

A force of nature



Prairie Dog State Park staff were busy cleaning up tree debris after Friday's storm. Baseball sized hail knocked down trees and damaged park property. —Photo courtesy Steve Mathes

County budget discussed

By ERICA BRADLEY
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The Norton County Commission held their last meeting of the month on Friday, when they were presented with their final proposed budget for the 2009/10 year.

This year's budget will be tight, but taxes will not be raised, they said.

John Mapes, Mapes and Miller Accounting, presented the budget to the commission, saying the mill levy went up from 71 to 73, but valuation dropped.

"Everyone has a tight budget this year," he said.

Mr. Mapes told the commission that most rural communities are in the same position.

"The county will operate on less money," he said.

The total taxes collected for 2009 were \$2,912,374 and in 2010 taxes collected will be \$2,843,143, he said.

Assessed valuation in 2009 was \$40,895,909 and in 2010 it will be \$38,947,012.

Norton County Clerk Robert Wyatt said that even though the mill levy is increasing, valuation dropped which means residents will pay less in taxes.

"It's really a milestone year we're facing. The commissioners goal was to not raise taxes during

a difficult time," he said.

In other commission business:

- Norton City/County Economic Development Director Diane Stiles updated the commission on economic development's efforts. Mrs. Stiles told the commission she wants to take \$500 out of her budget to donate to the Northwest Kansas Collaborative. She said the collaborative is working on bringing developers to the area and believes it will benefit Norton County.
- The economic development board will vote on it at their next meeting.
- Mrs. Stiles also updated the commission on the Moffet building. She said volunteers have been secured, and she would like to bring the Norton Chamber of Commerce in so they can assist with planning.
- Norman Nelson discussed why it is important to keep the Norton Correctional Facility. He said it would be a huge loss to the community and would affect residents as well as local businesses. The commission agreed, but they are still considering whether or not to hire a lobbying firm.
- The commission took a conference call from Jeff Younger, from Seminole Energy Services. The commission has already purchased 40 percent of their

natural gas at 6.60 MMBTU.

They agreed to purchase another 40 percent at 6.10 MMBTU. The natural gas is used in all county offices and departments.

- Cindy Linner, Norton County Treasurer, reported that tax receipts were up a little from the last five years.

She said she would like to purchase a fire proof safe from Kansasland Tire for \$700. She said there are a lot of documents in the treasurers office that should be protected. The commission agreed to the purchase which will come out of the treasurers budget.

- Kansas County Association Multi-line Pool Representative Larry Sharp presented the commission with an update of their services.

Mr. Sharp said the company was started in the early '90's because counties were paying high insurance premiums. He said 57 counties participate in the pool now, which covers county damages.

He said Norton County has had an above average four-year average. Kansas County Association Multi-line Pool is a non-profit, not an insurance company.

The commission met again yesterday.

That report will appear in Friday's Telegram.

They were called 'love apples'

An old saying comes to mind about this time every year. You know there are just two things money can't buy — true love and home-grown tomatoes. And to think, only two hundred years ago the English called tomatoes "love apples" and believed them to be poisonous.

How I long for the days when LeRoy's garden flooded the kitchen with bushels of beautiful tomatoes. Three old standbys, Glamour, Early Girls and Big Boys were his favorite varieties through years of experimentation. All were good for canning as well as serving fresh.

The Campbell Canning hybrid was definitely misnamed. They were a mushy disaster, full of fibrous cores clear down into the heart of the fruit. Redbird plum tomatoes produced a deep red, meaty tomato that made great spaghetti sauce and continued to bear until frost. We discovered we liked yellow tomatoes fresh but they lose their flavor when canned and worse yet, they ferment when used for tomato preserves.

Sliced tomatoes were on our table at every meal during the season. LeRoy's goal was to grow tomatoes and onions the same size as hamburger buns to make nice tidy hamburger slices. My southern brother-in-law's salad of choice was Tematers 'n mayo so he liked to visit us during garden season. We feasted on BLT's on toast or grilled Swiss cheese and tomato sandwiches or cottage cheese with tomatoes, cucumbers and little green onions. Juice dripped off our chins as we stood munching sun warm, hose washed glory in the garden patch. I canned, froze, pickled and preserved tomatoes all summer. Mama and I even ate them chopped with sugar and cream for breakfast. Now before you say "ewww," just give it a try. It'll make you a believer.

Last Sunday a church member here in Lee's Summit presented me with a bag of beautiful ripe tomatoes. Nothing could have been more welcome. There is a farmers' market near the Carlyle but our chefs have no time or budget leeway to purchase locally grown produce. Some of the more enterprising and green-thumbed residents attempt to grow tomato plants in buckets on their

balconies and a few of them even succeed. Container gardening suits cherry tomatoes well, but the big red globes we hunger for apparently need a little more soil

Collector
Chat
Liza Deines



to thrive properly. Some have tried the "hanging" upside down tomato plants widely advertised in gift catalogs but they have been a resounding failure, no matter how green the thumb.

The most requested recipe from Cook's Corner has been LeRoy's salsa, so for all who have asked, here it is again, just in time for the height of tomato season.

LEROY'S SALSA

- twelve cups peeled tomatoes, dead ripe
- four big Spanish onions cut in chunks
- six jalapeno peppers, seeded & chunked
- seven salsa peppers, seeded & chunked
- four large green bell peppers, seeded & chunked
- four large red bell peppers, seeded & chunked
- two tablespoons EACH of chili powder, salt, Minute Tapioca

and honey

- one tablespoon EACH of coarse ground black pepper and powdered cumin
- one cup dark amber vinegar
- two large bulbs of garlic cloves, crushed

Chop vegetables or process in food processor to the chunky texture you like. Use all the juices. Pour into a 10-quart enamel pot to cook. With a wooden spoon mix in all spices.

Bring to a boil and simmer for 30-45 minutes. Stir regularly to prevent sticking. When cooked down and thick, ladle into sterilized pint canning jars, seal while hot then waterbath jars 15 minutes in boiling water. Cool overnight, check seals. If a jar does not seal, refrigerate it and use right away. Sealed jars will keep a year.

Makes about 10-12 pints depending on how chunky you leave it and how long you cook it down.

IMPORTANT TIPS: You can alter the spices to suit your own taste but do not eliminate the honey, tapioca or the vinegar from this recipe. The tapioca is to thicken the mixture, the honey cuts any bitterness and the vinegar keeps it from spoiling after opening.

Do not use aluminum utensils for this recipe. Always wear plastic gloves when seeding out the jalapeno and salsa peppers — voice of sorry experience!

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