

State Chamber gets ideas on how to cut costs

By Greg Stover
The Goodland Star-News

The Kansas Chamber Express stopped in Goodland Tuesday afternoon to get ideas from business here on how to reduce the cost of doing business in Kansas.

The Express is a series of statewide meetings during which Lew Ebert, president of the Kansas Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and Terry Leatherman, its vice president, meet with business people and listen to their problems and ideas.

Goodland was the next to the last stop of tour's "30 cities in three

months" run.

Ebert and Leatherman were luncheon guests of the Goodland Kiwanis Club at the Northwest Kansas Technical College student union. About 30 people from Goodland and the surrounding area were there.

After lunch, Kansas Chamber board member Curt Stephens, of Colby, introduced Ebert, who talked about the need to develop a business growth strategy for Kansas to counter what he described as



Ebert

growth deficiency in the state evidenced by a net job loss in 2002. He said one purpose of the Express was to help identify those areas where the state, and its regulations, hurt business.

Ebert described the economic growth potential in Kansas as a three-legged stool of which the state's transportation network and its education and training programs represent two of the legs. Both are among the best in the nation, he said, but the third leg is the business climate, which includes the cost of doing

business.

Ebert said four specific areas can be improved in Kansas: Health care costs; worker's compensation costs, of which about 60 percent involves health care; unemployment insurance costs; and the high cost of litigation.

He said by improving these areas, Kansas can enhance its image to attract business looking to relocate.

Ebert said the state's significant investment in its education and training has increased availability of a skilled work force, which he believed is a potential "super weapon" for economic growth.

He said one of the goals of the Chamber is to establish a meaningful voice for businesses in the state-house, and he said business people can contribute without leaving their desk.

Some state politicians, he said, say that the state has done nothing to hurt the business climate in Kansas but Ebert says that "not hurting business doesn't help it." Positive action is needed stimulate real growth, he said.

Donna Swager, director of Wheat Ridge Acres Retirement Community, provided an example of how state Health Department regula-

tions hamper economic growth. She said that Heritage Health Care Management of Alamosa, Colo., operates six retirement communities in Colorado and one in Kansas, but because of the over regulation here, the firm is not considering any further expansion in the state.

She said the state's regulations are too stringent and unrealistic for most situations.

Ebert said he received similar reports during other meetings and recognizes the need declare "war on red-tape" and reform regulations so that they make sense.

Social Security checks to get larger in January

By Greg Stover
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People receiving Social Security and supplemental security income will see bigger checks starting in January.

A 2.1 percent cost-of-living adjustment will increase the money sent each month to more than 54 million people. The Social Security Administration said the average monthly benefit for all retired workers will increase from \$903 to \$922.

Several other changes will take effect in January. One of them is an increase in the maximum amount of annual earnings subject to Social Security tax from \$87,000 to \$87,900. The government estimates that about 9.2 million workers, out of the over 150 million who pay the tax, will pay more next year.

Another change is an increase in the amount a worker who has not reached full retirement age can earn without loss of benefits. In 2004, that will be \$11,640 a year, an average of \$970 per month. One dollar in benefits will be withheld for every two dollars above the amount.

Full retirement age is the age people, based on the year they were born, qualify for full retirement benefits.

For example the full retirement age for people born in 1939 is 65 years, 4 months. For people born in the period from 1943 through 1954, that age is 66.

For people born on Jan. 1, full retirement is based on the previous year. For example a person born on Jan. 1, 1943 will have his or her full retirement age determined as if he or she was born in 1942, which is 65 years, 10 months.

The amount needed for a quarter of coverage will increase from \$890 to \$900. Workers can earn up to four quarters of coverage per year based on their reported wages. In general, 40 quarters of coverage are needed to qualify for retirement benefits.

In 2004, workers will need to earn at least \$3,600 to earn four quarters of coverage. They do not have to earn \$900 every three months. Workers can earn the required \$3,600 in just one pay period during 2004 and still get all four quar-

ters of coverage for the year.

People who qualify can retire at any time between age 62 and their full retirement age, however their benefits will be permanently reduced for each month short of full retirement age.

The Social Security Administration estimates that a person choosing to receive their benefits early will generally receive the same total amount over their lifetime as if they waited for full retirement age, just at a lower monthly rate.

James Feyerherm, district manager at the Social Security office in Hays, said each person's situation is unique and their particular circumstances must be considered when considering when to retire. He said the Hays office, 1212 E. 27th St., can help in that process. The telephone number is (785) 625-3496.

For more information about the changes next year or the Social Security Administration in general, go to www.ssa.gov or call (800) 772-1213.

More interest in truck stop

PETRO, from Page 1

the country shows Salina as the only spot in Kansas, and Laramie as the only Petro in Wyoming. There are not any Petro stations in Colorado.

Petro opened its first truck plaza in El Paso in 1975.

Chairman Dave Daniels reported the state has cleared the Economic Development Council of any wrongdoing in the effort to find a buyer for the truck stop. He said he attended a Board of Realtors meeting, however, and real estate brokers here continue to be concerned

about the activities of the director.

Applegate has agreed to a contract for another year, Daniels said. He said the contract will be presented for the council's approval at the December meeting and then it will be recommended to the county commissioners for approval.

Council member Harlan House suggested the council needs to find a way to hold a goal-setting session to give Applegate some guidance and give the community an opportunity to provide input into the direction and goals.

House suggested holding a pub-

lic discussion at noon on the second Tuesday of December at Gambino's and invite everyone to attend. He said the format would be open, and that any topic could be discussed.

Council members present were Daniels, John Garcia, Kim Bohme, House, Larry Harper and Patty Eckhardt. Sherman County Commissioner Kevin Rasure attended as well.

The next council meeting will be at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Dec. 16 at Western State Bank.

Paper gains advertising person

Anne Hamilton started work Wednesday, Nov. 12, as an advertising representative for *The Goodland Star-News*.

Hamilton will be primarily dealing with customers east of Main Avenue north of 17th Street and east of K-27 to the south. She will assist customers with their advertising needs and promoting new business.

"I'm really excited about the opportunity to work here," said Hamilton. "I'm looking forward to going out in the community and meeting people."

Hamilton earned a Bachelor of Business Administration degree, with a marketing emphasis, from Fort Hays State University in December.

"We're very glad to have her," said Steve Haynes, president of Nor'West Newspapers. "We think

her background in marketing will be valuable to our customers."

Since August, Hamilton has worked at Cowboy Loop, 1631 Main Ave., as a counter clerk. She moved to Goodland in July from Kansas City, where she was an AmeriCorps volunteer after graduating from Fort Hays.

Hamilton was born in Salina and lived in Goodland until 1991 when, at age 10, her family moved to Wiggins, Colo. After graduating from Wiggins High School in 1999, she



Hamilton

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Tumblin' tumbleweed



A huge tumbleweed traveling west on 12th Street on Thursday night stopped to rest a few seconds in the intersection at Main Avenue. Shortly after its picture was taken, it turned south on Main, where it collided with a pickup going north. Since damage was negligible, both travelers continued on their way.

Photo by Greg Stover/The Goodland Star-News

Businesses to close for holiday

The Goodland Star-News office will be closed Thanksgiving Day, and the Friday edition will go to press a day early, on Wednesday.

The paper will be at news stands that day, and delivered on time in the mail. Deadline for news and ads is noon Wednesday.

City of Goodland and Sherman County offices will be closed Thanksgiving and Friday. The public library will be closed Thanksgiving but will be open for normal hours, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., on Friday.

State offices in Goodland will be closed Thursday and Friday and federal offices will be closed Thanksgiving only. All banks and government offices will be closed on Thursday, and there will be no

mail. Mail service will resume on Friday.

These businesses are among those that will be closed Thanksgiving and will be opened for normal hours on Friday: Cowboy Loop,

1631 Main Ave.; Crazy R's Bar and Grill, 1618 Main Ave.; Gambino's Pizza, 402 E. 17th St.; Kabredlos-Cenex, 320 E. 8th St.; Kear's Quality Liquor, 403 E. 17th St.; and Pizza Hut, 1803 Cherry Ave.

corrections

The Goodland Star-News *will correct any mistake in a news story. Please call our office at (785) 899-2338 to report errors. We believe that news should be fair and factual. We want to keep an accurate record.*

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