

Take advantage of the best local guide to what's on TV next week with The Telegram's handy schedule of programming.
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Tuesday
April 26, 2005

Norton, Kansas
Home of Bill Mathes

Briefly

Bowling teams to help youth

Teams are forming now for the Big Brothers Big Sisters annual fund-raiser, Bowl For Kid's Sake. Teams are being recruited for the event scheduled from 1-8:30 p.m., Saturday, May 7, at Rainbow Lanes, Norton. Program director Erin Manning said all money raised stays in Norton County to match children with mentors. If you would like to register your team or volunteer to be a team captain, call Mrs. Manning at 874-4200.

Hats to top off monthly coffee

Whispering Pines Retirement Center will hold its monthly coffee at 2:45 p.m. Wednesday. Everyone is encouraged to wear their favorite hat. Coffee and cookies will be served.

School paper distributed today

Norton Community High School's *The Nugget* will be in today's edition of *The Telegram* for those subscribers who get their paper delivered by carrier. People who want a copy, but don't get one with their paper, can stop by the high school to pick one up. Norton Community High School students will receive a copy of *The Nugget* at the school.

Weather

Forecast:

Tonight — Partly cloudy with lows in the mid 30s. North winds 5 to 10 mph with gusts to 30 mph shifting to the west after midnight. **Wednesday** — Highs in the mid 60s with a 20 percent chance of thunderstorms in the afternoon. **Wednesday night** — Lows in the upper 30s. Chance of rain 50 percent. **Thursday** — Highs in the lower 50s. 20 percent chance of showers. **Thursday night** — Lows around 40 with a 30 percent chance of showers. **Friday** — Highs in the upper 50s.

Howell report:

Friday High 63, Low 29
Saturday High 60, Low 29
Sunday High 64, Low 45
Monday High 62, Low 36
.04 of an inch of precipitation
Week ago High 73, Low 56
Month ago High 39, Low 33
Year ago High 70, Low 40
April precipitation 1.54 inches
Year-to-date precipitation 5.13 inches
(Readings taken at the Paul and Pat Howell farm
10 Miles North and 1/3 Mile East of Norton)

Prayer

Lord God, strengthen us so that we may avoid the temptation to follow our own desires instead of your will. When we fail and consequences come, we ask that you heal our brokenness and restore us to spiritual health. Thank you for being a God of reconstruction.
Amen

These old houses 'r' a comin' down

By VERONICA MONIER

Several decrepit houses will soon be nothing but a memory in Norton.

A public hearing was held at last Wednesday's Norton City Council meeting to discuss the houses at 409 South St.; 510, 512 and 512 1/2 N. Archer St.; and 513 and 515 W. Main St., which are all in violation of the city's uniform housing code.

Attorney Karen Griffiths said she spoke with an attorney for Donald Hays, the owner of the houses at 513 and 515 W.

Main St., who requested that the hearing for those two houses be continued for two weeks until the next council meeting.

She said Mr. Hays has been cleaning up the properties, except the houses, and would like to work something out with the city about getting the houses torn down. Councilman Ron Briery asked why he was just trying to get something worked out now instead of doing it sooner.

City Administrator Rob Lawson said he had spoken with Mr. Hays before when the city had thought about burning the

houses for practice fire runs with the fire department.

However, it isn't going to be possible to burn the houses.

He said he didn't know if Mr. Hays was aware of that.

The council decided to extend the hearing on the two houses for two weeks with the vote passing 4-1. Mr. Briery voted no.

For the properties at 409 South St., owned by Holly Fay Worthington, and those on North Archer, owned by Pauline Casida Gallentine and in care of Rodney

Dial, none of the owners have contacted the city or police department, said Chief Lynn Menagh.

Chief Menagh said notice was sent, via certified mail, four months ago asking the owners to clean up the property.

None of the owners were at the hearing to protest so the council ordered the demolition.

Mr. Lawson said it would be fall before city crews would be able to tear down the houses.

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Prior to the Rural Telephone annual meeting Friday, members enjoyed violin music played by Stanton Nelson, son of Sara and Terry Nelson, Long Island. An eighth grader at Northern Valley, Nelson has been playing the violin for eight years. His mother accompanied him on the piano.
— Telegram photo by Dick Boyd

Rural Telephone reports good year

By DICK BOYD

Rural Telephone Service Co. is not only making money, it's one of the fastest growing cooperatives in Kansas.

Shareholders at the company's annual meeting Friday at the Huck Boyd Center in Phillipsburg learned that after increasing by 67 percent in 2003, net income grew by 53 percent in 2004 from \$2,074,019 to \$3,169,293.

Total assets of the cooperative, which is headquartered in Lenora, increased to over \$106 million and equity to over \$45 million.

The annual payroll is now over \$10 million. Patronage refunds were paid for the 20th consecutive year and now total

over \$22 million. Patronage refunds in 2004 were \$543,246.

Larry Sevier, chief executive officer for the past 19 years of the cooperative's 52-year, presented a positive report, despite a more competitive telecommunications industry.

"The industry is changing more today than at any time in our history," he told the patrons.

"There is continued added pressure on our revenue stream.

"I will share with you this evening how we have transitioned our small telephone company into a sophisticated, hard charging, competitive entity and why this be-
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Man honored for 39 years of service to cooperative

By DICK BOYD

A rural Kensington man was honored for his years of service with Rural Telephone Service Co., during the cooperative's annual meeting Friday in Phillipsburg

Merlin Dennis served for 39 years on the cooperative's board of trustees before retiring this month. He was president from 1971 to 1989.

Mr. Dennis received an appreciation plaque along with compliments for his service to the cooperative.

"Merlin has served Rural Telephone with a lot of his time and dedication," said Larry Sevier, the group's chief executive officer.

"Since first meeting him, I've been in awe of this great leader of American rural telephone companies who has served on the national level as well as the local."

Following a video tribute, James Caplinger, Topeka, who has been the legal counsel for Rural for the past 44 years, and Kansas Senator Janis Lee, Kensington, spoke briefly about their respect for Mr. Dennis and his wife, Barbara.

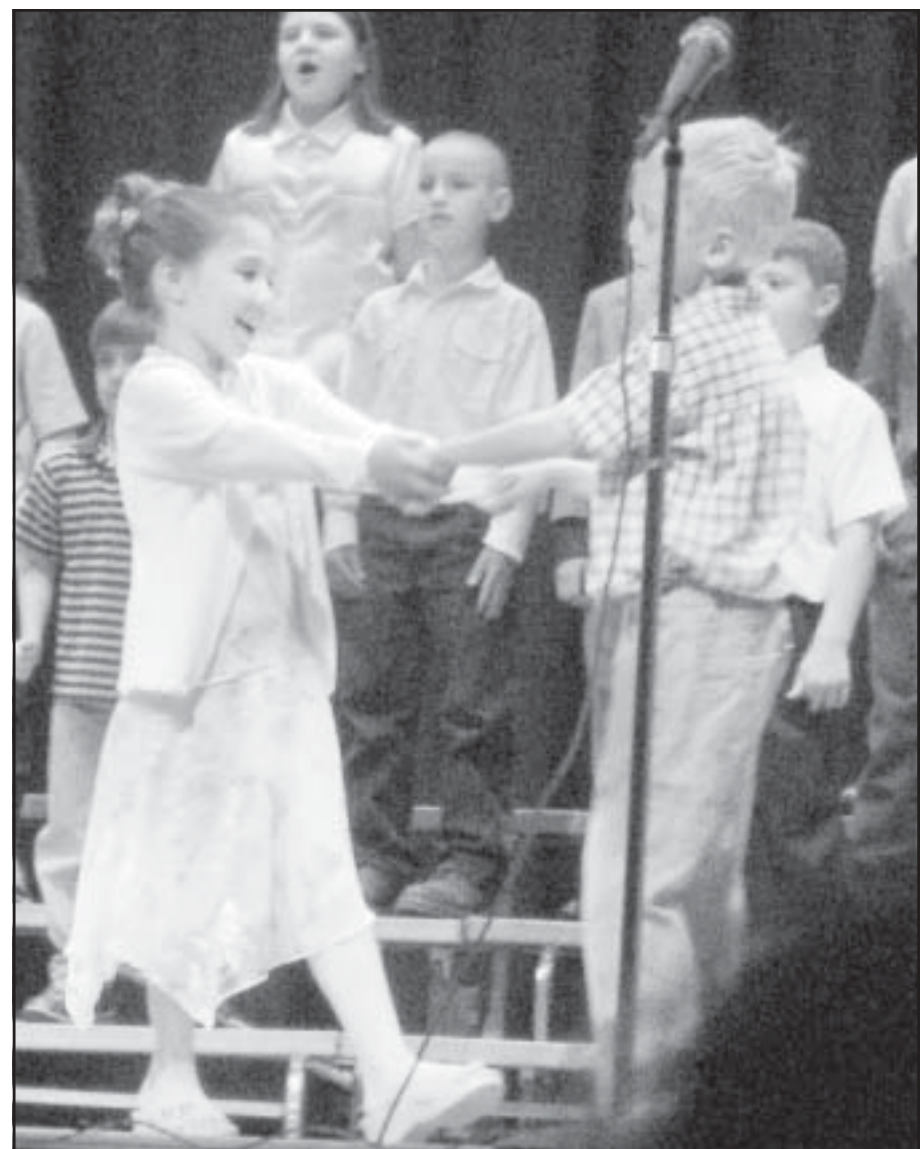
"Merlin, you have been a dedicated leader of Rural Telephone during my many years as counsel," said Mr. Caplinger. "Your service has been very much appreciated."
"Your retirement serves as a yardstick to me. I will reach the calendar age of 76 in a week. I live by the belief that the best of my life is going to be the rest of my life and I wish that for you."

"I grew up on a farm near the Dennis family," said Sen. Lee. "I remember when Merlin went into the Army and, when he
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Singing up a spring storm

The first and second graders of Eisenhower Elementary School held a spring vocal concert Thursday. One of the songs they sang was "Six Little Ducks". The "ducks" were (from left) Adam Boughman, Quinten Porter, Hanna Brooks, Gavin Lively, Raenee Patterson and Kristen Stuart (not shown). Adrienne Hager and Nicholas Koch (right) dance to "Rock Around the Clock".
— Photos by Charlotte Stephenson.



Telephone company grows from simple to technical

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"We are no longer the quiet, little telephone company we once knew. Gone is the much simpler life where we knew where our revenue streams were coming from.

"Enter the new super-competitive world, where the big get bigger and the small run the risk of being swallowed up. We don't want to be the one on the wrong end of this picture.

"Since the rewriting of the Telecom Act in 1996, everyone's territory has been open to competition and that has turned into merger mania. There are 500 less independent companies than there were in 1984.

"This is an industry that is in great turmoil and one that has become very complex. Mergers and acquisitions involve many large, well-known companies. SBC is acquiring AT&T. Sprint is merging with NexTel. Verizon is acquiring MCI. Alltel is acquiring Western Wireless and the list goes on. In each case, there is one factor driving these mergers and acquisitions: to become larger and more efficient by cutting the work force.

"The other big cost they want to cut is access charges they pay to companies such as ours. When they visit the FCC and Congress, they use all their might and power to convince them to change the rules and remove the protection of the small carriers in rural areas. They literally spend millions on lobbyists. They don't like paying into the Universal Service Fund and they don't like paying access charges to access our networks.

"Guess where the major portion of our revenue comes from. You guessed it. Eight-five percent of our revenue stream in Rural Telephone comes from USF and access charges. If we lose USF and access charges, we have only local service for income, which is only 15 percent of the pie.

"Folks, we've got a battle on our hands. Not only are Congress and the FCC studying ways to change the rules but we are seeing a greater percentage of our access lines and our members switching to other services, two of which are high-speed Internet and wireless.

"And, let's not forget this new technology Voice over the Internet Protocol which we will be providing in the near future.

"We knew we couldn't sit around and hope for the best. We needed to provide a host of services to enhance our revenue stream and that's precisely what we have done. We created Nex-Tech to expand our revenue stream and offer services that are sorely needed in many of the rural areas of western Kansas outside our regulated boundaries."

Nex-Tech provides long distance service in 85 communities, cable television in 27 communities, dial-up Internet service in 63 communities and high-speed Internet in 49 communities. Rural Telephone now receives 47 percent of its income from Nex-Tech.

"But, still we needed to address the access line losses to wireless," said Sevier. "Today, 50 million American cell phone owners are younger than 25 years of age. They spend \$20 billion a year on wireless service. The 21st Century will be the wireless century.

"I'm pleased to announce that we have found a solution, a way to bridge this gap. Our new company will be called Nex-Tech Wireless and it will bring superior wireless phone service to western Kansas. Golden Belt Telephone Cooperative in Rush Center south of Hays will partner with us and assist with the financing. Our national partner will be Sprint Wireless. We have



Larry Sevier, chief executive officer and general manager of Rural Telephone, gave a positive report of the year's operations and the future of the cooperative during the annual meeting on Friday. — Telegram photo by Dick Boyd



Frank Brungardt

agreed to a Strategic Roaming Alliance which will give our customers seamless national roaming. And, their customers will be able to roam on our network as they drive through Western Kansas.

"Not only will Nex-Tech Wireless offer superior service and a host of affordable local, regional and national rate plans but, through its partnership with Sprint, it will bring the latest in high-tech handsets and features.

"We're excited about bringing 25 to 30 additional technology-driven jobs to the region during the first 12 months of operation.

"Nex-Tech Wireless expects to have over 20 customer service locations in central and western Kansas to provide superior customer service. The system is expected to be operational by the fall of 2005.

"Make no mistake. This will be an expensive venture but one that is necessary to help secure our future, the future of our children and our grandchildren.

"We will jointly be borrowing \$20 million and investing another \$30 million. We have done our homework and worked the models forward and backward and this venture will work. If it wasn't a good, solid project, lenders would not be working with us.

"We have not and will not forget our roots; however, and we will continue to invest in our core business. And, we will continue to find ways to expand the services that Nex-Tech provides.

"A new day is dawning on a new and bright future. It will take a lot of work, but Rural Telephone and Nex-Tech will be like a beacon of light, a ray of hope for those in western Kansas.

"Many thanks to our board of directors for their dedication and foresight to see beyond the horizon, the executive management team for their vision and execution

of our strategic plan and the employees for their continued dedication and hard work.

"Thank you, members for remaining loyal to our cause and our other customers and business partners for their loyalty and support.

"There will be a Rural Telephone in our future. It may not look the same as in the past but it will provide the same high level of commitment and expertise you have come to expect from our people. That is our promise and commitment to you."

Frank Brungardt, Victoria, president of the cooperative, also spoke to the members.

"The telecommunications industry is continuing to change and is more competitive as the days go by," said Brungardt. "As the industry changes, we must be progressive and aggressive in every aspect of our operations. I must say we are and will continue to do both.

"We presently provide the latest and most sophisticated communications available, not only to rural areas, but to the cities as well. Today's technology makes distance obsolete. The rural areas are in the market place and we can compete with any city.

"I am extremely proud of our CEO/General Manager Larry Sevier, Executive Management team and our Board for having the foresight to visualize and act on future technology. This past year, we entered into the arena of wireless communication. We are working with our neighbors to the south, Golden Belt Telephone, and have formed a wireless company to launch these services. This is another example of implementing a much needed service in western Kansas to supplement our income.

"We must continue to provide the latest in technology and service to survive the challenges of the future. Our future will be dependent upon research, recruitment and economic development to create jobs and opportunities for our young men and women.

"Thanks to all our members, staff, employees and Board of Trustees for their continual support."

Mr. Brungardt represents Victoria, Galatia and Olmitz.

Other members of the board are: Glenn Lambert, vice-president, Damar, Palco, Zurich; Jim Harries, secretary-treasurer, at large; Phyllis Weller, assistant secretary, Lenora, Jennings, Hill City; Charley Minium, Morland, Selden, Rexford, WaKeeney; Ron Rahjes, Agra, Kensington, Athol; Doug Ziegler, Grainfield, Gove, Collyer, Quinter; Jerry Patterson, Edmond, Logan, Prairie View, Long Island, Woodruff; and Bob McCall, Gaylord, Alton, Natoma and Woodston.

Mr. Minium, Mr. Rahjes and Mr. Brungardt were re-elected to three-year terms.



Working to prepare for play

Monday, a work crew from the City of Norton and volunteers from the Norton Lions Club began assembling the new playground equipment to be placed in Elmwood Park. The new equipment is expected to take three days to assemble.

— Photos by Carolyn Plotts



Man served group for 39 years

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came back, he brought Barbara with him. She was from back east, New York City, not just eastern Kansas, but melted into the community very well.

"Both Melvin and Barbara wanted to do something about the inefficient phone system and moved ahead. Kensington and Agra exchanges soon became part of the Rural Telephone family.

"Thanks for coming back, Merlin, and investing your time and energy in service to your community."

Kansas Senator Ralph Ostmeier, Grinnell, was also present. Mr. Dennis said he was very thankful to everyone connected to Rural Telephone.

"The leadership of Larry Sevier and the board of trustees has been very innovative and forward looking," he said.

"The changes the past 40 years from four-party phones to wireless are amazing.

"Thank you, members, board, staff and employees for all your support. There is much more to come for Rural Telephone."

Clayton Teleman, a senior at Natoma High School, participated in the tenth annual Foundation for Rural Service youth tour to Washington in June, 2004. He was sponsored by Rural Telephone.

During the meeting, he presented video highlights of the tour. Many employees received service awards.

The award for the longest ser-



Merlin Dennis

vice went to Kevin Webb, senior combination technician, for 25 years. Neil Nickelson, engineering tech II, was honored for 20 years.

Others honored were: Ron Ellis, Steve Herrs, Terry Peterson, Dave Schneider, 15 years; Mark Basgall, Paul Becker, John Koerperich, Jesse Morgan, Sandra Pakkebler, Marty Ross, Darrin Walters, 10 years; and Dyrek Ayre, Ted Barbieri, Susan Baragree, Brodath Bell, Lance Bickle, Jim Broeckelman, Tackley, Jim Broeckelman, Corey Brooks, Bill Brown, Kurt David, Dustin Day, Dena Dellere, Mandy Gosselin, Ashley Heaton, Trinedy Holler, Marla Heronema, Marty Holler, Tonia Houghton, Jim Hutton, Roy Inlow, Jason Jenisch, Dustin Juenemann, Aaron Karlin, Allen Lang, Ryan McClung, Missy McMullen, Fig Millan, Dave

Pfeifer, Sherry Quarles, Steve Riat, Kami Sansom, Paul Simmons, Michelle Simoneau, Mary Thom, Dan Wahlmeier and Ron Wilburn, five years.

Board of trustees member Glenn Lambert was honored for 10 years service and Jim Harries for five years.

Door prizes were awarded and refreshments served.

The prize winners were Dick Boyd, Norton; Darold Grauerholz, Kensington; Lucille Hofaker, Logan; Randy Dues, Kensington; Dorothy Detwiler, Kensington; Beulah Brown, Morland; Robert Zordel, Hill City; Melba Hagman, Kensington; Billie Stapel, Phillipsburg; Miriam Sansom, Edmond, \$50 gift certificates; Evelyn Luck, Hill City; Ed Hoppe, Agra; Gertrude Erickson, Prairie View, \$100 gift certificates; Deb Berg, Logan; Evelyn Kee, Natoma; Luanne Theleman, Natoma, \$200 gift certificates; Theresa Dreiling, Victoria; Arlene Foss, Edmond; Irma Quint, Hill City, \$300 gift certificates.

During registration prior to the meeting, Rural Telephone members enjoyed violin music by Stanton Nelson, son of Sara and Terry Nelson, Long Island.

An eighth-grader at Northern Valley, he has played the violin for eight years. He also plays the piano, trombone and French horn. He sits first chair in the Western Kansas String Academy and studies violin with Dr. Matt Means at Fort Hays State University.

them free or reduced-rate utilities.

Mrs. Griffiths said the city had a policy not to give free or reduced rates to nonprofit groups in the past because if they did it for one, they would have to do it for all.

Mr. Briery said he would like to discuss it more at the Utility Committee meeting and then the council would vote on it.

• Bought a new derrick digger truck through a lease-purchase agreement. The cost will be \$139,722 with \$21,970 being paid this year. The truck will not be delivered until around October and will replace a truck, which is about 30 years old and doesn't pass safety inspections for 'live line' aerial basket work. The old truck will be used to trim

trees and other similar work.

• Accepted a low bid from Engel's Sales and Service for a 2005 Grasshopper mower for \$9,236. The vote passed 4-0 with Councilman Jerry Jones abstaining.

• Hired Cheri Brooks as the Norton swimming lessons instructor for the season. • Earmarked \$5,500 from the

money raised at the city's surplus auction for new restrooms at Elmwood Park.

• Approved County Extension Director Keith VanSlike's request to use the livestock building on Saturday, May 14 for the 4-H and FFA Spring Livestock Show.

• Paid bills in the amount of \$256,403.

City decides to tear down old, unsafe buildings in fall

(Continued from Page 1)

In other business, the council:

• Spoke with Karla Anderson, a board member of The Rock, a non-denominational Christian youth center being developed in Norton.

Ms. Anderson told the council that the group had been given the downtown building owned by the Brownes and wanted to know if the city would help out by giving

The paper you read for the news you need!
 THE NORTON TELEGRAM