



County hears idea on its health plan

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The Thomas County commissioners weighed the idea of changing the firm handling employee health reimbursement accounts Friday after County Clerk Shelly Harms presented two alternate proposals.

Harms said a health reimbursement account is a type of additional insurance plan that is supposed to cover anything above and beyond the deductible for county employees, except for vision, dental and prescription drugs.

The employees have a \$3,500 deductible, she said, but the reimbursement account is supposed to

pay anything over the first \$500 for them.

She said she decided to research other plans and companies besides the county's current firm, Professional Insurance Consultants out of North Carolina, using her resources through county clerks. She said she was referred to Select Account and EmPower.

Harms said the county signed with Professional Insurance Consultants two years ago for a cost of \$750 a month, totaling \$9,000 in 2010, to manage the accounts. This year the county is paying \$780, she said, which will come to a total of \$9,360. She said they also subcontract with Worksite Benefit Plans Inc. for an average of \$10,808 for the last two years,

depending on the number of employees.

Harms said according to her estimates, the county will pay about \$24,000 for those services this year, depending on how many employees qualify for benefits.

She asked Commissioner Byron Sowers how often the consultant from the North Carolina company had been here to talk with the county. Sowers said not more than twice a year.

Chairman Ken Christensen asked Harms if the county even needs a health reimbursement account.

"If we want to save money, we don't even want one," he replied.

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Weather here going from hot to cool, wet

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Yeah, it was hot. Record hot for March.

Today, it's been windy.

And tonight, look for rain.

And as they say, if you don't like the weather here, just wait a few minutes.

A heat wave which rode in on a high-pressure system broke records all over the area, most set in another warm spring, 1940.

In Colby, the high of 92 degrees Sunday broke a record of 87 set that year. Goodland reported 89, with a 1940 record of 86 for April Fools Day. Yuma, Colo., had 88, which tied the record; Tribune reported 90, compared to 88; Hill City tied a mark of 92; and Burlington, Colo., had 87, compared to 84.

McCook, Neb., had 92, breaking a record of 86 set in 2003.

Meteorologist Jesse Lundquist said the wind today has been brought on by an extreme pressure gradient as a closed surface low now on the Mexican border started north. "A fairly strong front" moved through this morning, sweeping the hot air away. Top gusts were generally 45 to 50 mph, he said, but Seibert, Colo., reported one at 57.

The storm system is expected to bring lower temperatures, with highs today in the 60s, a low tonight about 39 and a high Tuesday in the low 50s.

And that rain: the precipitation probability at 60 percent tonight from Tribune to Hill City, 50 percent Tuesday across northwest Kansas and 70 to 80 percent Tuesday night.

Chances of rain will trail off Wednesday as the low moves on east, Lundquist said.

Region's economy pushes ahead despite fuel prices

OMAHA (AP) - Rising fuel prices haven't slowed the economy in nine Midwest and Plains states, and a report released today suggests the region will continue growing unless there is a major economic shock.

"Only a significant upturn in oil prices or a catastrophe such as last year's Japanese tsunami will derail this expansion," said Creighton University economist Ernie Goss, who oversees the monthly survey of business leaders.

Businesses tied to agriculture, energy or international exports continue to lead the region's economy, Goss said.

The survey covers Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma and South Dakota.

The overall economic index for the region shows continued economic growth because it rose from 58.4 percent in February to 58.6 in March. The index has risen for five months in a row.

Goss says any score above 50 on an index suggests growth while a score below 50 suggests decline for that factor.

Each index ranges from zero to 100. The employment index grew to 58.5 in March from February's already-healthy 57.5.

"Employment growth in the region is accelerating with reports of labor shortages for skilled manufacturing workers," Goss said.

Inflation remains a concern. The price-

es-paid index, which tracks the cost of raw materials and supplies, rose to 76.5 in March from 74.7 in February.

But business leaders in the region remain optimistic about the next six months. The confidence index grew to 62.2 in March from February's 61.

The March inventory index increased to 58.9 from February's 54.2. Goss said that suggests businesses are expecting to expand production in the next few months.

The export index grew to 56.4 in March

from February's 55.3, and the import index increased to 57.4 in March from 56.6 in February.

The other components of the March index:

- New orders at 60.8, up from 58.4 in February.
Production or sales at 60.4, down from 60.9.
And deliveries at 54.5 in March, down from February's 56.4.

Gem farm couple honored by K-State

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Life-long Gem area farmers Carl and Patricia Ziegelmeier have been named 2011 Kansas Master Farmer and Master Farm Homemaker.

They were one of six couples chosen by K-State Research and Extension and Kansas Farmer magazine in the program that dates to 1927.

The Ziegelmeiers were honored at a banquet in Junction City on March 16. The five other couples were David and Paula Blasi of Pratt, Carl and Jeanette Hildebrand of Stafford, Galen and Nancy Hofmann of Leonardville, Ross and Judy Kinsler of Kingman and Larry and Debra Martin of Fort Scott.

K-State said they were chosen because of their leadership in agriculture, environmental stewardship and service to their communities.

Thursday, Pat Ziegelmeier said she and her husband are honored

to receive the award and will continue doing their part to look after the environment.

"We do 'no-till' more and more often, when the slope and soil type are right, to conserve moisture," she said, "and the land we have in the Conservation Reserve Program helps give the land a rest and provides a place for wildlife."

The couple started out working on their parents' farms in Thomas County and gradually accumulated land and cattle for their own operation, according to a story in the magazine written by Nellie Hill. The Ziegelmeiers said they grow wheat and corn and use conservation practices whenever possible.

Carl noted that they have about 300 cows in a cow-calf herd as well.

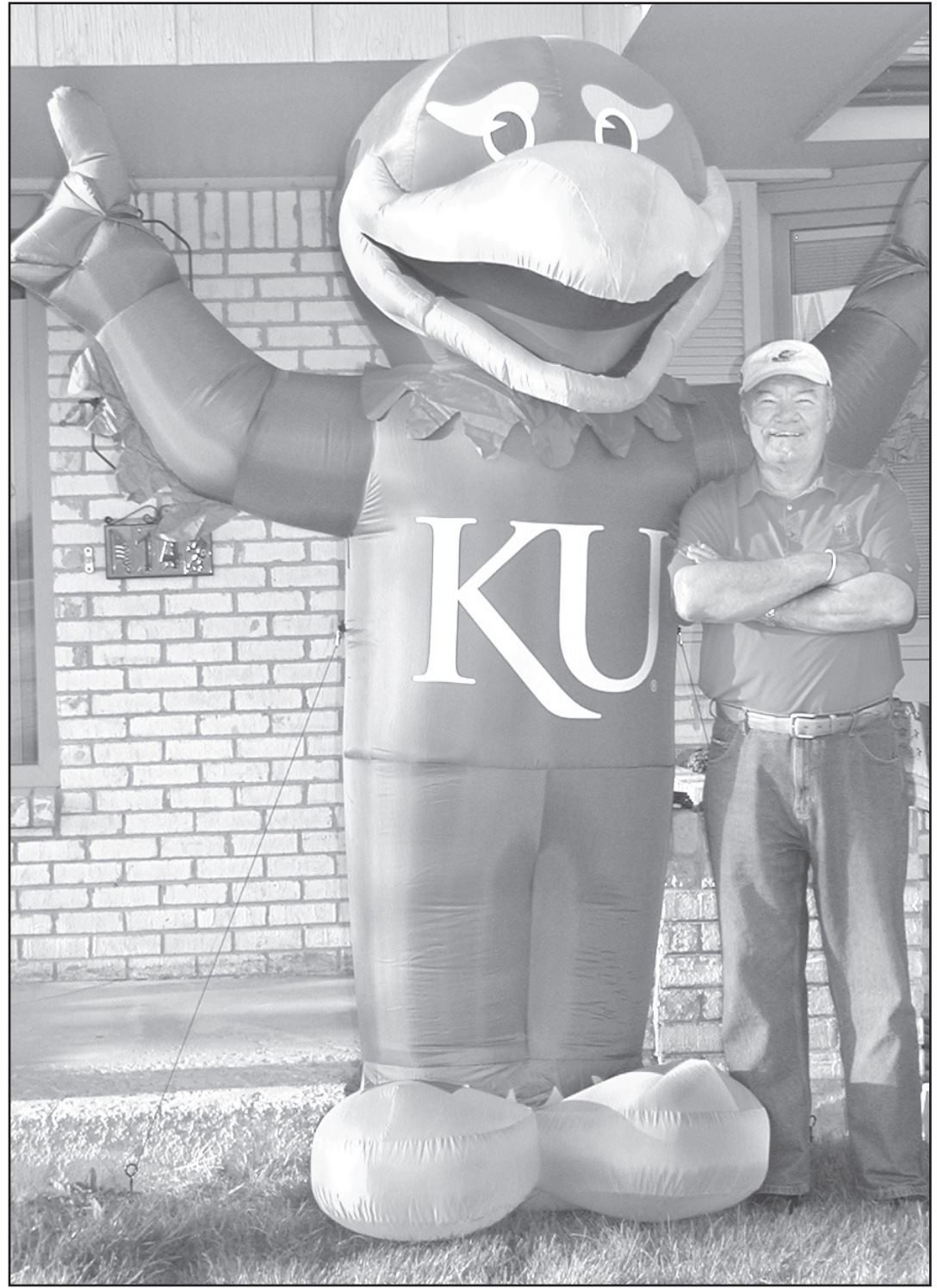
Their motivation comes from a desire to make their community a better place to live and work, coupled with involvement in several organizations, the story

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Carl and Pat Ziegelmeier can see some of their wheat from the front yard of their home north of Gem.

Jayhawks arise!



First Linsanity, then March Madness. Now, a host of Jayhawks fans are going nuts as the Kansas team plays in the national championship game about 8:20 p.m. tonight. Ron Evans of Colby even has a giant mascot and a KU flag out front of his home. He said his wife Sue and their daughter are in New Orleans for the game, but the last two times he went, the 'Hawks lost. He'll be watching the game on CBS.

Church to kick off with Easter service

The launch of the Colby Campus of Celebration Community Church has been set for 10:45 a.m. on Easter Sunday at the Colby High School auditorium, 1890 S. Franklin Ave.

"It will be a nondenominational, contemporary worship service," said church member Debbie McNinch of Colby, "and ... everyone is welcome, regardless of religious background."

The church is the brainchild of its founder, Senior Pastor Kyle Ermoian, and Edge Pastor Brant Rice, who both lead services in

Hays. Services in Colby have been held once a month since December through the efforts of McNinch and Colby Pastor Dave Funk.

McNinch said she can't believe the launch date is right around the corner. She said she has been looking forward to it.

Church staff members said they want to stress that they aren't trying to steal members from other churches, but hope to reach the lost, those without a church.

For information, go to www.celebratejesus.org.

Governor wants inquiry

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) - Gov. Terry Branstad says he wants a congressional inquiry into what prompted complaints about a meat product that some call "pink slime" and the industry refers to as lean, finely textured beef.

A public uproar about the product prompted the maker, Beef Products Inc., to suspend operations at plants in Waterloo, Iowa; Amarillo, Texas; and Garden City, Kan.

Speaking Monday at his weekly news conference, Branstad says

he's suggested an inquiry to U.S. Reps. Steve King and Leonard Boswell, and has raised the issue with Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack.

A federal microbiologist apparently was the first to use the term "pink slime" several years ago. It wasn't until recently that the issue exploded after mainstream media picked up on something long discussed in social media.

