Economic development works on housing related issues

By BRANDY LEROUX

bleroux@nwkansas.com Development has been working on some of the housing issues facing Norton.

"We don't have adequate quality housing," said Diane Becker, director of economic developworkforce — there's no place to put them."

"If we have quality rental housing and mid-range priced housing, we will attract more workers to town," she said. "There are apartments available in Norton, but they're not suitable for workers who are bringing their family with them."

There are several ongoing proj-

ects that economic development is in Norton. working on. One is the State Street Bed and Bath, State Farm Insurance and Mortensen's Computer Supply. The apartments would be in the upper level of the building.

ment. "That's one of the obstacles considered is the Rental Propto bringing in more people for the erty Licensing Ordinance. The and counties are giving away land ordinance would require property owners who rent houses in ensure their rentals are safe to live in. Economic development has done the research on similar ordinances in other cities and given the information to the Norton City Council to review and decide, though Ms. Becker doesn't think something like that will be passed

Norton City/County Economic Apartments, which would be in afford to fix the damage done by the building that houses Sander tenants, and so they wouldn't be able to rent the property," said Ms. Becker. The Free Lot Program, used by many counties in Kansas, is another option being consid-Something else that has been ered. Under the program, as long as certain criteria are met, cities for people to build homes on.

> "A common guideline is that the Norton to meet standards that home has to be worth \$100,000 at a minimum," said Ms. Becker. "It varies from community to community, and we've seen mixed results."

The Neighborhood Revitalization Plan and Demolition Assistance are programs that have seen several successes.

"Sometimes landlords can't report, the revitalization plan al- 12 applications: six residential, cal or maybe Northwest Kansas lows cities to pass a plan to give two commercial and four agriculproperty owners incentives to rehabilitate existing structures and build new ones through a tax rebate program. The Norton City Council passed the plan on Nov. 13, 2007. Each of the 28 taxing is an empty lot next to it instead Economic development assisted districts in Norton County have the option of adopting the plan in their district. Fifteen taxing districts have adopted the plan, nine are still considering it, and four voted to not approve the plan. Agricultural, commercial and residential structures all qualify

for the program. At the end of

in The

Norton

Telegram

newspaper!

According to Ms. Becker's 2008, Norton County approved but we'd like to see someone lotural. The demolition assistance program offers local governments up to \$2,000 for self-designated demolition programs in 2009.

"It's easier to sell a house if there of a dilapidated house," said Ms. Becker.

Economic Development has also looked into how much it would cost to purchase the Norton Commons, an income-based apartment complex in Norton. "We aren't looking at it for economic development to purchase, Planning and Development own the Commons," said Ms. Becker. "All we did was research the purchase price."

Individual housing program assistance has also been a success. five individuals in receiving housing assistance in 2008. Two people were approved for the United States Department of Agriculture First Time Homebuyers Program, two accessed the Kansas Energy Efficiency Program, and one took advantage of the Midwest Energy How\$mart Program.

Disc golf tourney to aid God's Pantry

Special to The Telegram The Kansas Disc Golf Association and Norton Disc Golf Club will host a Winter Food Drive Disc Golf Tournament at Elmwood Park on Saturday, Jan. 31. All proceeds will go to God's Pantry. Individuals or businesses

some canned goods or non-perish-

wishing to make a donation are

asked to contact Don Mordecai,

tourney, will receive a special payout is the disc package. Kansas Disc Golf Association Food Drive disc, and another disc for their \$20 entry fee. This disc package is valued at \$35.00.

Participants will be also entered in a statewide activity where they could win one of several disc golf packages or even a New Disc Golf Basket valued at over \$250.00 (that to be held at a later date).

The tournament will be one round in the morning, with players meeting at 9:45 a.m. and tee off at 10 a.m. Lunch will be provided.

After lunch, the players will decide if they want to play another round of singles, a round of doubles, or depending on the weather, to call it a day. But it's one round and lunch for sure, even if there is inclement weather.

If you are planning to attend, call tournament director Mr. Mordecai so a count can be taken for lunch.

tournament director. Participants are asked to bring There will also be "Closest to the Pin" prizes for all divisions, able food items for the Pantry. but there will not be any extra Disc golfers taking part in the payout for this tournament. The uilding: wiring another concern

(Continued from Page 1)

to Norton County for the new **Emergency Medical Services** building, as per the State of Kansas requirements.

Norton County has six ambulances, four of which are kept in Norton. The other two are in Almena and Lenora.

The electrical wiring is another area of concern in the current building, especially with all the electronic and medical equipment that needs to be used and charged in the building for use in the ambulances.

After Norton County hired BG Consultants for their architect services for the building, the commissioners opened the project for bids in December, but all the bids came in significantly higher than the architect's estimates. Steve

Retiring: *Improved roads* top achievement

(Continued from Page 1)

had made in 4-H in high school, and that is how I was able to go to college," he said.

When asked what he was most proud of doing as a commissioner, Mr. Lang said, "I think the road improvements with the millings has been one of the best things I've done. We're getting closer to making the roads all-weather accessible."

"I'm also proud to have helped Rural Fire District #2 get a brand new fire truck. I received a lot of calls from people in the county who were concerned about their homes. I'm glad I was able to help them out. Also, we had the sales tax voted on by the people, reducing the mill levy. It has been very successful," said Mr. Lang.

Mr. Lang said he is going to miss working with the people in the county. He will return to farming full-time with his son, Mike Lang.

"Thank you to everyone who has given us their cooperation and support," said Mr. Lang.

Commissioner Applegate wasn't the only one sworn in Monday morning. 17th District Judicial Judge William B. Elliott went to the commissioners' room and swore in Sheriff Troy Thomson, County Clerk Robert Wyatt, County Treasurer Cynthia Linner, Register of Deeds Wanda Vincent, County Commissioner John Miller and County Attorney R. Doug Sebelius.

Commissioner Applegate said she's excited to begin her duties because, "it gives me a new dimension of service. It's been a goal of mine since 1997 to be a county commissioner, since I have the time it takes to do the job."

Arpin, BG Consultants, said one of the reasons for the high bids is the cost of shipping and supplies, and also, because the grant is federally funded, any contractor has to follow federal wage regulations

 pay his employees the federal wages for each specific job.

The bids will be reopened this month, and presented to the commission in mid-February. The grant specifies that a contract between the county and a contractor must be signed by March 1.

The county also looked at other buildings in Norton to move the Emergency Medical Services to, but none were suitable.

"There were traffic flow issues, being able to safely and quickly get an ambulance out of the bays and onto the roads; some didn't have easy access to the highways; and others didn't have quick access to was to build a new building."

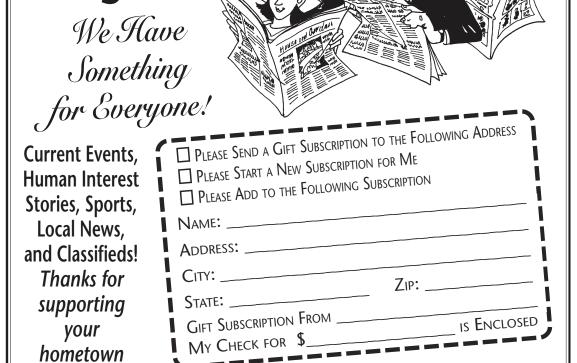
The location for the new Emerand safety.

gency Medical Services building will be at the intersection of Highway 36 and Road 1W, by Prairie Land Electric. The county purchased the property from Prairie Land Electric.

The first three contractors who bid on the job in November projected it would take nearly a year to build. Mr. Wyatt said that time frame could have been due to winter weather being factored in, and it's possible the new bids will have shorter build times because winter won't be an issue.

According to Mrs. Griffey, the county received a Community Development Block Grant from the Kansas Department of Commerce, which distributes federal funds to Kansas cities and counties looking to improve their communities.

The grant is given to communithe employees," said Mr. Wyatt. ties that have predominantly low "The county felt the best option and moderate income persons for the purpose of increasing health



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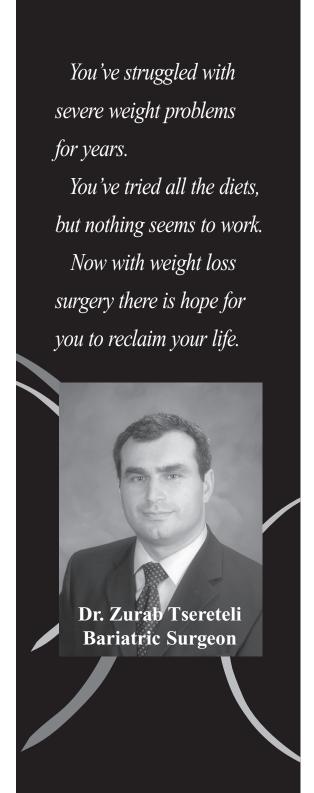
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