players.

A town of faith

The lyrics from the Christian band Casting Crowns song "Praise You in This Storm" can find a lot of meaning in Quinter.

"I'll praise you in this storm and I will lift my hands for you are who you are no matter where I am and every tear I've cried you hold in your hand you never left my side and though my heart is torn I will praise you in this storm."

Quinter has been through a lot through the years. The good times and bad. The ups and downs.

There's always some constant battle, perhaps now fighting population decline like most towns in western Kansas.

But one thing constant in the small Gove County town is faith. And there's a lot of it.

"It's a lovely community," said 93-year-old Helen Tilton, a 1932 QHS grad. "Our churches have no problem getting along together, and that's wonderful."

You can see the pride in the town's faith-based way of life at one of its goodwill stores.

There, Mary Jane Swihart continuously is working her nimble fingers for the good of others - including children in Romania.

Swihart was touched years ago after reading an old letter she found from her parents to her grandparents about mission work in China.

"How I got started was I read a letter my parents had sent home, and they were missionaries in China," Swihart said. "They sent home letters to their folks, and in a couple of them, my father saw over a dozen children frozen to death on his way to town. That's when God convicted me to try to help cold children in the world today."

Swihart organized Baby Bundles to be sent to Romania, helping cold children in a time of need. The bundles include a few outfits and undershirts, six diapers, booties made by prisoners from Ellsworth, rubber pants, blankets and a baby bottle - all rolled up in a comforter.

There is no heat or air conditioning in the building. Instead, the money that would be used for that is needed to help with the bundles, shipping and anything else that comes up.

Swihart herself doesn't even stake her claim as owner of the business.

"God's the owner, and I just work here," she said.

Strength of security

Everyone looks out for everyone in small towns. Quinter is no different.

With that comes a sense of security.

Friday morning's farmers market on the north end of town proved that.

Vendors could set up curbside and sell their homemade goods.

"It's rural and small, and I

like that,” Jodi Swihart, niece of Mary Jane Swihart, said as she sat in a chair selling goods at the farmers market. “Everybody knows your business, and you know everybody else’s. But there’s some security in that.”

Jodi Swihart was home-schooled and graduated in 2004. But she wouldn’t have wanted to grow up anywhere else.

“It’s a very good place to grow up,” she said. “I work at the library, and we have kids come and go every day. It’s just safe. There’s kids on the street at all times of the day by themselves just because they can be.”

She lived for a time away from Quinter and got a taste of what life outside a small town is like. And it wasn’t all that comfortable.

“I lived in Pennsylvania for a year, and it’s just different,” she said. “People had to help me know what it was safe to do because I was used to the freedom. You just don’t think about going somewhere by yourself at night here because who’s going to get you? Your neighbor, Frank?”

Upbringing

Business was brisk at the Food Pride grocery store in Quinter. And that’s exactly what Nancy Bowman was hoping for late Friday morning.

“It’s a chance to see my neighbors,” Bowman said about working at the store.

Bowman began working at the business during the summer. She grew up in Quinter and enjoys the small town.

“The way I was brought up in a plain church, we were just taught a good work ethic and to

watch out for your neighbors,” Bowman said. “We were taught to look out for each other.”

That’s what Bowman said makes for a strong tradition of family values in the town.

As for Gary Kesler, another employee at Food Pride, he tells Bowman it “must be our upbringing,” joking from across the store.

Kesler and his wife, Laura, who works at KansasLand Bank across the street, had two sons go through the school system, Grady and Brice.

Gary is a QHS grad himself, earning a diploma in 1973. He’s seen changes in the school and town since he grew up there.

Agriculture used to have a strong base in the community, and it still does, but not what it used to. Now, Kesler said, the hospital is a big draw.

“Basically agriculture based, but that’s been lost somewhat now,” he said. “The hospital right now is probably the biggest drawing card right now.”

But one thing has stayed the same for Quinter since Kesler graced the halls of the school. And that’s the fact that the school system has remained strong academically and athletically.

“Athletically, academically,” Kesler said, “we don’t have to take a backseat to anybody - that’s for sure.”

Main Street pride

Tilton, who will turn 94 on Oct. 1, jokes about Quinter’s financial significance in the region.

“We think we must be the banking center of northwest Kansas,” Tilton said with a laugh. “We have three banks, you

know.”

One of those banks was the brainchild of Scott Bird, a 1978 Quinter graduate. Bird is president of the bank and co-owner of Food Pride, along with his wife, Sheryl.

“We basically re-established a local community bank in town,” Bird said about KansasLand Bank that opened in May 2006.

“The community goes kind of how the business leaders on Main Street go - as far as the tone is set,” Bird said. “When you’re community-minded and you have investment in your community, you have to get into the community. By nature, you’re deeply involved.”

Bird works alongside Laura Kesler, who’s the bank’s vice president. Kesler and Bird both were in the same 1978 graduating class that had nearly 36 students - one of the largest in school history, Bird guesses.

The two have worked alongside each other for many years and can finish each other’s sentences and thoughts. Bird and Laura’s husband, Gary, also have spent time coaching summer basketball together.

But Bird knows the town always has had a solid work ethic.

“I think Quinter has always had that spirit,” said Bird, whose son, Matt, is a starter on this year’s football team. “You go in cycles a little bit. When I first started at the bank, the people that were on Main Street then, now a lot of that has turned over to a newer, younger generation. You’ll continue to see that. A really good story about improvement is Jack and Doris

Tebow with Ray’s Pharmacy.”

The Tebows recently moved a few storefronts south on Main Street to a larger location. There, they have renovated an old theater building that now houses Ray’s Pharmacy and Q Value.

Both Tebows grew up in Larned and lived in Wyoming and Indianapolis before moving to Great Bend. Then an opportunity for the couple to own their own grocery store popped up in Quinter.

It’s been 16 years since that opportunity happened.

“If the community - and bank, especially - wouldn’t have been behind it, it wouldn’t have worked,” Doris Tebow said.

The Tebows are working on settling into their new location and plan a grand opening in October. That grand opening will feature one of the few large soda fountains in Kansas, one that when completely refinished will be nearly 30 feet long and more than 12 feet high and dates back to 1904.

Role of the school

For Laura Kesler, a high school in the town is an essential.

And it’s a binding force for the community.

“When you live in a small town, you don’t have the entertainment like the larger towns have with a movie theater or Putt-Putt course,” said Kesler, who is proud to mention her son, Grady, played on the Class 2A undefeated state basketball title team in 2004. “So your entertainment really is your school. Your kids provide the entertainment for the whole community, and that’s why the whole town will turn out for a

ball game or forensics meet. That is the entertainment we have here - the kids.”

But it’s not just entertainment. The school is much more than that.

“It’s the survival of them. It really is,” Kesler said about schools in small towns.

QHS Principal Tucker Woolsey grew up in Oberlin and knows the importance of school districts in small towns. He’s seen changes, too, and knows towns nearly dry up when schools close.

“It’s the lifeblood. Without it, I think - like many small schools around - there isn’t a town,” Woolsey said. “More than that, the way the school system is ran shows the general quality of the school system in any town, and vice versa.”

The enrollment number for Quinter for the year is 144 for grades seven through 12. But the inevitable decline is not new to northwest Kansas.

“We’ve had that same problem,” Woolsey said.

“We’ve had a pretty big drop in enrollment the last several years. My first year here, we had 160 in seven through 12. We were down as low as 136 at the start of last year, and now we’re up a few students. We’ve had those issues before. To get people into the community, you need to have jobs, something in town to draw people in. For as far back as anyone can remember, those jobs were farming. But the way the economy is and the way farming has gone, it’s just changed the face of what farming looks like. Also, industry has changed.”

The bull’s-eye

Quinter has been strong in sports and academics throughout its history. The football team has won two state titles, one in 1973 in Class A, the other in 1992 in the Eight-Man, Division I ranks.

Then there's been the numerous boys' and girls' track titles.

The state crowns in scholar's bowl and forensics.

And the 2004 state title in 2A boys' basketball.

Last year, the football team finished with a 10-1 record after suffering through a rough 11-man schedule years prior.

And the 2008-09 boys' basketball team finished as state runner-up to Hanover in the 1A ranks. All the trophies of success line the hallways outside the gymnasium and near the cafeteria.

"We've had a lot of success over the years here in basketball and football recently," head boys' basketball coach John Crist said. "And we've had success in football before. We have two state championships, and all the track championships we've won. We've had tremendous success. I feel like as a coach, we always feel like we have a big bull's-eye on our backs everywhere we go. People love to beat Quinter.

"I look at it as a positive, because if they're getting up for you, then that means you're doing something right. And we try to feed off of that. The expectations for the boys this year are pretty high, both for football and basketball with what we accomplished last year. I know this senior class has talked about winning state championships, and I feel in

order to do that, you have to talk about it. You have to be able to dream it, see it and achieve it. You have to believe it. Hopefully the kids can step up and have a successful season in football, basketball and track and everything."

While Crist relishes the fact that Quinter has caught the eye of several people through the years, he also knows the town still faces some of the same problems as other regional cities.

"The school is tremendously important," Crist said. "You can look around the area, and the communities where the schools have closed down have seen the communities kind of dry up. I think if you don't have a school, you basically lose your community. I think the school is tremendously important. We've lost numbers just like everyone else has in western Kansas, but our grade school numbers are hanging on pretty good now. They've steadied out a bit. Hopefully our numbers will come back eventually, but it's a hard time for every school in the state right now. Obviously we don't want to lose our school."

'Q' stands for Quinter. One of Quinter's luxuries is Dairy Queen. Joni Kerns is in her 10th year as the owner of the local establishment, one of basically three eating joints in Quinter, along with the Pizza Station and the Q-Inn.

"I wanted people to know where Quinter was because of the Dairy Queen," Kerns said, noting her pride in her new sign that now features the large letters, DQ.

Kerns is a 1976 QHS graduate and tries to give back to the school as much as possible, sponsoring T-shirts for the school's basketball tournament - the Castle Rock Classic - and helping with the FFA club's pheasant hunters' breakfast.

She also has several high school kids working for her.

"Anything to do with athletics and kids," Kerns said. "I'm not necessarily teaching them book education, but life skills."

The Dairy Queen was built in 1968 and was one of the only eating establishments along Interstate 70 between Kansas City and Denver. That's because cities such as Hays, Colby and Goodland hadn't built out closer to the main national highway yet.

"Everybody knew where Quinter was because of it," Kerns said.

A cut above Zach Nemechek said it started as sort of a joke. Now, it's starting to catch on with other players.

The senior center and nose guard began getting a mohawk from coach Greg Woolf last year.

Nemechek, whose father, Victor, is a doctor in town, told Woolf he was going to get a haircut after lifting weights last year. The coach told him he would do it for free.

Now, every week or a week and a half, Nemechek gets a close shave.

This year, more players have followed suit.

"I'd kind of nudge the kids in the ribs and say, 'What about a mohawk today?'" the light-hearted Nemechek said.

"Then one turned into two,

two to four, and now about 10 people have them," Nemechek said.

But he's the only one Woolf gives a haircut to. Nemechek jokes that's because Woolf is too intimidating, even for himself. That says something, especially since Nemechek is well over 6 feet tall and weighs about 240 pounds.

"Even if he was a foot shorter than me, he'd still be the most intimidating guy," Nemechek said. "He's still got that personality about him that when he's in the room, there's no goofing off around him. You respect that he's there. On the other end of the spectrum, he's the nicest guy to play for. I couldn't imagine playing for another coach. I love the way he handles the other coaches, and each one has his own say."

A storm brews

The pain started Monday night and became too unbearable for the head coach to stand any longer.

Late that night, he went to the hospital and missed practices the rest of the week.

That meant assistant coach Brian Roesch was in charge of the offense and game plan. The defensive assignment went as usual to assistant Jeff Ruckman.

And one thing became certain Wednesday. That's when the team decide it was going to play for a shutout Friday night against Palco.

The game ball would be labeled with a "goose egg" and presented to Woolf if he made it back for the game.

Woolf, in his seventh year as Quinter coach, had exploratory

surgery mid-week on his lower stomach and eventually was released. He showed up mid-afternoon Friday at the school to talk with his players and coaches and see how things were going.

He knew nothing of the team's goal.

Nemechek and fellow senior Thatcher Deaton wanted a few minutes to talk to the team before the game. The coaching staff granted them their wish.

"We're going to get the shutout, sign the ball and give it to coach," they reiterated to the team before the squad gathered for a quick prayer.

Then the coaching staff came in, and Roesch talked to the team before Woolf entered the room.

"We're going to put that goose egg on the ball and sign it," he said, his eyes growing red and fighting back tears. "Just do it."

Then Woolf entered.

"God gave you the ability to play and to come out and do what you can do," Woolf said. "We are one team. Individuals stay here."

As the players left the locker room and entered into the night air, each placed a hand on a sign near the doorway that read: "I am only one, but I am one. I can't do everything, but I can do something. And what I can do, I ought to do. And what I ought to do, by the grace of God, I shall do."

The players walked out of the locker room and began their walk of faith.

Fourth and goal

Quinter took control in the second quarter, breaking open a 6-0 game at the end of the first

quarter to lead 22-0 at halftime.

Another 22 points in the third quarter put the game well in the Bulldogs' hand.

But it wasn't enough, and just settling for a victory wasn't going to satisfy the team.

The group wanted a shutout, the school's first since shifting back to the eight-man ranks last year.

And they wanted it for their coach.

But Woolf began substituting when the game got out of hand, allowing other players a chance to improve. It was something he had done in many games.

With Quinter leading 44-0 and 8:16 to play, Palco faced a fourth-and-goal from the two-yard line.

The shutout was in jeopardy, especially with the Roosters' starters still in the game and Quinter's second string on the field.

Palco quarterback Blake Gehring dropped back to pass, and the ball released off his fingers in a near-perfect spiral.

It landed right in the hands of Quinter senior Skyler Wittman, who returned the interception two yards deep out of the end zone to the five-yard line.

Later in the game, senior Jordon Hargitt broke loose for a long touchdown run, giving the Bulldogs a 50-0 win thanks to the 45-point rule in the eight-man ranks.

"He starts subbing younger kids in, and Ruck and I are like ..." Roesch said, throwing his hands up in the air, describing the sideline scene from the couch in the coaches' office.

"I'm thinking, 'You want the

game ball or not?'" Ruckman pipes in jokingly about his thoughts when the head coach started substituting.

"And the kid picks it off in the end zone," Roesch said, laughing.

"I told you guys, God had his hands in it," Woolf said.

The storm arrives

Inside the steamy locker room following the win, Roesch and the team presented Woolf with the game ball, letting him know about the goal of the shutout.

Woolf grabbed the ball and held it in the air, then took a few steps into the coach's office and returned.

Outside, the rain started to fall. Inside, the players listened to their towering coach talk about priorities.

And they learned their coach was facing a whole new game.

"I found out today," Woolf told his team, "that I have cancer in my belly."

He told the players he didn't know exactly where it was, how bad it was. Tests in Hays a few days later would provide more answers.

The rain pitter-pattered outside. The tears pitter-pattered inside.

"Last year, we came through a lot," Woolf told his team. "And we knew we were going to have to go through some things this year. I didn't realize it was going to be this. It's kind of a kick in the gut to me and my family also."

"My life is going to change here for the next 10 to 12 weeks, and I'm going to be relying on you big time," Woolf continued. "You guys know I have victory in Christ, and my God is a

wonderful God who created the universe and can take care of anything. He's bigger than anything that's growing inside of me."

"We are not going to let this affect us. Our big theme this year is 'one.'"

"I love you guys to death. You guys are just going to have to roll with it. This does not change our goal one bit. What is it? Our goal is what? To win a state championship. Nothing is changing off of that."

Praise in the storm

Each player took turns grabbing a marker and signing the game ball for their coach, their leader, who just told them he was beginning to face a battle.

Their words and thoughts inscribed on the ball let him know he wouldn't be facing it alone.

"Look at this," Woolf told Roesch in the office after all the players had left.

"God bless," Roesch said, looking at the ball.

It was the end to a long week. It was the realization that life was changing.

"It was brutal," Woolf said about the week. "I'd put it up there as one of tougher ones. The toughest thing for me right now is the emotional end of it and having to tell people. That's what's tough. It tore me up when I had to tell my son and my daughter because I have my two older ones. When I say these guys are my family, they are. They're over at my house all the time. They're in my youth group."

Yet, despite what's staring Woolf, the coaching staff,

team and town in the face, the mountain of a man wasn't about to waver in his faith.

"You always say we're never bigger than the game," Roesch said.

"You're right," Woolf said. "There's going to be a lot of teaching moments this year."

It will be teaching, mingled with faith - something that's sometimes frowned upon in today's age of separation of church and state. But not in Quinter. Not with a community so strong in its faith.

"Nobody has ever said a word to us," Woolf said about keeping religion out of the school. "As a matter of fact, I've had more people come up and talk to me about things their kids have come home with, instead of someone saying, 'You can't say that to my kid.' I've had more people come up and thank us for how we talk to the kids and what we're talking to them about. And it's not just parents; it's grandparents coming up and talking to me about it and thanking me for having the convictions for not going with what the world says but doing what's right."

"And I always know that if it came time where someone said you can't do it anymore, then, whatever. It's not going to stop. The kids like it. The thing is, the kids like hearing the truth - and they don't want it watered down. They want their football straight up, and we tell them straight up what's going on. And it's the same way in our youth groups. And they appreciate that."

Woolf and Roesch both are youth leaders at their churches,

and Ruckman is a Baptist minister in town.

"There's not a lot of separation between church and state on our team," Woolf said.

"It's real, man," Ruckman said. "It's not a job. It's life. We're going to serve the Lord and serve the Lord in our coaching and everything we do."

Nor would they want there to be separation.

Not on their team.

Not in their school.

Not in Quinter.

Especially now that a storm is bearing down on the community.

FEATURE STORY

Daily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Lawrence Journal-World

Christine Metz

This is such a sensitive subject - reporter did a great job of pulling together a compelling story, resources for victims, and awarding - winning quotes.

SECOND PLACE

Wichita Eagle

Fred Mann, Jeannie Koranda, Suzanne Tobias

Best of several stories that dealt with uninsured. This one did best job of pulling together statistics and painting the picture of the affected

THIRD PLACE

Salina Journal

Gary Demuth

A good story about dying “alone” and the importance of pre-planning. Reporter did a great job of pulling a personal story into a piece that will help spur readers to take action.

NEWS STORY

Nondaily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

Bonner Springs Chieftain

Nicole Kelley

Nicole brought readers into the fire from the very beginning. An excellent choice for a lead. Story contained lots of details and answered readers likely questions. Quotes were used wisely.

SECOND PLACE

Basehor Sentinel

Kaitlyn Syring

Difficult material handled professionally. Kaitlyn is a strong writer who includes a lot of details. One of her other submissions was also near the top three.

THIRD PLACE

Wyandotte West

Mary Rupert

A detailed read, the story seemed fair to both sides of a controversial topic. I thought I understood the situation and arguments.

NEWS STORY

Nondaily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Ellsworth County

Linda Mowery-Denning

This is how you write news and tell a story by getting the reader involved through description and good first hand account of what the writer observed while craftily piecing the elements of what those involved saw, felt and experienced.

SECOND PLACE

Ellsworth County

Alan Rusch

Good storytelling. It always helps to have a good source who opens up to the writer explaining things colorfully and emotionally. Still, you pieced it all together and it turned out to be a great story.

THIRD PLACE

Louisburg Herald

Aaron Cedeno

Story is well told. Writer certainly has a gift of storytelling in an artful, colorful and descriptive way. But need to incorporate more quotes/comments from sources who will spice up your work even more, making your story even better.

NEWS STORY

Nondaily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Miami County Republic

Brian McCauley

Great job hooking me in, when turned the page to the jump and found out the discovery, my jaw dropped. Nice job talking to a variety of sources. Nicely written.

SECOND PLACE

Johnson County Sun

Chuck Kurtz

Very interesting subject - it's something the public worries about. Nicely written - good background info.

THIRD PLACE

Olathe News

Kevin Wright

Nice piece. I like the details about the day-to-day, behind the scenes of the spelling bee and the work she did to get there. Nicely written.

By Brian McCauley

It was the last place Brian Grittando wanted to go.

After sitting next to his brother's covered body on the shoulder of U.S. Highway 169 just south of Paola following a fatal accident Jan. 28, Grittando would rather have never returned to that stretch of highway near the 311th Street overpass.

But another family member wanted to place a cross and see the location of the accident. According to a Kansas Highway Patrol report, Anthony Wileford, 43, who was living with Grittando in Osawatomie, drove off the road and hit a guard rail, causing the vehicle to overturn and eject him at 4:24 p.m. Jan. 28. He was pronounced dead at the scene.

Grittando and his fellow family member slowly walked along the battered guard rail Feb. 4, exactly one week after the incident took place. Pieces of twisted metal were still strewn throughout the ditch, remnants of the horrific accident that took Wileford's life.

But for Grittando, the incident was about to become even more horrifying. As he glanced up at the rocks that line the embankment underneath the bridge, he saw something that immediately made him hop the guardrail and scurry up the slope. His fears became reality when he realized that what he was looking at was portions of his brother's remains.

The gruesome realization came on the heels of a funeral service for his brother that Grittando attended four days

earlier. Wileford was cremated, with the ashes going to his mother, but Grittando said his recent discovery turned all of that closure upside down.

"My brother is not in that urn, he's still out on that highway," Grittando said. "He shouldn't be treated like road kill."

Looking for answers, Grittando said he called several officials who responded to the accident.

When the call went out shortly before 4:30 p.m. Jan. 28, crews from Paola Volunteer Fire Department, Paola Police Department, Miami County Emergency Medical Services and others responded to the scene. The Kansas Highway Patrol eventually took over the scene and handled the accident investigation.

Miami County EMS director Jason Jenkins said there currently are four death investigators on the EMS staff. When a fatality is reported, a death investigator will go to the site and process the scene, which includes taking photographs and sometimes putting the body into a body bag.

Typically, then a call is made to a local funeral home, which sends a vehicle out to pick up the body and take it for an autopsy, which often takes place at KU Medical Center.

Trent Knewtson is the district coroner for Miami, Linn and Bourbon counties, but unlike more than a decade ago, when death investigators weren't on staff, Knewtson rarely needs to go out to a scene. Instead, the death investigators handle the investigation and send the paperwork to Knewtson's office.

Rita Stanchfield, who works with Knewtson and has handled that paperwork for several years, said the death investigators have really helped the process become more smooth. Still, she admits there are some accident scenes in which it is almost impossible, with the manpower available, to ensure that everything is cleaned up.

Paola Police Chief Dave Smail said it appears the vehicle hit the guard rail going about 70 miles per hour, causing it to overturn several times and spray debris over an estimated 300-foot stretch along the highway.

Jenkins said a death investigator was on the scene shortly after the accident, but officials had to wait and see if KHP planned to send equipment and personnel to create a forensic map of the scene.

KHP Lt. Tom Catania said the diagrams are part of the thorough investigation process the department does for most fatal accidents, but since this particular accident only involved one vehicle with a sole occupant, and several witnesses saw the event, the decision was made to paint the scene and clear it as soon as possible because of the impending rush hour. Painting the scene means much of the evidence was marked using paint for a future investigation.

Jenkins said by the time the death investigator got the go-ahead to process the body, it was already getting dark. Joe Moreland of Eddy-Birchard Funeral Home in Osawatomie was called to the scene to collect the body for transport to KU Medical Center. He said he

helped the investigator get what they could into a body bag, and he remembers several officials with flashlights walking up and down the road, in a nearby field and along the rocks underneath the bridge looking for anything that needed to be collected.

Grittando has been searching for the one agency responsible for cleanup, but he's discovered that all of the agencies typically work together.

"The people on the scene basically take it on as their responsibility," Stanchfield said. "I understand their concern, and them being upset, but everybody out there did their best."

Police, fire, EMS and KHP officials all said they don't have the needed equipment or training to completely clean a messy fatality scene. Police and fire officials did say they have equipment to handle biohazards. Paola Fire Chief Andy Martin also said firefighters will sometimes use their hose to clear blood from a highway accident, but that wasn't needed for this fatality.

Undersheriff Mark Schmidt said most of the sheriff's office dealings with cleaning up fatality scenes have been through the funeral homes.

Chad Wilson of Penwell-Gabel Funeral Home said he has retrieved fatality victims in Miami County for several years. He said his main role is to go and pick up the body, but he would always help out to ensure that everything was accounted for.

He too, though, said it can be difficult if the accident occurred at night.

"We don't go back out the

next day, but somebody should," he said.

That somebody could be an independent cleanup crew company, which Moreland said he's heard are sometimes called to accident scenes, although it's not the funeral home's responsibility to do so.

Jenkins said the companies are commonly called to clean up crime scenes inside a building, but he is not familiar with them being used for roadside fatalities.

After bouncing from organization to organization, Grittando finally decided to take matters into his own hands. He went back to the scene Feb. 4 and collected as much of his brother's remains as he could and stored them in two bags in a freezer.

He said he contacted officials at the funeral home in Kansas City, Kan., where his brother was cremated, and they agreed to cremate any other remains free of charge if they are delivered. Grittando said he videotaped everything he did for future record.

"It's the most embarrassing and disgusting thing I've ever seen or heard of in my life," he said. "It's inhumane."

Jenkins, Smail, Moreland and other officials all agreed that, considering the extent of the accident and the location of the rocks piled underneath the bridge, it would have been almost impossible to not leave something small behind.

"They were all looking with flashlights," Moreland said. "If something has been found out there, it was just missed."

NEWS STORY

Daily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

Ottawa Herald

Meagan Patton

Nice coverage of a very unusual event. Give credit to quick action by witness of a car backing over a little girl.

SECOND PLACE

Iola Register

Ann Kazmierczak

Great humor, interest when 10 year old gets a petition to save a drive-in. Good story on how it was done.

THIRD PLACE

High Plains Daily Leader

Earl Watt

Nice coverage of a very unusual meter hit. Good detail in the story. I'm sure the meter strike was the talk of the town.

By Meagan Patton

Who says superheroes only are in comic books? A young girl and her family are calling a local man their "Superman" after he lifted a car off of her in an accident early Friday morning.

Nick Harris, 32, was dropping off his daughter, 8-year-old Cheyenne, at Eugene Field Elementary school shortly before 8 a.m. when he saw the incident unfolding on Tremont Avenue - a driver backing her vehicle out of a driveway who was about to hit a student.

"I was getting ready to pull the emergency brake when I looked up and saw the vehicle backing over her," Harris said. "I didn't even think. I ran over there as fast as I could, grabbed the rear end of the car and lifted and pushed as hard as I could to get the tire off the child."

That's when he said he noticed the girl, a 6-year-old first-grader, was one of his daughter's closest friends from school.

He told the driver of the car, 26-year-old Sarah Osladil, to put it in neutral to get the pressure off the girl, he said. He then carried the girl, who was screaming in pain, he said, over to the sidewalk.

"I got her backpack unstuck underneath the car," Harris said. "I didn't want to jerk her, but I had to move her, so I put her on the side of the road next to the driveway."

He said he was going to go get his phone to call 911, but the girl said she wanted him to stay with her.

"I was the only one she knew, so I stayed there until her mother

got there," Harris said.

An ambulance took the child to Ransom Memorial Hospital, Ottawa, and then by air ambulance to Children's Mercy Hospital, Kansas City, Mo. However, she suffered only minor injuries, including a concussion and some road rash, Harris said, and was able to go home the same day.

Harris said he visited her later that day.

When he got there, he was greeted by an alert, happy and grateful girl, who ran up to him and gave him a hug, Harris said.

"I was shocked," Harris said.

"I really didn't expect for her to be running up to me and squeezing me. From what I seen with my own two eyes, she should not be walking right now."

And that wasn't the only thing that amazed Harris that day. He still doesn't know how he found the strength to lift the vehicle off of her, he said.

"I know later on that day I tried a couple different times to lift a car like I did, and I couldn't do it," Harris said. "But somehow, adrenaline, hand of God, whatever you want to call it, I don't know how I did it. It just happened."

The next day, the girl attended Harris' daughter's roller skating birthday party, where she told everyone he was her Superman.

But Harris said he was simply a parent doing the right thing.

"I seen a situation, and I handled the situation the way I thought it needed handled," Harris said. "The car had to get off of her. I reacted without thinking."

"I don't consider myself a hero at all. People can call it

what they want, but I'm just a dad who happened to be at the right place at the right time. I hope any parent who would have seen what I seen would have reacted the same way."

He wasn't hoping for any recognition, he said. He was just grateful the girl was OK.

"Everything happens for a reason," Harris said. "To me, it was payment enough when she gave me that huge hug and said, 'Thanks, Superman.'"

NEWS STORY

Daily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Dodge City Daily Globe

Claire O'Brien

Excellent story in large part by a hard to get jail interview. Nice balance, thorough reporting that isn't always there in criminal stories. I'm sure this was a great interest to the community.

SECOND PLACE

Hays Daily News

Gayle Weber

Well-written story about small towns efforts to keep competing and stay alive. Daily News had many well written stories. It was amazing because all of these stories were "produced" by good, old-fashioned reporting without having major events fall into newspapers lap.

THIRD PLACE

Manhattan Mercury

Bill Felber

Well-researched story on power and expenditures. Article raises serious questions about KSU policies on a range of issues. I'm scratching my head why this hasn't been more widely reported? It would seem there could be financial questions about everything from Bill Snyders pay to the ability to pay for future athletic scholarships. I'm curious as to what happened.

NEWS STORY

Daily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Topeka Capital-Journal

Jan Biles

Story takes readers inside the life of the first gay person discharged under “don’t ask” policy. Extremely well-written and complete

SECOND PLACE

Kansas City Star

Judy Thomas

Slain doctor was more than an abortionist with devil horns and tail, as we discover with colorful and complete profile

THIRD PLACE

Hutchinson News

Edie Ross

After 2 years, we know with precise details how Greensburg is rebuilding after 2007 tornado. Story has every detail I could imagine.

INVESTIGATIVE STORY

Nondaily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

Bonner Springs Chieftain

Melissa Treolo

Great lead. The story contains all the numbers, but Melissa starts with the human aspect. It got me interested and would keep readers hanging around for the details. Clearly the category leader. Stories in series complemented each other.

SECOND PLACE

Eudora News

David Oakes

Strong lead. Story laid out the situation, and it also gave us a view of what businesses that left the area were thinking. This kind of information is productive for a city.

THIRD PLACE

De Soto Explorer

Elvyn Jones

Solid detailed writing. This topic would be of great interest to the community's readers, and I think the rest of their questions were answered.

INVESTIGATIVE STORY

Nondaily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Washington County News

Tom Parker

Nice intro - it really pulled me in. The personal story of DeVol makes the issue hit home. Good job getting all the facts and explaining it fully.

SECOND PLACE

Atchison Globe

Patty Moore

Very interesting. Good job following through with additional coverage as it unfolded. Good job explaining the facts.

THIRD PLACE

The Mirror

Estuardo Garcia

Nice job talking to various sources and following from beginning to end.

By Tom Parker

It was a hacking, chronic cough that drove Leigh DeVol to the doctor. Coupled with the cough was an increasing shortness of breath, most noticeable when climbing stairs, something she often did at work. She figured it had something to do with allergies or her sinuses, something normal. Something treatable.

It was none of the above. Instead, DeVol was diagnosed with lung cancer, and it had metastasized and spread to her brain.

"It was a shock," she said. "I haven't smoked for 15 years." DeVol told her physician that her family had no history of cancer. Heart disease was another matter, though her grandparents lived to be in their nineties. "We thought our hearts would get us first," she said.

Her radiologist asked if she'd had her home tested for radon. Like a great number of people, DeVol had never heard of radon. She bought an inexpensive test kit and, after following the directions, tested the air in the basement of her Washington home. She then placed the kit in a self-addressed envelope and mailed it to the lab.

Radon is a naturally occurring gas produced from decaying uranium found in nearly all types of soils. It can't be seen, smelled or tasted. But it can be measured though the use of various types of equipment ranging from simple charcoal canisters or liquid scintillation devices to elaborate electronic ion chamber detectors.

Readings are assessed through picocuries (pCi), which measure radon's rate of radioactive decay. One picocurie equals one trillionth of a Curie, or 0.037 disintegrations per second. When calculated at four picocuries per liter, the EPA's threshold figure, there would be about 12,672 radioactive disintegrations in one liter of air during a 24-hour period.

According to the EPA, every home in America has some level of radon. Nationally, the average radon level in indoor air is 1.3 picocuries. Some houses have more, some less, depending on a number of factors, but mostly the amount of radon contamination is attributed to the real estate mantra of "location, location, location." Radon concentrations are very much a matter of where you live or, to put it another way, of what lies beneath your house. A risk assessment chart was established by the EPA to educate homeowners about the potential hazards associated with escalating levels of radon concentration. Anything under two picocuries is about average and almost impossible to reduce. Between two and four picocuries is a sort of no man's land where the amount of radon poses risks tantamount to dying of poison or in a car crash—risks that increase exponentially for smokers. In fact, the odds are so stacked against smokers that they have their own chart. Per the EPA, anything over four picocuries for smokers or non-smokers alike is cause for immediate action. DeVol's test returned an analysis of over 21 picocuries.

When she followed up with a

second test several months later, the results were worse: 22.9 picocuries. The air in DeVol's basement was potentially lethal.

Radon is everywhere. It seeps through the soil and vents into the atmosphere where we breathe it in along with pollen, pollutants, dust and a host of microorganisms. Because of air movement and dispersal, radon poses little threat outdoors. Indoors, it's another matter. Most homes have little air movement, so radon tends to concentrate. It seeps into houses through cracks in the walls, sump pumps, or joints and pipes that penetrate foundations. As if that weren't enough, buildings create a slight negative air pressure or suction to the underlying soil known as the stack effect. The stack effect actually pulls radon into the structure.

Radon's entry isn't confined only to homes with porous foundations or dirt crawl spaces, though. Newer homes with airtight windows and walls can exacerbate radon, and furnaces and air conditioners can circulate the gas throughout the house. Though radon is chemically and electrically inert, radioactive decay spawns radon progeny, atoms that are electrically charged. They attach themselves to particles of dust floating in the air, which are then inhaled. Once imbedded in the lung, they emit alpha particles that pierce through the internal cells of the respiratory tract causing mutations in the cellular DNA. And thus begins the process of carcinogenesis.

According to the EPA, radon

is a class A carcinogen and the second-leading cause of lung cancer in the U.S.. It's blamed for the deaths of 21,000 people annually. Only smoking is worse. Combine the two and you have a recipe for disaster.

Though DeVol considered herself a casual or social smoker—a pack would last her several weeks, she said—she was often around people who smoked heavily. And while nobody in the medical establishment was willing to blame radon for her cancer, statistics show that people with a history of smoking are ten times more likely to develop lung cancer in homes with elevated radon levels than nonsmokers.

The figures calculated by the EPA on their risk assessment charts are telling. For example, if 1,000 people who have never smoked were exposed to four picocuries over a lifetime, about seven people could develop lung cancer. Increase the radon level to ten picocuries and the cancer toll rises to 18 people. It doubles at 20 picocuries.

For 1,000 smokers exposed to four picocuries, the figure rockets to 62 possible cases of lung cancer. At 20 picocuries the number is 260 people.

“Lung cancer is a behavioral disease,” said Brian Hanson, a radon expert at the Kansas Radon Program at Kansas State University. “People have a large amount of control over it. Smokers can stop smoking and reduce their risk of lung cancer. Everyone else can check for radon in their homes, and then take steps to mitigate it.”

While the average number of

homes with elevated levels of radon is one in four according to EPA estimates, it's more like one in three in the state of Kansas, Hanson said. And in many places it's one in two.

“You're in Washington?” Hanson asks. “You're one in two.”

Radon testing kits easy to use and inexpensive. Most hardware stores sell them—Zabokrtsky's Ace Hardware in Washington has them in stock, as does Andy's Hardware in Hanover—and they're available at any extension office. “Protecting Your Home From Radon,” an educational guide including do-it-yourself information for mitigation, is available for loan at the River Valley Extension District office in the Washington County Courthouse. Additional information published by the Kansas Radon program is available free of charge.

To Ross Mosteller, extension agent for the district, the fact that DeVol's house had elevated radon readings was anything but a surprise.

“If you live here, your levels will be high,” he said.

When Mosteller tested his home, the results indicated high levels of radon in the basement. Others who have purchased test kits from the extension office reported similar results, he said.

That's when they return to the extension office and ask, “What do I do now?”

It is, as they say, the million-dollar question.

Mosteller's advice is to decide whether to invest in mitigation construction, a process that could reach into the thousands of dollars, or, on a less costly note,

to determine your own personal acceptable level of risk.

“There are so many things to be afraid of,” he said. “We have to decide how we're going to live.”

Mosteller's concession was to move his children's playroom from the basement to the first floor.

“It's a lifestyle modification,” he said. “We spend a little less time in the basement, but it doesn't stop us from going down there.”

“It's one of the things we fight all the time,” Hanson said. “People can't see radon, they can't smell it, they can't taste it, so it's not that big of a deal. Here's the long and the short of it: there's no safe level of radon.” Some latitude can be allowed in homes reading less than four picocuries, Hanson said, but the state strenuously recommends mitigation for homes with levels between four and eight picocuries. “Within those measurements,” he said, “you should try to reduce the levels within the next six months. At the least, you should move people out of the basement if they're living there.”

While 22 picocuries sounds high, it's not the state record—that would be 260 picocuries found in one home, with a world record cresting at 2,000. As for the EPA's risk assessment charts, Hanson said the figures are based on a person's exposure to radon for nine to 10 hours per day.

“We recognize the fact that people aren't in their homes all the time,” he said. “But when they're home, do the children play in the basement, or do

people sleep down there? If so, they're at risk.”

Testing should be done under winter conditions, he said, with windows and doors closed. The initial test should be a short-term test, followed by a long-term test if the figures show elevated measurements in the lower numbers. For higher levels such as what DeVol found, another short-term test should be used as a follow-up.

“If the number is that high, the tests don't lie,” Hanson said. Mitigation usually involves venting the basement through means of a vent pipe and fan. The average cost for a radon contractor in Kansas to vent a house is between \$1,200 and \$1,400, Hanson said. That might be a hard sell in today's economy, he admitted, but the consequences of not venting might cost a whole lot more.

“Lung cancer is a very bad cancer,” he said. “It's one of the most painful as well as the least treatable cancers. It's also one of the last to be diagnosed, which means it's usually terminal.” DeVol's wonders what effect radon might pose to her children, all of whom who had bedrooms in the basement.

“They lived down there for 15 years, but they say there's no testing that can be done for them,” DeVol said. “I worry about my kids.”

She recently learned that cancer has spread to her bones. She's currently being treated with radiation and chemotherapy and, she said, takes it one day at a time.

Her advice is simple: “Test,”

she said. “Make sure you test.”

INVESTIGATIVE STORY

Nondaily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Johnson County Sun

Loren Stanton

Excellent lead takes reader on first steps into a well-reported and written investigation of an Overland Park subdivisions financial issues.

SECOND PLACE

Johnson County Sun

Chuck Kurtz

Out of site to most residents, the homeless do exist, and they are increasing in number. Good job of uncovering a pressing community issue.

THIRD PLACE

Shawnee Dispatch

Caroline Boyer

Good job of outlining the issues and reporting what taxpayers got with justice center.

By Loren Stanton

Nila Ridings says she never wanted to be a rabble rouser, but it is a role she has taken on and plans to keep until her house feels like a home.

When Ridings purchased a unit in the Quivira Falls subdivision about four years ago, she was ready to scale back work hours, devote more time to volunteer efforts and just relax in the comfort of the maintenance-provided community.

She knew when she bought the place that it needed some repair work on the siding, but she said she was assured the problem soon would be fixed.

Time went by and no one came to do the work.

Eventually, Ridings found out that there were widespread maintenance needs among Quivira Falls homes, and that there was not enough money to fix it all soon. She would have to wait her turn.

Ridings began to press for action, she said, because water was leaking into her house and causing damage. She was not pleased with the responses she received from the Community Association board.

Suffice it to say that in the months that followed – and it has been almost three years of months now – relations became highly strained between Ridings, the board and the current professional management team for the community.

She has filed lawsuits and been threatened with lawsuits. She has submitted petitions for

action and had the board reject the petitions. She has heard rumors, investigated rumors and been the subject of rumors. It has not been pretty.

Not that Ridings is alone among Quivira Falls residents who have actively fought and criticized the community's governing board and management. But other frustrated neighbors agree she has been involved in the dispute longer and far more vigorously than most others.

The unit Ridings owns is appraised at \$138,000, but she says she ultimately spent more than \$20,000 of her own money for repairs needed to stop the water seepage and to fix water damage.

She is locked in a dispute with management for reimbursement of those costs and also to get other problems fixed that she said still cause water to get into her furnished basement.

Her dreams of maintenance-free ownership, she said, have turned into a nightmare.

"When I bought this place I planned to spend the rest of my life here. If I have to live here the rest of my life now, I'd rather be dead," Ridings said.

As frustrated as she is, Ridings said she will not consider selling or moving until the structural and monetary issues are resolved.

"I will fight as I have the last two years to fix this. I will not pass my mistake on to someone else and make it their mistake," Ridings said.

Walt Vernon, who is serving his first one-year term as president of the Quivira Falls

board, said he does not want to get into a public debate with Ridings, especially because she has sued in the past and because the dispute is a civil matter.

Nevertheless, Vernon said Ridings should be asked if she properly followed the community's procedures for getting repair work done and having it reimbursed.

She acknowledges that she did not entirely adhere to the process, but she says she has her reasons.

Quivira Falls, in coordination with Overland Park codes officials, established a schedule for making the siding repairs needed in the community. About eight houses among the hundreds are fixed each month.

If people want to pay for their own repairs they can do so, Vernon explained, and the board will reimburse them as money becomes available. Those who get work done independently are to get three bids and have them reviewed by the board.

Ridings said she got three bids, but she did not go before the board for its review and blessing. Her attorney told her, she said, that the board's failure to authorize repairs on her home before damages occurred put the board in breach of contract. Therefore, she said, she no longer is obligated to follow the board's guidelines.

Settling that point could take awhile, but Ridings is adamant that she is on solid ground.

Ridings has ceased paying her monthly association dues until the issue is resolved to her satisfaction.

"I don't pay people who owe

me money,” Ridings said.

Several other disputes, legal and otherwise, have raged between Ridings, board members and the community’s professional management company, The Tiehen Group. An attorney for the latter sent a letter of warning to Ridings because of written complaints and accusations she was making to her neighbors about how the repair program was being conducted.

One sensitive allegation was that new stucco siding on some of the homes was being applied over rotted wood framework rather than having the wood replaced.

Jim Tiehen, president of Tiehen Group, said he is aware that one former employee of the repair crews has alleged that such methods were used on several homes.

Recently city codes officials were asked by one resident to be present while she peeled off new stucco. The resident told city officials she had suspicious that wood rot might lurk beneath, and sure enough, when the siding came up wood rot problems were found.

Tiehen said that was an unfortunate mistake and does not reflect what crews are instructed to do.

“We’re not trying to cover anything up,” Tiehen said. He added that the top priority in repair efforts is to fix problems so homes do not incur further damage.

Tiehen’s company was hired well after many of the problems and complaints in the community surfaced. Prior to his

firm being hired, no professional management company was involved in overseeing Quivira Falls operations.

In some cases, Tiehen said, temporary patches are put in place until a full repair can be made.

There have been other battles waged by Ridings in her quest.

She worked on a petition calling for election of new board members, and she filed suit when petitions were rejected by the sitting board.

She filed suit for access to the association’s financial records and won. What she found was skimpy.

Vernon concurs that a CPA has since determined that past accounting was “sloppy.” Much more detailed financial record keeping and review methods now are in place, Vernon said.

INVESTIGATIVE STORY

Daily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

Junction City Daily Union

Eric Brown

Excellent job of presenting lots of information - complicated information - making it understandable. Stories of politicians and bribes are best handled by newspapers and this story does a nice job highlighting what obviously was hours of reporting and fact checking. These stories are of vital community importance.

SECOND PLACE

High Plains Daily Leader

Jessica Crawford

Great job of going through expense vouchers and asking about high meal charges and high-priced hotels. Nice job of presenting both sides. More newspapers should do stories like this from time to time to keep common sense alive and make government officials accountable.

THIRD PLACE

Junction City Daily Union

Eric Brown

Good job of research by the newspaper to check into city manager salaries. This has a little different twist in that it shows Junction City's salary to be low. Good job of educating citizens on matters and showing how low pay could cost more in long run.

INVESTIGATIVE STORY

Daily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Manhattan Mercury

Carrie Miller

A great investigative piece on a controversial topic. Miller sought out a variety of sources and found ways of getting critical information when sources have been less than forthcoming.

SECOND PLACE

Newton Kansan

Cristina Janney

This is in-depth reporting at it's finest. Janney makes use of a wide variety of sources and provides a sidebar story with informative statistics. This piece was one of two standouts in this category, and it only separated from first place in that the first place entry dealt with a more controversial topic that would have been harder to get information on. GREAT JOB!!

THIRD PLACE

Dodge City Daily Globe

Claire O'Brien

A well-balanced piece that sought viewpoints on each side.

INVESTIGATIVE STORY

Daily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Topeka Capital-Journal

Tim Carpenter

Very thorough reporting with impressive balance of facts, quotes and sources.

SECOND PLACE

Kansas City Star

Mike McGraw, Laura Bauer, and Mark Morris

Impressive educational series with notable sidebars detailing human angle. Good, tight writing.

THIRD PLACE

Lawrence Journal-World

Christine Metz

Incisive story that went beyond the basic facts and government data. A community serve and public awareness to boot. Well written and researched.

SERIES

Nondaily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

Bonner Springs Chieftain

Melissa Treolo

Comprehensive coverage of a subject that is obviously near and dear to the community. Solid reporting, far and away the best in the category.

SECOND PLACE

De Soto Explorer

Elvyn Jones

Reporter did a fine job of putting a face on those affected by the recession. It really helps personalize an issue many people still don't understand.

THIRD PLACE

Bonner Springs Chieftain

Melissa Treolo

Helps readers/parents know just a little more about those who will be teaching their children.

SERIES

Nondaily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Atchison Globe

Katy Blair

Difficult story subject, but handled extremely well. Good use of sources and thorough examination of issues. Great lede paragraphs puts this one on top.

SECOND PLACE

Atchison Globe

Patty Moore

Each story on its own is great, together as a series this was an outstanding entry. Good use of multiple sources and in-depth coverage in each story.

THIRD PLACE

The Mirror

Shawn Linenburger, Estuardo Garcia

Well written series of stories. Well balanced coverage of issue.

SERIES

Nondaily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Kansas City Business Journal

Rob Roberts

A clear-cut winner in a very competitive category. A very good read on a subject most people are sick of - health care reform. Your play on words was creative, but the content and personal face you put on the issue put you at the head of pack.

SECOND PLACE

Wichita Business Journal

A comprehensive look at the impact a sagging economy has on businesses and communities. Very well written with great layout and graphic elements.

THIRD PLACE

Miami County Republic

Brian McCauley and Ashlee Mejia

Very informational series on how we can impact our environment. Well written with nice use of graphics

By Rob Roberts

The architect of “the public option” - a focal point in the national health care reform debate - said a robust government-run insurance plan for non-elderly Americans is more than a bargaining chip.

“It’s a crucial part of what will make the reform plan work,” said Jacob Hacker, a Yale University professor whose public-plan concept was picked up by the John Edwards, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama campaigns in 2007.

Now, toward the end of the August recess, members of Congress are poised for a standoff on the issue. Based on the latest tallies, it appears reform legislation without a strong public option won’t fly in the House, and any bill that contains such an option will be sunk in the Senate.

U.S. Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., said at an Aug. 24 town hall meeting at the University of Missouri-Kansas City that reform legislation containing a consumer-run cooperative rather than a public option stands the best chance of passage this year. That elicited loud boos from an audience of nearly 1,500, whom McCaskill called “the most vociferous (supporters) I’ve seen for attempts to reform health care.”

But the support she heard for a strong public plan clearly was not coming from Kansas City’s large-employer or insurance-carrier communities.

Here is the domino theory local employers and insurers frequently spell out in opposing a public option: The public

plan, originally offered through a government-run exchange to individuals and the smallest of employers, eventually will be opened to all employers. Because of its lower price, the plan soon will drive private insurers out of business. Then, the federal government will heap on coverage mandates, increasing costs and reducing employers’ ability to control them.

“There can be dire scenarios painted with just about any situation,” said McCaskill, who has voiced support for a public plan. “It’s a pretty dire situation if we do nothing.”

McCaskill added that public-plan opponents “can’t say the government is incompetent ... and then say, ‘You can’t compete with them,’ especially if it’s a constrained public option. And that’s what we’re talking about here - a constrained public option that is not going to drive private insurers out of the market.”

THE CASE FOR MORE COMPETITION

Hacker said even a robust public plan will “absolutely not” lead to a single-payer system.

“I’ve repeatedly said that even if all employers are allowed in, the system will evolve toward a fairly stable equilibrium in which large employers that self-insure continue to provide private coverage and the smallest of employers and self-employed find it more attractive to go into the exchange,” Hacker said. “And, of those in the exchange, I would say only about half will choose the public plan.”

Hacker said private plans in the exchange would enjoy some

key advantages over a public plan, including brand recognition, deep pockets for marketing, the caché of being private and experience covering 171 million members, many of whom are happy with their coverage.

But about 48 million Americans have no coverage, he said, and without public competition, the interconnected problems of soaring costs, an uninsured population that accesses care through emergency rooms and cost-shifting to the privately insured will worsen.

Part of the problem stems from the fact that most cities are dominated by one or two private plans and a similar number of hospital systems, Hacker said.

“These two problems - insurer and provider consolidation - are related,” he wrote in an Aug. 20 report on public-plan legislation. “They have driven up premiums for employers and workers, and they have encouraged insurers to control costs by shifting expenses onto patients or weeding out high-cost patients, rather than bargaining for lower provider payments.”

COMPARING COMMITTEE PROPOSALS

Reform bills that passed out of three House committees and the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions committee all call for competition from a public plan to help rein in costs and improve quality, Hacker said. He said two House bills were “good” because they would allow the public plan to create a provider network (Medicare’s network, minus doctors who opt out) on its first day of operation,

pay providers Medicare-plus-5 percent rates and negotiate drug discounts.

The plans passed by the House Energy & Commerce Committee and the Senate HELP committee, which was led by the late Sen. Ted Kennedy, are “not so good,” Hacker said. They would require the public plan to create a provider network from scratch and negotiate rates with providers throughout the country, making the plan difficult or impossible to establish.

He called the co-op model in the Senate Finance Committee’s yet-to-be passed bill downright “ugly.” It would entail the same challenges of building provider networks and negotiating rates and would result in regional or statewide plans lacking the size and provider choice necessary to compete with private plans, Hacker said.

Only a robust public plan will be able to reduce medical inflation through innovations in financing and delivery of care, Hacker said. Therefore, he was dismayed by Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius’ recent comment that the public plan was “not the essential element” of health reform.

Suzanne Discenza, an associate professor of health care management at Rockhurst University, said she was surprised by the comment, which seemed to suggest the Obama administration was willing to use the plan as a bargaining chip to achieve other reforms.

“I don’t think that’s what (Sebelius) really thinks,” Discenza said. “I think she was trying to strike a conciliatory note. So

maybe that was a well-chosen phrase” - meaning the public option is “an” essential element, just not “the” essential element.

EXAMINING THE CO-OP ALTERNATIVE

Discenza said she thinks a public plan is essential and could coexist with and drive improvements in the private insurance industry. Terry Norwood, CEO of Midwest Public Risk in Kansas City, isn’t so sure. Norwood, who shares the concern that a public plan could wipe out all payers but Uncle Sam, said his organization is, essentially, a consumer-run co-op like those proposed by the Senate Finance Committee. It provides self-insurance for 99 local governments and school districts in Kansas and Missouri. By joining together, Norwood said, those entities have been able to achieve premium savings of 2 percent to 3 percent and build reserves that allow members to avoid big cost swings. But the organization’s ability to cut out middlemen is limited: It must buy stop-loss insurance in the event of catastrophic claims, and it rents its provider network from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City. Therefore, its administrative costs are running between 12 percent and 14 percent, about the same as Blue Cross’, Norwood said.

Hacker said Medicare’s administrative costs are less than 2 percent, compared with about 11 percent for private plans under Medicare Advantage. That is a near-perfect “apples to apples” comparison because both types of plans are operating with similar rules and treating the same

population, he said.

Discenza said arguments for maintaining the current system for covering the non-Medicare population are “short-sighted” because “more and more people are falling off those rolls.”

The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation reported that the percentage of U.S. employers providing health insurance declined from 69 percent in 2000 to 60 percent in 2007. The percentage climbed to 63 percent last year.

“But (increased coverage)

certainly won’t be the case this year,” said Marci Nielsen, vice chancellor of public policy and planning for the University of Kansas Medical Center.

Nielsen said KU supports affordable health insurance for all, not a public plan per se.

“But if we are to have a public plan,” Nielsen said, “it needs to be structured in a way that ensures we are getting cost savings, paying providers fairly and doing a better job of reimbursing for primary care and prevention.”

Hacker said a robust public plan offers the best means for replacing the costly fee-for-service payment model. But devising an alternative that providers, payers and consumers can live with may be as tricky as getting a public plan through the Senate.

SERIES

Daily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

Ottawa Herald

Great job covering the biggest story in 2009 - and localizing it! Tight writing and good research by reporters - community should be proud and better educated. Good job by all!!

SECOND PLACE

Iola Register

Susan Lynn

Good to see this covered so thoroughly.

THIRD PLACE

Arkansas City Traveler

Andrew Lawson

Well-written and interesting. Good subject to cover. Loved the story of the subject as a young boy.

By Courtney Servaes

Debbie Aubert had a vision for retirement.

Less work. More time with family and friends.

But Aubert, who taught middle school in the West Franklin School District for 29 years, said retirement didn't work out the way she had planned.

The economy tanked. Her husband lost his job at American Eagle Distribution Center, 1529 N. Davis Ave.

"It definitely didn't pan out as I had thought it would go because of financial reasons," Aubert said.

Aubert and her husband aren't alone.

Other area families are showing concerns about their retirement plans, Bill Henningsen, with Edward Jones, 502 S. Cedar St., Ottawa, said.

"They are naturally concerned about whether or not they can retire when they planned on it," Henningsen said.

THING OF THE PAST

Aubert said it was getting to be too much.

She couldn't work two jobs. She couldn't substitute teach and work 34 hours at Ferrellgas, 103 S. Main St., Ottawa.

Not at her age.

"I work evenings and weekends at Ferrellgas now," she said. "And I was subbing at West Franklin during the week days."

Aubert said she took on the two jobs to help compensate for her husband's salary.

"My husband is currently unemployed and hasn't had much luck finding work," she said. "Being a 59-year-old male in this economy hasn't been easy for

him."

For the Auberts — and other families — retirement might be a thing of the past, Aubert says.

After her husband lost his job, she's starting to wonder whether it's possible to save enough money to retire.

"Various other jobs that my husband has had, had mismanaged [employee stock ownership plans] where he lost a great deal of money, so that drastically changed our retirement plans," Aubert said.

WHEN TO RETIRE

Henningsen says the market has gone through a serious downturn — the worst in 50 years.

But it's also gone through a serious recovery, he says.

"The issue for them is, if you are going to continue to invest in markets, you have to become aware and comfortable with fluctuation," he said. "You can't say, I want high returns and no risks. That formula just doesn't work."

Henningsen said typically he works with families to help them plan for the future, not just make expectations about what retirement will look like.

"I think prior to this period, people based retirement decisions on, 'Hey, I'm this old, I should be able to retire,'" he said. "I want to retire, therefore I will retire."

Those people — usually aged 55 and older — are the ones most impacted by the recent economy, Henningsen said.

"They've already begun to envision retirement," Henningsen said. "That's the normal place where people start to visualize retirement."

TAKING MYSTERY OUT

OF IT

It's tough living month to month.

But Aubert said they have no choice.

"I, like other state employees, have my KPERS," Aubert said about the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System. "But as I'm below the age of 55, I will not be able to access it without penalty until I'm 59 1/2."

For families like the Auberts, Henningsen said sitting down and crunching numbers really can help.

"In some cases, people are right on track. They are frightened and a little bit nervous about it, but when we run the numbers, they are right on track," Henningsen said. "Running the numbers and running the figures takes the mystery out of it."

Aubert said it helps that she receives a small monthly check from KPERS from a portion of its fund.

That check, coupled with her job, hopefully will be enough to help Aubert survive until her husband finds a job, she said.

"Faith in God helps," she said. "And knowing that you can only do what you can do, but it's tough worrying about how you're going to have the money to make it from month to month."

SERIES

Daily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Hays Daily News

This is a good series that has an in-depth look at not only the teams it covers, but the schools and the larger community. It addresses many important issues and is well-planned.

SECOND PLACE

Manhattan Mercury

Paula Glover

This is an innovative series that takes a look at the life and times of small town churches. It addresses not only the churches' past but also their future, it discusses the challenges facing small rural churches.

THIRD PLACE

Garden City Telegram

Shajia Ahmad and Rachael Gray

This is a good series that takes a look at the historical event that captured national attention. The series capitalizes well on the memory of local sources and look at a number of aspects of the case.

By Nick Scheien

The players sat in the locker room, dripping with sweat fresh from victory.

Their leader, their head coach, walked back out of his office and looked at the members of his team. Those who had battled so courageously and victoriously just minutes before.

Suddenly, a pitter-patter started to fall outside. Then a more constant, heavy rain unleashed after holding off for most of the game.

The drops dripped off the top of Quinter High School onto the cement landing outside the football team's locker room. It was the beginning of a storm, or at least another night of rain in northwest Kansas.

Greg Woolf, the head coach of the Bulldogs, took a deep breath and exhaled.

The locker room was quiet.

The Bulldogs, one of the top teams in Eight-Man, Division I in the state, were about to face a storm - but not outside.

None of the players on the team knew Mother Nature had opened her eyes and began pouring tears down on their little portion of the world. Neither did the coaches.

The storm they were about to face was different, unexpected.

Woolf, a mountain of a man and a former football player himself, opened his mouth and began to speak as his eyes reddened and his heart became heavy.

"You guys know my priorities are always God, my relationship with Jesus Christ, my family, teaching and you guys," Woolf

said. "And I love you guys."

There was a pause, then a few more words.

The pitter-patter on the ground no longer was outside the door.

It was inside the locker room, on the floor in the form of tears from the players.

A town of faith

The lyrics from the Christian band Casting Crowns song "Praise You in This Storm" can find a lot of meaning in Quinter.

"I'll praise you in this storm and I will lift my hands for you are who you are no matter where I am and every tear I've cried you hold in your hand you never left my side and though my heart is torn I will praise you in this storm."

Quinter has been through a lot through the years. The good times and bad. The ups and downs.

There's always some constant battle, perhaps now fighting population decline like most towns in western Kansas.

But one thing constant in the small Gove County town is faith. And there's a lot of it.

"It's a lovely community," said 93-year-old Helen Tilton, a 1932 QHS grad. "Our churches have no problem getting along together, and that's wonderful."

You can see the pride in the town's faith-based way of life at one of its goodwill stores.

There, Mary Jane Swihart continuously is working her nimble fingers for the good of others - including children in Romania.

Swihart was touched years ago after reading an old letter she found from her parents to her grandparents about mission work in China.

"How I got started was I read a letter my parents had sent home, and they were missionaries in China," Swihart said. "They sent home letters to their folks, and in a couple of them, my father saw over a dozen children frozen to death on his way to town. That's when God convicted me to try to help cold children in the world today."

Swihart organized Baby Bundles to be sent to Romania, helping cold children in a time of need. The bundles include a few outfits and undershirts, six diapers, booties made by prisoners from Ellsworth, rubber pants, blankets and a baby bottle - all rolled up in a comforter.

There is no heat or air conditioning in the building. Instead, the money that would be used for that is needed to help with the bundles, shipping and anything else that comes up.

Swihart herself doesn't even stake her claim as owner of the business.

"God's the owner, and I just work here," she said.

Strength of security

Everyone looks out for everyone in small towns. Quinter is no different.

With that comes a sense of security.

Friday morning's farmers market on the north end of town proved that.

Vendors could set up curbside and sell their homemade goods.

"It's rural and small, and I

like that,” Jodi Swihart, niece of Mary Jane Swihart, said as she sat in a chair selling goods at the farmers market. “Everybody knows your business, and you know everybody else’s. But there’s some security in that.”

Jodi Swihart was home-schooled and graduated in 2004. But she wouldn’t have wanted to grow up anywhere else.

“It’s a very good place to grow up,” she said. “I work at the library, and we have kids come and go every day. It’s just safe. There’s kids on the street at all times of the day by themselves just because they can be.”

She lived for a time away from Quinter and got a taste of what life outside a small town is like. And it wasn’t all that comfortable.

“I lived in Pennsylvania for a year, and it’s just different,” she said. “People had to help me know what it was safe to do because I was used to the freedom. You just don’t think about going somewhere by yourself at night here because who’s going to get you? Your neighbor, Frank?”

Upbringing

Business was brisk at the Food Pride grocery store in Quinter. And that’s exactly what Nancy Bowman was hoping for late Friday morning.

“It’s a chance to see my neighbors,” Bowman said about working at the store.

Bowman began working at the business during the summer. She grew up in Quinter and enjoys the small town.

“The way I was brought up in a plain church, we were just taught a good work ethic and to

watch out for your neighbors,” Bowman said. “We were taught to look out for each other.”

That’s what Bowman said makes for a strong tradition of family values in the town.

As for Gary Kesler, another employee at Food Pride, he tells Bowman it “must be our upbringing,” joking from across the store.

Kesler and his wife, Laura, who works at KansasLand Bank across the street, had two sons go through the school system, Grady and Brice.

Gary is a QHS grad himself, earning a diploma in 1973. He’s seen changes in the school and town since he grew up there.

Agriculture used to have a strong base in the community, and it still does, but not what it used to. Now, Kesler said, the hospital is a big draw.

“Basically agriculture based, but that’s been lost somewhat now,” he said. “The hospital right now is probably the biggest drawing card right now.”

But one thing has stayed the same for Quinter since Kesler graced the halls of the school. And that’s the fact that the school system has remained strong academically and athletically.

“Athletically, academically,” Kesler said, “we don’t have to take a backseat to anybody - that’s for sure.”

Main Street pride

Tilton, who will turn 94 on Oct. 1, jokes about Quinter’s financial significance in the region.

“We think we must be the banking center of northwest Kansas,” Tilton said with a laugh. “We have three banks, you

know.”

One of those banks was the brainchild of Scott Bird, a 1978 Quinter graduate. Bird is president of the bank and co-owner of Food Pride, along with his wife, Sheryl.

“We basically re-established a local community bank in town,” Bird said about KansasLand Bank that opened in May 2006.

“The community goes kind of how the business leaders on Main Street go - as far as the tone is set,” Bird said. “When you’re community-minded and you have investment in your community, you have to get into the community. By nature, you’re deeply involved.”

Bird works alongside Laura Kesler, who’s the bank’s vice president. Kesler and Bird both were in the same 1978 graduating class that had nearly 36 students - one of the largest in school history, Bird guesses.

The two have worked alongside each other for many years and can finish each other’s sentences and thoughts. Bird and Laura’s husband, Gary, also have spent time coaching summer basketball together.

But Bird knows the town always has had a solid work ethic.

“I think Quinter has always had that spirit,” said Bird, whose son, Matt, is a starter on this year’s football team. “You go in cycles a little bit. When I first started at the bank, the people that were on Main Street then, now a lot of that has turned over to a newer, younger generation. You’ll continue to see that. A really good story about improvement is Jack and Doris

Tebow with Ray’s Pharmacy.”

The Tebows recently moved a few storefronts south on Main Street to a larger location. There, they have renovated an old theater building that now houses Ray’s Pharmacy and Q Value.

Both Tebows grew up in Larned and lived in Wyoming and Indianapolis before moving to Great Bend. Then an opportunity for the couple to own their own grocery store popped up in Quinter.

It’s been 16 years since that opportunity happened.

“If the community - and bank, especially - wouldn’t have been behind it, it wouldn’t have worked,” Doris Tebow said.

The Tebows are working on settling into their new location and plan a grand opening in October. That grand opening will feature one of the few large soda fountains in Kansas, one that when completely refinished will be nearly 30 feet long and more than 12 feet high and dates back to 1904.

Role of the school

For Laura Kesler, a high school in the town is an essential.

And it’s a binding force for the community.

“When you live in a small town, you don’t have the entertainment like the larger towns have with a movie theater or Putt-Putt course,” said Kesler, who is proud to mention her son, Grady, played on the Class 2A undefeated state basketball title team in 2004. “So your entertainment really is your school. Your kids provide the entertainment for the whole community, and that’s why the whole town will turn out for a

ball game or forensics meet. That is the entertainment we have here - the kids.”

But it’s not just entertainment. The school is much more than that.

“It’s the survival of them. It really is,” Kesler said about schools in small towns.

QHS Principal Tucker Woolsey grew up in Oberlin and knows the importance of school districts in small towns. He’s seen changes, too, and knows towns nearly dry up when schools close.

“It’s the lifeblood. Without it, I think - like many small schools around - there isn’t a town,” Woolsey said. “More than that, the way the school system is ran shows the general quality of the school system in any town, and vice versa.”

The enrollment number for Quinter for the year is 144 for grades seven through 12. But the inevitable decline is not new to northwest Kansas.

“We’ve had that same problem,” Woolsey said.

“We’ve had a pretty big drop in enrollment the last several years. My first year here, we had 160 in seven through 12. We were down as low as 136 at the start of last year, and now we’re up a few students. We’ve had those issues before. To get people into the community, you need to have jobs, something in town to draw people in. For as far back as anyone can remember, those jobs were farming. But the way the economy is and the way farming has gone, it’s just changed the face of what farming looks like. Also, industry has changed.”

The bull’s-eye

Quinter has been strong in sports and academics throughout its history. The football team has won two state titles, one in 1973 in Class A, the other in 1992 in the Eight-Man, Division I ranks.

Then there's been the numerous boys' and girls' track titles.

The state crowns in scholar's bowl and forensics.

And the 2004 state title in 2A boys' basketball.

Last year, the football team finished with a 10-1 record after suffering through a rough 11-man schedule years prior.

And the 2008-09 boys' basketball team finished as state runner-up to Hanover in the 1A ranks. All the trophies of success line the hallways outside the gymnasium and near the cafeteria.

"We've had a lot of success over the years here in basketball and football recently," head boys' basketball coach John Crist said. "And we've had success in football before. We have two state championships, and all the track championships we've won. We've had tremendous success. I feel like as a coach, we always feel like we have a big bull's-eye on our backs everywhere we go. People love to beat Quinter.

"I look at it as a positive, because if they're getting up for you, then that means you're doing something right. And we try to feed off of that. The expectations for the boys this year are pretty high, both for football and basketball with what we accomplished last year. I know this senior class has talked about winning state championships, and I feel in

order to do that, you have to talk about it. You have to be able to dream it, see it and achieve it. You have to believe it. Hopefully the kids can step up and have a successful season in football, basketball and track and everything."

While Crist relishes the fact that Quinter has caught the eye of several people through the years, he also knows the town still faces some of the same problems as other regional cities.

"The school is tremendously important," Crist said. "You can look around the area, and the communities where the schools have closed down have seen the communities kind of dry up. I think if you don't have a school, you basically lose your community. I think the school is tremendously important. We've lost numbers just like everyone else has in western Kansas, but our grade school numbers are hanging on pretty good now. They've steadied out a bit. Hopefully our numbers will come back eventually, but it's a hard time for every school in the state right now. Obviously we don't want to lose our school."

'Q' stands for Quinter. One of Quinter's luxuries is Dairy Queen. Joni Kerns is in her 10th year as the owner of the local establishment, one of basically three eating joints in Quinter, along with the Pizza Station and the Q-Inn.

"I wanted people to know where Quinter was because of the Dairy Queen," Kerns said, noting her pride in her new sign that now features the large letters, DQ.

Kerns is a 1976 QHS graduate and tries to give back to the school as much as possible, sponsoring T-shirts for the school's basketball tournament - the Castle Rock Classic - and helping with the FFA club's pheasant hunters' breakfast.

She also has several high school kids working for her.

"Anything to do with athletics and kids," Kerns said. "I'm not necessarily teaching them book education, but life skills."

The Dairy Queen was built in 1968 and was one of the only eating establishments along Interstate 70 between Kansas City and Denver. That's because cities such as Hays, Colby and Goodland hadn't built out closer to the main national highway yet.

"Everybody knew where Quinter was because of it," Kerns said.

A cut above Zach Nemechek said it started as sort of a joke. Now, it's starting to catch on with other players.

The senior center and nose guard began getting a mohawk from coach Greg Woolf last year.

Nemechek, whose father, Victor, is a doctor in town, told Woolf he was going to get a haircut after lifting weights last year. The coach told him he would do it for free.

Now, every week or a week and a half, Nemechek gets a close shave.

This year, more players have followed suit.

"I'd kind of nudge the kids in the ribs and say, 'What about a mohawk today?'" the light-hearted Nemechek said.

"Then one turned into two,

two to four, and now about 10 people have them," Nemechek said.

But he's the only one Woolf gives a haircut to. Nemechek jokes that's because Woolf is too intimidating, even for himself. That says something, especially since Nemechek is well over 6 feet tall and weighs about 240 pounds.

"Even if he was a foot shorter than me, he'd still be the most intimidating guy," Nemechek said. "He's still got that personality about him that when he's in the room, there's no goofing off around him. You respect that he's there. On the other end of the spectrum, he's the nicest guy to play for. I couldn't imagine playing for another coach. I love the way he handles the other coaches, and each one has his own say."

A storm brews

The pain started Monday night and became too unbearable for the head coach to stand any longer.

Late that night, he went to the hospital and missed practices the rest of the week.

That meant assistant coach Brian Roesch was in charge of the offense and game plan. The defensive assignment went as usual to assistant Jeff Ruckman.

And one thing became certain Wednesday. That's when the team decide it was going to play for a shutout Friday night against Palco.

The game ball would be labeled with a "goose egg" and presented to Woolf if he made it back for the game.

Woolf, in his seventh year as Quinter coach, had exploratory

surgery mid-week on his lower stomach and eventually was released. He showed up mid-afternoon Friday at the school to talk with his players and coaches and see how things were going.

He knew nothing of the team's goal.

Nemechek and fellow senior Thatcher Deaton wanted a few minutes to talk to the team before the game. The coaching staff granted them their wish.

"We're going to get the shutout, sign the ball and give it to coach," they reiterated to the team before the squad gathered for a quick prayer.

Then the coaching staff came in, and Roesch talked to the team before Woolf entered the room.

"We're going to put that goose egg on the ball and sign it," he said, his eyes growing red and fighting back tears. "Just do it."

Then Woolf entered.

"God gave you the ability to play and to come out and do what you can do," Woolf said. "We are one team. Individuals stay here."

As the players left the locker room and entered into the night air, each placed a hand on a sign near the doorway that read: "I am only one, but I am one. I can't do everything, but I can do something. And what I can do, I ought to do. And what I ought to do, by the grace of God, I shall do."

The players walked out of the locker room and began their walk of faith.

Fourth and goal

Quinter took control in the second quarter, breaking open a 6-0 game at the end of the first

quarter to lead 22-0 at halftime.

Another 22 points in the third quarter put the game well in the Bulldogs' hand.

But it wasn't enough, and just settling for a victory wasn't going to satisfy the team.

The group wanted a shutout, the school's first since shifting back to the eight-man ranks last year.

And they wanted it for their coach.

But Woolf began substituting when the game got out of hand, allowing other players a chance to improve. It was something he had done in many games.

With Quinter leading 44-0 and 8:16 to play, Palco faced a fourth-and-goal from the two-yard line.

The shutout was in jeopardy, especially with the Roosters' starters still in the game and Quinter's second string on the field.

Palco quarterback Blake Gehring dropped back to pass, and the ball released off his fingers in a near-perfect spiral.

It landed right in the hands of Quinter senior Skyler Wittman, who returned the interception two yards deep out of the end zone to the five-yard line.

Later in the game, senior Jordon Hargitt broke loose for a long touchdown run, giving the Bulldogs a 50-0 win thanks to the 45-point rule in the eight-man ranks.

"He starts subbing younger kids in, and Ruck and I are like ..." Roesch said, throwing his hands up in the air, describing the sideline scene from the couch in the coaches' office.

"I'm thinking, 'You want the

game ball or not?'" Ruckman pipes in jokingly about his thoughts when the head coach started substituting.

"And the kid picks it off in the end zone," Roesch said, laughing.

"I told you guys, God had his hands in it," Woolf said.

The storm arrives

Inside the steamy locker room following the win, Roesch and the team presented Woolf with the game ball, letting him know about the goal of the shutout.

Woolf grabbed the ball and held it in the air, then took a few steps into the coach's office and returned.

Outside, the rain started to fall. Inside, the players listened to their towering coach talk about priorities.

And they learned their coach was facing a whole new game.

"I found out today," Woolf told his team, "that I have cancer in my belly."

He told the players he didn't know exactly where it was, how bad it was. Tests in Hays a few days later would provide more answers.

The rain pitter-pattered outside. The tears pitter-pattered inside.

"Last year, we came through a lot," Woolf told his team. "And we knew we were going to have to go through some things this year. I didn't realize it was going to be this. It's kind of a kick in the gut to me and my family also."

"My life is going to change here for the next 10 to 12 weeks, and I'm going to be relying on you big time," Woolf continued. "You guys know I have victory in Christ, and my God is a

wonderful God who created the universe and can take care of anything. He's bigger than anything that's growing inside of me."

"We are not going to let this affect us. Our big theme this year is 'one.'"

"I love you guys to death. You guys are just going to have to roll with it. This does not change our goal one bit. What is it? Our goal is what? To win a state championship. Nothing is changing off of that."

Praise in the storm

Each player took turns grabbing a marker and signing the game ball for their coach, their leader, who just told them he was beginning to face a battle.

Their words and thoughts inscribed on the ball let him know he wouldn't be facing it alone.

"Look at this," Woolf told Roesch in the office after all the players had left.

"God bless," Roesch said, looking at the ball.

It was the end to a long week. It was the realization that life was changing.

"It was brutal," Woolf said about the week. "I'd put it up there as one of tougher ones. The toughest thing for me right now is the emotional end of it and having to tell people. That's what's tough. It tore me up when I had to tell my son and my daughter because I have my two older ones. When I say these guys are my family, they are. They're over at my house all the time. They're in my youth group."

Yet, despite what's staring Woolf, the coaching staff,

team and town in the face, the mountain of a man wasn't about to waver in his faith.

"You always say we're never bigger than the game," Roesch said.

"You're right," Woolf said. "There's going to be a lot of teaching moments this year."

It will be teaching, mingled with faith - something that's sometimes frowned upon in today's age of separation of church and state. But not in Quinter. Not with a community so strong in its faith.

"Nobody has ever said a word to us," Woolf said about keeping religion out of the school. "As a matter of fact, I've had more people come up and talk to me about things their kids have come home with, instead of someone saying, 'You can't say that to my kid.' I've had more people come up and thank us for how we talk to the kids and what we're talking to them about. And it's not just parents; it's grandparents coming up and talking to me about it and thanking me for having the convictions for not going with what the world says but doing what's right."

"And I always know that if it came time where someone said you can't do it anymore, then, whatever. It's not going to stop. The kids like it. The thing is, the kids like hearing the truth - and they don't want it watered down. They want their football straight up, and we tell them straight up what's going on. And it's the same way in our youth groups. And they appreciate that."

Woolf and Roesch both are youth leaders at their churches,

and Ruckman is a Baptist minister in town.

"There's not a lot of separation between church and state on our team," Woolf said.

"It's real, man," Ruckman said. "It's not a job. It's life. We're going to serve the Lord and serve the Lord in our coaching and everything we do."

Nor would they want there to be separation.

Not on their team.

Not in their school.

Not in Quinter.

Especially now that a storm is bearing down on the community.

SERIES

Daily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Kansas City Star

Tony Rizzo

This is an excellent series concept, addressing the theory - environmental impact on behavior. Obviously, a huge amount of interview and analysis time went into the series - but they were resources well spent.

SECOND PLACE

Topeka Capital-Journal

Jan Biles

We know about the recession in general and national towns. This series brings it home to Kansas. How is it here? That's the important question - excellent concept that includes communities and businesses of all types and sizes.

THIRD PLACE

Hutchinson News

Ken Stephens, Edie Ross, Amy Bickel, and Jason Green

Health care reform - a ponderous, complex topic. The writers did a good job of breaking down reform to a more local perspective. I felt the series got better as it progressed.

EDITORIAL WRITING

Nondaily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

Baldwin City Signal

Jeff Myrick

Great job explaining vote importance. Answered question on if the vote was swayed.

SECOND PLACE

De Soto Explorer

Elvyn Jones

Nice job pointing out importance of Pastor that served community for 50 years. These types of people need recognition.

THIRD PLACE

Eudora News

Variety of topics keeps readers coming back to each issue of newspaper. Nice job of pointing out issues that need attention.

By Jeff Myrick

We were thrilled when we heard Baldwin City Police Cpl. Kim Springer had been chosen by the Douglas County Crime Stoppers as its first-ever winner of the Distinguished Service Award. Springer is certainly worthy of the honor. Her tireless efforts as the School Resource Officer are well documented. One only has to think about the lack of headlines on the front page of the Signal over the last few years about trouble at Baldwin High School. Those used to be the norm instead of the exception. But she may be best known for instituting the SRO Hotline in the Baldwin School District that gave students and parents an opportunity to call and leave a voice mail, anonymously or not, about possible criminal activities that are going on. The program was a huge success, garnering 40 calls on average a month and 500 between the hours of 10 p.m. and 3 a.m., when students felt most safe to call.

The Crime Stoppers specifically lauded Springer for the hotline, which they called an extension of their own anonymous efforts, at the Baldwin City Council meeting Monday when they presented her the award. Again, we were thrilled.

But it was tarnished. Unfortunately at this point, Springer is the former SRO. The Baldwin School Board eliminated its half of the funding for the position recently because of budget cuts necessary to make up for reduced state funding.

We find that sad – and not a bit

smart.

We understand the monetary constraints that caused the move. The district was facing a possible shortfall of \$1 million. Budgets are tight everywhere. The city is tightening its belt, too. We all are. We all have to.

But do we cut insurance out of the budget to save money? Of course not. We can't afford to do that. In essence, that's one of the many facets that the SRO provides.

In this day and age, we can't skimp on protecting our children. No, we never have thought the Baldwin School District was somewhere that the horrific tragedy of Columbine, where numerous students were gunned down by fellow students, could occur. But we didn't think that could happen at an Amish school, either – but it did. The list of these types of tragedies has occurred is unfortunately long.

No, that can't happen here. Or can it? Have we all forgotten about the student who made online threats against the Maple Leaf Festival several years ago, threatening the use of guns and pipe bombs? We hope not.

That didn't happen, thanks in large part to a student alerting an SRO about the posting on a Web site. The situation was quickly defused. That's how this works. We were also encouraged Monday night to hear Mayor Ken Wagner pledge to examine budgets and see what could happen to restore the position. We hope that happens and we hope the school district will think again. The SRO position here has unfortunately had a roller coaster history in regards to funding and

who's in charge.

The taxpayers are in charge and we need to demand that we have an SRO in place.

EDITORIAL WRITING

Nondaily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Ellsworth County

Linda Mowery - Denning

Open, no nonsense attitude on issues of local interest. Issue is clear and points readers should think about are made strongly

SECOND PLACE

Oberlin Herald

Steve Haynes

Strong writing, clear reasoning. Opinion is clear. Local importance.

THIRD PLACE

Sabetha Herald

Amber Deters

Clear, strong opinions followed by strong reasoning.

EDITORIAL WRITING

Nondaily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Kansas City Business Journal

Brian Kaberline

Well-written. Concise. Justified. Everything a good editorialist should be. Oh, and witty, too.

SECOND PLACE

Osage County Herald-Chronicle

Wayne White

Of the top three in this category, Wayne was the most in-depth - particularly in making readers know where his conclusions came from. But I never lost interest. Good writing here.

THIRD PLACE

Olathe News

Rick Babson

Great one-liners throughout. Very quick-hitting style that I'm sure draws a regular readership.

By Brian Kaberline

Kansas City recently notched an achievement in the national health care debate as the site of two sizable forums in which information, rather than acrimony, was the main event. U.S. Sen. Claire McCaskill attracted an estimated 1,500 to a town hall meeting at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Although there were smatterings of boos and catcalls at times, McCaskill helped keep things orderly and civil as she explained elements of proposed reform legislation and how the debate might play out in Washington.

The following day, the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce drew a crowd maybe a tenth as large to a half-day forum aimed at small business owners. Experts and panelists offered frank opinions and didn't shy from pointing out how their views differed from those of others sharing the stage. Yet panelists and audience members alike listened to and showed respect for others.

It may seem odd, even sad, to applaud things such as common courtesy and respect for others. But it is notable at a time when political debate is becoming ever more divisive and coarse and for an issue that touches upon personal security, political and economic philosophy, and a long list of what-ifs.

Civil debate is even more valuable when it comes to complex, controversial issues. It's certainly easier to listen to someone whose views we agree with, but it's often more valuable

to listen to people with differing views.

Listening with the same intensity with which we speak our minds will not guarantee consensus or even preclude sharp disagreements. But it can illuminate points of agreement and temper opinions with consideration of others, leading to wiser, more workable policies and actions.

Let's hope that the constructive dialogue about health care reform that has taken place in Kansas City spreads to other locations and to other divisive topics.

We might be amazed at the difference that healthy debate can make.

EDITORIAL WRITING

Daily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

Iola Register

Susan Lynn

These were great editorials, dealing with issues that are of importance to the community. Lynn backs up her opinions with a great framework of factual information. The hint of irony catches readers' attention and holds it.

SECOND PLACE

Ottawa Herald

Jeanny Sharp

These were well-written editorials, relating to issues of importance to the local community. They take ongoing news items a step further and include a call to attention.

THIRD PLACE

Arkansas City Traveler

David A. Seaton

These were well-written editorials, dealing with a wide range of local and national topics, Seaton provides a call to action in each of his pieces and puts himself out there with a call to action in his piece "Grow Up Mr. Mayor."

By Susan Lynn

LaHarpe is being treated like a second-class citizen. All of a sudden, it's not good enough.

Not good enough to be a site for the county's emergency services — though it sits dead center in the county. Not good enough to have a school, which was more a matter of efficiencies of scale: It takes less money to operate fewer buildings.

So in an effort to make lemonade out of a certainly sour situation, LaHarpe citizens asked for the abandoned school building for use as a community center. In a letter signed by LaHarpe Mayor Lloyd Turner, possible uses for the 30-year-old building were detailed, including use as a city hall, public library, recreation center, public meeting space and space for a museum, arts and crafts activities and public spaces that could be rented for private parties and other functions such as wedding receptions. These are all activities that are either operated in dilapidated buildings or have no venue in LaHarpe.

Board members turned up their noses at LaHarpe's plea. One board member reportedly retorted "What has LaHarpe ever done for us?"

For two years, 2007 and 2008, LaHarpe gave the school district two neighboring plots of land free of charge to be used by USD building trade students to build houses. The city also, free of charge, hooked up utilities to the two houses. LaHarpe also is part of the district and sends children to USD schools who might otherwise be attending elsewhere.

That's what LaHarpe has done and is doing for USD 257.

LaHarpe's gift of building lots, with utilities included, was not only a supportive gesture to area students showing confidence in their expertise to build marketable homes but also was a savings to the district of thousands of dollars in land and labor. Both houses sold, keeping the building trades program afloat, adding value to LaHarpe, perhaps adding students to USD 257's enrollment.

STRAPPED FOR CASH, the district wants to sell the LaHarpe building. But buyers have stayed away in droves.

The board should think again. However much the district might get for the building would disappear in a single budget year. Giving it to LaHarpe would create goodwill that would last and last. As for bottomline benefits, helping LaHarpe make itself a better place to live could attract new residents with school-age children. A single family could bring in more additional money to USD 257 than the interest the district could hope to earn on whatever the building would bring in this deflated real estate market.

Besides, LaHarpe did demonstrate its community spirit, its generosity and its sense of a good investment when it donated those lots to the IHS building class. Now it's the district's turn.

EDITORIAL WRITING

Daily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Hays Daily News

Patrick Lowry

Powerful, local editorials that take a clear and strong position on issues within the community that likely provoke community conversation. Nothing wrong with that!

SECOND PLACE

Garden City Telegram

Dena Sattler

Editorial writer takes on a tough or sticky issue, writes a strong opinion piece and attempts to engage readers to join the conversation.

THIRD PLACE

Emporia Gazette

Ashley Kent Walker

Good creative style of opinion writing in the “writing is important” piece. Other two editorials also well done.

By Patrick Lowry

Even in England’s House of Commons, where prime ministers regularly sound like those grumpy old men in the balcony on “The Muppet Show,” it is not considered polite to call somebody a liar. In fact, it’s considered unparliamentary and results in discipline if not immediately withdrawn.

In the U.S. House of Representatives, where heckling and comments from the peanut gallery are not part and parcel of the daily proceedings, such a comment should be considered grounds for removal from office. This is Congress, after all. The U.S. Congress. Debate is welcome; uncivil and rude behavior is not. Decorum is upheld even during moments of extreme disagreement.

So when Rep. Joe Wilson, R-S.C., could not refrain from yelling “You lie!” during President Barack Obama’s address to Congress last week, it was only a matter of time before he received his punishment. It came Tuesday in the form of a resolution of disapproval from the House. By a vote of 240-179, the House of Representatives said Wilson’s conduct was a “breach of decorum and degraded the proceedings of the joint session, to the discredit of the House.”

It was the first time in the chamber’s 220-year history a member has been admonished for speaking out while the president was giving an address. The disapproval certainly was less than Wilson could have received. The rude lawmaker

could have been hit with a censure or reprimand. Either would have been appropriate.

What proves incredulous to us is that 167 Republicans and 12 Democrats did not believe Wilson’s outburst deserved even the milder rebuke he received. A full 179 elected national leaders - including Reps. Jerry Moran, Todd Tiahrt and Lynn Jenkins, all R-Kan. - sent the message with their “nay” vote that it’s apparently OK to yell at the president when he’s got the floor.

It should not be OK. Disagreement is fine; it’s a hallmark of our representative democracy. But so is civility.

This isn’t tennis’ U.S. Open or the MTV Awards. We’ve already learned to teach our children not to follow the examples of professional spoiled brats who star in athletics or the music industry.

These are the hallowed halls of the U.S. Capitol. And those who serve in either chamber should likewise act as role models. Rep. Wilson was out of line with his behavior. So were the other 178 (yes, Wilson voted against the measure) elected officials who didn’t see a problem.

Trust us, the children of this country follow by example. That’s no lie.

EDITORIAL WRITING

Daily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Kansas City Star

Matt Schofield

Nice job of taking on subjects that will improve the city. Good to see editorials that go toward improving western Kansas as well as metro areas.

SECOND PLACE

Hutchinson News

Mary Rintoul

Nice job of taking on the State Legislature. Pointing out local needs was well done.

THIRD PLACE

Lawrence Journal-World

Ann Gardner

A subject that is a local problem that needs covering - telling both sides of the issue.

LOCAL BUSINESS STORY

Nondaily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

Bonner Springs Chieftain

Nicole Kelley

Not the average business story here. Writer gets readers to connect to Amy Thomas' story and to her giving nature. I was also glad to see Nicole not dwell on the negative but capture the positive.

SECOND PLACE

De Soto Explorer

Elvyn Jones

Lots of detail! Reporter did a great job getting subject to open up about his business. Readers gain perspective on impact of a down economy. Very interesting to read.

THIRD PLACE

Basehor Sentinel

Kaitlyn Syring

Story captured impact of this venture for the community. Also captured the adrenaline of an important first day.

LOCAL BUSINESS STORY

Nondaily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Marysville Advocate

JoAnn Shum

A nice angle - we saw lots of stories about the auto dealers, but this is the first I've seen that looked at the other end of the process! Good localized story on a national issue.

SECOND PLACE

Atchison Globe

Patty Moore

Nice job covering how a proposed tax will alter local businesses - before it is implemented.

THIRD PLACE

Washington County News

Cynthia Scheer

A lovely, entertaining story about a unique business - and an even more entertaining "business man" - thoroughly enjoyed this!

By JoAnn Shum

Smitty's Salvage is under the hood, rather than under the proverbial gun, to get the Cash for Clunkers cars parted out, dismantled and disposed of. Smitty's Salvage, Axtell, is a participant in the Cash for Clunkers program as a recycling yard for the traded-in vehicles. Smitty's was the only authorized buyer of Cash for Clunker vehicles in this part of Kansas. Smitty's purchased about 100 vehicles through the program. Vehicles came from Honeyman Ford, Seneca; Nordhus Motors, Marysville; Melton Motors, Belleville; and dealerships from Manhattan.

"Some are in great shape, and others weren't," said Rick Smith of Smitty's Salvage.

The first vehicles began coming in about a month ago, trickling in at first, and then all of a sudden, dealerships started bringing them in at a fast pace. A towing service was hired to bring in most of the vehicles, and some were brought in by dealers. One stipulation of the clunkers program is that vehicles have only a limited lifespan at recycling yards. The vehicle must be destroyed in some fashion or another. It cannot exist as a complete vehicle after 120 days, Smith said.

"Each of the clunkers has to be shredded within a certain time span of entering the yard and then sold for scrap metal," he said.

The vehicles have to be disposed of or dismantled within 120 days of when they were bought.

"Quite a few are destroyed or dismantled immediately," Smith said. "To meet the government's requirements, they can no longer be a vehicle."

The influx of 100 extra vehicles coming through the program adds to the 60 that normally come in every month at Smitty's.

"There are still a few stragglers coming in from some dealers," Smith said. "It's been a real challenge for the car dealers, who made a lot of effort to make a little bit of money. I can't imagine how many hundreds of hours the dealers spent to get through the paperwork. They earned every nickel they made."

"I am very pleased that we had a chance to get all these late-model cars. Now there is a huge amount of late-model parts available. Boy, that was fantastic. We have access to lots of late model parts."

Smith said the value of some vehicles that were traded was clearly more than what the owner got in the Cash for Clunkers program. The program allowed \$3,500 to \$4,500, depending on gas mileage.

But, he said, most of the vehicles "needed to go." "In the hundred cars we got, there were a dozen cars that it was a shame that they were destroyed," he said.

The program is good for salvage yards because they get some good salvage vehicles, Smith said. So much so that some of the clunkers obviously met acidic ends well before their time, he said.

"Some of the vehicles could have been driven for the next five

to 10 years and would be a really nice vehicle for the age of the vehicles," said Nate Engelken of Smitty's. "There are some cars in the clunker group with relatively low miles."

"Iron is selling for \$100 a ton right now," Smith said. "The market is under pressure to go down slightly. Highest price in recent years was \$150, and I don't believe we'll see that again. The lowest price was last year when it hit \$30. A couple of years ago, we were taking it in for free."

"We get in about 1,000 ton a month and that includes cars, scrap iron and farm machinery," Smith said. "There are usually 60 to 70 cars that come in during a month."

The clunkers program has been good for Smitty's and for the people who buy parts, Smith said.

"It's good for the automakers, but really tough on the auto dealers," he said. "For the public who took advantage of it, it was a wonderful deal. From the taxpayers' point of view, I don't know."

LOCAL BUSINESS STORY

Nondaily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Miami County Republic

Brian McCauley

The personal stories of former employees give this story a haunting quality. The subject - along with interviews - captures the turbulent and uncertain spirit of local business in 2009.

SECOND PLACE

Kansas City Business Journal

Rob Roberts

This story is a great blend of human interest and local business. It's interesting and informative - the scope of this family's success is handled objectively while keeping it readable.

THIRD PLACE

Wichita Business Journal

Chris Moon

Excellent overview of economic situation and retailers' plights. Easy to follow, makes good use of relevant information

By Brian McCauley

When Chrisanne Badders drives past the parking lot near the intersection of Pearl and Piankishaw streets, she can't help but think back on the more than nine years she spent working as a data input clerk for TeamBank.

It was her first full-time job, and she quickly made friends with her coworkers.

Many of the employees would park in that lot, behind TeamBank's former financial headquarters.

"We used to have to fight for a parking spot," Badders said.

Now, most of the lot is empty during working days. It's an everyday reminder to the Paola community of how the country's economic struggles have hit home in Miami County.

The Office of the Comptroller of the Currency closed TeamBank in late March and appointed the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. as receiver. The FDIC then entered into a purchase and assumption agreement with Great Southern Bank, based in Springfield, Mo., to assume all the deposits of TeamBank.

During the transition, several TeamBank employees were told their positions were being eliminated. Great Southern spokesperson Kelly Polonus confirmed Monday that the total number who lost their jobs from the Paola headquarters was 67. Polonus said the number has evolved as some associates have taken other opportunities within Great Southern. Most stayed until the end of July because Great Southern offered them a

retention bonus to do so, but now many have joined the millions of Americans who currently are unemployed.

Badders knows all about the struggles. Her husband was also laid off from his job earlier this year. But she still considers herself lucky. She recently got a job as a receptionist at Lakemary Center, allowing her to continue to work in Paola.

Rhonda Cordle wasn't so lucky.

After working as an accounting clerk for TeamBank for 12 years, Cordle also was told her position was being eliminated. It was a big hit, especially since her retirement package of TeamBank stock disappeared when the bank went under. Paola-based Team Financial Inc., the holding company for the failed TeamBank institution, also filed for bankruptcy earlier this year.

The retirement package was one of the main reasons Cordle took the job to begin with, because her husband is self employed. Now she's struggling to find work, and she's worried that there won't be near enough jobs in a town the size of Paola to accommodate all the former TeamBank employees.

"I'm afraid about the economy of Paola," Cordle said.

The job field may push some of the unemployed residents to look for work in other communities, but for Tracy Bryant, there was never any question — she was going to stay in Paola.

After working as a data input clerk at TeamBank for 11 years, Bryant said her goodbyes at the

end of July, but she already has begun her new job as a loan processor at Citizen's State Bank.

"I knew I was going to stay in Paola," Bryant said, although she admitted she was lucky to find a job so quickly and added that most of her former coworkers are still looking for work.

At least three longtime TeamBank employees already have found other banking positions in Paola thanks to First Option Bank, which announced earlier this year that it had absorbed the trust services from the former TeamBank. Former TeamBank trust officers Carolyn Jacobs, Kathy Lovig and Betty Hewitt have moved to First Option.

But some former TeamBank employees, like Cordle, are expanding their job search into other fields.

"I'm a little discouraged with the banking industry right now," Cordle said.

LOCAL BUSINESS STORY

Daily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

Iola Register

Bob Johnson

A great story on how a business puts workers on a project to improve the community. Project attracted national attention.

SECOND PLACE

High Plains Daily Leader

Jessica Crawford

Unusual business that has brought to community attention because of the story. Great human interest story.

THIRD PLACE

Arkansas City Traveler

Sydney L. Bland

The story gave the community a review of the area business and their growth. Keeps industry in all of the readers' minds.

By Bob Johnson

Joe Works figures its better to keep his employees at B&W Trailer Hitches working, even when business is slow.

When sales dipped a year ago when forecasts of recession became stark reality, Works looked to the community to find tasks for his employees to perform.

It was too late for a big push for some new product, Works said Friday morning, not long before he was interviewed by Kevin Tibbles for NBC's Nightly News. We remodeled the plant office and during a staff meeting someone mentioned that (storm sewer) grates downtown were in pretty bad shape. We found some scrap around the plant, made new ones and installed them.

That led to discussions about other random acts of kindness that we could do, Works said.

The first visible effort was installation of bleachers at the Allen County Fairgrounds in Riverside Park. Workers then put a new roof on the shelter house in Humboldt's Camp Hunter Park, refurbished tennis courts and constructed horseshoe-pitching pits.

All the while, Works avoided layoffs with work-share, which had many employees on duty three days a week and their wages supplemented by unemployment compensation. Work-share started in November and ran through January.

Orders have picked up recently. Spring is our busiest time, Works said, but it's hard to predict very far ahead.

With several community projects done, Matt Aikins, production supervisor, suggested work on the town's churches. Friday four

B&W workers were prepping and painting the exterior of Poplar Grove Church, the last of Humboldt's churches to be so touched.

An ongoing project is construction of a third ball field in the George Sweatt complex at the southeast edge of Humboldt. Work on two existing fields preceded that.

A feature of the new field work is a fund-raising project.

There was quite a bit of timber that had to be removed and instead of just dozing the trees and hauling them off, we decided to cut them up for firewood, Works said.

That's what the wood lot outside the plant is. The wood is being sold, with money going to the ball program.

The most expansive part of B&W community assistance is its Employee Appreciation Program. All of our employees were asked to submit projects at their homes, Works said. Three employees join the owner and together they spend a full day doing whatever is needed. They put on siding, build fences, clear brush, trim trees and even do inside work, such as Sheetrock.

Through this week's two projects were done Friday's 68 employees' homes have been tweaked.

B&W has 180 employees.

THE COMMUNITY projects prompted NBC News to send a crew of three to film workers in the plant and at Poplar Grove Church, the ball park and employees' homes. The segment is scheduled for Monday night's 5:30 news show, said Laura McCabe, a producer from Kansas City, who cautioned the story may get bumped to another night.

B&W mainly manufactures trailer hitches, although it got its start 15

years ago building custom truck beds.

That is our flagship product, high-quality truck beds, and we still produce a few, but most sales are of hitches, Works said. Works, who admits to eschewing publicity, shrugs off praise for diverting company resources to community projects at a time when many owners are furloughing employees.

Dan Julich, one of B&W's first hires, observed: It was much better to keep people than risk losing them and, when sales pick up, have to train new employees. Joe has done the best he can to keep us working, and we appreciate it.

Julich said he and others also enjoyed a break from production line work by going into the community to help friends and neighbors.

Poplar Grove, one of the oldest congregations in town, doesn't have resources or members enough to do repairs and cosmetic touchups that Julich and three others, Bill Chapman Jr., Charlie Heiman and Chris Jones, toiled at Friday.

I'm glad to be able to help them out, Julich said.

In some cases, community projects have involved repairs long needed. When the roof of a shelter house was replaced at Camp Hunter Park, Julich said the names of Works Progress Administration workers were found inscribed on a piece of sheeting underneath shingles.

We put our names on a new sheet of plywood, and called ourselves the Slow-Time Division, he said.

LOCAL BUSINESS STORY

Daily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Hays Daily News

Mike Corn

Excellent in-depth piece analyzing impact on local labor market with the closing of a nearby prison.

SECOND PLACE

Newton Kansan

Cristina Janney

Good, enterprising piece with particular emphasis on community importance and relevance.

THIRD PLACE

Dodge City Daily Globe

Claire O'Brien

Great local business story tied to "National Doughnut Day" but also taking a closer look at the baking process, the bakers and the customers.

By Mike Corn

When the minimum security prison here is mothballed on April 1, communities and businesses in northwest Kansas won't see it as a laughing matter.

Instead, it very well could be a costly matter for them, perhaps topping the \$1 million mark. And that's if they even try to replace the benefit that has fallen to them, thanks to a series of prison work crews that fan out nearly every day of the year.

Those crews perform a multitude of tasks for cities, counties, non-profits and even state and federal agencies that simply couldn't - or wouldn't - afford to hire the manpower to accomplish what the prisoners do for a pittance.

In addition, local businesses - specifically A-1 Plank in Hays and Wilkens Manufacturing south of Stockton - use prisoners to fill otherwise unfilled positions.

In return for jobs, prisoners pay their room and board and create savings accounts for when they return to life outside the prison. They also contribute to the state's victim's fund, even if the working inmate was convicted of what would be considered a victimless crime.

"It's bad news," said Art Wilkens, owner and manager of Wilkens Manufacturing.

Wilkens has six inmates from the Stockton prison, and for the most part he said he's been happy with their performance.

A-1 Plank has 12 inmates working at its Hays facility. Before it closed, Schult Homes in Plainville had nine prisoners

working.

The inmates get a regular wage, Wilkens said. The money goes toward transportation to and from work, room and board, the state's victim's fund and individual savings accounts.

The largest share of the earnings are set aside to pay court costs, alimony and child support if those responsibilities exist.

"We give them raises," Wilkens said, "the good ones."

While Wilkens uses the prison labor to fill holes in his workforce, communities and nonprofit groups take advantage of the prison labor to do a laundry list of tasks.

The Kansas Department of Transportation, for example, uses prison labor to trim grass around signs on state highways, including Interstate 70.

County fairs, including those in Ellis and Rooks counties, get free labor to spruce up fairgrounds. The Phillipsburg Rodeo, in fact, virtually relies on labor from the prison to get everything ready.

The list is lengthy, and includes a who's who of northwest Kansas communities.

Inmates from Stockton, for example, in fiscal year 2008, performed 48,606 man hours of work. That would be worth \$280,384 at minimum-wage levels prevailing at the time.

From July 1 through the end of December, Stockton inmates performed 19,644 hours of work, worth \$125,889.

Closing the Stockton facility is expected to save the Department of Corrections \$1.65 million annually.

That's labor that would have

to be replaced by the entities, should they decide to continue what inmates have been doing.

To be sure, Stockton isn't the only prison with work crews.

Norton, for example, also has work crews. In fact, they do more work.

In fiscal year 2008, Norton inmates performed 61,275 hours of work, worth \$354,322. From July 1 through the end of December, Norton prisoners performed 25,833 of work, worth \$165,911.

In that 18-month period, inmates worked more than 115,000 hours. That work was valued at just shy of \$1 million.

Statewide, inmates from Stockton, Norton and other facilities have put in about a million hours of work

All of the Stockton work crews will be disbanded once the minimum security facility is mothballed. The number of Norton's work crews will be sharply reduced, if they remain at all.

"We are not doing away with them completely," said Department of Corrections spokesman Bill Miskell, "but they are going to be scaled back."

Part of the logic is that a single guard must be paid to oversee a seven-man work crew. Inside the prison, that same guard could watch over a much larger number.

Work crews from Toronto and Osawatimie, also being closed, will be lost as well.

Prison labor isn't totally free, but it's close. Inmates taking part in the work crews get paid, but that pay scale only ranges from

65 cents up to \$1.05 a day.

For Craig Mowry, manager of the Kirwin National Wildlife Refuge northeast of Stockton, the value of the work crew he gets is high.

Each year, he reports to supervisors in Denver on the contributions the crew gives.

While the crew's labors might only be worth \$75,000 at minimum wage, if they were federal employees the wages would be double that at \$180,000.

"That doesn't include the crew boss," Mowry said.

While Denver has been supportive of the refuge and is even allowing a fourth staff member there, Mowry won't be asking for supplemental funding.

"They do a lot of work for us," Mowry said of the work crews.

Work includes fixing things around the lake, cleaning restrooms, mowing and picking up trash. But they also help pour concrete for boat ramps.

"Just a number of things," he said. "We always keep them busy."

Mowry said he's had a crew from the Stockton facility ever since it first opened.

"It will impact the Kirwin refuge pretty hard," he said, "very negatively."

The same is true over at Webster Reservoir, where another crew regularly helps with mowing, concrete work and keeping the park virtually spotless.

At Wilkens, it's uncertain how those positions will be filled.

"That will throw us in a bind if they should shut down," Wilkens said the workers who come from the prison.

And that leads to frustration with state government.

Money is being waste on unneeded highway projects, Wilkens said, pointing to work north of Hays and in the Marysville area.

"They just need to get rid of some money and they got rid of it," he said. "Anybody would go broke operating the way they do."

LOCAL BUSINESS STORY

Daily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Wichita Eagle

Molly McMillin

Excellent business analysis of the market for the product, the regional labor market and an educational and calculated projection of the future of the jet industry.

SECOND PLACE

Lawrence Journal-World

Chad Lawhorn

Wonderful first person draw into a quirky business, the man no one likes, and what he encounters. An overall business angle as well.

THIRD PLACE

Hutchinson News

John Green

Good, incisive and in-depth business story.

By Molly McMillin

Nobody saw this coming.

Thousands of jobs lost. Production cuts. Furloughs. The cancellation of a major new aircraft program.

The global financial crisis hit the business jet market hard and fast and put Wichita's lifeblood industry in an agonizing free fall.

A year later, there is evidence that the global economy is in the early stages of recovery. But for business aviation and Wichita planemakers, the climb back will be long and slow.

"We're going to win, but it's going to be a long fight," said Hawker Beechcraft CEO Bill Boisture.

Deliveries are expected to drop further next year from already depressed 2009 levels. An upturn in deliveries is expected in 2011 or 2012.

But it may be several years before demand for business jets returns to record highs.

"We're in the bottom . . . of a long cycle," Cessna Aircraft chairman, president and CEO Jack Pelton said in an interview ahead of this year's National Business Aviation Association show. The show opens Tuesday in Orlando, Fla.

As demand for jets eventually increases - and it will, aviation experts say - Wichita jobs will return.

But whether aviation employment returns to previous levels is uncertain. Some say it's unlikely.

Wichita business jetmakers are under pressure to lower costs as they deal with the new reality of lower demand.

They're also grappling with

increased competition, particularly from business jet manufacturer Embraer in Brazil.

"They're going to continue to be a real thorn in our side," Pelton said.

Before the fall

This past year couldn't have been more different from the previous one.

Before the downturn, Wichita planemakers were in their third year of record deliveries.

Cessna, Hawker Beechcraft and Bombardier Learjet were boosting production and hiring as order books bulged.

Cessna was about to break ground on a new production plant for its largest business jet, the Citation Columbus. The Columbus program has since been canceled.

Cessna had planned deliveries of 535 jets this year. That's been cut nearly in half.

Any downturn, economists once thought, would be cushioned by a strong international market and big backlogs. A year ago, the U.S. stock market was piling on losses and the financial crisis spread around the world.

The industry has never before faced a downturn this severe, said Teal Group analyst Richard Aboulafia.

Cessna, Hawker Beechcraft and Bombardier Learjet have shed almost 13,000 jobs in the past year. That doesn't include lost jobs from local suppliers and others who support the industry.

The industry has taken a tough blow, Aerospace Industries Association president and CEO Marion Blakey said during a visit to Wichita this week. But the fundamentals are in place to

weather it, she said.

"It's an industry with great bones," Blakey said. "We are in a strong position."

Reassessing

As the market changes, companies are taking time to assess their business.

"The market has given us a respite here," Boisture said.

Hawker Beechcraft is working to improve its business so it will be ready to compete when the market improves, he said.

Ultimately, the company's footprint likely will be smaller.

It's assessing outsourcing "non-core tasks," Boisture said. Where it's practical, it's seeking "lower labor-cost markets," he added.

At the same time, it's considering closing and consolidating facilities to cut overhead. Specifically, it likely will close its Salina plant and move work to Wichita.

"We are intending to do more work with fewer people," Boisture said. "Our early assessments of our processes tell me we can get a lot leaner than we are."

Bombardier Learjet is concentrating on efficient operations, customer satisfaction and its product lineup, Bombardier Learjet vice president and general manager David Coleal said. It also is developing a new business jet, the Learjet 85.

That, and an eventual improvement in the market, will create a need for more jobs at some point, Coleal said.

At Cessna, Pelton said there's no fundamental changes in the works.

"We have a lot of capacity that is still underutilized," he said.

The downturn forced Cessna to close its Bend, Ore., plant and move work on its Corvallis models to Independence and to Chihuahua, Mexico.

In all, Cessna is consolidating 10 facilities with about 540,000 square feet of space to meet lower production needs, its parent company, Textron, said last month.

Cessna must improve its margins and increase profitability, officials said. It's striving to lower the cost of fabrications, production and engineering and to improve productivity, they said.

Pelton said it's difficult to tell what will happen with jobs in the future.

"It's all based on when demand comes back and what kind of production rates you might see," he said.

While not all the city's aviation jobs came back after the downturn following Sept. 11, 2001, Cessna's employment before this downturn exceeded its previous levels.

A 'nasty cycle'

Business jet demand depends on an economic recovery, the return of corporate profits and how quickly customers feel confident about buying.

While the numbers are improving, the quantity of used jets on the market remains high, prices remain down and usage continues to be lower. The lack of financing available for aircraft purchases also is still a problem.

"It's a pretty nasty cycle," said Cowen and Co. managing director and senior research analyst Cai von Rumohr. "The comeback usually takes a while to generate

momentum."

Teal Group's Aboulafia said he expects recovery to begin in 2012.

Cessna isn't projecting when 2008 levels might return, Pelton said.

"It's fair to say it's going to be a ways down the road," he said. "We're not planning for it in the next five years."

Order cancellations have slowed to more manageable levels but haven't stopped entirely, Pelton said. Cessna is taking new orders but not at the rate of previous years.

"The good news is we're starting to see the economy starting to recover," he said.

Worldwide, planemakers delivered 1,315 business jets in 2008. It may take six to eight years for those levels to return, Aboulafia said.

Regardless, the long-term fundamental global need for travel using corporate aircraft will be there when the economy recovers, experts say. Emerging international markets also will evolve and stimulate demand.

"Time is important, and safety and security and the ability to do business are important," Boisture said.

Wichita planemakers are still developing new products to be ready to compete when the market improves.

One must take a long-term view, Coleal said.

"New products will improve safety, reliability and be more sensitive to the environment," he said. "All these things will be good for aviation."

New competition

When the market returns, the

competition for business jets will have intensified for Wichita planemakers.

Gulfstream, for example, is developing the new super-midsize G250. The first plane rolled out of the factory earlier this month.

An even larger threat is Embraer, which is developing three business jets to add to the three jets it already has in the market.

"(Embraer is) gunning for the Wichita part of the business," Aboulafia said. "They're going for the lower end of the business jet market, and that's where the Wichita companies play."

The company builds good products and is aggressive on price, he said.

"If you look at each Embraer product, they're going after the Cessna or Hawker or Learjet product for a couple of hundred thousand dollars less," Aboulafia said.

The advantage for a company like Cessna, however, is customer loyalty and superb service, he said.

Because Embraer has built airliners for so long, it brings an eye toward ruggedness and reliability to the market, Hawker Beechcraft's Boisture said.

"I'm very concerned about them," he said. "They're a good engineering company."

"They have a product development plan that is, in my view, well-developed to enter the market where we and Cessna have been for many, many years," he said.

Eyes turn to Mexico

As they look to lower costs, Cessna, Hawker Beechcraft and Bombardier Learjet have turned

to Mexico as a lower-cost area to place work.

"The pressures to do that are going to increase," von Rumohr said.

About 190 aviation companies do business in Mexico and employ about 27,000 people.

For the first time last year, Mexico was the fastest-growing aerospace supplier in the world, outpacing China by a wide margin, Aboulafia said.

"Mexico represents a compelling value proposition for a lot of companies that want to outsource, whether that's partnering or building (their own) factories," Aboulafia said.

Hawker Beechcraft employs about 280 people there, up from 180 a year ago.

Hawker Beechcraft is evaluating what work its Mexico facility will perform in the future, Boisture said.

The hourly labor costs there are attractive. They total about \$4 an hour, including wages and benefits, sources say. The Mexican government also encourages U.S. companies to place work there.

The decision to move work, however, isn't as simple as wage rates. There are a number of issues and risks to consider, including quality and political uncertainties, experts say.

"The long-term economic stability of the country is something to worry about," said Malcolm Harris, a finance professor at Friends University and former chief economist for the U.S. Postal Service.

Pelton said Cessna has no plans to expand beyond what it's currently doing in Mexico.

A Cessna-owned facility in Chihuahua builds the composite fuselage for the company's Corvallis aircraft. It also does some sheet metal work and wire harness assembly work.

Labor officials are concerned about the work being shipped to other countries.

Machinists union District 70 president Steve Rooney said Mexico is a threat to U.S. jobs. He said the government must rethink the North American Free Trade Agreement.

"It's a race to the bottom," he said.

Still, Rooney is optimistic about the future of jobs in Wichita. The key will be training, he said.

Because of the age of the current work force, many workers will retire over the next five to eight years, Rooney said.

"As long as we have people trained, most of those jobs will come back," he said. "I believe people want planes built by highly skilled people right here."

Wichita's aviation industry might look a little different in the coming years.

"I think there's a synergy here that no other region has," Bombardier Learjet's Coleal said.

"That's hard to replicate."

Other parts of the world are trying to be the next Air Capital with its concentration of manufacturers and great work force, Coleal said. Wichita must understand the competition and be prepared.

"As long as we're aware and able to execute . . . I think we have a strong future," Coleal said.

GOVERNMENT/POLITICAL STORY

Nondaily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

De Soto Explorer

Elvyn J. Jones

Great subject and excellent writing. Good job explaining the background and comparing the towns.

SECOND PLACE

Eudora News

David Oakes

Good job. I like how you made the effort to find out what exactly happened - but it would be nice to know what the policy was and how it was violated.

THIRD PLACE

Oxford Register

Janice Kneisley

Good intro paragraph, lots of good information. It was missing some good quotes - would have added a lot to the story.

GOVERNMENT/POLITICAL STORY

Nondaily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Ellsworth County

Linda Denning

Mowery-Denning outlined, in excellent detail, what Wilson Lake means to the economy of communities in the area. It's detailed and the state plus federal laws apply to Lake usage. The author sorts through the details to give the public a better understanding.

SECOND PLACE

Washington County News

Tom Parker

Parker outlines how a rumor on the internet led to a shortage scare of an antiviral used to treat the flu.

THIRD PLACE

Atchison Globe

Patty Moore

Moore deftly explains to readers how the city finance director was forced out of office by the commissioners after less than six months in office.

GOVERNMENT/POLITICAL STORY

Nondaily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Shawnee Dispatch

Caroline Boyer

Good article! Nice to hear both sides!

SECOND PLACE

Fort Leavenworth Lamp

Tisha Johnson

Kept my attention! Good article

THIRD PLACE

Wichita Business Journal

Chris Moon

Good article, but left me wanting to know more!

GOVERNMENT/POLITICAL STORY

Daily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

Arkansas City Traveler

Foss Farrar

This was a terrific government story disguised as a great read. In other words, it was interesting and fun to read. Well done.

SECOND PLACE

Iola Register

Richard Luken

Nice job spotlighting an issue of importance to taxpayers.

THIRD PLACE

Junction City Daily Union

Eric Brown

Thoughtful objective look at a controversial issue.

By Foss Farrar

One house renovator calls them “diamonds in the rough.” They are Arkansas City’s forgotten old houses — once beautiful and sturdy — but left vacant and without needed maintenance years ago.

Many of these structures date back to the early 1900s or even back further, to the late 1800s.

Now some of them are coming alive again, thanks to people like Ernie Snow, a retired construction worker, and his son, Jeff. They have saved what had been a dilapidated house at 521 N. C St. from the wrecker’s ball by diligent work over the past three months.

Ark City’s building, planning and codes director Matt Rowland pointed to it on a tour of fixed-up houses in various neighborhoods throughout town on Tuesday. It’s a good example of what’s been happening more often here, he said.

Snow purchased the house at a tax sale and then came to Rowland’s office and asked for a permit to renovate it, Rowland said.

“I had taken it to the City Commission to get it condemned,” Rowland said. “But since he came in, they have made quite a bit of progress.”

Their work proved so fruitful that, on Rowland’s recommendation, city commissioners at a recent meeting changed the status

of the house from “unsafe or dangerous” to acceptable under city code.

It’s one of a half dozen recent house renovations that Rowland pointed out Tuesday. One possible reason for the improvement boom is the city’s Neighborhood Revitalization Program, offered for several years.

Rowland is promoting the incentive to property owners. Within the last year, the city increased the tax rebate from 75 to 90 percent. That means that you get most of the tax increase back if you renovate your home.

“In the last couple of years I think we’ve seen a lot of improvements on the way people are taking care of their yards and houses,” Rowland said.

Jeff Snow took a break from working on the house on North C to comment on the work he and his father have done. When they first purchased it, weeds and vines hid it from sight.

They built a new front porch to replace one that had rotted away and also renovated a back porch that was falling apart, he said.

Inside, they took out a dilapidated bathroom at the rear of the house and extended the structure to the north for a kitchen. They also renovated a closet for a washer and dryer and made room for a breakfast area.

“He’s planning to sell it,” Snow said of his father’s plans for the house. “A couple of people are interested.”

Years ago, Ernie and Jeff Snow had a local construction company, but since then Ernie retired and Jeff moved away. But

now he’s returned to Ark City to live and he is planning to start the business back up.

NELSON AWARD

Rowland drove west to 600 N. First St. to show another renovated house that had a “Nelson Award” sign in its front yard. The award honors property owners for neighborhood beautification.

Pablo Fuentes, a city-licensed construction contractor, did the work, Rowland said. He has lived in Ark City the past nine years and has renovated several houses.

“I’d like to say it was my doing,” Rowland said. “But it’s the people who fix up these houses and neighborhoods and make our way of life a lot better.”

He showed another house Fuentes had rebuilt from the foundation up, at 625 N. Fourth St. A painter, Vicente Hernandez, was at work on the outside upper story.

“The house that was there before was unsalvageable,” Rowland said.

Reached by phone, Fuentes said he has worked in construction the past 20 years and started his own company after moving to Ark City.

“I like to do this work and to help make the town look better,” he said.

GINGERBREAD HOUSE

Rowland showed another house at 403 S. C St. that he refers to as the “gingerbread house.” The renovation work was done by Keeli Montgomery, owner, and her mother, Arnetta Curless. They bought the three-bedroom house as an investment.

Montgomery said she acquired the house after it had been repossessed by a bank. “It wasn’t livable when we first bought it. It was an eyesore of the neighborhood but we thought it had potential.”

She and her mother did a major overhaul including installing new wiring and a new gas line.

“There was no electricity when we bought it,” she said. “It still had the gas lines for gas lighting.”

Those were corroded and had to be done away with, she added.

Montgomery and Curless worked day and night for nearly a year to renovate it, she said. They started in May 2008 and finished in February 2009.

They will show it at an open house from 7:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. today, she said.

Rowland showed a few other houses including a small one on South Seventh Street purchased by Mateo Martinez. “This is an example of something you can do on a limited income and a little paint,” Rowland said.

Martinez fixed up that house, which was headed for condemnation, and another dilapidated house next door, Rowland said.

Another house being renovated on North A Street was not on Rowland’s tour Tuesday, but he noted that the owners have done good work on it.

Loren and Randi Shultz, owners of a three-story wood frame house at 411 N. A have been working on it for two years. They live in the house, Randi Shultz said.

She said they replaced the

roof, installed gutters on the eaves, replaced windows and renovated the front and side porch. They still have more scraping and painting to do.

The house dates back to 1876 and the couple is applying to put it on the National Register of Historic Places.

It is the second house they have renovated, she said. The first was in Oklahoma, where her husband is from. “This one is a lot harder and bigger.”

Shultz said she believes the older houses are better quality than the new ones. “If people would put a little money in it the older ones are built better.”

GOVERNMENT/POLITICAL STORY

Daily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Newton Kansan

Christina Janney

Budget cuts were a big topic in this category, but the Newton Kansan was the only paper that effectively put a face on the consequences. Profiling how one state client would be affected made the story real.

SECOND PLACE

Dodge City Daily Globe

Eric Swanson

Good job showing how forced unpaid leave will make like difficult for low-paid court staff.

THIRD PLACE

Great Bend Tribune

Susan Thacker

Detail strong on this issue based report.

GOVERNMENT/POLITICAL STORY

Daily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Wichita Eagle

Brent D. Wistrom

There is just not a community that does not complain about it's streets, but Wichita's must be the worst in Kansas. Story detailed sorry state of streets and told readers how to take action.

SECOND PLACE

Hutchinson News

Mary Glarkin

Good reporters, "put a face" on the story, but this report traced government earmarks to the face of office holders who secured them, even though they voted against them.

THIRD PLACE

Lawrence Journal-World

Scott Rothschild

Sourcing for this story have to be a challenge, but report offered personal interviews to illustrate the problem and need for solutions.

By Brent D. Wistrom

Along one of the nicest paved trails in Wichita is a crumbling street called North Oak Park Drive. It slices through a heavily used disc golf course near the Little Arkansas River in North Riverside Park.

But it floods frequently. Standing water seeps into the pavement and erodes it on a microscopic scale that has grown into deep cracks and softball-sized chunks of broken-out asphalt.

North Oak Park Drive is among the worst paved roads in Wichita, which has more than 500 miles of street in "critical" condition and, like many cities, isn't spending enough to keep up with the deterioration.

Dozens of other streets are in similar shape - drivable, but bumpy. They are steadily worsening, forcing the city to spend more to fix them. Miles of newly annexed roads put more strain on an inadequate budget.

It will be up to City Council members - including whoever wins three contested races this spring - to decide how to address the problem. (See the District 1 and 6 candidates' ideas on Page 8A.)

Courtney Darrah, a 28-year-old who lives at the corner of North Oak Park Drive and North Forest Avenue, would like to see the roads fixed. She, her husband and two kids ride their bicycles on the sidewalk instead of on the street. But she sees benefits in a bumpy road.

"It slows people down and there are a lot of kids around. It acts like a speed bump," she said.

She also would rather see her tax dollars improve the park she lives next to. Her view exemplifies part of the dilemma council members face when they prioritize spending - fix roads or fund other projects that are often sexier and call for ribbon-cutting ceremonies.

It's those battles of priority and rising repair costs that have led streets to a critical point that affect almost everyone in some way.

Rough roads eat away tires, jostle alignment and jiggle wires and bolts loose under the hood, sometimes forcing vehicles into the shop earlier than expected, auto repair experts say. And when cracks grow and potholes proliferate, the city is forced to reconstruct the roads instead of repaving them, costing tens of thousands more per block.

People notice.

About 1,000 residents responding to a city survey in 2006 gave the city a 32 out of 100 on "street repair," the lowest marks for any transportation issue. They ranked street maintenance highest when asked what more city money should be spent on.

Wichita already trails cities such as Tulsa and Colorado Springs in maintenance spending.

On average, cities with more than 100,000 people spent \$2,759 per paved lane mile in 2006, according to the International City/County Management Association.

Wichita spent \$1,822 per mile that year.

'Going backwards'

Moved by some compelling figures that show how quickly streets go from bad to worse, the council voted last year to add another \$2.5 million to the street maintenance fund - short of the \$4.1 million public works officials said they needed just to hold conditions steady.

It would take another \$10 million a year over the next decade to fix the city's most critical streets, according to a public works report.

But even the additional \$2.5 million is on hold as the city examines how it can withstand grim budget projections.

Wichita's overall road conditions will decline this year - with or without the approved cash.

"We're already going backwards," said Tony DeCicco, the city's maintenance engineer. "To be realistic, we're never going to have enough money to just fix all the streets."

For years, the city has focused on its most traveled roads, he said, and residential streets have fallen far behind. Most of the money is spent on keeping streets safe - not on preventive maintenance that engineers and some council candidates would prefer.

Rating the roads

The city tracks road quality with a pavement condition index (PCI) that runs from 1, a dirt road, to 100, a road in perfect condition. The rating includes cracks, potholes and overall bumpiness.

The city's overall PCI has

fallen from 73 in 2003 to 70 this year, an Eagle analysis shows.

That might sound high or low depending on where you drive.

Many of the best roads are either tucked away in new subdivisions or are heavily traveled arterials. Many of the worst roads are in densely packed neighborhoods in the city's aging core.

About 100 miles of dirt streets are spread across the city, including a stretch of Wichita Street just a few blocks from City Hall.

Residents have to get signed petitions from their neighbors to get dirt roads paved and then pay for it over 15 or 20 years. The city paves about 1.5 miles of dirt road a year, according to city documents.

Residents on asphalt or concrete streets have to wait their turn.

The city has a crack-sealing crew that can fill in cracks and pothole filling crews that prolong the life of the street. Resurfacing and reconstruction come out of the city's maintenance budget.

The streets that have a lot of complaints, a poor PCI rating or requests from council members get paved first, DeCicco said. The process is open to political pressure, but council members have not abused that, he said.

The city has about \$15.5 million in its pavement maintenance budget this year - more than half goes to in-house crews responsible for roads, bridges and many other things. The remainder - about \$5.9 million - is for contract maintenance that mends entire roads at a time.

The contract cash is split evenly among the six City Council districts.

The problems are not.

District 2 in northeast Wichita is often seen as one of the most prosperous, but it also has the most miles and highest percentage of road with PCIs of less than 60. District 1 in central northeast Wichita and District 6 in north-central Wichita follow. The worst of the worst - dirt roads and those with PCIs under 30 - are most concentrated in southeast and north-central Wichita.

Many streets with the poorest ratings are not on the city's fix-it list - sometimes because of lack of complaints, other times because they are scheduled for reconstruction in the city's 10-year plan.

"We've got plenty of bad streets to go around," DiCicco said.

Fixing it

Last fall, Public Works Director Chris Carrier said it would take \$100 million to reconstruct the 158 miles of city street with a PCI less than 50 - those viewed as failing.

But he knew that was a long shot, if a shot at all. Many of his peers in other cities are in similar circumstances.

Cities and states are trying to deal with aging roads, bridges, sewers and sidewalks, but since the economy tanked, most have fewer dollars coming in.

Some are finding solutions.

Last November, Tulsa residents approved a one-cent sales tax and a general obligation bond issue that is expected to pay for \$451 million in projects.

"It's really as much about economic development as anything," Tulsa Metro Chamber President and chief executive Mike Neal told the Tulsa World newspaper after the vote. "It's going to be so nice not to have to figure out which two or three streets we can drive prospects on when they come to town."

Topeka, prompted by its chamber of commerce, will vote in April on whether to start a half-cent sales tax to fund maintenance projects.

Wichitans already pay a 1 percent sales tax approved by voters in 1985 - half was to keep property taxes down, and most of the remainder has funded construction of Kellogg.

No one in Wichita is suggesting a new sales tax. That likely would be a tough political sell as the aircraft industry jettisons thousands of jobs and other sectors of the city's economy sag.

One recent afternoon, Tony Lamb sat at a picnic table at the edge of Zimmerly listening to a crackly radio mounted to his bicycle.

He said he has been coming down the street - now one of the worst in the city with a PCI of 26 - for about 30 years.

It used to be for work. Now he's unemployed and homeless.

He said he hasn't been too bothered by the potholes, but he knows to ride slow in the area. He's watched thousands of trucks roll over the crumbling concrete and says it's time for the city to repave it.

But he said he doesn't have the money for a reasonable apartment, let alone tax dollars to

pitch in on roads.

"If they'd fix it up like they did at 13th Street (and Broadway), that'd be great," he said.

How to get your road fixed

The city strives to fill potholes within about 24 hours, and it routinely seals cracks in roads.

Much of it is complaint-driven. Even if the city doesn't fix your road immediately, it records complaints and considers them when planning what to pave next. You can also call your council member at 316-268-4331 to request maintenance.

To report a pothole, request street maintenance or ask other questions about the upkeep of your road, call 316-268-4060.

How to get a dirt road paved

Property owners in the area on or near a dirt road typically have to petition their neighbors and get 50 percent of them - or owners of 50 percent of the land - to agree to pay for it.

The payments are usually spread over 15 or 20 years, and the city allows people who meet low-income guidelines to defer their payments.

RELIGION STORY

Nondaily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

Derby Informer

Linda Stinnett

Immediately gets the reader's attention, identifies a problem and traces it to the local area. Well worded. Probably opened the eyes of many readers.

SECOND PLACE

De Soto Explorer

Elvyn J. Jones

Easy to read, well-chosen quotes. Talks about new twists to an old subject.

THIRD PLACE

De Soto Explorer

Elvyn J. Jones

Interesting lead and an interesting subject. The story of their lives is interesting and what they have done is even more interesting.

By Linda Stinnett

The shooting of Dr. George Tiller in Wichita on Sunday sent home the message that church buildings are not always a place of sanctuary.

The need for a security plan is not new in the mindset of several local churches – even though Derby Police Lt. Jimmy Queen said he doesn't believe the department has worked a disturbance case which occurred in a local church in recent memory. The scenario has been close to home, though, for Don Mayberry, senior pastor at Pleasantview Baptist Church in Derby. Mayberry was fresh out of the seminary in the mid-1980s when he noted a man entering from the back of the building who was obviously inebriated.

"I knew who he was ... he was a very familiar face in town," said Mayberry, who did not live in Derby at the time.

The man came forward during the usual "commitment time" near the end of the service and Mayberry reached out to take the man's hand. The man pulled a knife and without thinking twice, Mayberry reached out and grabbed it and pitched it out of the man's reach and near the feet of nearby choir members.

The incident shook many in the congregation, even though they later found the man intended to turn the knife over to Mayberry. He thought by giving it to Mayberry he would avoid harming himself.

Then, earlier this year Mayberry was notified of the death of a colleague he had worked closely with when he lived in Il-

linois. In March that pastor, Fred Winters, was killed by a gunman who opened fire inside the First Baptist Church of Maryville, Ill. "It was a shocking disbelief to all of us," Mayberry said.

That incident shook Mayberry and since that time the church has begun working on its own security procedures. A member of the church who is also a career law enforcement member is helping organize the effort which involves utilizing ushers to be aware of who is entering the building and keeping auxiliary entrances locked during services. Ric Alspaw, family and counseling minister at Derby's First Christian Church, heads the security team for that congregation. They, too, have a plan in place to help minimize threats during main times of worship.

With the help of nearly 20 members who also work in law enforcement and training from groups which work solely with churches, First Christian has been "intentional" in its efforts to protect its members.

"They were just an unbelievable resource for us," Alspaw said.

Some of the procedures likely go unnoticed by most members. About a year ago a more visible check-in process was developed so parents and guardians of children left for their programs could not be picked up by anyone else. "We feel like that has been a real positive move for us," Alspaw said.

At both Pleasantview and First Christian, the procedures also include medical emergencies. Alspaw said the church has purchased an automatic external

defibrillator to aid with heart patients and there is a sense of security among the team, knowing it has the ability to help other members in need.

Mayberry said the methods which his church is utilizing mirror many already in place in schools.

"Schools are the front-runners on this," he said.

Churches, though, work to balance the need for security with their own desire to be open to the community.

If side entrances must be locked at Pleasantview, greeters are utilized to open locked doors for people who arrive at the wrong entrance.

"Those greeters are a first buffer for being aware, but they also double as a warm, friendly smile to welcome people in," Mayberry said. "I'm not interested in a closed community and a closed congregation."

Queen said the police department has also worked to be aware of the layout of local churches. Normally, officers are only in the buildings when a door is inadvertently left unlocked after services, he said, but they do search the premises at that time to make sure the site is secure.

Officers do know they must be as aware of security in that building as in any other.

"Use all precaution wherever you go," Queen said.

"We just need to be wise," Mayberry said. "I know you can't eliminate (violence) but you can minimize it."

RELIGION STORY

Nondaily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Marysville Advocate

JoAnn Shum

Writer did a nice job of explaining “why” and how the Amish live the way they do. Nice package of pictures and story.

SECOND PLACE

Atchison Globe

Patty Moore

Great piece that tied together a church’s long history in this community and how it continues as a viable, visible presence.

THIRD PLACE

Atchison Globe

Faye Miller

Well written, concise, descriptive - writer did an especially good job of bringing the spiritual element into this.

By JoAnn Shum

In the summer of 2007, an Amish family arrived at their new home on a farm south of Axtell. Soon three more families followed. Two more families have purchased land in the area since then and others are seeking out land for purchase.

Part of the rapid population growth within Reno County’s Amish communities, these young adults and their children sought to establish a new settlement with sufficient farmland.

The new residents from the Yoder, Hutchinson and Haven areas have made their home at a place they call Harmony Hills, a rolling stretch of land along Kansas Highway 87 a few miles south of U.S Highway 36.

Known for their plain dress and resistance to the adoption of many modern conveniences, the Amish are dedicated to a simple lifestyle, said Nathan Schrock, who moved to Marshall County with his family in August 2007. “It is better to stay close to God and rely on help from Him for our daily needs,” he said. “We don’t adopt anything new for fear of losing our identity and faith. If we change, then the plain and simple lifestyle is lost. We live our lives in the Amish lifestyle, and we don’t feel we have a right to condemn anyone.”

The community emphasizes church and family relationships, Schrock said.

“We value a rural life, where a large family provides an abundance of manual labor. The rules of the church must be observed by every member and cover most parts of daily living.”

Some of the rules include not using electricity, limiting use of telephones, prohibiting ownership and operation of a car and specifying the style of dress. Families moving to the area are considered Old Order Amish, the most general and traditional of the communities in Kansas.

To run errands, the families rely on horse and buggy.

“Traveling is more of a challenge here because of the hilly and narrow roads. It’s okay as long as there is a shoulder on the road. Our horses can easily do 10 miles an hour on a straight level run.”

Before moving here, the Schrocks lived a mile from Yoder on a farm that was in the family for five generations.

They looked at property in Washington County, but tended toward this area.

“When we started looking for a new location, we wanted a cooler climate with more rains,” Schrock said.

“We have long admired Marysville’s fine historical past,” he added.

Nathan and his wife, Ellen, have four sons, ranging in ages from 10 to 8 weeks. Other families include the Toby Yoders, who have six children, the Dale Bontragers, who have five children, and the Jerry Schrocks, who have five. Dale Bontrager’s mother, Ida Bontrager, and her son, Milton Bontrager, live in a house on the Bontrager farm. Milton works at Twin Valley in Beattie.

The Daniel Miller family purchased the Brooks farm north of U.S. 36 and is planning to move here soon. Jerry Schrock’s

father, Eli Schrock, bought land from Lyle Ladner and will soon be moving to the area as well. Another family from Wisconsin hopes to buy land in the area and plans to build a greenhouse on the site.

The families speak German as their first language, and English as a second language. A bishop officiates over major events in their church. A minister or deacon leads church services and the local minister is Toby Yoder. However, there is no central authority in the community. The majority of Old Order Amish congregations do not have church buildings, but hold worship services in private homes, Schrock said.

In addition to church services, conducted in German, on Sundays, they meet some weekday evenings for singing in German and English. A potluck is held before the singing begins. Their hymns are sung without accompaniment although most Amish would allow the harmonica, Schrock said. Their hymnals date to the early 1900s and are filled with songs passed down for 300 to 400 years.

Part of a resourceful community, the Schrocks have moved a mobile home onto their farm and entirely remodeled it, installing new flooring and windows. Living without electricity, they heat with a wood stove and use Coleman gas and propane for the lights. Appliances run off propane.

Only New Order Amish would have electricity, Schrock said. The Old Order are known for their avoidance of certain modern technologies. Amish do not

view technology as evil, he said, but there is a place for modern technology.

Friends from neighboring communities and the Marshall County Agency on Aging take them to Marysville and other places if they have a long distance to travel. Occasionally they hire people to take them places. In larger Amish communities, a van service is contracted to take the Amish to town or appointments. "We get a lot of our groceries in Axtell, and we bank at Axtell," he said. "We butcher meat from the farm, and we rent lockers for storage of our frozen meat at the Beattie Locker."

Schrock built a shed for their horses, buggies, machinery and feed and has a workshop on one side.

He also built a dairy barn for milking about 25 head of cows. Dairy Farmers of America, a dairy marketing cooperative, picks up the milk every other day. Yoder milks about 40 cows and Bontrager, around 25. Most have Holsteins with a sprinkling of Jersey.

"We keep the dairy small, so we can do it by ourselves," Schrock said. "Before the new baby was born, Ellen helped in the morning, and the children also help in the morning and evening."

"This is a very friendly community," he said. "People here help each other out."

Before moving to this area, Schrock worked in construction for 17 years and taught at an Amish school for six years. He also does roofing, siding and other construction work and is checking into options of making storage barns.

Using his grandfather's tools, he made a china cabinet for their home. He also built one of the buggies, which he rode in to propose to his wife, Ellen. "By farming and operating a dairy, I am home during the day unlike my former jobs," Schrock said.

Both the Schrock and Yoder families grew up on dairy farms in the Haven area. Schrock said the dairy business has been good, with milk topping out at \$20 a hundred weight last winter. The price is currently about \$12.50, but is forecast to climb by May when there is a planned buyout on some dairy farms, Schrock said.

The family has two buggy horses, one pony and four draft horses. The draft horses are used for light farm work. He uses a tractor to plow, chisel and disc. His father and brothers all use John Deere equipment, as does Nathan.

"All our equipment is on steel wheels with rubber casings over the wheels," he said. "It's not a very smooth ride. Not too many of the Old World Amish use tractors, but around the 1930's they started using them, mainly because the heavy field work was in the heat of the summer and was hard on the horses."

"Most farms are going to intensive grazing, so they don't have to use tractors," he said. "Investment costs are less and therefore profits are higher." In Yoder, the soil is sandy loam, according to Nathan. Fields are level and square.

"We are still trying to adjust to the hills and terrain here," he said. "We stay away from chemicals and sprays, but we are not strictly

organic."

"We use the corn for silage here," he said. "All our crops go through the cows."

There has been a westward movement for the Amish communities. More communities are appearing in Nebraska, Colorado and Montana. Amish communities in Kansas are in Garnett, Hutchinson, Fort Scott, Chetopa, Galesburg and, most recently, the Axtell area.

"The Amish are always looking for cheaper land and looking for grassland," he said. Since they don't have electricity, they keep up with the news through the newspaper and Time magazine.

"The newspaper is the best source of news," he said. Entertainment includes reading books and playing games. The boys enjoy softball, shooting BB guns and bows and arrows. "Our beliefs are no alcohol and no smoking."

The Shrocks share a phone with the Yoders. The phone is located in a phone booth on the Yoder farm. In the town of Yoder, there was one pay phone, and people had to wait in line to use it.

"The reason we don't have phones in our houses is because we don't want to become a slave to the phone," he said. "By having the phone in a phone booth at our neighbors', people can get a hold of us by leaving a message. We check messages regularly and return the calls."

The Amish do not educate their children past the eighth grade, believing that the basic knowledge provided at that point is sufficient to prepare one for the Amish lifestyle, Schrock said.

Like other Amish communities, they have a one-room schoolhouse called Harmony Hills School, located in a building on the Toby Yoder farm. There are 10 students in kindergarten through grade six. A young woman, Dinah Miller, from Kalona, Iowa, is the teacher. The school provides education in many crafts and in general education such as spelling, geography, history, English and German.

After completing school, the boys join their families in farming, woodworking and furniture making. The girls do the sewing, gardening, baking, canning and help with the chores on the farm.

"The goal in clothing is plainness, sober and modest dress style," said Nathan. "Clothing should not call attention to the wearer."

Hook and eye closures or straight pins are used as fasteners, rather than using buttons on dress clothing. Snaps are used on jackets, and plain buttons for work shirts and trousers. The historic restriction on buttons on women's clothing is attributed to tradition and rules of the church. Men can have buttons on some of their clothing.

Ellen sews all the family's clothes, as is the tradition of the Old Order Amish. The women wear dark colors.

"You wouldn't see an Amish woman wearing a pink dress," Schrock said. "Dark blue denim work clothing is worn by the men."

Women wear calf-length, plain-cut dresses in a solid color. Aprons are often worn at home,

usually in white or black, and are always worn when attending church. A cape, which consists of a triangular piece of cloth, is usually worn. In the colder months, a long woolen cloak may be worn. Heavy black bonnets are worn over the prayer coverings in cold weather. Girls may wear black or dark blue bonnets. The women don't cut their hair. The men wear broadfall pants with suspenders for work. Their Sunday attire includes dark trousers, white shirts, vests and black coats. The men have a bowl shaped haircut. Married men and those over 40 grow a beard, but no moustaches.

The men wear broad-rimmed straw hats in the warmer months, and black felt hats in the colder months, he said.

A large Amish wedding, attended by 300 guests, is being planned at the Toby Yoder farm for their daughter, Linda Yoder and fiancé, Lynn Yoder. A new shed was built for the event, which begins at 9 a.m. with a three-hour service, followed by a large dinner, opening of gifts, children playing volleyball and an evening meal.

The move to a new community has been a big change for the children, noted Toby Yoder, whose family lives across the road from the Schrock family.

"This is a different climate and different landscape from our former home in Yoder. There have been some adjustments."

"We like living in this area," he said. "People are friendly here."

RELIGION STORY

Nondaily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Miami County Republic

Brian McCauley

Well written, engaging story that does a great job of demonstrating the Christian principles of forgiveness and redemption in the person who was a former drug dealer.

SECOND PLACE

Fort Leavenworth Lamp

Melissa Bower

Reporter did a nice job of developing VBS into a full feature story. You had a great lead paragraph and super comments from small children (which can be tough to get) - you turned a staple summer activity (VBS) into something readers will enjoy.

THIRD PLACE

Kansas City Nursing News

Arley Hoskin

My only complaint was that I had to read quite a ways before getting to the vital information about why the churches united and how big a problem it was. Otherwise, it was well done.

By Brian McCauley

For nearly a decade between 1996 and 2005, Philip Slater weaved an elaborate web of drugs and stolen property to — in his mind — rule the Miami County streets.

“I was a good drug dealer, I’m not afraid to say it,” Slater told a group of about 25 youths Sunday night in the basement of Lighthouse Presbyterian Church pastor Kirk Johnston’s house. “I ran the streets of Osawatomie and Paola like I owned the place. I thought I was unstoppable.” Slater’s world crashed in around him on Jan. 13, 2005, when Gordon McDowell, who was a friend of Slater’s and an associate in his illegal dealings, worked with the Paola Police Department to set up a sting operation that would send Slater to prison for almost four years. McDowell’s betrayal infuriated Slater, and his first instinct was to blame his friend and plan his vengeance.

“I hated this man,” Slater said. “I hated him with every bit of my soul.”

Little did Slater know that McDowell’s biggest impact on his life was still yet to come. Filling a need

Slater remembers his childhood as a cry for attention and a desperate search to fill a void in his life. He described his father as an alcoholic and his mother as caring, but often only to the point of providing money as she slowly phased herself out of his life.

During high school he focused intently on sports, dedicating himself to something

he hoped would give him fulfillment. But when he was expelled from school three months into his junior year for missing too many days, he began seeking fulfillment in other ways. Breaking into cars and robbing houses, Slater took his pain out on those around him.

“I didn’t get attention at home, so I found it on the streets,” Slater said. “Looking back on that, I’m so ashamed of who I was. I was a selfish, pathetic, young punk.”

His acts soon had him facing a handful of misdemeanor and felony charges, which he avoided by heading to boot camp after spending three months in the Miami County Jail.

When he got back, he was able to turn things around for a short time. He got a job, a girlfriend and even became a father to a baby girl. But he soon learned that dealing drugs was a quick way to make money, and his life once again began to spiral out of control.

“Slowly, over time, my family came second,” said Slater, who became addicted to a drug called “ice,” a type of methamphetamine.

Even when his family left him because of his condition, Slater was still focused on getting his next fix. It’s an addiction that wouldn’t let go, even after he was given a break upon his capture and offered a chance at probation.

“I wasn’t out an hour, and I was high again,” Slater said of bonding out of jail for \$50,000. This time, the court wasn’t as lenient, and Slater was ordered to serve 40 months in prison.

desperation to Salvation Thinking he would only get another slap on the wrist, Slater was caught off guard by his sentencing. All he could think about was how he was going to get his next fix.

It was that line of thinking that lead him to commit the desperate act of fleeing the courtroom to escape his fate. He managed to get away from law enforcement officials, and the entire county was blanketed with information about Slater in an attempt to track down his whereabouts.

Slater said he enjoyed all the media attention, and it just further fed his ego. It may have also made him overconfident, as he was later taken back into custody at his house.

“Caught in my own home, how silly can you be?” Slater said. “But that’s what drugs will do to you.”

While Slater was serving his term in prison, he didn’t know that McDowell was thinking about him every day. But McDowell wasn’t harboring emotions of hate, instead, he was putting his newfound faith to work by praying for Slater’s salvation.

The prayers may have been answered by a young man Slater would frequently run into in prison. The man would bombard Slater with messages about the salvation that only Jesus Christ could offer. While the meetings were awkward and unwelcome at first, Slater admitted that the words sparked a change in him. Soon, he began using the man to learn about scripture. One verse in particular from Psalm 107 put

things into perspective for Slater. “Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men, for he breaks down gates of bronze and cuts through bars of iron,” Slater read to the youths Sunday while fighting off tears.

“I bawled and bawled off this verse,” he said.

Upon Slater’s recent release from prison, he knew one of his first stops would be to see McDowell.

Hope for a new life

Sitting across from each other with only a small table and a Bible separating them, Slater, the former drug dealer, and McDowell, the former associate who turned him in, were together again Sunday evening.

But instead of acting out his vengeance, Slater embraced his friend and shared their story together in the hopes that it will prevent the current youth of Miami County from making the same mistakes.

“Drugs can kill you spiritually and physically,” said McDowell, whose own methamphetamine use nearly cost him his life and his family.

McDowell quoted 1st Corinthians 6, verse 19-20, which says your body is a temple for the Holy Spirit, and you must “honor God with your body.” “Putting drugs in your body is dishonorable,” McDowell said. Slater knows he still has a long way to go to fully correct his life, especially with his now 10-year-old daughter. But he is confident in his new life with Christ in control.

“Through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, anything is

possible,” Slater said. “When I feel like I’m down to nothing, I know that God is up to something.”

In order to help Slater with his new life, McDowell passed out a journal to the youths Sunday asking them to write down messages for Slater.

“Our lives as Christians are an epic story,” McDowell told the youths as he opened the journal and read the message written inside the front cover. “May this journal be the beginning of your epic story.”

Although he’s ready to begin his new Christian life, Slater hasn’t forgotten his past, and he’s not afraid to use it to guide others. He told the youths Sunday that he plans on going back to prison, but this time it will be as a free man sharing his message to inmates struggling behind bars.

“I thank God for taking my mess and making it a message,” Slater said. “I know that the rest of my life is the best of my life now.”

RELIGION STORY

Daily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

High Plains Daily Leader

Jessica Crawford

This went above and beyond the usual “mission” story that is a staple of more religious features. Particularly well done story, great quotes, nicely packaged. Far and away one of the best submitted in all divisions.

SECOND PLACE

Ottawa Herald

Courtney Servaes

I like this concise story that spotlighted several towns and how they were living their faith through service. Short, sweet and nice graphics.

THIRD PLACE

Ottawa Herald

Courtney Servaes

Was this the “deepest” story no, but I loved the fact that someone you usually don’t think about was highlighted and those that simply put up the sign can have a profound commitment to their “simple” job.

RELIGION STORY

Daily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Garden City Telegram

Shajia Ahmad

Intriguing story about a small congregation and great description of service. You did a great job of painting a picture with words. Nicely done especially explaining the development of this particular branch of orthodox church.

SECOND PLACE

Leavenworth Times

Tim Linn

Great mixing past and present - loved the historical background, it also puts emphasis on the old church that is still growing today.

THIRD PLACE

Garden City Telegram

Rachael Gray

Good job explaining the significance of this celebration.

By Shajia Ahmad

Inside the building of the Orthodox Christian church, members of the congregation raise their voices in antiphonal chants between the priest, a few leaders and the rest of the crowd, weaving together melody and text to create a union of music and prayer.

The light inside is dimmed before the start of the Saturday night service, and the smell of incense fills the air as the Rev. Philip Vreeland swings about a metal censer. A few members of the congregation, some of them women quickly wrapping scarves around their heads, trickle in as they kneel in front of the standing icons at the front of the room, crossing themselves and lighting candles as the service continues.

From inside the sanctuary, Vreeland asks the small congregation to pray in peace for the armed forces, for the city and country people, for the seasons and fruits of the earth, for the travelers by sea and by air and for the sick and captive, and the small group recites back in unison. Two long pews line the room's walls, but no one is sitting; the church members remain on their feet for the length of the hour-long service.

The ancient liturgy has come to them from the first few centuries, developed by the patron saints of the church and dating clear back to the apostles, Vreeland said. The chants were developed and practiced by the church's patron saints: Saint Basil the Great, Saint Gregory the Theologian and Saint John

Chrysostom.

"Much of what we do, we do through song," he said. "The only change has been the elaboration of the music and the codification of the chants."

The Three Hierarchs Antiochian Orthodox Christian Church is only one of 15 Orthodox Christian communities in the state, and the only Orthodox church west of Salina. Families from the area who had wished to participate in church activities in previous years sometimes would drive four hours to visit a local house of worship, Vreeland said.

The small congregation in Garden City that began meeting about four years ago when two families came together to worship has grown into a small but strong group of about 20, with members of the McCallum and Lobmeyer families and few other individuals. After purchasing a new building last April at the corner of Fair and Main streets -- before they had a place of their own, they met in a rented space at Garden City Community College -- the church is opening its doors, hoping that others might join them. The group will host an open house Thursday night.

Many people they meet, several said, are surprised to learn there is a Christian Orthodox church in this corner of the state.

Orthodox Christianity

During the service, Vreeland wears a long, heavy-looking, black robe and an outer golden garment, called a "phelonion" in Greek. The phelonion is a liturgical vestment worn by a

priest of the Eastern Christian tradition, comparable to the chasuble worn by priests of Western Christian traditions, he said.

The former pastor of the St. George Orthodox Church in Kearney, Neb., divides his time between his and his wife's home in Kearney and the newly established church in Garden City, where they have extended family. They spend the second and third weekends of each month in town to lead services at the church, where they live during the week, as well. During the other weekends, when Vreeland and his wife are away, the worship is led by Brian McCallum, an area artist and instructor at GCCC. Vreeland said he does not know how long he will continue making the trek between states, but does not mind the journey either way.

"If the Lord wants me here, I have a nice place to stay," he said. "Of course, we do have our home in Nebraska. I have to depend on what God wants me to do."

In the year 1054, known as the "Great" or "East-West Schism," medieval Christendom divided into Eastern and Western, or Latin, branches, and later came to be known as the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. Five-hundred years later, Protestant churches began breaking away from Rome.

Today, Orthodoxy is the prevalent form of Christianity in Greece, Russia, Romania and many Arab countries, and with more than 300 million adherents.

While the Orthodox Church is variously called the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Orthodox Catholic or Christian Church, all Orthodox churches share an identical faith, common traditions and same basic forms of worship that have remained unchanged through almost 20 centuries.

Individual Orthodox communities may use their own language or mixture of languages in services and may have their own particular customs. Both the St. George Orthodox Christian Church and the Three Hierarchs are part of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, with more than 200 congregations throughout the nation. The archdiocese is a part of the ancient Patriarchate of Antioch, an ancient Syrian city where, according to biblical texts, “the disciples were first called Christian,” Vreeland said.

While he himself is not of Arab origin, many of the parishioners and founding members of the Kearney church were Syrian and Lebanese Christian immigrants who settled in Nebraska in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They migrated to the area, Vreeland said, because the farmland was similar to that of the lands they left behind in their original countries. The settlers became farmers and peddlers and established the Orthodox Church in Kearney in 1904, the first Orthodox Church west of the Mississippi River in its time.

New beginnings

Along the walls behind the standing congregation, dozens

of bright, colorful crimson, gold and emerald-colored portraits line one corner of the room. The images of saints are stylized in two-dimensional perspective; the flat essence of the artwork helps to symbolize the patrons’ holiness rather than their humanity, maintain uniformity and discourage personal expression by the artist who created it, said Garden City resident Debra Franklin, a local member of the church.

Before Franklin became an Orthodox Christian a few years ago, she admits the eccentricity of the portraits were startling at first, until she came to understand the artwork and use it to enhance her spirituality.

“When you stand before them, you understand that these are the people who brought the church to the point where we can be a part of it today, practicing the faith in its present-day form,” she said. “For me, it’s also a reminder of those who came before me.”

The icons are not considered to be idols or objects of worship, Franklin said, but to venerate the person depicted. Among the luminous images, the faces of the three patrons of the church, the three hierarchs, also look back. They were chosen by Vreeland and his grandchildren because they were great educators, they said.

Near the front of the room, tall icon stands made from podiums and draped with golden fabric also display the vivid images of saints, and small, temporary room dividers separate the nave of the church from the sanctuary, where only

the priest and altar boys are allowed. A signature part of the Orthodox Church, known as the iconostasis, is the screen or partition, usually with doors and tiers of icons, that separates the two parts of the room and shields much of the altar from view.

Congregation members hope a permanent iconostasis will be installed in June. The structure is being completed by members of St. Mary’s parish in Wichita, Vreeland said, who are offering it as a gift.

Inside the church, other small signs of reconstruction are also visible: A few doors and walls are still under repair, and the parish hall has just been completed. In spite of the pending repairs, the church members plan to tour the facility and invite guests for the open house.

“We hope and pray that people will come,” Vreeland said.

RELIGION STORY

Daily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Kansas City Star

Donald Bradley

Fabulous story that looks at a broad range of a local churches impact - on its followers locally and across the world; well-rounded, rich details, great photos - a super package.

SECOND PLACE

Lawrence Journal-World

Sarah Henning and Nick Krug

Intriguing story. I especially appreciated the research into “how” this individual - or any individual - can be elected as pope. Good quotes from those who oppose him too.

THIRD PLACE

Topeka Capital-Journal

James Carlson

This was a good news story with ties to religion. What sold me on this was how reporters were able to show how this individual's actions destroyed and then rebuilt congregations and directly affected those who worshipped at the churches.

AGRICULTURAL STORY

Nondaily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

Rush County News

Linda Kenyon

Kenyon wrote a moving story about an Alexander farmer after having back surgery. Kenyon's account details how Mr. Well's family also copes. It's a story of hope.

SECOND PLACE

Bonner Springs Chieftain

Melissa Treolo

The Natural Ag Hall at Bonner Springs is on the downturn financially. Treolo outlines in great detail reasons for the downturn. Excellent detail.

THIRD PLACE

Derby Informer

Linda Stinnett

Reporter Stinnett details the work needed to grow Christmas trees in eastern Kansas. Well written and detailed.

By Linda Kenyon

Kirk Wells has struggled through the most trying year of his life, but he believes he still has plenty of reasons to be grateful. Wells, in his early 50s, underwent spinal surgery in September 2008, and was told by doctors he would never walk again. He has a narrower than usual opening in the vertebrae that was pinching nerves in L1 and L2 vertebrae, and also had a ruptured disk in the same area. "It's not the doctors' job to paint a rosy picture, but they just made me determined to prove them wrong," he said on Monday. Wells went to Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital in Lincoln, Nebraska, where he had approximately three weeks of intensive therapy.

"The first 10 days I thought 'I can't do this,' but then one day it was like I flipped a light switch and I decided I was going to prove the doctors wrong," Wells said. "I'd be lying if I didn't admit that a lot of times I was ready to give up and throw in the towel, but I had so much support from my family and friends."

Wells started having success with the therapy in Nebraska, especially with water therapy in a swimming pool. His muscles were very weak, but he began regaining sensation in his legs, especially the right leg. He passed the test for a hand control drivers license, and family and friends helped make his home handicapped accessible.

He returned home the middle of November and began therapy in Hays. He started learning to crawl and was fitted for leg

braces. He traded in his minivan with hand controls for a used pickup and started work around the farm with the help of friends.

"You don't realize how many people will put aside their own stuff to help you," he said.

He has continued to improve slowly, becoming able to walk for short distances. He traveled to La Crosse last week without his wheelchair and was able to get a haircut, visit his insurance agent and stop at the bank.

"I'm a long ways from getting around the way I want to, but the last month or so my legs are beginning to wake up and get some feeling," he said.

Wells said his left leg has been slower to respond, but now it is starting to respond. He has planted some of his winter wheat this fall and drove a combine to help harvest his milo.

He hasn't been impressed with most of his doctors, but said every single therapist, either in Nebraska or Hays, have been "absolutely wonderful."

He also credits his wife, Nada, for her constant support. "She's been a trooper. I've never heard her complain," he said.

Wells lost his father this year, but became a grandfather for the first time with the birth of two grandsons. People praise him for his refusal to give up, but he said he's "literally too stubborn to sit her and take it."

He is grateful as he looks back over the past year, but is unable to count all of them.

"I wouldn't know where to start and where to stop," he said.

AGRICULTURAL STORY

Nondaily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Washington County News

Cynthia Scheer

Great subject, great story, great writing. Those 3 elements, coupled with quality photos, make this an easy choice for first place. It was a great read from start to finish.

SECOND PLACE

Washington County News

Cynthia Scheer

Different twist to the routine harvest event that made for a good read. Great quotes.

THIRD PLACE

Ellsworth County

Linda Mowery-Denning

An all around good read putting dual faces on the subjects - their professional sides shed for their farmer side. Well written.

By Cynthia Scheer

Charlie Rolan makes his way up the barn roof, his black, worn high tops finding their way between the roof boards. Narka's water tower looms in the background as Rolan ascends to the top of the barn despite 30-mile-an-hour wind gusts.

He carries a long, double-clawed prybar in one hand and a shorter, nine-inch one - which he said he could hardly get along without - in the deep, back pocket of his blue overalls. His hammer rides in the hammer loop of his carpenter-style overalls.

The man's small, bent frame dots the large barn's immense roof.

A gust of wind blows, and pieces of wooden shingles sail off the roof as the long, aluminum ladder, which is tied at the top to the roof and staked at the bottom into the ground with electric fence posts, clatters against the barn. Rolan keeps climbing. Once at the top, he kneels onto his red and white knee pads and begins to pry the wooden shingles from the barn's roof. He wears knee pads, he said, so that he doesn't get blisters on his knees.

Rolan estimates he has torn down more than 100 buildings - all of them since 1992 when he retired from his job at CE Combustion Engineers in Concordia where he worked for more than 17 years.

Tearing down buildings has been his retirement project. It is not uncommon for him to work 13-hour days. In the summer, when days are longer, he sometimes works 16 hour days.

He is 80 years old.

He can tear down large barns in a month. A chicken coop or small building can be dismantled in a week or two.

This is the 39th barn he has torn down. Or maybe the 40th. Or the 41st. He has lost track since he stopped keeping written records a few years ago. But pencil-written scribbles in a small, green notebook confirm that it is at least the 39th.

He maneuvers and works atop the barn as if the roof were sitting on the ground and there was no danger of falling off.

Haddam resident Jay Frye said he saw Rolan working on the top of a barn a few years ago.

"I couldn't believe that he went up on that ladder so high on the big barn all by himself," Frye said. "It was a one-man show. He was walking around up there with no straps or anything, and that just caught my attention. And he worked fast, too. I went back about two weeks later and that thing was basically gone." Rolan has never fallen off a building.

But he fell through the ceiling of one once.

He was tearing down the old Mahaska grade school when he stepped on a piece of plywood and fell 10 feet. But he didn't get hurt.

"I do worry about falling off," he said. "I really try to make sure I'm not gonna fall off, and I hope I don't."

Wind and weather don't slow Rolan down

Rolan's memory is sharp, although he is now hard of hearing. He said he still feels alright, and except for some arthritis in

his hands and back, he is in good physical shape. He said he pulls muscles in his sides on occasion while tearing down buildings, but those usually don't stop him from working.

Wind and weather don't seem to stop him either. He recalled tearing down a large barn in the winter of 1992.

"I had to wear coveralls that day because it was 10 degrees out," he said. "It started snowing while I was up there, but I kept working. When I finally quit to go home, the snow was a foot deep."

He also recalled a day in his early years of tearing down buildings that the wind blew his ladder over.

"It was 20-foot to the eve, and I hadn't tied the ladder to the barn," he said. "A big wind came and knocked my ladder down. I put up two ladders, one on each side of the roof, so I had to go up and over the roof and go down the other side to the ladder. You gotta tie the ladders down so they don't blow around on you."

He has taught himself everything he knows about the art of barn deconstruction. He can now dismantle an entire barn, house or other outbuilding without breaking more than two boards.

"The thing that amazes me about Charlie is how he tears down entire buildings and breaks very few boards," said Marvin Parrack, who lives across the road from Rolan.

Parrack said Rolan has torn down several buildings for him and his wife, Elaine, including four houses, the old Hopewell School house, six barns and several hog sheds and outbuildings.

"Very little is left when Charlie gets done with it," Parrack said. "Everything is in a neat, orderly fashion when he goes away."

Parrack said he has lived near Rolan most of his life and found out about Rolan tearing down buildings simply by talking with the man.

"Once he started tearing down buildings, the word spread fast," Parrack said.

Rolan used to hire high school kids to help him tear down buildings but had to stop when the help broke too many boards. "On long boards, if you split one, you've lost a lot of money," Rolan said. "So I mostly just had kids pulling nails."

Rolan said one man helped him tear down a building in return for some of the lumber.

"He worked really fast, though, and tore up a lot of boards," Rolan said. "You have to go slow and take your time."

Rolan tore down his first building when he was 12. Rolan, who was born in 1929, tore down his first building at the age of 12 in the southeast Oklahoma town of Redlands. The house belonged to a neighbor.

"The government wanted buildings tore down," Rolan said. "The government took a lot of buildings from people in the late '20s and '30s because they couldn't pay their taxes."

Rolan worked on the house after school and on the weekends. Nobody told him how to tear down a house; he just did it one board at a time.

He doesn't remember what he was paid to tear down the house, but he does remember

asking if he could buy some of the lumber from it.

"They took the lumber and put it in a shed somewhere and wouldn't sell any of it," he said. "It probably just sat there and rotted."

Rolan, who was the oldest child in his family, dropped out of school in the seventh grade to help with the farm work. His grandmother watched him and his siblings while his parents went to work at a packing house in Oklahoma City.

He later went to work for a pipeline crew for three years, which lead him to his wife, Florence June, who lived in Mahaska.

The couple met in Beatrice, Neb., where she worked. Rolan moved to Mahaska in 1959 to be closer to his future wife, and began working for a local farmer. The couple married in 1960. She died in 1996.

After retiring in 1992 at age 63, Rolan said he decided to tear down old outbuildings. It had been decades since he tore down the big house in Oklahoma.

"I liked tearing down that house and wanted to tear down some more," he said.

He put an ad in the Penny Press asking for old buildings to tear down. He later advertised lumber for sale, which all came from these dismantled buildings. The first building Rolan tore down was located near his house. On some properties, he tore down six or seven buildings in one location.

"People wanted these buildings tore down on old farmsteads so they didn't have to pay taxes on them anymore," he said.

Salvaged lumber, building materials are all sold. He tears down the buildings for free. His incentive is the wood, doors, windows, tin and other recovered building materials.

He keeps it all.

It all sells.

His yard is filled with perfectly stacked rows of lumber, all sorted based on size and length. Dozens of rusted hinges and other building parts are displayed throughout the property. The walkways between the stacks of lumber are so well-manicured that it looks as if the lumber was placed on the greens of a golf course.

Rolan says Sundays are used to mow his property and work in his garden.

"And I have a lot of mowing to do," he said.

He estimates he has sold wood and other building materials to nearly 200 people over the past 17 years. He has sold lumber to people in Kansas City, Jewell, Marysville, Norton, Hebron, Neb., Hastings, Neb., and the list goes on.

"Everything that is any good people want to buy," he said. "People come here to buy lumber to replace boards in barns and houses that have rotted out. A guy from Jewell comes pretty often to buy floor boards and base boards."

Rolan said a man from Marysville buys old barn boards to make picture frames with. Several pieces of the barn Rolan is tearing down now are already sold.

"I have a guy who will buy all the floor boards I've got," he said.

He said his current barn also has many 1x12 boards, which are often sold months before he even starts on a barn. He has customers who call him frequently and ask when he will have more.

"A lot of people would rather have old lumber than new," he said. "I know by experience that old lumber is a lot stronger and better than the new stuff you can buy. And people like to use these old boards to fix up their old buildings."

Rolan said he doesn't advertise his lumber for sale anymore, although most of his local business has been through word of mouth.

Word of mouth is also how people wanting buildings torn down knew to contact Rolan.

Most of his more than 100 buildings have been located near Mahaska. Narka has been the address for a few. Haddam has also had a barn or two. The farthest he has traveled to tear down a barn is Washington.

Rolan's years of tearing down barns have provided him with a few comical tales, including the one about the bees.

"The first building I tore down here at Mahaska had bees in it," he said. "I had a hard time getting those bees outta there. Now I take wasp spray with me all the time."

"Recently a wasp stung me," he continued matter-of-factly. "I don't get to fighting them. I let them sting me if they want to. I carry alcohol to clean the area and continue working on the barn."

Rolan said that first building with the bees was also where he stepped on his first - and only -

nail.

Rolan works five days a week, but may be nearing retirement. Rolan said he often works from 1 p.m. until just before dark on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. He takes mornings off so that he can pick up his meals from Mahaska Propane and do other business and chores.

He starts on the barns about 9 a.m. and works until just before dark most Tuesdays, Thursdays and weekends. He leaves handwritten notes on the back of scraps of paper on his door with his anticipated arrival time in case customers come looking to buy some wood.

He takes his lunch with him to the buildings, which often includes home-cooked meals including tomato and chicken noodle soup.

Rolan hauls a load of wood home with him most every night when he finishes working. He said he doesn't have problems hauling large boards around. A big board requires dragging to the pickup's tailgate before going to the other end and pushing it up into the pickup, but it's nothing he can't handle on his own.

Once he gets a building torn down, he spends about a month pulling nails and stacking lumber at his farm.

"I wire-brush most of the lumber if it has dirt on it," he said. "I wear out a lot of wire brushes."

But after nearly two decades of working full-time tearing down old buildings, Rolan said he is considering a new retirement hobby.

"I have always enjoyed tearing down buildings" he said. "But

I'm going to start slowing down, for sure next year. It's time to start doing something else. Probably some hunting and fishing."

But he doesn't plan to quit the profession altogether.

He can't quit. Yet. He still has standing orders from those in the community to tear down a few more buildings.

"I've still got a waiting list of upcoming buildings to do," he said. "There are two houses in town, a grain bin in the country, and this barn," he said motioning toward the large barn he is now working on at the east edge of Narka. "And there may be a few more."

As long as there are buildings to tear down, Rolan may be on one, methodically moving his pry-bar this way and that until he jimmies yet another board loose to haul home to his lumber piles just south of Mahaska.

AGRICULTURAL STORY

Nondaily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Kansas City Business Journal

Suzanna Stagemeyer

Story has local relevance, strong on facts and flows nicely.

SECOND PLACE

Fort Leavenworth Lamp

Will King

I've got a soft spot for stories involving members of the armed services, but this one is also well-written and adds a neat angle for an ag story.

THIRD PLACE

Olathe News

Jim Sullinger

This story is proof ag goes beyond livestock and grain. It was well-written change of pace. Photos and layout completed the attractive piece.

By Suzanna Stagemeyer

Good Natured Family Farms this month will sow seeds that could yield a national springboard.

The cooperative, which includes more than 150 family farms mostly within 200 miles of Kansas City, steadily has gained larger clients and renown. At a Sept. 17 investment conference in New York, founder Diana Endicott will present a plan to replicate the Good Natured Family Farms local brand program nationwide and seek an investment to further develop the program regionally. That could include millions of dollars worth of warehouses and infrastructure to aggregate products and let the alliance supply big-box retailers, such as Wal-Mart Stores Inc., that have been too large to serve.

“Maybe we can take this program to a national level,” said Endicott, who works from a beef and produce farm in Bronson, Kan.

Good Natured Family Farms had gross wholesale sales of about \$4 million last year of products such as beef and pork raised near Goff, Kan.; sweet onions, cucumbers and melons grown in Rich Hill, Mo.; milk and cheese from a dairy farm in Firth, Neb.; and jellies from wild fruits picked in northern Kansas. During the past two years, it started supplying Sysco Food Services of Kansas City Inc. and Associated Wholesale Grocers Inc., which is about as big a customer as the all-natural food cooperative can handle right now, Endicott said. In addition, the alliance and longtime partner Ballis Food Stores is the first company to stock its products so are laying out a way to share best practices with others.

“We think that this is the right

thing to do for a lot of different reasons,” Ballis CEO David Ball said.

Endicott described the conundrum of whether to invest in infrastructure or wait for scale as a chicken-or-the-egg question.

But she said, aggregation is everything. ... It is what it's going to take to get it to the next level.

The cooperative has good packinghouses and docks, but refrigeration capacity is limited. A loan program through the U.S. Department of Agriculture also could help set up refrigeration systems, Endicott said.

Good Natured Family Farms was asked to present at Agriculture 2.0, a sustainable ag investment conference, because of its success in distribution, said Janine Yorio, managing director of investment firm NewSeed Advisors, the conference co-host.

The cooperative has created consistency for local farmers and stores, and focused on profitability instead of relying on grants, she said.

“I've seen business plans like hers, but I haven't seen anybody else that's been able to pull it off like she has,” Yorio said. “It's the only successful one that I've seen so far.”

Conference attendees, she said, will range from individuals who can invest as much as \$2 million to hedge funds that manage billions.

The 29 area Ballis stores account for 90 percent of Good Natured Family Farms sales, with Sysco at roughly 6 percent and AWG around 4 percent.

“We'll use them as much as we can,” Sysco CEO Hank Jolly said. “It's obviously market-driven as far as customers that want the product.

I think down the road, and once customers get used to us having those (local) products during the season, I think it will just grow from there, quite honestly.”

Cool weather chilled produce sales this season, but Endicott said current estimates are that AWG could bring \$1.5 million in additional sales, as well as branch out beyond produce to dairy, meat, honey, breads and other items.

Good Natured Family Farms is the only local produce supplier Sysco works with so the alliance had all the proper agreements readily available, along with food safety and other certifications, said Pat Cipolla, director of produce operations. Sysco, which has helped the cooperative with food safety financing, collects products from Ballis central warehouse.

Demand for local produce increases each year. Although it typically costs more, it's safer, higher quality and supports local farmers. An expanded infrastructure would make it easier to collect the products and decrease the amount of handling, he said.

“Our main issue is to try and get enough volume in here,” Cipolla said. “We're learning as we go.

AGRICULTURAL STORY

Daily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

High Plains Daily Leader

Jessica Crawford

Complete package - wonderful profile of veteran of wheat harvesting along with attractive design package. Well written insight on what keeps the man going.

SECOND PLACE

Ottawa Herald

Sharon Stauffer

Comprehensive look at the impact the economy has on multiple phases of agriculture. Impressive use of multiple sources.

THIRD PLACE

High Plains Daily Leader

Robert Pierce

Nice profile on the KFB masters program but it also served to educate the public that there's more out there than corn and wheat in an ag-based state.

AGRICULTURAL STORY

Daily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Garden City Telegram

Shajia Ahmad

Original lead that draws you into the meat of the story - a well-balanced look at the struggles facing the dairy industry. Great ending!

SECOND PLACE

Hays Daily News

Mike Corn

Great story that shows the connection between an ag-based enterprise and urban residents. Very well written, beginning to end, and interesting info on use of technology.

THIRD PLACE

Hays Daily News

Mike Corn

Very attractive package and a nice read.

By Shajia Ahmad

When Plymell dairy owner Boyd Sigafosse looks down his line of munching cows, he knows their content behavior means they're stress free-and happy, he said.

Though the cows may be content, most dairy farmers are not. The national dairy industry is taking a hard hit in a tight and stagnant economy, especially in western Kansas, where 22 large dairies produce about 70 percent of the state's milk.

At least one area dairy farm that has been hit hard by rising cattle-feed prices and decreasing consumer demand is closing its doors: The West Kansas Dairy in Coolidge is in the midst of shutting down, putting a few dozen out of work in Hamilton County.

Dairy manager Clint Anderson declined to comment in detail about the closure but confirmed that the business is no longer viable because of high milk production costs. Job losses will total 40, he said, and at least seven people already have been fired. The dairy cows may be sold to farms in other states, Anderson added.

Vreba-Hoff Dairy Development LLC, the global dairy development business based in Ohio that owns the Coolidge farm, declined to comment to The Telegram. An official said a closing date still is uncertain.

That closing business isn't alone in its woes. Prices for milk are just above two-thirds of what it costs Kansas farmers to produce the staple, and dairy farmers face corn costs that have doubled in the last five years due to competition from ethanol producers.

Large-operation dairy farms

are spending on average between \$1.40 to \$1.50 to produce milk but receiving only about a \$1 per gallon for the commodity, Kansas Dairy Association Board member Mike Bodenhausen said.

Bodenhausen, who's worked in the milk and dairy industries for several decades, said the economic climate for the industry today is the worst he's ever seen.

"I can tell you that in most cases, every dairy farmer is producing at least a 30-some percent loss," he said. "That will vary from farm to farm -- but it's going to be hard to find an industry dairyman who's breaking even right now."

At Plymell Dairy LLC, where about 1,300 "happy" head of dairy cattle are milked three times per day by high-tech sensory machines, Sigafosse said he's selling milk for about 90 cents a gallon right now. A year ago, the small-scale dairy farmer received about \$1.80 per gallon of milk production.

Heavy losses due to high corn prices -- about 65 percent of the average Plymell milking cow's production is used to cover its feed costs -- coupled with a cash-strapped consumers and global decreases for demand of American butter and cheese means increased cull rates: More and more dairy cows are headed to the slaughterhouse.

Dairy farms typically have a 30 percent cull rate; that is, about 30 percent of the cows that die or do not produce profitable amounts of milk are replaced each year. Right now, that turnover rate is 40 to 55 percent at the Plymell farm, Sigafosse said, reflecting a national trend of dairy farmers who must sell parts of their herds for slaughter. That hurts the beef industry, as well, Sigafosse admits.

Nationally, dairy cow slaughter is up 30 percent while beef cow slaughter is down 14 percent, the Associated Press reported last week. Unless the supply and demand align, industry officials project that more than 1.5 million of the nation's 9 million milking cows could be slaughtered this year as dairy operators look to cut costs.

"Milk is a fluid product -- we can't shut it off or turn it on," Sigafosse said. "A 1 percent increase in supply, and our prices plummet."

One way to store milk -- turn it into cheese -- is also not a viable option for dairy farmers because cheese supply is at all time high.

The Plymell dairy farmer said he hopes the dairy industry will be quick to respond by reducing herds and, subsequently, its milk production in order to bolster demand and prices.

"Your parents always said there'd be days like this and that you'd get through it," he said. "We wouldn't be milking today if we didn't believe this thing will turn around."

AGRICULTURAL STORY

Daily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Hutchinson News

Amy Bickel

This story on the struggles of small dairy farmers stands out in a category full of great entries. It puts a human face on the industry. Well written, combined with great photos.

SECOND PLACE

Hutchinson News

Amy Bickel

Compelling read! A great personal touch to a routine event like a wheat harvest. Photos are exceptional and writing quality outstanding. So close to being #1 entry.

THIRD PLACE

Kansas City Star

Scott Canon

Unique look at a surprising trend toward "small" farming and the niche they fill. Writing style makes it easy to visualize life in these small enterprises.

By Amy Bickel

The night before his 52nd birthday, Calvin Nisly lamented to his wife that he didn't know how long his small Reno County dairy could stay in business. For 13 years, the 65 cows he milks each day have provided him enough money to take care of his family of six. But on this early March day, reality had set in when his most recent paycheck came in the mail.

His cows are losing money. His youngest child, 4-year-old Juliet, overheard her father's woes. The next day, she wrapped him a gift - all the money from her piggy bank, 75 cents' worth. She told him it was to help buy the cows hay.

"She thought it would be sad if the cows left, and she thought she'd do her part," he said with a laugh, but added in a more serious manner, "My first thought was we shouldn't have talked about it in front of her, but it was very touching, all the same."

Chosen profession

Thirteen years ago, Partridge-area dairyman Calvin Nisly had a choice to make: be a dairy farmer or be a school social worker.

As he watched part of his Brown Swiss cow herd file into his milking parlor one afternoon, he said he never questioned whether he made the right choice.

Nisly and his wife, Andrea, were living in Switzerland, where Andrea was born. They wanted to come back to Kansas. With family already taking over his father's dairy farm down the road, Nisly built his own milking

operation on a small acreage of land.

Instead of the 9-to-5 work of an office job with weekends off, he elected the hard-working lifestyle of a dairy farm - getting up at 3:30 a.m. every morning of the week to start the day's milking.

His work typically ends well after dark. Vacations are rare. The last milking he missed was when Juliet was born. She turns 5 this spring.

But on a recent evening, after finishing his evening milking, Nisly admitted he has reservations about the business. His check from his marketer for the first two weeks of February was \$5 a hundredweight less than what he received in January.

Falling prices

Mirrored by a faltering U.S. economy and a now struggling export market, milk prices have dipped 50 percent since summer after reaching record levels in 2007 and early 2008.

A year ago, milk averaged around \$20 a hundredweight, which equals about 12 1/2 gallons, according to the U.S. Agriculture Department. Last month, prices averaged around \$12 per hundredweight (per 100 pounds), and economists expect it to fall to just above \$10 in March. With inputs like feed still high, that means milk costs more to produce than what the farmer needs to break even, said Mike Brouk, with Kansas State University.

"We have more milk than we need, it's that simple," Brouk said of the prices.

Poor prices, however, can only be weathered so long.

With 70,000 dairy farms

across the United States, many are looking at ways to cut costs amid one of the worst dairy situations in recent history.

Some have culled cows. Others have gone out of business, said Chris Galen, spokesman for the National Milk Producers Federation.

"I think there is a real concern - depending on how leveraged they are and how much debt they have - that they won't be able to hang on," he said. "The bottom line is, with the prices we are seeing this early spring, no one is going to make money and we're going to lose some."

A voluntary herd buyout program run by the federation could help some with oversupply, Brouk said. According to the federation's Web site, 51,000 cows went to slaughter during the most recent program last fall - taking 976 million pounds of milk off the market.

"Basically, we have 9.2 million dairy cows in the United States," Brouk said. "There are some estimates that we might reduce that herd size by 500,000 or more. I think in January, there were 40,000 more dairy cows culled than we had the month before."

Other help comes in the form of a government subsidy. The Agriculture Department's Milk Income Lost Contract program now is in effect, providing a buffer for milk producers against their losses. MILC is paid on a monthly basis whenever fluid milk prices fall below \$16.94 per hundredweight.

There is talk of some immediate stimulus funding coming to the nation's dairies, said Ron

Grusenmeyer, with the Midwest Dairy Association. For now, producers just have to hold on.

“Things are going to be pretty dire,” Grusenmeyer said.

“They’re digging into capital reserves; they are looking for the banks to say they can have an operating loan to get through the next six to eight months. They are looking at every option they can - feed rations, trying to make sure they are using the most effective feed.”

How long will it last?

The situation could speed the demise of the state’s already dwindling small family dairy farms, Brouk said.

While the number of large dairies has increased, thus more cows being milked, the number of small dairies has diminished. Brouk said today there are 400 dairy farms in Kansas with a permit to sell milk, compared with more than 1,150 a decade ago. In Reno County, which has the most dairy farms in the state, numbers continue to remain somewhat steady, at 43 dairies - much of it due to the area’s large Amish and Mennonite population, he said.

Nisly said he’s watched a few of his fellow dairymen call it quits, mostly because they’ve reached retirement age and their children aren’t coming back to the farm.

He’s also read the current situation might just last three months. That wouldn’t be as tough to withstand.

“Other places I’ve read say not to expect it to turn around until the middle of 2010,” he said.

He doesn’t know if he and

others in the area can hold on that long.

“Some people would be able to keep going, but we’d have to look at selling out,” he said. “That isn’t our intent, but it seems a lot more possible.”

Not that Nisly regrets any of it.

“It’s in my blood,” he said simply of dairying. He noted his grandfather, Sam Beachy, was a dairyman, his father was a dairyman and many of Reno County’s dairy farmers are some sort of relative.

He said the time he gets to spend with his family on the farm is irreplaceable.

“I felt like it was important that we do something together than go our separate ways,” he said of his choice of professions. “For what dairying means to me, it is important that I connect that with my family. I had a good idea that we wouldn’t get rich, but we want to continue dairying.”

YOUTH STORY

Nondaily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

Eudora News

David Oakes

Nicely written. Good job talking to teens involved.

SECOND PLACE

Derby Informer

Jeni Burrows

Very informative and a topic youth will be interested in reading. Good job talking to youth and administrators to see both sides. Well written.

THIRD PLACE

De Soto Explorer

Elvyn J Jones

Nice job. I like the details and can see young girls wanting to read this.

YOUTH STORY

Nondaily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Marion County Record

Rowena Platt

Enjoyed the article very much.

SECOND PLACE

Atchison Globe

Faye Miller

I liked the song interjection.

THIRD PLACE

Marion County Record

Susan Berg

It's interesting to hear about an unusual age and hobbyist.

By Rowena Platt

Nellie Kassebaum of Burdick recently spent 10 days in Peru on a National Geographic expedition.

The 12-year-old daughter of Bill and Jennifer Kassebaum was among 15 young people from across the nation who won the trip. Her father accompanied her. Now in its fourth year, the Kids Hands-on Explorer Challenge is offered to youngsters ages 10 to 14 as a way to inspire them to a lifetime of exploration and discovery. Nellie is the first person from Kansas to be selected. She won by submitting an essay about her experience in getting a close-up photograph of a grasshopper.

"My little lime green friend that I met that day imprinted on my mind and made me really think about the treasures in nature and how they are everywhere in all shapes and sizes," she wrote.

In Peru, the days were crammed with activities.

"People were very nice and welcomed us," Nellie said. "They wanted us to be there."

One of her favorite stops was at the lost city of Machu Picchu, an ancient city built between mountains by 60,000 people. The town was so secluded that Spanish Conquistadors never found it. Hiram Bingham, a National Geographic explorer, discovered the city in 1911.

Machu Picchu is listed as one of the seven wonders of the world. It draws about 2,000 visitors a day.

Intact adobe buildings sit on terraces hewn out of mountains.

The young explorers traveled by bus around steep mountains, then walked up a series of steps to get to the ancient city.

"Machu Picchu is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen," Nellie said. "I couldn't imagine all of the work that went into building this sacred city."

Another highlight was a three-day stay in a tropical rain forest. The group flew into an adjacent town and traveled by bus and boat to an isolated lodge.

"Boats were my favorite part," Nellie said. "You could see a lot of wildlife along the river."

At a botanical garden, the group learned about natural medicines made from plants. They also visited a farm where yucca, oranges, lemons, limes, and other tropical fruit were grown, and fished for piranha at a lake. The lodge was open to the outside, allowing birds and insects free access to the interior. Guests slept under mosquito nets. They learned about termites and fire ants. Electricity was provided two hours a day.

"The guides, cooks, and other workers had a pride of ownership," Nellie said.

In the capital city of Lima, Nellie experienced streets lined with vendors persistently hawking wares. The climate was dry and foggy.

The team visited a farm that raises Peruvian horses. One evening, the camp was divided into two teams, each with a National Geographic photographer. Each member had a camera and received instruction in photography.

"We experimented," Nellie said.

The expedition included a visit to the Sacred Valley, an old Incan city surrounded by terraces on which crops such as barley and corn were growing and a few cattle were grazing.

Plots were small, and everything was done by hand.

It was late fall in Peru, so harvest was underway. Nellie enjoyed huge kernels of corn served with cheese sauce.

The group went on a treasure hunt to learn about the Incan culture. Nellie participated in the ancient custom of braiding women's hair. She also saw clay and straw being mixed together in large pits to make bricks. The rock working skills of the Incas intrigued her.

"Every rock would fit together, like the pieces of a puzzle," she said. "Looking at all of the tiny angles was amazing. Later, we slid down some natural rock slides. That was a very fun day!" Nellie enjoyed the colorful clothes worn by the mountain people. A band and dancers entertained the Americans at a school. They, in turn, gave gifts to the students.

At a weaving school, the students watched as intricately designed clothing and other items were made from alpaca wool. After two days of travel to get from the rain forest to Wichita, Nellie and her dad were ready for a rest.

"It was good the days were full," Nellie said. "I saw a lot." Nellie is the granddaughter of former Senator Nancy Kassebaum Baker and the great-granddaughter of former Gov. Alf Landon.

YOUTH STORY

Nondaily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Shawnee Dispatch

Ashlee Kieler

Well-written article! Kept me reading and inspired!

SECOND PLACE

Kansas City Nursing News

Arley Hoskin

Well written, very inspiring story!

THIRD PLACE

Shawnee Dispatch

Caroline Boyer

Good story! Important topic that should be discussed!

YOUTH STORY

Daily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

Ottawa Herald

Courtney Servaes

The complete package - great design elements and powerful story about a topic you don't normally see covered. Sure to draw the attention of youth.

SECOND PLACE

Ottawa Herald

Courtney Servaes

Once again, a combined package of design and well written story that will draw youth to the newspaper and educate both youth and adults.

THIRD PLACE

Ottawa Herald

Jenalea Myers

A feel good political story that shows its not necessarily about the "party" and more about being informed and active in politics.

By Courtney Servas

Jesus ate with sinners. He didn't judge them, didn't criticize them.

Instead, Erica Layton said, Jesus tried to help them, tried to save them.

And that's what she says she wants to do.

"That has been on my heart lately," Layton, who will be a senior at Wellsville High School, said.

Layton said it's not enough to go to church regularly, not enough to pray, not enough to worship.

Rather, she says you have to help others, have to get involved and try to save others.

"It's realizing that God is worthy of everything," she said.

THE WORD

Layton wants to spread her faith to others.

She tries to do that through her church, through youth group, through fellowship.

Recently Layton, who is a member of Life Church in Olathe, attended a church camp that she said reinforced her beliefs and initiative.

"I'm a lot more outgoing," Layton said about how she has changed since joining the youth group. "I've met some people who have changed my life."

She said she goes to church in Olathe - with more than 200 other youths - because she likes the style and the church's outreach. She likes the church's message.

"God created the world all out of love," she said. "He sent his son to die out of love. He died out of love."

RAISED IN CHURCH

Amanda Ahrens has been raised in a church.

Her mother, Susan, wanted it that way, wanted her children to

know God.

The Ahrens regularly attend Faith Lutheran Church, 1320 W. 15th St., Ottawa, which Amanda Ahrens, 16, said has helped her deal with the stresses and pressures of high school, with friends, with relationships, with life.

"We have a pretty good program," Ahrens said of the youth program at her church. "A lot of us have grown up together."

Ahrens' youth group meets weekly, but Christal Chapman, director of youth at the church, said the children participate in other activities and events - lock-ins, concerts and canoe trips - throughout the year.

"I'm a firm believer that if kids are involved in a youth program somewhere where they are really learning about God, that's really important," Chapman, Ottawa, said. "It makes you understand the world."

Chapman said all of the youth group events help students to understand the role of God in their lives, in their worlds.

"Kids have so much to deal with these days - divorce, peer pressure," Chapman said. "If kids have a solid understanding that God is where our strength comes from, not only are they doing better themselves, but they are able to tell their friends, 'God has my back.'"

EMBRACING FAITH

Weston Roth, 13, uses his youth group to meet people, to make friends.

Roth, Ottawa, is a member of Grace Community Fellowship, which worships at Washburn Towers, 526 S. Main St., and said his youth group organizes events to help keep them involved and active in the community and in their church.

"If you don't have that good of a relationship with God, you won't go to heaven," Roth said.

He said recently his youth group participated in a vision quest, where they visited a cemetery.

"It teaches you how to embrace Christian faith more," Roth said.

In addition to the vision quest, he said the youth group often plays trust games that teach the participants to work together and rely on each other.

CHRISTIAN BY DEFAULT

Prayer helps Layton cope with life, with peer pressure, with relationships.

Layton said when she faces a difficult choice or decision, she's not alone - the most important person in her life is always listening.

"The biggest thing for me has been prayer," Layton said.

And it's not just praying for answers that is important to Layton. She said prayer is very much about helping and praying for others.

"I feel a strong calling," she said. "I spend a lot of time with it. I love it, and I wouldn't have it any other way."

On average, Layton said she spends more than 10 hours a week participating in church activities, but it hasn't always been that way.

"I used to be one of them - Christian by default," she said. "Most people believe there is some sort of God."

YOUTH STORY

Daily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Garden City Telegram

Monica Springer

Comprehensive and fun look at the behind the scenes preparations for a county fair. Well written and presented in an attractive layout.

SECOND PLACE

Manhattan Mercury

Josh Kinder

Great lead that draws readers into “feel good” story. Nice photo package, but the story could stand out all on its own. Well written with multiple sources.

THIRD PLACE

Garden City Telegram

Shajia Ahmad

Well written story on what could be termed a controversial subject. Handled nicely to educate youth and adults alike.

By Monica Springer

Wool needs to be sheared and hair needs to be cut. Then there's the feeding, watering, walking and standing. There's no room for mud or stains, so baths are necessary several days or weeks in advance.

There's a lot of prep work that goes into county fairs.

Spectators at livestock shows or sales at county fairs often see the result of behind-the-scenes work.

They see cleanly-shaved, mostly well-behaved animals. They see sheep that automatically stretch out their front and hind legs in front of a judge. They see weights and classes filled out on entry cards, and cages at the fairgrounds with sawdust and supplies in them.

Most people who aren't in 4-H will not see kids declining sleepover invitations because they have to feed animals early in the morning. They don't see that half-finished sewing project that's sprawled out on a dining room table, or recipe books strewn across the house trying to find that one recipe that will be award-winning and mouth-watering.

July means one thing to 4-Hers: The county fair is approaching.

County fairs mean carnival rides and funnel cakes, livestock and art projects, photography and rocketry, cooking and sewing, and many other projects and

activities.

‘One people-loving pig’

When her daughters first started in 4-H, they wanted to show pigs at the county fair. But Sheri Scott, who lives in Scott City with daughters Kiersten, 13, and Kiesha, 19, and her husband Don, wasn't thrilled with their request.

Then Natasha entered their lives.

Natasha was one of the first pigs the family showed at the Scott County Fair about eight years ago. Kiersten said Natasha liked cereal bars and other human treats. The pig also came to the gate when she saw the family and liked her belly scratched.

“Natasha was one people-loving pig,” Sheri said.

After that, Kiersten and Sheri were hooked on pigs, and Kiersten has been entering them in the fair ever since.

The Scott family keeps busy with their livestock and other fair projects during the summer. Pigs have to be washed and their hair cut, sheep have to be walked and sheared, and all the animals have to be fed and watered daily.

Preparation for the county fair takes all summer, the Scott family said.

Responsibility

Near Garden City, the Strasser family is working on finishing up fair entries, including sewing and

rocketry projects.

Jensen, 12, is entering projects in buymanship, educational displays, rockets and arts and crafts. Ryan, 16, is entering rockets, small engines and electricity. The family are members of the Beacon Boosters 4-H Club.

Jensen is still working on her sewing projects, including a hot green zebra print shirt and an aqua and purple tote bag. But there's more work than just preparing entries.

She also will serve as a junior superintendent for the arts and crafts projects at the fair. That involves setting up and cleaning the shelves beforehand and helping judges when the exhibits are being evaluated.

Jana Strasser said she enjoys watching her kids and other kids in the club grow. She said she likes watching their confidence level rise as they speak more and get more involved in the club.

Kiersten Scott and Jensen Strasser said they've gained leadership skills, life skills and are more confident speaking in front of people.

Responsibility comes when kids are expected to track the expenses of their fair projects. The Gerber family said many of the judges at the fair will ask 4-H kids how much their projects cost, whether it be livestock or arts and crafts or photography.

Many kids track their own

YOUTH STORY

Daily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Hutchinson News

Kathy Hanks

One of the most heart-wrenching stories I've ever read. The writer let the story unfold from the subject's mouth in a compelling way. Great lead, great ending - all around great writing.

SECOND PLACE

Kansas City Star

Rick Montgomery

What an eye-opener and compassionate read. So well written and so uplifting to witness success where there could so easily have been failure. A compelling read for youth and adults.

THIRD PLACE

Salina Journal

Gary Demuth

Complete package - great writing on a controversial subject along with attractive layout. Good entry in a very competitive category!

By Kathy Hanks

Jennifer Longfellow wishes she could go back to the moment just before everything went bad. Back before Julia Alcala, Tori Dowell, Myranda Mason and Veronika McDaniel got into her 1991 Ford Taurus. If she could, the 17-year-old would change the course of events of March 27, 2008, when the five friends went cruising off to Frazier Park during school lunch break. But life doesn't work that way. Instead, Jennifer has been struggling with the harsh reality that in one second everything in life can change forever.

The high school junior has spent the past year replaying the events in her mind. She goes over it as she lays her head on the pillow each night, still hearing the horrific sound of crushing metal, the screams and the semi-truck driver honking his horn.

She wakes in the morning to a collage of her best friends - Tori, Myranda, Julia and Veronika - all smiling in photos taped to the bedroom door.

Jennifer was the driver and only survivor of the accident that killed her four girlfriends that day. Jennifer's car collided with a semi at the intersection of Stubbs Road and U.S. 160. They never made it to Frazier Park.

The lone survivor

A year later, Jennifer still wrestles with the physical and mental injuries from the crash. There is the haunting memory of waking in a hospital in Amarillo, Texas, where she had been flown after being stabilized at the local

hospital.

"I noticed the girls weren't with me," she said. "I didn't care about me. I wanted to know if my girls were OK."

After being told they hadn't survived, she didn't care if she lived. She felt she deserved to suffer.

But counseling helped. After the accident, she stayed home from school a month.

Others might have moved to another town. That wasn't an option, though last fall Jennifer's parents, John and Delynn Longfellow, considered moving to Junction City, where John Longfellow was stationed in the military. The job they were hoping for, however, didn't open up at the time.

After that first month after the accident, Jennifer knew she had to return to school.

"I didn't want to flunk. I couldn't put it off," Jennifer said. Taking that first step back into the school building was the hardest. Someone from the Area Mental Health Center went with her, and stayed with her throughout each school day for the first week.

There were a lot of stares, even from people she considered friends.

"Most didn't know how to act around her," said Delynn Longfellow, who works at the high school as a paraprofessional.

Jennifer still struggles with a traumatic brain injury and short-term memory loss. In January, she was placed in special education, so that her course load could be modified and she would have additional help.

The law makes a ruling

On Jan. 22, Jennifer faced another nightmare, with an emotional crowd of her four girlfriends' families gathered in a Grant County courtroom for a trial against her.

Magistrate Judge Margaret Alford convicted her of four counts of vehicular homicide and failure to yield to oncoming traffic.

That same day, Jennifer's attorney, Wayne Tate of Hugoton, filed an appeal. District Judge Clint Peterson reviewed the evidence.

According to the court record, the prosecution argued Jennifer ignored warnings from her four passengers before driving into the intersection. However, Peterson said, they could not prove whether that occurred with time for her to avoid the collision or after she was already on U.S. 160 and the collision was unavoidable.

"The Court is unable to find beyond a reasonable doubt the warnings were voiced with sufficient time for the respondent to avoid the collision," Peterson ruled.

Other than inattentiveness, the court believes there was one other contributing factor to the collision.

The angle of the intersection of Stubbs Road and U.S. 160 is not the typical right angle. Drivers traveling south on Stubbs Road, as Jennifer was, approach U.S. 160 at an acute/obtuse angle and are required to turn their heads more than 90 degrees to check for oncoming traffic from the west, which was the direction the semi was traveling.

From her position, Jennifer would have had to crane her neck to a greater degree than ordinarily required to properly check for oncoming traffic, the court found.

In February, Peterson overturned the conviction and found Jennifer innocent of the four counts of vehicular homicide but guilty of failure to yield to oncoming traffic. She was sentenced to pay a \$94 fine and had her driver's license suspended for a year.

Going on with life

Now, a little more than a year after the accident, life goes on. But nothing is the same. These days, there are no text messages from her girlfriends filling the mailbox of Jennifer's cell phone. The house phone seldom rings with calls for her. And there is no laughter coming from a cluster of girls hanging out in her bedroom.

Instead, it's eerily quiet for the home of a teenager.

"I lost my support system," she said of her four girlfriends. "We were always together."

She could really use her girls now that she's pregnant. The baby is due in early September, which will be her senior year. She plans to continue in school, while an older sister cares for the baby. And no matter how difficult the moment will be, she plans to walk across the stage at the 2010 graduation and receive her diploma.

For now, she comes directly home from school every afternoon, driven by her mother. She plans to start a part-time job sometime soon.

During the week when she

walks into the high school commons area, she sees all the clusters of cliques, the insular units that outsiders cannot penetrate. She walks past them, reminded of what she once had. Going to school is painfully lonely.

"Those girls were my life," she said. "I feel lost. Out of place."

Delynn knows her daughter is not the same person she was before the accident. The short-term memory loss has been difficult, even for her family to handle. There are mood swings. She can't handle teasing or joking. Nothing is funny like it once was.

Other than the courtroom, there has been no contact with her girlfriends' families.

Sometimes, Delynn wishes they could all sit down together, "Even if it was to yell at us," she said. That would be better than the silence and the uncomfortable feeling they all live with. "It would clear the air."

The problem goes back to people just not knowing what to say to each other, Delynn believes.

But she notes the wonderful support they have had from the community, the medical staff, counselors, and teachers and staff at school.

John Longfellow said his daughter is someone who will hold up.

"Before the accident, I wanted to be a cosmetologist," Jennifer said.

Now, when she thinks of her future, she wants to help people. She likes the idea of becoming an obstetric nurse.

"Helping to create life is a wonderful thing," she said. "The happiness on the parents' faces."

Meanwhile, not a day goes by that Jennifer doesn't think of "my girls," as she calls them. Or wish back that moment just before everything went bad.

EDUCATION STORY

Nondaily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

Bonner Springs Chieftain

Nicole Kelley

Nice “featurish” lead that draws readers into a strong news story. Well written and inspirational for other school districts. Great use of quotes.

SECOND PLACE

Oxford Register

Janice Kneisley

Nice use of contrasting elements pulled together through technology. Very well written.

THIRD PLACE

Eudora News

David Oakes

You made a story full of numbers very readable by adding human emotions in the form of quotes from the superintendent. Nice job.

EDUCATION STORY

Nondaily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Johnson County Sun

Kristin Babcock

The article takes a look at an unusual and frustrating time for new grads. The cause for the freeze is explained well in the story and readers can put a face with the issue.

SECOND PLACE

Kansas City Business Journal

Steve Vockrodt

This is an issue that most school districts will eventually face and the writer gives it fair and honest treatment.

THIRD PLACE

Miami County Republic

Brian McCauley

It might be a small issue but the “daily dilemma” is a microcosm of the challenges in public school systems. It’s objective, no fingers were pointed but the points were made that something is not quite right.

By Kristin Babcock

Janice Sparks entered a program to get a degree in education two years ago, never worrying about the job market after graduation.

“There’s always new schools opening and I was told there shouldn’t ever be a problem, especially in Johnson County,” Sparks said. “I didn’t really factor that in. I never really had a fear about finding a job until I started student teaching and the economy changed.”

Sparks began student teaching in January, near the time Shawnee Mission, Blue Valley and Olathe, along with numerous school districts across the country, implemented a hiring freeze. Sparks, Olathe, graduated on Saturday with a degree in elementary education from Ottawa University of Greater Kansas City. She is looking to break into a job market that is unusually slow to hire.

“That’s the hardest part is you’re just waiting,” Sparks said. “I’d like to have had a job by now. It’s not unheard of for student teachers to get hired before they stop student teaching. This year is just different. All of my friends who went to college with me are the same way.”

Taylor Kober recently moved to Gardner after graduating from Pittsburg State University with a bachelor’s degree in elementary education. She said she has applied to five or six districts in Johnson County.

“I honestly have had no luck,” Taylor said. “My dad says you just keep working at it and something will end up happen-

ing. I hope so too, but we’ll see... I just thought there would be a lot more jobs out there.”

Usually there are, said Mary Ann Benner, director of teacher education for Ottawa University of Greater Kansas City. She works extensively with students for placement in schools in the Kansas City area.

“I don’t know that I’ve talked to a district that doesn’t have a freeze right at the moment,” she said. “This is a marked difference for May. Usually many of our students from December have already signed a contract or are close to signing a contract. That really isn’t occurring this year.”

Last year, Blue Valley hired about 70 new teachers, Shawnee Mission hired about 65 and Olathe hired about 115, officials said.

The hiring process is not completely frozen for districts. They are just hiring later in the year, and likely for fewer positions, officials said.

The Blue Valley School District is still evaluating how many positions will be filled internally following retirements and resignations, said Jim Payne, executive director of human resources services.

This year the district expects to hire about 60 or fewer certified employees, he said. The number of new teachers could be lower than that, he said.

Shawnee Mission is also still evaluating how many positions will be open, Leigh Anne Neal, district spokeswoman, said. By February, the Olathe School District usually has about 20 to 25 candidates for early hire lined

up, said Lowell Ghosey, executive director of personnel and services. This year, the district has only eight, and they were made before the hiring freeze, he said. The district has made it a priority to hire internally as much as possible, he said.

“It’s just the position scrutiny has been turned way up because of the whole funding situation across the state,” Ghosey said.

Benner said she encourages graduates to continue applying, and to look at substitute teaching or paraprofessional work.

“We’re encouraging students to make sure they show prospective employers why they should be chosen,” Benner said.

Benner said prospective students are asking whether they should work toward an education degree.

“Even though there’s still a tightening of positions, there’s still the graying of teachers in school districts,” Benner said. “We know the field always has a need for quality educators.”

Sparks said one district told her they will not start hiring until two weeks before school begins. Until then she will keep working to find a job, she said.

“I am optimistic,” she said. “I’m probably going to get a little bit less optimistic come August. I’m hoping when the door opens they’ll say, ‘Oh! Come on in.’”

EDUCATION STORY

Daily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

Ottawa Herald

Courtney Servaes

Creative graphics package will surely draw readers into a very educational, eye-opening story about the impact the economy is having on education. Nicely done!

SECOND PLACE

High Plains Daily Leader

Jessica Crawford

Very creative lead and warm profile in a teaching veteran. Well written.

THIRD PLACE

Iola Register

Bob Johnson

Fun lead and well written story in a unique educational opportunity for middle school students.

By Courtney Servaes

Natasha Jenkins knows problems often don't stay at home. Jenkins, social studies teacher at Ottawa High School, sees those problems every day.

She sees disputes, divorces and money problems.

And those problems only amplify when the economy worsens, she said.

"Everything our students experience at home - the good and the bad - gets brought to school," Jenkins said. "With the current state of the economy, I foresee the struggles and hardships families face being an extra burden that will impact students' lives."

To help students, Jenkins said teachers have to anticipate these problems and find ways to combat them - on top of an already stressful and ever-changing workload.

OTTAWA

Ottawa Superintendent Dean Katt said the first day of school might be a little different this year.

Teachers usually have help from librarians and counselors before starting school, he said, but many of those positions have been cut or reduced.

"Teachers are accustomed to having everything ready the first day with kids," Katt said. "There are going to be things that were ready before school started that aren't going to be now."

Not only that, but Katt said the district has significantly slashed the number of new hires this year. Last school year, he said the district hired about 35 teachers. This year, it only welcomes seven new teachers.

"That's a lower number than typically," Katt said. "It's a drastic dropoff, but last year was kind of an exceptional year in the other way."

Katt said the elementary art position was reduced from two positions to one, and the English classes might be more crowded at the high school.

"We don't know how all of these cuts are going to affect us," he said. "Things aren't going to be done the way they were before."

WEST FRANKLIN

Dotson Bradbury knows it's going to be challenging.

Bradbury, West Franklin superintendent, said meeting what's known as Annual Yearly Progress, a requirement of federal education laws, every year is becoming more difficult - especially with fewer resources and larger class sizes.

"Making AYP is still in place, and the number of students who must score proficient continues to increase each year," he said.

Bradbury said to combat the economy, some additional positions were cut last spring and others - like the school's information technology director - were combined to form new positions.

In addition, he said the district cut 1.5 custodial positions, reduced one bus driver position, cut one language arts position and the school resource officer.

"We're continuing to provide a quality education with larger classes and shrinking resources," he said. "Our staff is committed to continuing to provide a quality education for every student in these challenging economic

times."

CENTRAL HEIGHTS

It's not just the budget; it's everything.

But Central Heights Superintendent Jim Reece says his staff has done well to adapt to any challenges it recently has faced.

Reece said Central Heights - unlike many of the other area schools - is not on a hiring freeze, but is being cautious about spending.

One of the most obvious changes to the school district will be to middle school math classes, which now will be taught by a different teacher, Reece said.

"Central Heights' staff have done a great job of dealing with any challenges, not just the recent budget challenges," he said.

WELLSVILLE

The bottom line is: a lack of funding is hurting students, Wellsville Superintendent Denise O'Dea says.

"We are being asked, and in essence being required, by the state and federal government to continue to do what we have always done, but with less teachers and less resources," she said.

O'Dea said students need extra teaching staff, more classes and fewer students in those classes to continue to be successful - something school districts are being forced to cut.

"The public continues to demand the results that have been seen in recent years, and that might not be a possibility," she said. "While our district will continue to put the needs of all students first, the funding challenge will be a detriment to our kids."

MORE WITH LESS

When it comes down to it, Katt says teachers are going to have to be more resourceful.

“They are going to have to do more with less resources, obviously,” he said. “We’ve made so many cuts.”

Some of those cuts will impact students, Katt said, but almost all of the cuts will impact teachers.

“I wouldn’t consider it pressure,” Jenkins said. “But I’ve taken into consideration that not all families will be able to afford school supplies within the first couple of weeks of the school year.”

Jenkins said she tried to stock up on school supplies this summer to help those students who might not be able to afford them right now.

“Personally, I know that trying to scrape by with finances can be quite a burden,” she said. “Younger students might not seem directly impacted by the struggles, but if a family is having financial difficulty it can sometimes cause emotional stress for everyone, children included.”

But at the end of the day, Jenkins just wants her students to take something away from this experience, to learn something.

“I think it’s important for students to realize, especially with the state of the economy, that education is their ticket outward and upward,” she said.

“As they read about job cuts, home foreclosures and our national debt, they should consider social and economic implications.”

EDUCATION STORY

Daily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Hays Daily News

Diane Gasper-O'Brien

Great story on students doing the management and sales at school store for 13 or 14 year olds. Good plan for "hands on" sales experience.

SECOND PLACE

Garden City Telegram

Monica Springer

Good story and pictures of teacher demonstrating sign language. A subject not taught by many schools.

THIRD PLACE

Manhattan Mercury

Sarah Nightingale

Fine story on how a school is dealing with Spanish speaking students.

By Diane Gasper-O'Brien

They use writing and math skills. They learn about leadership and economics and responsibility, and even a little philanthropy.

No, this isn't a 101 class list for a college freshman.

It could be, except these students are only 13 or 14 years old.

Eighth-graders at Victoria Middle School in charge of the Squire Zone, four years running, get a taste of the various responsibilities of managing a store when they sign on as a board member.

The store, located in the basement of their school, is open for a 15-minute period after lunch two days a week when they sell drinks and snacks to fellow students.

Board members show up before the store opens to make sure everything is in order. By the time they take their places behind the counter and at the cash box, it's a mad rush.

"Some of the people, we know right away what they want," said Dalton Dreiling, one of the board members for this year's final nine-week period.

There's enough for everyone who wants to make a purchase.

But that doesn't stop sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders from wanting to be the first in line.

Some even come back more than once.

"I had to get something for somebody else," sixth-grader Brian Dome said as he made his second trip to the store one day earlier this spring.

Dome grinned as he admitted

he actually was making his way down the stairs again to make a purchase for an older student.

Different board members are appointed every nine weeks. They purchase the supplies and keep track of their inventory for restocking purposes.

The idea of a store started four years ago when Nancy Piatt, a long-time English and reading teacher at the school, applied for a grant from the McDonald's Classroom Grants Program in Hays.

"Our store really didn't fit the criteria for one of those grants," Piatt said. "But (McDonald's owner) Gail Kuehl said she'd loan us \$500."

Piatt and colleague Beth Schmidt, who teaches social studies, English and reading at the school, opened a bank account for the store that summer. And that fall, one of the first tasks for the charter board of directors was figuring out a schedule to repay the loan.

Pam Scheck, the school custodian, painted a former storage room in maroon and gold school colors, transforming it into a pleasant customer-friendly atmosphere.

Naming the store after the school mascot, the Squires, seemed appropriate.

The idea of a student-run store caught on so well that by the end of the first year, the Squire Zone commissioned the high school shop class to build a counter.

The board also was able to purchase a refrigerator, and the Parent Teacher Organization donated another one.

"The teachers are pretty

supportive when the store is open; they can bring snacks to class, which is a big 'wow' with the students," Piatt said.

The administration also approves of the venture.

"This has been great for the kids," said Linda Kenne, principal of Victoria Middle School. "They're in charge of it. They get to make decisions, and it's been a great learning experience for them."

The teachers said the hands-on experience has been invaluable.

"Part of our goal was to teach our kids to make change," Piatt said. "They just don't do that anymore."

"We learn responsibility, how to take money," Audrey Crawford added, "how to stock shelves."

Following its nine-week stint, the board takes a portion of its profits and chooses a charity to donate money.

They also leave enough seed money for the next group's start-up fees.

The teachers also learned a lot along the way, including what would sell and what wouldn't.

"I think through the years," Schmidt admitted, "we probably learned as much as the students did."

"You definitely learn patience," Piatt said.

In the early days, they tried to sell pencils and notebooks and paper.

"We thought when they ran out (of supplies), they'd buy them from us; it didn't happen," she said, laughing. "That was a bust, wasn't it."

“Bottom line, they like food and Gatorade,” Schmidt added.

The two teachers had fun reminiscing during store hours last month, talking about reducing prices as the semester wears down.

Piatt retired from teaching last year, and Schmidt will do the same at the end of this month.

So they’re out recruiting their replacements as chair of the Squire Zone’s board.

“It will be open,” Schmidt said. “We’re still finalizing sponsors for it, but it will be open.”

And Schmidt said she plans to be there at the first day of the Squire Zone next fall.

“Oh, yes,” Schmidt said, “we’ll come back and get them started.”

EDUCATION STORY

Daily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Hutchinson News

Clara Kilbourn

Good article! Interesting way to present history so that you live it!

SECOND PLACE

Wichita Eagle

Suzanne Tobias

Great story! Good job!

THIRD PLACE

Wichita Eagle

Lori Yount

Good story! Got me thinking.

By Clara Kilbourn

Along the Arkansas River on Friday, 48 Lyons eighth-graders launched a voyage that gave life to the story of the Lewis and Clark Expedition they had studied in their history books. Accompanied by 19 sponsors, they put 22 canoes into the water near Alden and rode four-miles eastward toward Sterling, imagining the route that stretched from St. Louis to Fort Clatsop in Oregon.

Along the way, the young explorers faced water currents that overturned their canoes, sand bars that slowed their progress, and, finally, the hardship of a carrying their canoes.

"I don't know how they (Lewis and Clark) did it," Cassidy Dellinger said. "There were intense moments along the way."

When they planned their excursion, Angel Holguin thought it would be easy, but he, and other students, learned otherwise.

"It was hard, really hard," Ariel Gomez said.

History teacher Sharon Quinn and language arts teacher Lita Zimmerman joined forces before the trip to teach the students about Lewis and Clark's exploration of then uncharted territory.

The students studied the Louisiana Purchase, drew maps, wrote journals as if they were on the journey and learned about American Indian tribes and animals. They also watched a video of the expedition.

A contrast in the two adventures was that the students paddled downstream while

Lewis and Clark fought their way upstream. That would be much worse, James Jared said. Overall, though, he thought the trip was fun.

"But I didn't imagine it would be that hard," he said.

Marshall Schottler recalled that Lewis and Clark traveled in birch bark canoes rather than today's fiberglass versions. And the original explorers carried all their supplies.

The trip had been planned for earlier in the week, with a cookout of venison burgers.

When it was rained out, the group ate the burgers at school and carried sack lunches on the buses for the Friday voyage.

Among the calamities the students' will most remember are shoes filled with sand, a lost pair of glasses retrieved from under the water, and canoes filled with water. They struggled to upright the boats and get back in while they kept them from tipping. More pleasant to remember will be the "pretty stuff" - birds and flowers that they hadn't seen before.

And even if most of them fell into the river and were soaked to the skin, getting out of school was a plus, they agreed.

COLUMN WRITING

Nondaily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

Derby Informer

Jeff Cott

Clear smooth flowing. Explains the situation and how it relates to the reader. The writing has a personality to it that draws in the reader.

SECOND PLACE

Norton Telegram

Liza Deines

A unique approach - writing in 1st person from the times in your youth. Very enticing to a reader - like reading someone diary.

THIRD PLACE

Riley Countian

Gloria Freeland

Personal and flows well. Reminds the readers of events in their own lives and creates a bond. The reader wants to read to the end.

By Jeff Cott

One thing you can count on in life is change. Very little ever remains the same and if it does it is probably stagnant and uninspired.

The newspaper business is currently going through some of the largest changes in the history of the industry. Daily newspapers are experiencing shrinking subscription numbers, layoffs and reduced paper sizes. In some instances newspapers are even closing their doors, which is something that Derby has just experienced.

From an inside-out view of the industry, much of what newspapers are experiencing has been self inflicted and a lot of it centers around an inability to change enough.

The Internet and the access of electronic news has been around for many years now, which made it evident that eventually there would be a shift in the tide. At some point large numbers of readers will prefer to get news electronically as to reading it in a printed publication. We are now beginning to approach that point and the numbers are growing dramatically.

The industry has adapted to the change in the sense that most papers have an online version of the paper and with that, more people than ever are reading newspapers in some way. The problem is, as a business newspapers haven't developed enough revenue streams to be recapturing the lost subscription revenue. This is especially true with the large daily papers.

The story is different to some

degree for small hometown papers like this one. The news and events that are covered specific to the immediate community cannot be found as easily all over the Internet.

Subscription numbers for community papers have not seen the decline because of their ability to offer a unique type of extremely focused local news that no one else covers. There is some degree of built in resiliency because of that.

It won't be enough in the long run though to sustain even community papers if they don't make changes, too.

There is still a hunger for news and information, but how it is acquired by the reader has evolved. It is time that the industry take hold of that change and take advantage of the opportunity it presents.

Over the next several months and years you will see this paper making changes to adapt to the situation at hand. The printed paper as you see it will not go away but the delivery of news and information will change, presenting new and effective opportunities for readers and advertisers

COLUMN WRITING

Nondaily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Hiawatha World

Ike Larson

Mr. Larson's life and relationship w/ his wife is an open book. Column is fun and enjoyable to read. I like his style.

SECOND PLACE

Louisburg Herald

Aaron Cedeno

Writer's like Mr. Cedeno shouldn't have to sweat getting and keeping jobs in newspapers.

THIRD PLACE

Atchison Globe

Katy Blair

Writing is fun and most readers can probably relate to it.

COLUMN WRITING

Nondaily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Kansas City Business Journal

Fred Logan

I appreciated this writer's frank and candid tone, as well as the wide range of topics covered.

SECOND PLACE

Southwest Times

Rachel Coleman

Thoughtful insights on parenting. It's easy to relate to the writer's life - enjoyed the personal anecdotes.

THIRD PLACE

Miami County Republic

Brandon Steinert

Funny, down-to-earth. reading the column feels like a conversation with a friend.

By Fred Logan

My sons, Sam and Jack, turn 18 years old today.

I remember their first day of kindergarten. Children lined up in the school's front hallway before marching into the classroom. Sam and Jack trembled in abject terror.

As the line of students began to move, my boys instinctively reached out their hands to each other. I watched, teary-eyed and dumbstruck, as the two guys who argued over Barney and Dumbo videotapes found the courage to enter kindergarten by holding hands.

I guess you could say that the experience was one of the serial astonishments of parenthood. How well I remember the wake-up calls Sam and Jack launched from their cribs. They discovered how to turn them into jungle gyms. They climbed from one crib into the other to enhance early-morning play opportunities.

That was noisy fun. So was the special language they invented to alert each other that playtime was to begin. Long before they could speak, the first to awaken would start a low, sing-song chant that sounded roughly like "eye-ee-yi, ee-yi, ee-yi." Then the other would join in, and we'd have "eye-ee-yi, ee-yi, ee-yi" in stereo.

Usually, their pre-dawn primal communication was an annoying wake-up call for mom and dad. I would give anything to hear it again now.

Little boys get older, of course, and develop their own interests. Sam and Jack did that

in ways that at once amazed me and filled me with pride.

I wouldn't have been able to predict any of it. That's OK: Those serial astonishments of parenthood defy prediction.

And soon, too soon, kindergarteners graduate from high school. But funny things happen that comfort parents. They overhear their children speaking in the next room as young adults. They see them respond to challenges with insight and maturity. They're reassured that everything will be fine.

That reassurance is one of the serial miracles of parenthood. So with the memory of them hand-in-hand on that first day of school, I celebrate as Sam and Jack turn 18 and prepare to leave for college.

And on this day I pray that they will know this: My hand is always, across time and place, stretched out to hold yours.

COLUMN WRITING

Daily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

Iola Register

Susan Lynn

Story brought out the fact that police reports must not show favorites in reporting the news.

SECOND PLACE

Colby Free Press

Marian Ballard

Humorous story on transition from old methods to new methods.

THIRD PLACE

Ottawa Herald

Tommy Felts

Great story.

By Susan Lynn

Monday morning I received a request to not print an item from the police report. This happens frequently.

“It’s nobody’s business,” the woman said in a not too friendly manner, of news of their arrest for domestic violence.

Airing one’s dirty laundry probably doesn’t get rid of the stench.

And while I could sympathize with the caller’s plight, I couldn’t make an exception.

If we are to publish the police report we have to treat everyone the same — except for two instances.

The first is when publishing the report would somehow put a person in danger. Perhaps they are being stalked and news of their whereabouts would lead a perpetrator to their doorstep.

The other instance is when a public official, say the mayor, is arrested for drunken driving. Because of his responsibility to Iola, his crime would warrant its own headline and a full story. Publishing the police report is more than fodder for gossip. If people are made aware of thieves, scammers, those with violent natures, and other malcontents, they have been given fair warning.

Monday’s caller said her 7-year-old daughter had “overreacted” to a harmless situation when she called 911.

“People fight,” the mom said in a matter-of-fact manner.

She neglected to tell me her daughter had been hit during the disturbance. If I had held a shred a sympathy for the woman, it

quickly evaporated once I read the police report.

What’s truly frightening is the mother’s attitude to her daughter calling for help and possibly interrupting what could have escalated into an even more tragic circumstance.

Publishing the news item probably won’t have any effect other than to make the people mad at The Register. It’s too bad they can’t be shamed into becoming better behaved. Into becoming better people. Better role models for their children.

Yes, people don’t always see eye to eye. They disagree. But to take it to the level of fighting — of physicality — is criminal behavior, nothing less. It’s not OK to hit, to shove, to throw things at people. It’s not OK to yell obscenities at someone.

It’s sick to cover up for an abuser — especially when children are put in danger.

As for the altercation being “nobody’s business,” the caller is wrong. Domestic violence takes a toll on society. It causes dysfunctional families. Children who live in violent homes withdraw from their friends and do poorly in school. Teens who suffer abuse turn to drugs and sex to anesthetize themselves from the pain. Abused adults repeat the cycle with their children. Somewhere in our town is a little girl who called for help. If only we could answer her call.

COLUMN WRITING

Daily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Manhattan Mercury

Bill Felber

These were great columns that dealt with a wide range of topics. They held local interest and are well written.

SECOND PLACE

Manhattan Mercury

Ned Seaton

Another great column for the Mercury. These columns were a very interesting read. The defining difference between these and the first place entry was the stronger call to action in the first place entry. Still, these columns are great. It was tough to choose between the two Mercury columnists.

THIRD PLACE

Pittsburg Morning Sun

JT Knoll

These were wonderful columns to read. The writer's voice comes through in the pieces. The columns also create a strong sense of place, and have a great local flavor.

By Bill Felber

I am from Chicago, which spawned the City News Bureau. Its famous motto was "If your mother says she loves you, check it out."

That may explain why I occasionally have a hard time coping with aspects of the Internet that tend to follow more of a back-fence philosophy: I heard that Jack told Julie that somebody told him that ...

Case in point: the "shooting" a week or so ago at Dick Edwards Ford.

There wasn't one. Which should explain why we failed to report that there was.

Let me repeat: no shots were fired at Dick Edwards Ford. Not even one. Not even by accident.

I can say that with certainty because we checked it out before we reported it...which we didn't do. Because it didn't happen.

All of the above probably comes as a great surprise to some users of our Web site's public-driven message boards. Many message board regulars got their journalism training at the back fence instead of the City News Bureau. Which explains why a pseudonymous individual felt comfortable writing that an offshoot of a CNN Web page linking to "KRNT in Topeka" (presumably that person meant KSNT) was reporting "a shooting at a car dealership in Manhattan."

Somebody ran with that into a Google search reporting the RCPD at the scene of a shooting at Dick Edwards. A few minutes later somebody else reported hearing that KMAN was also at

the scene.

Here's the truth. The RCPD did pay a quick visit to Dick Edwards based on a tip from a caller regarding a shooting. The shooting actually occurred in another county at a site that had nothing to do with the car dealership; in other words, the original tipster was addled. But of course the tip had to be checked out. We did check it out, and found it to be baseless. We didn't run anything on the Dick Edwards shooting for the same reason we didn't run anything on my DUI arrest last week: There wasn't one.

The message board, however, was not constrained by such details. By Sunday, another anonymous expert felt comfortable reporting why The Mercury had not reported the shooting: we don't have news reporters working on Saturday. Nobody checked that out, either. We have a reporter on regular Saturday duty. Always have. The reporter on duty was the one who determined there was no basis to the story.

Having condemned The Mercury for not reporting the shooting that did not happen, another writer condemned journalism generally. "You have a shooting in Manhattan at a major dealership in NE Kansas and NO ONE reports on it. Wasn't even in Sunday's Mercury. No news reports on TV. What a joke the media has become!"

Not much irony there, huh?

Finally, two days after the initial posting, a poster decided to actually contact somebody. He or she got hold of the TV station that apparently was the

original source of the erroneous report. They reported being told of "some confusion" during the original report, suggesting the shooting may have been "across the street" from Dick Edwards instead of at it. (In fact it was about 40 miles away.) This, too, was offered anonymously.

This column will be red meat for the message boards. Boarders will reject the notion that amateur reporters ought to follow the same principles as professionals. They will revel in the greater freedom they enjoy, and bristle at the suggestion of a need for constraint. They will assert that the editor of The Mercury is in no position to lecture since The Mercury makes errors as well. That last is true; that's why we run corrections.

So far, for the record, nobody has run a correction on the Dick Edwards shooting story. We haven't run one because, having checked it out first, we didn't err.

I'm not sure why no message boarders have run a correction — unless it's because they haven't checked it out yet, so they don't know they're wrong.

COLUMN WRITING

Daily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Lawrence Journal-World

Cathy Hamilton

So very funny. I laughed out loud. Reading the column, it's clear the writer is a natural storyteller and a good judge of her audience.

SECOND PLACE

Kansas City Star

Matt Schofield

This personal look at life in Baghdad is unique and fresh. The small details peppering each column are vibrant and make the reader aware of the ongoing conflict in Baghdad.

THIRD PLACE

Topeka Capital-Journal

Ric Anderson

Anderson is honest and witty, without trying to be funny. The column topics are unique and creative, ranging from personal to worldwide events.

SPORTS STORY

Nondaily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

Bonner Springs Chieftain

Chris Wristen

This was a great story. Rather than a typical “doubles pair earns trip to state” story, the writer instead frames the story in terms of the trials faced early on in the season and how this doubles team used its chemistry to make it to state. Nor the same old state qualifier story.

SECOND PLACE

Bonner Springs Chieftain

Nick Bates

Another great, non-traditional sports piece. This story isn't about the kid who wins. Rather, it is about a kid who, in spite of doing well all season, runs into problems in this race. It is compassionate while being unflinching. Another great piece from Bonner Springs.

THIRD PLACE

Bonner Springs Chieftain

Chris Wristen

I just realized that all three of my top picks came from the Bonner Springs Chieftain. Wristen again does a fine job. As a general note, the Chieftain seems, at least in this small sampling, to do a good job of telling their sports stories in a way that is unique, interesting, and effective. Good job!

SPORTS STORY

Nondaily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Hiawatha World

Joey May

This was a great read. Very well-written article telling the dream of baseball for the young boys. Overall neat story.

SECOND PLACE

The Mirror

Benton Smith

Great story telling how the relay team overcame and ran to state title. Very good article that made me want to turn the page and see how it ended.

THIRD PLACE

Louisburg Herald

Andy Brown

Great story of triumph. Well-written and full of great quotes. That completes the story.

By Joey May

A young man from Hiawatha has a dream that he might have the opportunity to play baseball in high school.

In a year of a state budget crisis, the idea of adding even one more program to a district that has already tightened its belt to the tune of about \$400,000 seems farfetched.

Or is it?

According to a persuasive essay “The Fight for Baseball,” written by eighth-grader Bradley Leupold, USD 415 is one of only three schools out of the 64 Class 4A districts that doesn’t offer baseball.

To Leupold, 13, who has played baseball since tee-ball days, the prospect of high school baseball is an attainable dream. He decided to turn this dream into a persuasive essay for English class last spring.

“When I first started this essay, I didn’t know where it was headed,” Leupold said. “But I’d really like to get the word out there. I think we could really benefit. We could have athletes who could compete.”

For his essay, Leupold searched the Kansas State High School Activities Association Web site and found that Hiawatha, Cheney and Hesston — all Class 4A schools for the 2008-09 school year — were the only ones who did not offer baseball.

“Along with these high schools surprisingly even smaller districts near Hiawatha possess baseball, including Wathena, Troy, Effingham and Maur Hill-Mount Academy,” his essay

states.

Troy and Wathena have a cooperative for just their baseball program, started only three years ago.

Leupold said offering baseball would give young athletes the opportunity to pursue this sport in college.

“If there wasn’t even a baseball program this would eliminate the chances of talented ball players to become noticed

and given a scholarship for sport opportunities and education,”

Leupold’s essay states “Students should be able to participate and excel in the sports that they really enjoy. If one of these is baseball, it’s completely unfair to the kids who don’t even get the chance to play the sport.”

He said that anything can happen if enough people support the effort.

“Supporting the idea with positive reinforcements from fundraisers to petitions, will dramatically help the cause and anything can happen when you fight for your dreams!” the essay concludes.

Baseball

Considered in ‘94, ‘99 Hiawatha considered adding baseball in 1994 and again five years later. Both times the school board decided against it.

In 2000, the girls softball program was added to Hiawatha’s line-up of spring athletic activities.

“When softball was brought up, probably what pushed it over the edge is we were behind in offering female programs,” said HHS Athletic Director David Fitz.

Fitz, who has been athletic di-

rector in Hiawatha for 10 years, said he was surprised to learn that only three schools currently do not offer baseball in Class 4A. In the current Big Seven League, Hiawatha is joined by Sabetha (Class 3A) and Seneca (2A) as schools who don’t offer baseball. Fitz said he didn’t know whether opposition from track coaches in 1994 was also instrumental in putting a stop to implementing baseball.

“But anytime you have a lot of sports in one season, you don’t have a lot to draw from,” he said. “There would be fewer athletes and existing programs would suffer.”

“A major disadvantage” Hiawatha American Legion Baseball Manager Paul Rockey was the Legion coach who brought the matter to the school board in 1994.

“We thought we had the votes in at the school board until that evening,” he said. “Somebody changed their minds.”

Rockey said he felt intense opposition from track coaches at the time. The second time the matter was broached with the school board was in the late 1990s by two fathers of Legion players.

“At that time, I think the reason it wasn’t voted through was more economic reasons,” Rockey said. “Plus they said they didn’t have enough options for girls. Softball went in, but baseball didn’t.”

Rockey said that as area schools have added baseball to their high school line-up, Hiawatha’s competitiveness in that sport has lagged.

“We are behind all the high

school teams, who have already had 30 practices and 20 to 25 games,” Rockey said. “It’s a major disadvantage to us.” Rockey said he also felt adding a high school sport could rekindle participation in baseball, starting down the ranks at the Little League age.

“High school sports are attended a little better than summer programs,” he said. “It would give them something more to work for.”

Rockey said with enough community support high school baseball could succeed in these drastic economical times. “When we took it to the school board, we had so much community support and enough donations and volunteers to completely fund the first year,” he said. Rockey said he also thinks Hiawatha would have player participation, not just from Hiawatha boys, but from Horton as well. Already 10 Horton boys play on the Hiawatha Legion teams. Rockey said this could possibly lead to a viable school co-operative, such as the one in existence between Doniphan County high schools.

“That’s another way to institute a program where you could have the costs split between two districts,” he said.

Baseball coming to Sabetha High?

Sabetha American Legion Baseball Coach Paul Herl has recently approached the school district there with surveys and cost projections for starting up baseball and softball programs at the high school level.

While he wasn’t met with rejection, Herl said he was put off

for a few months while school board members deliberated budget issues in the face of state aid reduction.

He said that while many school districts may cry budget issues when faced with adding a new program, he doesn’t think that baseball will incur a lot of expense.

“It’s not like basketball where you would play back-to-back days,” he said. “You could probably get by with one uniform.”

Herl came up with an extensive list of cost projections for the Sabetha school district to consider.

Estimated start-up costs for baseball were about \$4,700 and \$4,000 for softball.

“There is a way it could be done if people want it badly enough,” Herl said. “The first thing we would have to do is go out and raise start-up costs.” But would it help his Legion team?

“Yes, it would, but the real reason is to make kids better baseball players,” he said. “Let the kids decide.”

A school board member speaks

Hiawatha school board member Denise Ellfner said the subject of a baseball program has not been broached during her time on the board.

“I support providing our students with many opportunities,” Ellfner said. “Assuming the funding and the numbers were in place and after studying the many sides to this issue and having an open discussion with the other board members, I would like to think that I would support

this issue.”

Ellfner and her husband, Del, have actively supported many sporting activities, including coaching their son Alec’s baseball team for the past several years.

Ellfner said she would like for the opportunity for her children to play in their favorite sports at a competitive high school level. “Concerning a cooperative team, there would have to be a great deal of homework done before that type of situation could occur,” Ellfner said. “There are so many factors to consider when you start involving another school district. However with school funding and budgets becoming so difficult, I can see where this might become a viable option for many districts.”

What do the players think?

Several of the current Hiawatha American Legion ball players had a definite opinion on what they would choose if given the option.

Out of four players asked, three were track participants and one played tennis. All four said they would rather play baseball in the spring.

Senior Gabe Noll, who has been a state track qualifier for the past two years, said he would like the option of dual sports participation. He referred to fellow Big Seven Leaguer Holton, who allows students to participate in more than one sport at a time.

“They just have to make a commitment to one sport if they fall on the same day,” he said. “But if I had to choose, it would be baseball. I love baseball more. I also think it would make us [the Legion team] lots better.”

Fellow Legion player Jereme Jones, who plays tennis in the spring, agreed with Noll. He would prefer baseball and said competing with other towns on Legion has become increasingly difficult.

“These teams have already played 20 to 30 games when they start off their Legion season,” Jones said.

While school officials cite sport equality, Jones disagrees, saying girls also have the option to play golf, wrestle or even play football if they want to.

Senior Tanner Smith runs track, but has played baseball since he was old enough to catch a ball and swing a bat. “I like baseball a lot better than track,” he said.

Senior Jordan Marable is also in favor of dual sports participation. He loves to run and is a state track qualifier, but said baseball is his all-time favorite sport.

“We wouldn’t have to spend the first month just trying to play catch up with all these other teams,” Marable said at a recent Legion game where Hiawatha came up against Doniphan County. “We also have one of the nicest facilities in the state. I think the school support would also get more interest in the Little League teams.”

Marable felt that baseball could be supported through fundraising efforts or private donations, which is how the tennis program at Hiawatha came into existence.

“If we don’t do something we’re going to lose our baseball programs for the little kids, who are struggling to find players,” he

said. “It gives them the opportunity to look forward to something in high school that they like as little kids.”

SPORTS STORY

Nondaily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Shawnee Dispatch

Chris Wristen

Wonderful heartwarming story. Well-written and very inspirational story that had a need to be told. Keep up the good work.

SECOND PLACE

Johnson County Sun

Mark Dewar

Terrific story that even told the coach's story and tells us about his heart transplant. Inspiring story.

THIRD PLACE

Miami County Republic

Andy Brown

Great lead that kept me reading this. Very well put together story. Nice story to share with the readers.

SPORTS STORY

Daily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

Arkansas City Traveler

Joey Sprinkle

Great article! Made me feel the heart and soul of sports.

SECOND PLACE

Augusta Daily Gazette

Jeremy Costello

Showed dedication and what it takes to be a coach.

THIRD PLACE

Iola Register

Jocelyn Sheets

Great article - headline hooked me.

SPORTS STORY

Daily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Emporia Gazette

C.J. Moore

Good job telling big moment of big game.

SECOND PLACE

Hays Daily News

Gonor Nicholl

Good detail and comments in describing what must have been a heartbreaking loss.

THIRD PLACE

Manhattan Mercury

Joshua Kinder

Good questioning. Good writing. Solid reporting.

SPORTS STORY

Daily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Kansas City Star

Kent Babb

Great writing. Made the subject exciting/fun to read. Nice work!

SECOND PLACE

Lawrence Journal-World

Dugan Arnett

Good investigating - well researched - interesting look at big-time college sports.

THIRD PLACE

Hutchinson News

Brad Hallier

Good story, good writing about a good team, interesting about the bird!

SPORTS FEATURE STORY

Nondaily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

Eudora News

Jeff Deters

Touching story that held my interest throughout. Great job of talking to multiple sources for quotes and information. Very nice piece.

SECOND PLACE

Basehor Sentinel

Chris Wristen

Nice story about a behind-the-scenes topic and individual who doesn't often receive the praise that is desired. Way to think outside the box of normal sports features.

THIRD PLACE

Derby Informer

Jeremy Shapiro

Well done. Took an interesting story and looked even deeper into it than most writers might.

SPORTS FEATURE STORY

Nondaily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

The Mirror

Benton Smith

This was really interesting to read. It had a good mix of sports and human interest elements. The story has a nice flow to it and a good intro and conclusion. Great job!

SECOND PLACE

The Mirror

Benton Smith

This was a moving story. Very easy to read. The subheads are good and give a nice flow to it. Nice use of quotes.

THIRD PLACE

Kingman Leader-Courier

Nancy D. Boost

This was a nice change of pace from the other feature stories. Fun to read. Good intro. A lot of interesting quotes. Well done!

SPORTS FEATURE STORY

Nondaily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Miami County Republic

Andy Brown

Well written story, made me feel the emotion!

SECOND PLACE

Miami County Republic

Gene Morris

Good article - kept me reading from start to finish!

THIRD PLACE

Osage County Herald-Chronicle

Jeremy Gaston

Awesome article! Unique story!

By Andy Brown

As the Louisburg soccer team walked onto the Piper High School field Monday, the weather was nearly perfect.

The sun was shining, the temperature was just right, and it made for a beautiful night of soccer — almost.

The weather might have been nice outside, but the Wildcats players were going through a whirlwind of emotions on the inside. A flood of thoughts and memories came rushing back. Thoughts of a former teammate, friend and teacher. Memories of all those game-winning goals, fancy moves and amazing passes.

Zac Messmer was on the mind of nearly every Wildcat player that day. Reality still hadn't sunk in.

Early Sunday morning, Messmer, 19, was killed by a train near Drexel, Mo. The news sent shockwaves through the Louisburg community and left hundreds, if not thousands, saddened by his death.

In Messmer's honor, the Wildcats played for him Monday and did so with a heavy heart. The players walked onto the field stone-faced. Smiles were few and far between, but they knew what they had to do.

They needed to win for Zac.

An LHS soccer legend As a seventh-grader, Zac Messmer attended a soccer camp conducted by coach Ben York which featured several high school age athletes.

It was then York found out he had something special on his hands. Messmer had no problems showing up the older players and York realized all the potential he had.

"When I saw him out there schooling all those older players, I knew he was going to be good," York said. "He was just so confident. Not everyone can say that about themselves."

Messmer was one of four players who York considers the cornerstone of the Louisburg High School soccer program. Messmer, along with Zac Brown, Anthony Vallacqua and Dustin DeLand, brought a young Wildcat program to heights not even York could have imagined early on.

The program, which started in 2003, had a rough time competing, like any young program would. Then came the "Wildcat quartet."

"Those guys were so much fun to coach because they loved the game so much and they really gelled well together," York said.

"They were great friends and the chemistry was really great. Nothing against any of the players on this team or that I have coached in the past, because they are good too, but those guys were great."

In their final three years, the four players made deep runs into the soccer playoffs and all they wanted was to make a state tournament to represent their town. But every season, there was always one team standing in their way — Piper.

The Pirates bounced Louisburg each of those three years and Messmer and the rest of

the Wildcats' dream of a state tournament appearance, was just that — a dream.

Messmer wound up being everything York could have asked for in a player. He was athletic, he was talented, and he had the awards to prove it.

The 2008 LHS grad racked up all-league and all-state awards by the handfuls, and he had the respect of everyone on the field.

"He was the best overall player to ever come through this program," York said. "I really don't think there is anyone close. He was a great player and he could do it all."

Messmer is still the one current players look up to today.

"Zac was definitely the best player to ever play at Louisburg," senior Stephen McTeer said. "He was so good. He played the game with a lot of heart and he had some crazy moves."

One of those moves is one which will forever live in Wildcat lore.

During a match against Ottawa in the postseason, the Wildcats met the Cyclones for the third time. With the season on the line, a Wildcat sent a corner kick and the ball sailed toward the goal.

Messmer leapt in the air and spun backwards. With his back toward the goal, Messmer kicked the ball off his heel and found the corner of the net for the game-winning goal.

In other words, it was Messmer-izing

"That was one of the craziest goals I have ever seen," McTeer said. "I have never seen anything like that before, especially in high school. We got it on film too. It was amazing."

After high school, Messmer played a year of college soccer at Iowa Wesleyan, and this summer he transferred to Johnson County Community College in hopes of making the Cavalier soccer team.

Those hopes and dreams were never realized.

Shocking news
Stephen McTeer was sitting in church, as was Anthony Juarez.

Woody Watson woke up to what he thought was a nightmare.

That is what some of Messmer's former teammates, and current Wildcats, were doing when they heard of his death.

"Someone came up to me in church and asked me if I had heard about Zac and I hadn't," McTeer said. "When they told me ... at first I thought it was just a sick joke. Then I realized it was true and I just lost it. I couldn't believe it."

The news hit all of the Wildcats hard and the players spent most of Sunday calling back and forth between one another to inform them of the news. The players tried to gather all the information about what happened that fateful morning.

Junior Daniel Wilson received a phone call from Messmer an hour before his death.

"He just wanted to call and talk, which I thought was kind of weird because he really didn't do that a whole lot," Wilson said. "He just wanted to know how our game went (Saturday) and how we did. I know he was happy we won, and he always called at least just to check on how we were doing. He really cared about the team."

Although Messmer really

cared for his former teammates, it was York he looked up to the most. After Messmer graduated, he went to work for York over the summer and the two became friends.

York watched Messmer grow from an ornery seventh-grader at camp to one of his best players, and in the end, to one of his best friends.

"The emotions really come and go for me," York said. "I was so shocked when I found out, just like everyone else was. When people you love are taken away from you like that, it just comes in waves. There will always be that void in my life now that Zac isn't here anymore. I might see something, smell something or hear something that reminds me of him and it is tough. It is definitely going to be a rough next few weeks."

After the players had a few days to take it all in, they started to reminisce about all the good times they had with Messmer.

"When I was a sophomore goalie, a lot of those guys, especially Zac really made me better by challenging me every day in practice and they made sure I got better," Juarez said. "They pushed me really hard and that is something I will always remember about him."

Messmer didn't stop his teaching with Juarez.

"There were definitely quite a few times where he pushed me in practice and made me look pretty bad," junior Tanner O'Hara recalled. "Zac was definitely a confident player, and he wanted to just dominate at everything. But on the other hand, he would always stop and show you what

you were doing wrong and tell you, you had to fix it. He was a great teacher."

Wilson had a little different view of Messmer. He found himself standing on the sidelines during certain games and watching Messmer do his thing in amazement.

"He wanted to break your ankles with a great move, and then right after that he wanted to break your ankles again," Wilson said. "He never let up and worked really hard to be the best."

Messmer wanted to prove he and his teammates were the best team in Class 4A. During his senior season, the Wildcats made it all the way to the state quarterfinals when they traveled to Kansas City, Kan., to play Piper for the third-straight season.

Louisburg eventually lost the game in a close 3-2 battle, which left a void in Messmer's playing career — a void many of the players felt Monday.

Winning for Zac

It was as if Messmer was on the field with the Wildcats on Monday evening at Piper.

Louisburg faced off with Piper for the first time since that 2007 contest and the Wildcats, without question, wanted to beat the Pirates. It wasn't for themselves; they wanted Messmer to have his revenge.

There was no big speech before the game. The players knew what they had to do.

"We knew it was different, because usually before the game we get in a circle and Ben talks to us to get us fired up," Juarez said. "There was no talk. We just

went right into our prayer. We didn't talk about it much before the game, but everyone knew who we were playing for."

Less than a minute into the match, it was apparent the Wildcats weren't going to let this one slip away. Wilson scored on a breakaway 12 seconds in and Louisburg eventually took a 3-0 halftime lead.

It only got worse for Piper. Wilson scored his second goal early in the second half and senior Ray Crosswhite finished the Pirates off.

Crosswhite, who wears Messmer's old No. 1, got the game's final goal in the 5-0 victory, as if Messmer himself wanted to rub it in. The Wildcats had finally done it.

"We definitely wanted to win this one for him," Watson said. "He was never able to beat Piper, and we wanted to be able to do that for him."

After the game was over, the traditional high-fives and smiles weren't there. In fact, they were nowhere to be seen.

Many of the players broke down in tears after the emotional victory. They sat on the sidelines and just stared onto the field as they wished their buddy was still with them.

Instead of his normal post-game talk, York turned away from the players, squatted down on the field and wept. He cried the tears he had wanted to all day.

York had tried to hold them back and put on a brave face for his team, but he couldn't any longer. He let it all go.

As he looked onto the field at Piper High School, with bright

lights beaming down, York saw that seventh-grade kid, many years ago. He saw that senior in high school and his many amazing shots.

And, he saw that friend — a friend that changed York's life for the better.

"Everyone knew who Zac Messmer was," York said. "Everyone knew him on the field and what he was about. He competed hard and he never gave up. It really hasn't sunk in for me yet."

To honor Messmer, the Wildcats will wear an armband for the rest of the season and have dedicated the rest of the season in his memory.

"We had high goals for ourselves this year and we want to make the state tournament, but now we want to do it for Zac," McTeer said. "He was never able to get there and we want to get there for him. I know that is what he would have wanted us to do."

Game on.

SPORTS FEATURE STORY

Daily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

High Plains Daily Leader

Earl Watt

Very sensitive, well-written story. Lots of emotion, great quotes and layout make it a clear #1 entry.

SECOND PLACE

Chanute Tribune

Jason Peake

Nice profile on a sport that doesn't garner much publicity - you can almost feel their pain.

THIRD PLACE

Iola Register

Richard Luken

For all those fans and perennial "losers" this is a story to which they can relate. Well written, fun read.

SPORTS FEATURE STORY

Daily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Manhattan Mercury

Joshua Kinder

Great story about a special player who provided a lot of memories for her fans.

SECOND PLACE

Hays Daily News

Gonor Nicholl

Good feature about a basketball player who had a special career and a special relationship with his grandfather, playing the game they both loved.

THIRD PLACE

Manhattan Mercury

Cole Manbeck

Good in-depth story about a coach of a major college basketball program whose name recognition alone made a story of strong interest to readers.

SPORTS FEATURE STORY

Daily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Kansas City Star

Kent Babb

Great story about a great athlete and even better man. Nice, conversational writing style. Impressive amount of research that was organized well. This was one of the most touching sports stories that I've read.

SECOND PLACE

Wichita Eagle

Paul Suellentrop

Great lead into story carried all the way through. It's great to read about the academics of athletes, especially those who are so talented and original. Reporter has a talent for storytelling which works well with this story.

THIRD PLACE

Lawrence Journal-World

Dugan Arnett

Nice bit of research traveling to Buffalo to find out about new football coach Turner Gill. Reader gets good feel for how Gill is as a human and not just a coach. While stories like this are better told in casual tone, this goes too far in my opinion. Sometimes it is better to report and go less with story telling. It loses a little bit of authentic feel of a newspaper story.

SPORTS COLUMN WRITING

Nondaily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

Baldwin City Signal

Jimmy Gillespie

Gillespie injects humor and his own unique outlook and experiences to make his columns a fun read.

SECOND PLACE

Derby Informer

Jeremy Shapiro

Shapiro knows his audience and understands his topic. These columns were fun to read and informative.

By Jimmy Gillespie

Each year, high school seniors leave the world of prep sports and move on to bigger and better things.

A few of those seniors usually leave a mark on their specific sport that is remembered for a long time. Heather Garcia left Baldwin High School last May with nine state gold medals and numerous records.

In the world of small-town high school sports, it's often families that impact their school. One child will come and go while another is just entering the high school. Once the final one graduates, the program misses them more than words can say. My best example — excuse my running bias, it's in my blood — is Matt and Megan Noonan. They brought home handfuls of gold medals for BHS, including six state titles for the boys' cross country and track teams. Although coach Mike Spielman seems to reload on talent every year, those two left a legacy at Baldwin High. I was lucky enough to be a part of that for a few years.

During my four-plus years as the Signal sports writer, I've been lucky enough to follow another pair of siblings. Their name is well known around the mat. For five seasons, the Callahan brothers have cemented their place in Bulldog wrestling lore. BHS coach Kit Harris was a little emotional after Alan Callahan's final match at the state meet Feb.

28.

"They've been such a cornerstone of our program for five years," Harris said. "I'm mostly sad, because I don't get to coach them anymore. They are great kids. They are hardworkers and definitely raised the bar in our practice room. They worked for every bit of success they had. They were definitely blue-collar wrestlers."

It's hard to put into word what the Callahan's have done during their years as Bulldogs. Well for starters, they hold seven school records. Alan set two this season — takedowns (120) and team points (299).

Kevin set one, nearfalls-2 (46) as a junior. During his sophomore campaign, he set four others. Those were technical falls (15), nearfalls-3 (57), total nearfalls (100) and match points (452).

Oh there are also a couple of state records, too. Alan set the state team points record this season with 1055.5. The one record they might be best known for is the state career wins record. Older brother Kevin, a 2008 BHS graduate, capped off his incredible career a year ago with a state championship, which was the only state title between the brothers, and state record. He set the career wins mark at 171 with his title.

Watching Kevin win that title was one of the happiest moments in my short career as a sports journalist. I started here during the beginning of his freshman season, but I watched him every season. It was an honor to be a part of his (and Alan's) career. Kevin placed fourth as a fresh-

man at state and second as a sophomore and junior. I sat quietly during his final match, just taking pictures, but on the inside I was cheering for him.

He was always and still is one of the nicest athletes I've talked to and gotten to know over the years. He always gave an interview and had the right things to say every time. The image of him jumping into Harris' arms after winning his state title will be etched in my memory, forever.

Then this wrestling season rolled around and all of the talk was about how it was Alan's time to follow in his brother's footsteps. His career as a dominant grappler didn't begin quite as young as Kevin's did. However, Alan burst on the scene as a freshman by placing sixth at state, after injury defaulting because of a broken leg.

He followed that up with a third-place finish as a sophomore. His junior campaign ended early when he failed to medal at state. Combine that with his brother's state title and Alan had plenty of determination this winter.

Each tournament, it was easy to see his goal was a state championship. Alan didn't care that he was closing in on Kevin's wins record. He wanted to be the top of his weight class when it counted the most.

Alan came so close to that goal. He advanced to the state finals for the first time in his career. That was the first step. Then came the final match. Unfortunately, he ran into Saint James' Taylor Moeder and lost the title. It was tough to watch the match as I wanted Alan to

repeat Kevin's senior year. His brother did, too.

"I was proud of Al after it was all done," K. Callahan said. "It hurt me more than anything. I wanted him to know what it feels like to win a state title and stand on top. I know how hard he worked. I've been there for a good majority of what he's put into it. If anything, he's worked harder and been more dedicated than I was. If I could I'd give him mine, just because I know he wanted it that bad and deserves it. He's still the best in my book and always will be."

It was also a honor to watch Alan's career unfold before me. Like his brother, he was always happy to talk to me and usually had a smile on his face. He even spoke to me shortly after his final match.

After it was all said and done, the Callahans combined for 342 victories during their time at BHS. Yep, each brother won 171 matches. They are tied for the state career wins record. If Alan, would have beat Moeder, he would sit atop alone. That's how Kevin dreamed of it happening.

"I hate it that he tied my record, because I know he could have beat it," K. Callahan said. "I wanted him to win it and beat my record. I wanted that for him. It's nice to share it and it means a lot to me, but the way I pictured it was him breaking my record. Now it's our record and I couldn't be more proud of my little brother."

While it's uncertain how long the Callahans will hold the state record, one thing is certain — the BHS wrestling program won't be the same next year. Thanks for

the years of success Callahans. You're part of the reason I enjoy this job as much as I do.

SPORTS COLUMN WRITING

Nondaily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Louisburg Herald

Andy Brown

Great mix of topics, and all topics were local. Nice job of offering your opinion, even when it was negative towards fans or administrators of schools you cover. The column about coach Kueser was very nicely done.

SECOND PLACE

The Mirror

Benton Smith

Very impressed with the column about Austin Stone. Very moving and inspiring. Good writing overall in all columns.

THIRD PLACE

Atchison Globe

Hank Layton

Writer showed ability to cover a variety of topics although all were local. Diverse stories, all well written. Not afraid to make an opinion.

By Andy Brown

I wish I could say this announcement caught me by surprise. But for me, it became a matter of “when” rather than “if.”

Louisburg boys’ basketball coach Jim Dillon announced his resignation last week as many of you probably already know. Even at the beginning of the season, I could just tell something wasn’t right with this team.

Sure, they were young and sometimes it takes awhile to get the chemistry together, but as the season wore on, it became evident this wasn’t going to be a fun year for Dillon or his players.

Heads butted, verbal fights ensued and some players never bought into what the Wildcat coach was trying to instill in the team. I am sure many of you don’t need me to tell you this as you probably saw or heard most of it yourself.

Although this wasn’t the full reason, I have to believe this was a big reason Dillon decided to hang it up. The coach couldn’t take it anymore.

Dillon didn’t tell me this was the reason on or off the record, but it doesn’t take a scientist to figure this one out. The chemistry just wasn’t there.

He has been around basketball his entire life and loves the sport, from when he was a manager for the Kansas basketball team under then-coach Roy Williams, to being a head coach in Herington, a middle school coach in Andover

and finally the head coach in Wildcat country.

Maybe he just wanted a break from the sport (like he said in the story) to spend more time with his family. That could have been part of it, but I don’t think that was the main reason.

It would be easy for me to say he got a raw deal in the process, but I am not at many of the practices, nor am I in the locker rooms after the games, so I don’t know exactly what went on. Nor do I care to, actually, but all I can look at is Dillon’s history at Louisburg.

His first season he won the league title with a group of players he didn’t know and later earned a berth in the state tournament in 2005. Dillon has led the Wildcats to three substate final games in the last five years, which is not an easy thing to do. Looks pretty good here.

Dillon also saw the writing on the wall for the state of the program after the Kansas State High School Activities Association allowed athletes to work with their coaches during the summer months.

“I wasn’t sure if I had the energy or the want-to to work,” Dillon said. “I don’t want to use this as an excuse, but if we have more exposure to our kids, I am going to be battling Gary Griffin (football) and Jeff Lohse (baseball) for our own kids, and I know where basketball is going to be on that end. Football is king here and baseball is big as well. I don’t think guys will be willing to do things in the summer. There is no more frustrating thing as a coach than being there in the summer and nobody is there with

you.”

A lot of things probably led up to Dillon’s decision, and maybe it is time for a fresh start to the Wildcat program. Louisburg has loads of young talent that can do some special things in the coming years, and sometimes a new coach can give the program a newfound energy.

Let’s hope the Wildcats can find that chemistry to make a run in the Frontier League over the next couple of seasons and that Dillon can find a way to get back into the sport he loves so much. He deserves at least that much.

SPORTS COLUMN WRITING

Nondaily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Shawnee Dispatch

Chris Wristen

This judge enjoyed your nice easy to read style that was enjoyable to read. Your stories were well-written concise and very thought out and covering a wide subject range.

SECOND PLACE

Olathe News

Tod Palmer

Great story ideas that are well written and enjoyable to read. All your stories make an impact on your community and get to see a different side to sports.

THIRD PLACE

Miami County Republic

Gene Morris

All your articles were very interesting and easy to read. You tackled difficult subject matters and spun them in a positive light.

SPORTS COLUMN WRITING

Daily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

Arkansas City Traveler

Joey Sprinkle

Especially enjoyed the column about the state cutting money from the education budget. Really put things in perspective and took coverage to write as a sports fan. Clever columns and good writing overall.

SECOND PLACE

Parsons Sun

Anthony Cook

Enjoyed the fact that your topics had local interest. The story about Thanksgiving basketball made me smile because a lot of families can relate to similar events!

THIRD PLACE

High Plains Daily Leader

Earl Watt

Really liked how you tackled a local issue in the column about stadium renovations. Would have liked to have seen all three entries local in nature.

By Joey Sprinkle

Here is a prime example of my bad luck with storm chasing: Tuesday night, when funnel clouds seemed to be popping up all over Cowley County, I was at the Royals baseball game in Kansas City.

While local weather enthusiasts and storm spotters were chasing the supercell thunderstorm that seemed to be camping over Strother Field, I was chasing down a Zack Greinke shirt on T-shirt Tuesday.

And my wife? Oh, she was just hunkered down in the ladies, restroom inside Cowley 8 theater just a stone throw from Strother Field. Yep, my wife is getting more tornado action than I am.

Ironically, my wife, biggest complaint was not that the sheriff, office wouldn't let them leave until the danger passed. She was miffed that she didn't get to see the end of the movie.

A certified storm spotter with the National Weather Service, the first thing I check when I turn on the computer every morning is the convective outlook for the day. The chance that severe weather could be coming into our neck of the woods. As I headed up to Kansas City, I really didn't expect much from the 20-percent risk of severe weather.

Shows what I know.

It reminds me of the day a few years ago when I was chasing a supercell thunderstorm between Garden City and Scott City in southwest Kansas. The storm I was tailing had a perfect

spaceship look to it and I was in the perfect spot, looking west as the storm headed northeast. I was standing in front of a friend, house out in the country, eagerly awaiting the rotating monster to produce a funnel cloud and in turn, a tornado.

Alas, no tornado was produced, not even a funnel cloud.

A few days later, when discussing the storm with the friend who lived there, and telling of my disappointment in not seeing an elusive twister, she kindly mentioned that I must have not been looking in the right place, because, You didn't see the tornado just beyond those trees over there?, she said, pointing to the northwest.

Fortunately, I had better luck Tuesday night at Kauffman Stadium than I do chasing tornadoes.

Not only did the Royals defeat the Arizona Diamondbacks behind Gil Meche, the masterful four-hit shutout, but I hung around after the game long enough to snag not one, but three autographs from one of my favorite players, Royals third baseman-right fielder Mark Teahen.

The last time I made the nearly four-hour trek to Kansas City, I stood outside the main gates while my friend went autograph-hunting and I watched Teahen sign autographs for at least 20 minutes. Another one of my favorites, first baseman Billy Butler, also signed for what seemed like forever. So this time I grabbed a few cards of as many players as I could think of and set up shop.

Teahen was the only player

who left the stadium from the front gates that I actually had cards to sign. Well, not exactly; several other players left the same way, including outfielders Jose Guillen and Coco Crisp, pitcher Brian Bannister and designated hitter Mike Jacobs. Bannister had his baby girl in his arms, so I left him alone. I have a lot of respect for athletes, family time and want to be respectful of that. Jacobs left with his family as well, pushing a double stroller, but I was told he wasn't real affectionate with signing his name on anything but contracts, so I didn't bother.

Guillen and Crisp, unfortunately, couldn't have been more rude without actually committing assault. Both players went out of their way to ignore the fans who pay their exorbitant salaries, refusing even to make eye contact. With major league sports becoming more and more a business, and with the majority, it seems, of professional athletes that refuse to have anything to do with those who ultimately pay their salaries and worship the ground in which they walk, it, becoming more difficult to get behind any of them. As soon as I endear these players to my heart, they either get traded or play out their contracts and sign as free agents, most notably for large-market teams such as the New York Yankees and Los Angeles Dodgers.

Teahen, and Butler, seem like such nice, everyday guys, guys who if they were not larger-than-life heroes, could just as likely be your next-door neighbors. Teahen, who incidentally, was born in 1981 in Redlands, Calif., about 15 minutes from where,

as a junior, I was a manager on
my high-school baseball team,
signed all three of his cards that I
brought to the game.

That,Äô a hero I can get behind,
no matter what team he plays for.

SPORTS COLUMN WRITING

Daily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Emporia Gazette

C.J. Moore

These columns were a lot of fun to read and reflect a passion for the subject matter. They show Moore to be a versatile writer who can express himself well on a variety of subjects. Gazette columnists were my top two picks! Way to go Gazette!

SECOND PLACE

Emporia Gazette

Joey Berlin

These columns were also a lot of fun to read and were knowledgeable. This was a tough category to judge in that there were many great entries. The only difference between this and the first place pick was in variety of subject matter. Both were great entries! Good job Emporia Gazette!

THIRD PLACE

Great Bend Tribune

Mike Courson

Great entries. Well thought out columns. I appreciate the call to action in your sportsmanship piece. The Lady Panthers piece was wonderful and the Pitino piece is well-expressed.

SPORTS COLUMN WRITING

Daily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Kansas City Star

Joe Posnanski

The narrative on baseball scout Art Stewart was an astounding piece of journalism. And Posnanski's Zack Greinke feature was thorough and compelling as well.

SECOND PLACE

Kansas City Star

Jason Whitlock

Whitlock's style is somewhat unique but always provocative. He takes on the subjects that other sports columnists do, but always with an interesting angle.

THIRD PLACE

Wichita Eagle

Bob Lutz

Lutz's explanation of a clock issue was objective and it did much to allay any concerns by WSU fans that they had received a raw deal. Also, a nice discussion of the K-State controversy.

By C.J. Moore

I set off this week on what I thought would be a pretty easy task. I wanted to understand the Division II Regional rankings, and come up with an explanation for why the Emporia State women, ranked eighth nationally, were only ranked fourth in the South Central Region.

After watching Emporia State blow out two of the best teams in its conference the past week — Missouri Southern and Pittsburg State — it was hard for me to fathom that there are three teams better in the region, and I was not alone.

"They're the No. 1 team in the region, period," Pitt State coach Lane Lord said. "They can score. They play good defense. The best thing they do though is they hit big shots, and anytime you start to make a run, they get a hustle play or a loose ball and turn it into a 3-point play or a 3-point shot. They've got a great inside game, and Ida Edwards is arguably the best player in the league."

Well, Lord is only in his second year in the MIAA, and this is my first year covering the league, so I thought maybe we had the regional rankings all wrong, and the Lady Hornets were right where they should be.

ESU coach Brandon Schneider has been at Emporia State for 13 years — 11 as head coach and two as an assistant — and he's spent many more years around the region, growing up

around the West Texas A&M program where his dad was the coach.

Maybe Schneider understood why his team's ranking seemed low.

"I obviously don't understand them; I don't agree with them," Schneider said. "So me trying to have any control and our team having any control over what six people do and think would just be a waste of our time."

Since I had a little time to waste this week, I tried to figure out why Emporia State was only ranked fourth in the region; why the MIAA has only three teams in the top 10; and what Einsteinien formula they used to figure these rankings.

But first I took a history lesson.

I looked back over the last 12 years to see how the teams and conferences fared in the regional tournament. After all, the reason the regional rankings are so important is because they decide which five teams get an at-large bid into the regional. The South Central Region has three conferences — the MIAA, the Lone Star and the Heartland — and the conference tournament winner in each conference gets an automatic bid, and then the final regional ranking decides the seeds.

In the most recent regional rankings, the MIAA has three teams (Nos. 4, 6 and 7); the Lone Star has six teams (Nos. 1, 3, 5, 8, 9 and 10); and the Heartland has one team, ranked second.

That led me to believe that traditionally the Lone Star performed the best. I was mistaken.

In the last 12 years, an MIAA team has won the region seven

times, the Lone Star has won four times and Drury, no longer in the region, won once. Out of the 22 teams to play in the regional championship game, 15 have been from the MIAA.

"It's obvious to me that the MIAA has done a pretty good job in this region for a long time, and we're not probably getting the respect that our conference deserves," Schneider said.

Well, I thought, maybe it's a new era, and maybe the national rankings are also just a reflection of the past and they don't reflect the regional rankings in all the other regions as well.

Wrong again.

Out of the top 14 teams nationally, only three were not ranked first or second in their region: No. 8 ESU at four, No. 9 Washburn at six and No. 12 Tusculum at three in the Southeast region. The No. 15 and 16 teams, Quincy and Michigan Tech, are third and fourth in their region; however, the top two teams are ranked fourth and fifth nationally.

So what was the South Central Region looking at? I called committee chairman Sally Brooks to find out.

Brooks is the coach at Angelo State, ranked eighth in the region with a 14-9 record. Brooks told me the regional rankings were completely objective, whereas the National rankings are completely subjective.

"It's not supposed to be subjective; it's not supposed to be, 'well, I think this team is better.' I know why you're asking that question, but it's not supposed to be about what we think," Brooks said. "It's supposed to be about

the numbers we're looking at. Even if we saw other teams play, we're not on the call saying this team is better based on somebody's personal feelings on it."

Brooks kept emphasizing objective, not subjective, and the fact that it's all about the numbers. If that's the case, I'm confused why there even is a committee.

Plug the numbers into a computer, see what it spits out and leave the human element out of it.

The criteria the committee is supposed to use includes overall record against D-2 teams, in-region record, strength of schedule, results versus ranked teams and significant wins and losses.

So I tried to train myself to forget about my subjectivity and think like a committee member. To make sure we all don't let our feelings get in the way, let's look at two teams without giving away which school is which.

Team X is 18-4 overall against D-2 opponents, 18-4 in-region, in second place in its conference and 3-2 against the top 10 teams in the region.

Team Y is 18-3 overall against D-2 opponents, 18-3 in-region, in first place in its conference and 3-0 against the top 10 teams in the region.

Team X and Y share three common opponents: Pittsburg State, Texas A&M-Kingsville and Texas A&M International. Team X beat Pitt State at a neutral site in its state, also beat International at a neutral site, and lost to Kingsville at a neutral site. Team Y beat Pitt State twice (home and away), beat International in Texas on a neutral court,

and lost at Kingsville.

Team X is Central Oklahoma, ranked third in the region, and team Y is Emporia State.

So maybe I'm missing something inside the numbers, or maybe subjectivity (say it ain't so) is creeping its way into the rankings.

Emporia State associate athletic director Carmen Leeds was the chairman of the South Central Committee for women's basketball from 2000 to 2004 and she is currently on the softball committee. Leeds said subjectivity does enter the equation, and sometimes they're even asked to set their objectivity aside.

"I was told we were following the numbers too much is what I was told when we were on, and to make sure that we didn't, and on my softball committee same thing," she said. "The national rep would come back and ask why and you would say because of the numbers, and they would ask, what's your other reasoning? So you have to kind of talk the numbers out and be able to explain it away from the numbers."

Is this committee different?

Brooks would have you believe so, but committee member Maryann Mitts, the Missouri Southern coach, painted a different picture.

"Is there some subjectivity? I think as we get closer to the end there will be, but just like anything else, everybody can look at the columns and the numbers any way they choose," Mitts said.

Mitts said the column that is hurting the MIAA is strength of schedule. Most MIAA schools did not play Lone Star schools in the nonconference. Instead, the

Lady Hornets scheduled four NAIA teams, but that was not because they wanted to avoid Lone Star and other D-2 teams.

When Schneider was assembling the field for the Candlewood Suites Classic last year, he could not get any D-2 schools to accept an offer. Emporia State has also struggled to find D-2 schools to agree to play a home-and-home series.

"We wanted to try to create a regional tournament, and we were able to do that back when my dad was coming to the tournament and Cameron was coming to the tournament," Schneider said. "... It's been increasingly difficult to get any Lone Star teams to come because they've got people that are on the committee within their conference telling them that as the chair of the committee, it's dumb for you to play any MIAA schools, so it's been really, really hard."

So with no choice but to show its prowess in conference, the Lady Hornets have done just that. They are one of only two teams in the top 10 with a perfect record against the rest of the top 10. Saint Mary's, ranked second in the region, is the other. But Saint Mary's has only played one game against the top 10, a win against No. 5 Southeastern Oklahoma, ranked fifth.

Emporia State has three wins over top 10 teams. Its best win comes against the Lady Blues, who are ranked a spot below Southeastern but could also make a case to be ranked higher.

Washburn has wins against California (Pa.) and Indiana (Pa.), the top two ranked teams in the Atlantic Region, and a win

against Drury, ranked fifth in the Midwest Region. The Lady Blues were not even ranked in the first regional rankings this season.

Looking at the numbers, it's tough to explain how Saint Mary's, 17-3 in region, is second when it plays in the Heartland, considered the weakest conference in the region.

West Texas A&M, ranked first, does make sense, because its record against the top 10 is 5-1, and its in-region record is 20-3.

As for the rest of the rankings that have the Lady Hornets at fourth, Washburn at six and only three MIAA teams in the top 10, I must side with Schneider and subjectively object.

HEADLINE WRITING

Nondaily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

Belle Plaine News

I really like the creative play on words with the beer blast headline, really caught my attention. Good Collection.

SECOND PLACE

De Soto Explorer

Elvyn Jones

The 'orff' headline was fun and made me want to read what the heck 'orff' was. Stitching together was also very good, nice use of color.

THIRD PLACE

Baldwin City Signal

Jeff Myrick

"Flory has flair" good job making like the rhyme - very creative. "Shedding light" good play on words.

HEADLINE WRITING

Nondaily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Atchison Globe

Joe Warren

For the record, I didn't realize my top 2 were from the same newspaper until the very end. Both were clever, but the "Horten is a who?" headline regarding the impersonation crime broke the virtual tie. Nice job!

SECOND PLACE

Atchison Globe

Mary Meyers

"Disguised failed to Mask Crimes" was my favorite. You were just one Dr. Seuss reference away from beating your colleague.

THIRD PLACE

The Mirror

Shaun Linenberger

"Smoothie Operators." My high school had no such option. Good job using common pop culture to lure your readers in.

HEADLINE WRITING

Nondaily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Johnson County Sun

Jessica Marshall

All three entries submitted grabbed my attention and meshed well with the stories. Great job of being creative without being “cute”

SECOND PLACE

Kansas City Business Journal

Michelle Renner

Very creative use of headlines. Liked how the story leads and headlines meshed together.

THIRD PLACE

Olathe News

Rick Babson

Fun and creative headlines, grabbed my interest.

HEADLINE WRITING

Daily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

Arkansas City Traveler

Joey Sprinkle

Some good variations on old intentions. Looking past stories to get to the real words.

SECOND PLACE

Ottawa Herald

Tommy Felts

Yes, they are easy to spot but fun and to the point without pointing.

THIRD PLACE

Junction City Daily Union

Jason Roberts

Keep the words going so the stories can keep flowing.

HEADLINE WRITING

Daily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Newton Kansan

Christine Wyrick

Good work making attention gathering headlines fun and to the point in a round about way.

SECOND PLACE

Hays Daily News

Ron Fields

Nice use of modern student language. They will enjoy it more.

THIRD PLACE

Emporia Gazette

Joey Berlin

Good fun, attention getters. Keep em' going.

HEADLINE WRITING

Daily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Kansas City Star

Don Munday

All three were great eye catching headline puns. Well timed use of verbage to convey the story.

SECOND PLACE

Salina Journal

Gordon Fielder

All three entries were giving readers a chance to catch the topic and, I think, make them want to read on.

THIRD PLACE

Wichita Eagle

Kirk Seminoff

Give me the story that goes with this headline or not if its good. Well times phrases to capture the readers.

NEWS AND WRITING EXCELLENCE

Nondaily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

De Soto Explorer

Writing and headlines seem crisp and accurate. Many stories have second windows for readers to enter.

SECOND PLACE

Baldwin City Signal

Reporters work very hard for clarity and detail. Nice job on writing and headlines.

THIRD PLACE

Basehor Sentinel

Nice job highlighting issues with solid writing and headlines.

NEWS AND WRITING EXCELLENCE

Nondaily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Marion County Record

Overall writing was very good - and each issue has an opinion page with local opinion. Very close between the top three in this category, and each one had attributes that set it apart.

SECOND PLACE

Louisburg Herald

Leads mostly brief and to the point. Good effort to localize statewide and even national issues. Front page feature especially good.

THIRD PLACE

The Mirror

Good presentation. Writing that (in most cases) is tight, entertaining and a handy tab format. Good use of color on pages and in writing.

NEWS AND WRITING EXCELLENCE

Daily Division 1

FIRST PLACE

Arkansas City Traveler

From eye catching headlines to comprehensive hard hitting writing, the Traveler places great emphasis on telling the story well. Extensive and well-written murder-trial coverage.

SECOND PLACE

Junction City Daily Union

I really liked the “what’s at stake” approach to most ledes. Writers told readers why stories ought to interest them.

THIRD PLACE

High Plains Daily Leader

Precision is the strength of the leader’s writing. Writers work hard to present an authoritative look at the news.

NEWS AND WRITING EXCELLENCE

Daily Division 2

FIRST PLACE

Great Bend Tribune

I really appreciate the Tribune's "feel" as a community newspaper. Coverage well-balanced with writers capturing what is important. Feature writing is especially strong.

SECOND PLACE

Garden City Telegram

Telegram writers elevate even small topics into something worth reading. Nice work.

THIRD PLACE

Newton Kansan

Kansan features high-interest stories predominately and gives them strong, concise writing. I like the "issues" pieces and how reporters developed them.

► Larned lady golfers headed to state, **Page 10A**

GREAT
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First H1N1 doses arrive

Health-care providers first in line for vaccine

BY DALE HOGG
dhogg@gbtribune.com

The first shipment of the much-anticipated H1N1 vaccine to arrive in Barton County is only a drop in the bucket, but at least local health officials can begin what could be a long battle with the infamous new flu virus.

The Barton County Health Department received 114 doses of the live-virus intranasal vaccine Tuesday. "We have begun administering them to health-care providers and emergency medical personnel," said Lily Akins, department director.

The influenza vaccinations many folks have been getting is strictly for the seasonal flu and does not combat H1N1.

State health officials dole out the new vaccine based on the percentage of a county's population between the ages of 0-24 years. This determines the order in which counties are served and the number of doses they receive.

"They are a high risk group," Akins said of health professionals. "We have to keep them on the job."

But even with another shipment of about 300 dose next week, "that's hardly enough to make a dent," she said.

Even for these folks, getting the vaccine is voluntary. Nonetheless, "I encourage all health-care workers to get it," Akins said. The department will plan a special vaccination clinic to reach out to those in health fields.

"We want to protect their patients and we want to protect them," the director said.

The doses come in a syringe with a small, soft tip. Half is administered as a mist into each nostril, said Karen

See **H1N1, 12A**

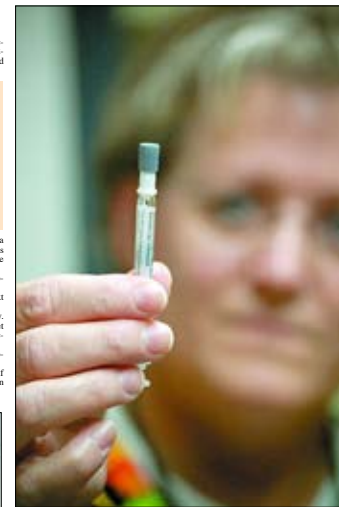


DALE HOGG/Great Bend Tribune

Above, Barton County Health Department nurse Karen Winkelman displays one of the intranasal H1N1 vaccines the department received Tuesday. The first shipments will be used to inoculate health care providers. At left, Winkelman discusses the vaccine with Dru Garrett, a nurse with Great Bend Children's Clinic.

TO LEARN MORE

For more information about H1N1 vaccine availability, contact the Barton County Health Department at 620-792-1902. For information on the virus in general, call 877-427-7317, or e-mail H1N1@hhs.gov. Information is also available from CDC at www.kthhs.gov.



DALE HOGG/Great Bend Tribune

Above, Barton County Health Department nurse Karen Winkelman displays one of the intranasal H1N1 vaccines the department received Tuesday. The first shipments will be used to inoculate health care providers. At left, Winkelman discusses the vaccine with Dru Garrett, a nurse with Great Bend Children's Clinic.

Vehicle crashes into side of building

BY KAREN LA PIERRE
klapierre@gbtribune.com

ELLINWOOD — A stuck accelerator sent a red, 1965 Ford Mustang crashing into the south side of the Ellinwood High School Field House Monday evening, but the student driver escaped without serious injury.

The 15-year-old driver, EHS student Cameron Williams, was wearing his seat belt.

The Mustang traveled 365 feet, hitting the

field house at full force. Witnesses said the engine just continued to accelerate as the vehicle slammed into the wall.

"The ambulance came out to treat him initially," said Monte Doll, EHS activities director. "He's fine, at least as of yesterday."

Williams was not transported to the hospital and Doll estimated the front of the Mustang was pushed back 18 inches.

The field house, which is used by the football team, was boarded up Monday night, Doll said. Once the building is cleaned up, it

will be easier to estimate the internal damage to the building.

The car traveled into a small storage area, an ice machine was demolished, and an internal door was damaged. There was also extensive damage to the external wall.

The crash happened at 6:42 p.m., after football practice, and the coaches had just left.

"He's a very, very lucky young man," said Doll. The car had to be towed away, and Doll said he thought the car was totaled.

Clafin board makes budget adjustments

BY KAREN LA PIERRE
klapierre@gbtribune.com

CLAFIN — Clafin Superintendent Jane Oser said that the Clafin School Board has already made budget adjustments for the 2009-10 school year.

"The Clafin school district is not in dire financial

strains," said Oser. The school district has already cut \$181,727 prior to the beginning of this school year, she said.

"The Clafin BOE made these reductions in the budget prior to the 2009-10 school year. During the 2008-09 school year the BOE members spent many hours and many meetings

planning for the reduction in the general fund due to declining enrollment, as well as loss of state aid," she stated.

"The Clafin BOE and administrators continue to be proactive and to plan for the future of the students who attend the Clafin schools."

"As stated above, the Clafin school district has made the necessary adjustments for the 2009-10 school year. During the 2009 BOE meeting we received our annual audit with no budgetary violations and affirmation that the district is in good shape fiscally."

"We know we will probably lose additional fund-

ing this school year because we continue to hear the state may take away additional dollars, but at this time we do not know what that amount is."

"The board has been so proactive," said Oser. "We'll spend month and month planning for next year."

"If we could get enough districts that would join... that would send a good message to the Legislature," Vernon said.

USD 428 not ready to lead funding charge

BY SUSAN THACKER
sthaacker@gbtribune.com

Ten years ago, Great Bend Unified School District 428 helped lead the charge for more education funds from the state. But now members of the Schools for Fair Funding group say the Legislature is ignoring the historic Kansas Supreme Court ruling of 2006.

Schools for Fair Funding is a group of large school districts, towns and

success through litigation. Montoy v. State was filed in 1999 and, after a favorable ruling in 2006, districts received more funding for teaching at risk students - including poor students and English language learners.

Great Bend Superintendent Tom Vernon said USD 428 has received about \$5 million more in funding since 2006.

Last year, Great Bend saw about \$15 million cut from its budget. "Our base funding this year goes back to base funding prior to 2006," Vernon said.

The lawsuit argued that the Kansas constitution calls for schools to be fairly and adequately funded.

Schools for Fair Funding members are weighing their options in light of recent budget cuts, and the threat of deeper cuts to come.

Vernon attended an SFF meeting on Oct. 2.

"I told them Great Bend is not interested in stepping out in front again," he said. "There is no doubt the Constitution is not being followed."

However, Vernon said, a handful of school districts shouldn't be alone in holding the Legislature accountable.

This time, more districts, representing a majority of the 450,000 kids in Kansas public schools, need to get involved, he said.

"If we could get enough districts that would join... that would send a good message to the Legislature," Vernon said.



Vernon



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NEWS AND WRITING EXCELLENCE

Daily Division 3

FIRST PLACE

Kansas City Star

Great overall package!!

SECOND PLACE

Lawrence Journal-World

Edgy, unpredictable story selection and presentation make Journal-World staff winners. They produce great headlines and compelling copy throughout - although there are a few too many ledes of the lullaby variety.

THIRD PLACE

Wichita Eagle

Excellent local focus on story selection and treatment. Some might prefer punchier ledes, but you are surely keeping your readers happy with your newsy variety and outstanding content package.