

\$1 THE NORTON TELEGRAM

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8 PAGES

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Norton, Kansas
Home of Leon Stromer

Briefly

Teachers' Welcome Picnic August 18

The Norton School District's annual Teachers' Welcome Picnic is scheduled for Aug. 18 at 7 p.m., in the 4-H Building adjacent to Elmwood Park. Co-sponsoring the event with the school district are the Norton Lions Club and the Norton Area Chamber of Commerce. Welcome bags will be given to the eight new teachers. Fried chicken, rolls and drink will be furnished. Please bring two dishes, salad and desert and your own table service. Lions Club members, returning school staff and school board members are asked to bring two dishes.

Food distribution at Clayton Saturday

The distribution of government surplus food for low income persons will be held Saturday at the Clayton Library from 2 to 3:30 p.m. The distribution in Norton, Lenora and Alma took place today (schedule printed page 1 in Tuesday's Telegram).

Meals on Wheels Aug. 10-16 told

The Mendo Club will deliver Meals on Wheels Aug. 10-16. The contact person is Eunice Neitopp 877-2439. Delivery people are to be at the hospital by 11:30 a.m.

Bio-lab, Gitmo transfer linked?

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weather forecast



Tonight - Partly cloudy with a low around 70. Breezy with a south wind between 15 and 20 mph, with gusts as high as 30 mph. Saturday - Sunny and hot with a high near 100. Saturday Night - A 20 percent chance of showers and thunderstorms. Partly cloudy with a low around 66. Sunday - Partly cloudy with a high near 92. Sunday Night - A 20 percent chance of showers and thunderstorms. Monday - A 30 percent chance of showers.

Kingham report:
Tuesday, August 4 Low 60, High 87
Wed., August 5 Low 62, High 87
.....15 Precipitation
Thursday, August 6 Low 65, High 91
(Readings taken at the Kingham farm 9 miles northwest of Norton)

Prayer

Father, as we wrestle with the struggles of life, make us keenly aware of your presence and abundant mercy. Amen



Water Plant Supervisor Chris Frack demonstrated the chlorine room at the Norton city water treatment plant on Wednesday. The chemical building was constructed when the city was forced to make upgrades

to the plant. Mr. Frack said the plant's improvements were primarily for safety reasons.

—Telegram photo by Erica Bradley

Unfunded mandate problem

City discusses water plant's \$11 million debt

By ERICA BRADLEY
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The Norton City Council, at Wednesday's meeting, discussed the water treatment plant, and their options for paying for the \$11 million debt they have acquired due to new Kansas Department of Health and Environment, and Environmental Protection Agency standards.

Norton City Administrator Rob Lawson said the \$11 million is split between the water plant and the sewer plant. He said upgrades to the sewer plant are done and work is continuing on the water plant.

The Environmental Protection Agency enacted the new standards years ago. Mr. Lawson said the water plant was 45 years old. The new standards had to be enforced, two years ago costing the city to be millions of dollars in debt.

Water Treatment Plant Supervisor Chris Frack said the improvements included a chlorine room, new holding tanks, a new computer system and new piping.

He said the improvements have made the plant a lot safer for employees as well as the community.

Mr. Lawson said the city was fined \$2,200 for not having the improvements done fast enough. He said the city was do-

ing studies to determine how to make the improvements when they were fined.

Ransom Financial Consultants' financial analyst John Haas presented the council with data for the last two years. He estimated that the city would pay \$456,000 per year for the water plant upgrades.

The city did not have to make those payments in 2007.

Mr. Haas said total expenses in 2007 for water was \$455,743, and he projected expenses in 2009 to total \$1,062,779, including the debt payments.

Mr. Haas presented the council with options for making their payments which included refinancing the loan through the United States Department of Agriculture or raising utility rates.

Mr. Lawson said their loan is currently through the State Revolving Loan Fund, and they are required to pay it back in 20 years.

Mr. Haas encouraged the council to re-finance their loan through the United States Department of Agriculture, which would be a term of 40 years and would cut the loan payment in half.

Mr. Lawson said the city would be able to make those payments but cannot afford

to pay \$456,000 per year.

"The water department has to support itself; we can't raise taxes or move money to pay the loan off. The revenue isn't coming in," he said.

Mr. Haas also discussed the option of raising utility rates, which he estimated would cost each resident an extra \$40 per month. Utility rates include water, sewer and trash.

"The last thing we want to do it raise rates," Mr. Lawson said.

"This is not a budget problem. This is an unfunded mandate problem," he said.

Mr. Lawson said other rural communities are in a similar position. He said smaller towns are being held to the same standards bigger cities are, but they are not able to fund the projects like bigger cities because the population is not that big.

He estimated Norton's population to be around 3,000.

Mr. Lawson said the city is not at fault.

"I encourage people to write to their state representatives," he said.

In other council business:

• Chris Miller, Miller and Associates, discussed bids for phase two of the water

plant project. He said three bids were received, and the low bid was thrown out due to mathematical error. Tom Downing, president of Downing Drilling, said the error was a mistake and asked the council to consider his bid. The council discussed the issue and made a motion to refer it to finance committee.

"We want to do the work for you. We feel we have a good product," Mr. Downing said.

• The budget hearing was held at 5:45 p.m. The council discussed the budget, which has been finalized. The mill levy will remain the same but valuation is down.

• Roxanne Kent presented the council with information about animal cruelty. She asked the city to adopt a stricter code, especially when dealing with dogs being left in vehicles during summer months. The public safety committee will discuss the issue at their next meeting.

• Mr. Lawson gave his report. Blue Cross and Blue Shield health insurance premiums have gone up from 2 percent to 2.17 percent. He reported the fair rides have been taken down and stored. Mr.

(Council - Continued on Page 5)

County CodeRED updated

The Norton County Sheriff's Office recently updated its account with Emergency Communications Network, the provider of the CodeRED high-speed notification solution utilized throughout Norton County.

The update will allow message recipients to easily identify calls coming through the system.

Their caller ID will read Emergency Communications Network or (866) 419-5000.

Norton County Sheriff Troy Thomson said the new system will be more rel-

evant for Norton County residents.

"Residents can simply call the number displayed on their caller ID to hear the last message delivered. This will greatly reduce the number of inbound inquiries handled by our office and will offer residents an immediate replay of the message," he said.

The CodeRED system provides Norton County officials the ability to quickly deliver messages to targeted areas or the entire county. If you are not sure that you are included in (CodeRED - Continued on Page 5)

Grant to fund historic survey

By ERICA BRADLEY
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Norton City/County Economic Development received a grant from the Kansas Historical Society, which is to be used to conduct a historic survey of downtown Norton. The survey is the first step in designating a historic district.

Norton City/County Economic Development Director Diane Stiles said the grant was for \$7,000, which will be matched by time economic development

employees will spend on the project.

She said the total cost of the grant is \$12,000, including the grant from the historical society and the money matched by her office.

"The benefit to the community is that buildings in the historic district will be eligible for tax credits, but if they do not want to become a historic building they don't have to," she said.

(Survey - Continued on Page 5)

Christmas time at Prairie Dog State Park

Prairie Dog State Park and Norton Travel and Tourism Committee are co-sponsoring their annual Prairie Dog Christmas on Saturday when campers can decorate their campsites in a Christmas theme.

Prairie Dog State Park Manager Steve Mathes said campers can compete for chamber bucks, which can be used at certain Norton County businesses.

Mr. Mathes said the tourism committee donates the prizes. Campsites will be judged between 9-10:00 p.m. Saturday night, and the awards ceremony will be held at 10 p.m. at campsite eight.

"If you decide not to enter the contest, the park staff would like to invite you to 'think cool,' join in the fun and view the creativity of others," he said.

Mr. Mathes said a vehicle permit is required. Daily permits are \$4.20 and annual permits are \$24.70.

He estimated eight campsites participated last year, but he said he is not sure what to expect this year due to the storm on July 31.