

# Thomas County's recycling center is a creative solution to a difficult problem

By MARK TOMB

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Examples of creative solutions to difficult problems can be found throughout the history of Kansas. The frontier spirit still guides Kansas communities in how solutions are discovered and forged.

When faced with rising environmental compliance costs and limited space for landfills, cities across Kansas have embraced ambitious recycling programs.

This trend is especially apparent in Northwest Kansas where several regional organizations have been established to facilitate recycling efforts. Recycling has been a powerful solution to reduce the need for landfill space while at the same time preserving resources for future generations.

Cities are making recycling easier for citizens by creating convenient drop-off locations, accepting more materials, and establishing curbside recycling programs. As a result, recycling in Kansas has accelerated during the past decade.

## Community Recycling Center

In 1995, a meeting of the Thomas County Conservation District indicated that the community was interested in creating a recycling program, with the stated goal of reducing the amount of solid waste going to the county landfill. This meeting triggered the creation of "Citizens For Recycling," a group that spearheaded the creation of a regional recycling center in Colby.

Members of the former group volunteered their efforts for various recycling projects and conducted their first organized recycling collection as part of Earth Day festivities in April 1997. The event was held at a local business in Colby and the response was tremendous. Nearly 100 families dropped off items during the three-hour event. The events continued from April 1997 until May 2000 with an average of 200 families participating each month.

To accommodate the growing demand of the program, the Thomas County Conservation District organized an effort to build a permanent recycling facility. On Earth Day of April 2000, the first collection was held at the new facility. "One of the things that we have done is given the public the opportunity to manage their solid waste problem on their own. This allows them to voluntarily choose to be part of the solution or be part of the problem," said Lynette Koon, District Manager of the Thomas County Conservation District.

The center was equipped with outside collection bins in June 2000 to allow public access to that facility 24 hours a day. This increases the ability to serve the community at the convenience of the public.

"The goal was to make recycling as easy and convenient for citizens as possible," said Laura Davis, Co-Director of the recycling center.

## Funding

The recycling program is sponsored primarily by the Thomas County Con-

servations District in cooperation with the cities located within Thomas County.

The Conservation District provides a considerable amount of the overall leadership for the program by distributing educational materials and providing administrative direction for the effort.

Most of the funding for the building was provided by a grant received from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment and several in-kind contributions. Contributors included the City of Colby, Midwest Energy, Tarbet, Apache Construction, and the Thomas County Commissioners.

The City of Colby provided the land and some of the labor for the construction of the center. The City continues to make a commitment to the center by providing funding for utilities and a half-time employee to work at the center five days a week.

"From the standpoint of the City, the response has been amazing. We did not anticipate this level of interest in recycling. Anything we can do to preserve our landfill space saves major dollars," said Carolyn Armstrong, Colby City Manager.

## Regional Recycling

In addition to the recycling center in Colby, several neighboring cities have recycling trailers with several organizational bins to prepare the trailer for easy drop-offs at the center.

The cities of Brewster and Rexford sponsor trailers that are transported to the recycling center when they are full.

The cities are responsible for the labor and expense of transporting the recyclables. "The community really supports the program. The program has been actively promoted by the local school and their efforts have really got the program going," said Mike Schultz, Brewster City Superintendent.

The trailer has allowed rural residents around Brewster the ability to recycle. "We do take in a fair amount of material from Brewster and the sur-

rounding areas. It is hard to get some people to change, but it is so expensive to run a landfill, that every bit certainly helps," said Schultz.

Citizens voluntarily participate in all of these recycling programs and participation has increased tremendously since the recycling center opened and now that trailers are regularly servicing area cities. In 1997, the first year of the program, residents recycled an average of between one and two tons per month. This year the average

monthly volume has increased to around 25 tons, saving several thousand dollars in landfill costs. With landfill costs certain to increase, there is much to learn from the experiences of this partnership.

For information concerning the recycling program, contact the Thomas County Conservation District in Colby at (785) 4627482.

Mark Tomb is the Intergovernmental Relations Associate for the League of Kansas Municipalities.

## November youth pheasant hunt planned

The Hays Chapter of Pheasant Forever in cooperation with the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks will be conducting the Fourth Annual Youth Pheasant Hunt. The special hunt was established to encourage and recruit youth hunters ages 12-15. The event is fashioned to promote a quality hunting experience, hunter ethics and conservation.

The event will be held on Nov. 17, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Activities will include a hunter safety review, gun dog handling and training demonstration, trap shooting, pheasant and quail hunting, field preparation of game and a hamburger/hotdog feed.

The event will be limited to 20 youth ages 12-15 that have successfully completed the Hunter Safety Education

course. All participants must provide a Hunter Safety Card the day of the hunt.

Deadline to apply is Nov. 8. Youth interested in applying should pre-register by contacting Wildlife Manager, Kent Hensley at Cedar Bluff at (785) 726-3212 or Pheasant Forever members, Leroy Culbreath (785) 628-6934, or Dick Klaus (785) 625-1061.

## Student News

### Amanda Campbell

Amanda Campbell a junior at Fort Hays State University, accepted a \$250 Charles and Carrie Miller Scholarship.

Recipients of the activities-related Charles and Carrie Miller Scholarship are selected by a committee appointed by the university president.


At Colby Community College, she was the treasurer of the Phi Theta

Kappa International, Honor Society, Student Senate Sophomore Representative and a member of Kansas Intercollegiate Band and received first chair in the Western Kansas Community College Honor Band. She also was on the Dean's List.

Campbell, daughter of Jerald and Janet Campbell of Colby, plans a career in psychology.

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