

## Weather Corner



**Tonight...**Mostly cloudy. A chance of light snow or light rain in the evening...Then a chance of light snow after midnight. Lows in the lower 20s. North winds 10 to 15 mph. Chance of precipitation 50 percent.

**Tuesday...**Mostly sunny. Highs in the lower 40s. West winds 10 to 15 mph. Tuesday night...Partly cloudy. Lows in the lower 20s. South winds 10 to 15 mph.

**Wednesday...**Partly sunny with a 20 percent chance of light rain showers or snow showers. Highs in the mid 40s. Southwest winds 10 to 15 mph. Wednesday night...Mostly cloudy with a 20 percent chance of snow showers. Lows in the lower 20s.

**Thursday...**Partly sunny in the morning then becoming mostly sunny. Highs in the lower 40s. Thursday night...Partly cloudy. Lows around 19.

**Friday...**Mostly sunny. Highs in the mid 30s. Friday night...Mostly cloudy in the evening then becoming partly cloudy. Lows around 16.

**Saturday...**Mostly sunny. Highs in the mid 30s. Saturday night...Partly cloudy. Lows around 14.

**Sunday...**Mostly sunny. Highs in the lower 30s. Sunday's low, high: 27, 43. Saturday's low, high: 28, 54. Friday's low, high: 19, 52.

Construction on Vision Source's new facility along Range Avenue has moved inside as sheets of plastic block January weather from creeping in the buildings openings.



KEVIN JOHNSON/Colby Free Press

## Norton County Economic Development supports Sunflower Electric power plants

By VERONICA MONIER  
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The Norton County Economic Development Board is supporting Sunflower Electric in its appeal to install two new power plants.

Barry Madden from Prairie Land Electric was at the board's last meeting to talk about the denial of the permit for two new plants at the Holcomb site for Sunflower Electric. The secretary of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment denied the air permit because of the emission of carbon dioxide.

Mr. Madden said that the two new plants met or exceeded all of the

Kansas Health and Environment department's guidelines, which are established to protect public safety and the environment. Currently, there are no federal regulations on carbon dioxide emission.

He said Sunflower Electric has appealed the decision and may have their appeal heard by March.

With the new plants, there would be 161 new jobs created.

The board approved signing a resolution to support Sunflower Electric in their work to get the two new plants permitted in the state.

- Received the 2008 strategic plan from Director Diane Becker. The plan lists the three goals of economic development, which are job creation, downtown development and housing. The board was asked to study the plans for a month and bring back suggestions at the Jan. 8 meeting.

- Approved Hannah Mazour as an intern for the spring semester. She is a student at Fort Hays State University and will work on a website for

economic development, focusing on business assistance and including available incentives, educational seminars and courses, business start up help, and existing business consulting programs. She will also serve as the liaison between Norton County and the newly proposed Fort Hays Entrepreneurship Educational Program. The internship will start in January and will end in May.

- Reviewed the Neighborhood Revitalization Act brochure, which explains the program and will be sent to county residents sometime in the future.

- Approved membership on the Northwest Kansas Travel Council.

- Asked Ms. Becker to talk to surrounding counties about doing a regional labor force study, which will show the numbers of the available labor force in the region.

- Appointed Ms. Becker to serve on the Kansas Rural Economic Development Board and on the Pioneer Country Development Board.

## McCook may be 'Friend of the Court' in 'Friends of the River' lawsuit

From the McCook Daily Gazette

City Attorney Nate Schneider will give an update to council members on the "Americus Curiae," or Friend of the Court brief, that the council previously voted to file on behalf of the Friends of the River lawsuit, at the regular city council meeting 7:30 tonight at City Council Chambers in Memorial Auditorium.

The "Friend of the Court brief is filed by an individual or organization to present arguments in addition to those presented by the immediate parties involved in the case.

The lawsuit filed by Friends of the River, nine property owners in the Republican River Basin,

asserts that the property tax authority granted to the Republican River Natural Resources Districts by LB701 is unconstitutional, as it levies a property tax to pay for a state obligation, compliance with the Republican River Compact.

LB701 allows the NRDs to issue bonds to pay for water buy-outs, with the purchased water sent to Kansas to comply with the Compact. Under the bill, the bond would be paid back by increased property taxes and a new occupation tax on irrigated acres for those residing in the Republican River Basin, including home and property owners in McCook.

A Jan. 24 trial is scheduled in Lancaster District Court in Lincoln for the lawsuit.

## Casino operators focusing on new turf

TOPEKA (AP) — When folks think about Kansas, they have the usual images: sprawling wheat fields, graceful pastures and, more times than not, references to Dorothy and the Wizard of Oz.

In the coming months, add to that list slot machines, roulette wheels and money — lots of money. That lure of riches has casino operators converging on the state like stampeding cattle.

It started with the enactment last year of a law allowing four state-owned and operated resort casinos in Kansas. Thirteen casino operators are jostling for a chance to open casinos in Wyandotte, Cherokee, Sumner and Ford counties.

The operators would manage the casinos for the state in return for a piece of the action — which translates to money measured in the millions. State-owned casinos are unique to Kansas but that doesn't mean it can't work. Casino operators are betting they will make money; if they didn't believe that, they wouldn't be here.

"It's not going to knock off Las Vegas as the top destination, but people are going to play there. Where people play is where money can be made," said David Schwartz, director of the Center for Gaming Research at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

Resort casinos are a competitive business, always on the lookout for ways to expand their market.

"It becomes a situation where they want to expand pre-emptively. The other companies want to expand, so they have to expand just to survive and stay alive. If somebody else goes to Pennsylvania, they would want to go to Kansas," Schwartz said.

Beyond the potential market, Kansas has another advantage. Whoever ends up running the four casinos will have a monopoly in their gambling zone. The law says no other casinos can be built until 2032 and the operators sign 15-year management contracts with the state.

"This is going to be very stable profits and that is a chance they want to take. It is a reason for so many to try to get into Kansas," Schwartz said. "If you don't have competitors in the region, it is that much more stable."

Doug Lawrence, a gambling consultant and lobbyist who helped craft the law, said another incentive is Kansas casinos will pay 22 percent of revenue to the state

compared to other states where it can be as high as 40 percent.

"The state finally understood that a higher tax rate doesn't mean more revenue," Lawrence said. "When you build a larger facility, they will come from farther away to see it."

He said location is another factor. The casinos in Wyandotte, Sumner and Cherokee counties all will be near heavily traveled interstates and Ford County's will be in Dodge City, a well-known tourist spot because of its Old West heritage.

"It's a perfect storm. Great sites, great tax rates and a certainty of circumstances for the next 15 years," said Lawrence, who's representing prospective developers in Ford, Sumner and Wyandotte counties.

Casinos may be in the gambling business, but they don't gamble with their money.

"These companies today are extremely sophisticated," said Frank Farhenkopf, American Gaming Association president. "They are responsible to their shareholders for a fair return on investment. They are followed closely by Wall Street analysts and they just don't do things willy-nilly."

He said casino operators rely on numerous studies and crunch numbers to help them decide whether a location has potential.

For instance, a 2006 survey by Harrah's Entertainment ranked Kansas among the 31 states generating more than 2 million casino trips throughout the nation the previous year. It also said Kansas was among states with casino gambling participation higher than the national average of 25 percent of adults.

Farhenkopf said Kansas, like Iowa, is a state with light industry and agriculture.

"It has worked out for the companies and worked out for the state and local governments there. You would expect it to be similar in Kansas," he said.

The AMA's 2007 survey shows \$1.2 billion in gross revenues for the 16 facilities in Iowa and \$1.6 billion for neighboring Missouri with 11 casinos, including four in Kansas City, Mo., near Wyandotte County. Casino operators don't want to appear to be parachuting into Kansas and dropping a casino on some open land. They have developed alliances with Kansans, either in partnerships or hiring them as consultants.

"It takes away the outsider factor and also helps them to navigate though local politics," Lawrence said.

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