

Lots of accomplishments for director

By **ERICA BRADLEY**

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In the last year, Norton City/County Economic Development Director Diane Stiles has had a lot of accomplishments, both professional and personal.

Stiles has been economic development director for almost three years. She started in 2007, after completing an internship at the office.

Stiles is from Lenora. She said she grew up on a farm between Lenora and Norton before the family moved to the "big city." In 2001 Lenora High School closed, and Stiles transferred to Jennings High School to complete her senior year. She graduated in 2002 and attended Fort Hays State University where she majored in political science and received a certificate in philosophy of public life.

She spent a year in China, studying Mandarin and interning at a law firm. After graduating in the spring of 2007, Stiles took an internship at the economic development office in Norton.

The director announced his intent to leave halfway through the internship. Stiles applied.

"The rest is history," she said.

Stiles said there were a lot of challenges in taking on the role, but she had a lot of support from her board members as well as the experience as an intern.

"The thing that helped me the most was being an intern and having a heads up on the projects in the office," she said.

In 2007, the economic development office was still relatively new. It had started in 2005 and had had two directors as well as a period where there was no director.

"When I first started, the fact that the office was new was a challenge. The board members helped the transition. They are committed to driving the office and economic development in Norton County in the right direction," she said.

Economic development has taken on larger projects, some taking years to complete.

In the summer of 2007, Stiles met with a group of community members in Lenora to plan a walking trail surrounding Larrick Park and promote the historic Sand Creek Truss Leg Bedstead Bridge, which is on the National

Historic Register, currently located northeast of Lenora.

Stiles said several options were researched before deciding to pursue a millings trail.

"In April, I will be submitting a grant to the Sunflower Foundation to fund the trail. The bridge will be moved to the new location this summer. The trail will promote community wellness," she said.

Stiles has worked on other community projects. Last year, she began the Promoting Norton County Initiative, which was implemented to try and keep the state from closing Norton Correctional Facility. Pinegar Smith & Associates was hired as the consulting firm and has brought two legislative visits to Norton.

She said economic development assisted over 40 businesses with projects, offered a variety of courses, guided one business through the Norton County Revolving Loan Fund application, awarded two business education scholarships and expanded the resource library.

Individual assistance included awarding two business education scholarships, offered two business start-up classes, assisted over 25 entrepreneurs with business plans, financing, marketing or education, two entrepreneurs started businesses and one business owner received a loan from the revolving loan fund.

Another economic development project was the storefront renewal project which funded 17 applications. The total granted was \$13,620.69 and the total investment was \$48,791.08. The program will continue in 2010. Applications are due March 31.

The Norton County Visitor Center, also known as the Moffet building, was another big project in 2009. The center received a grant from the Federal Home Loan Bank for interior renovations. The project was delayed by an accident in June, but Stiles reported the damage is almost complete. She expects interior renovations will begin this spring.

The Dr. E.A. Lyons House was donated to the Norton County Community Foundation and recently received a \$90,000 grant from the Kansas State Historical Society Heritage Trust Fund.

The Heaton building was also donated to the Norton County Community Foundation. Work



Norton City/County Economic Development Director Diane Stiles took time out of her day to spend with her son Henry. Stiles stays busy with Henry and with work.

—Telegram photo by Erica Bradley

began on that building and included roof repair, exterior repair and paint and clean-up.

Stiles also worked on a historic district designation. She wrote a grant to hire a consultant to conduct a survey of downtown Norton and received funding from the Kansas State Historical Society Historical Preservation Fund. The survey completion date and grant application deadline was yesterday.

Ten applications were approved for the Neighborhood Revitalization Plan in 2009 including: one Almena residential, one Densmore residential, four rural Norton residential, three Norton city residential and one Norton City commercial.

Stiles said one project doesn't make a difference, but all of the projects do.

"When you put them all together, it makes a

large impact on the community," she said.

In 2009, Stiles also had personal accomplishments. She married Asa Stiles, an officer on the Norton Police Department. The couple welcomed their son Henry in December.

She said some things have changed since becoming a mother.

"I realized how inefficient I was in my free time," she said.

Stiles travels occasionally for work and has tried to spend as much time at home as she can.

"Now I might just leave for Topeka in the morning and come back at night instead of staying the night," she said.

"This is my favorite time in my life because everything seems balanced," she said.

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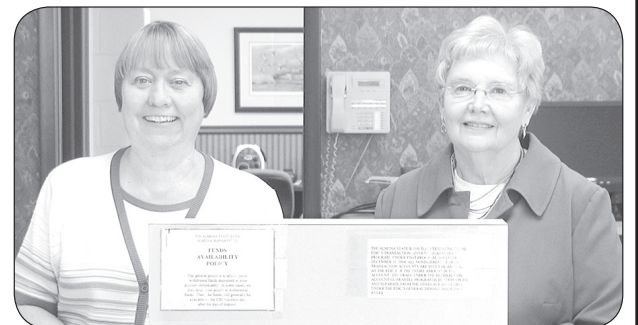
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Pictured from left to right, front row, Vicki Leonard, Stephanie Ryan, back row: Dusty Ulmer, Vicki Henderson

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— **NORTON LOCATION** —
Pictured from left,
Wanda Stephenson and
Shirley Stutterheim



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