

Travel and tourism major player in development

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An area's biggest industries are important to its economic development, and in northwest Kansas, the travel and tourism industry is one of the main players.

The travel industry has a big impact, said Roger Hrabec, vice president of the Northwest Kansas Travel Council and economic development director for Rooks County in Stockton. People are spending a lot of money to visit Kansas, he said, and you can't ignore travel and tourism as an economic development tool.

Though many may think of tourism as the ocean and mountains, he said, it has an impact in Kansas, which has neither. People come to see the largest ball of twine in Cawker City, he said, to hunt or fish or to experience rural life. It all brings money in from outside. Even people on their way to the mountains have to stop off to eat, buy gas or spend the night.

A lot of economic development people probably don't make the connection to tourism, he said, but in 2004, travel and tourism brought \$5.6 billion into Kansas, providing 166,000 jobs and \$3.5 billion in wages.



Price

The council promotes 18 counties of northwest Kansas, Hrabec said — Sherman, Wallace, Cheyenne, Rawlins, Thomas, Logan, Decatur, Sheridan, Gove, Norton, Graham, Trego, Phillips, Rooks, Ellis, Smith, Osborne and Russell.

The 18 counties work well together, said Connie Grafel, secretary of the council and marketing director of the Oberlin-Decatur Area Economic Development Corp.

"One of us probably couldn't draw many people in," she said, "but if people come in for a few days and go around the area, we can give them plenty to do. We work well together as a region."

The council spends the most money on the Ultimate Guide to Northwest Kansas, Mr. Hrabec said, and attending tourism and travel trade shows.

"We promote the whole area," he said, "attractions, historical, cultural and recreation."

One community wouldn't have the money to do it alone, Ms. Grafel said, and wouldn't have as much to offer. Someone coming to Oberlin might stop in Bird City for steak on the way, she said, and that's how the council can work to help travelers experience the whole area.

Hunting and fishing are the biggest draws here, Hrabec said; at trade shows in Kansas City and Denver, there is definitely a market for outdoor sports. The council also markets agritourism, he said, whether it be corn mazes, working farms or a bed and breakfast with nature-based activities.

The state has been promoting agritourism for several years, he said; it's a growing industry. The state has formed an agritourism advisory council, said Donna Price, president of the travel council and director of the Sherman County Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Mrs. Price serves on the group, which has held regional agritourism conferences. Agritourism is huge, she said; it's definitely growing.

The travel council has partnered with several organizations, Price said, to pay for a study by a consulting firm, Fermata, to increase nature-based tourism. The study will take time, she said, but it will pull out

Kansas' assets and give the groups direction in marketing them.

The Sherman County Convention and Visitors Bureau, the travel council, Southwest Tourism Group, the Western Kansas Rural Economic Development Association (known as WKREDA), the Travel and Tourism Division of the state Department of Commerce, the Department of Wildlife and Parks and Fort Hays State University all are involved in the study, which should give them more choices to reach visitors.

The marketing push may include advertising on television and in magazines, she said. Fermata did this type of study on the Flint Hills region, and it was featured in a 20-page spread in the April issue of *National Geographic*.

The council does a lot to promote the area to people from other states, Mr. Hrabec said, but doesn't leave out Kansans. The council always has a booth at the Kansas Sampler Festival, he said, which is a huge event for the state.

The Sampler encourages Kansans to visit their own state, Hrabec said, and to preserve our rural culture. About 7,000 people attended the event the last two years in Garden City, he said; it gets enough attention

that other states were coming to see how they can copy it.

There is a formula to determine how much money travelers bring to a community, Grafel said; you take the county's annual guest tax and divide it by the number of the percent collected. Take that times 100, she said, to get gross annual hotel sales, then divide it by .40 because 40 percent of the money people spend is for lodging and the other 60 percent for other things, such as food, shopping and fuel. That will get you the total community-direct income from overnight travel, Grafel said.

Using that formula with Decatur County's 2006 guest tax, you would take the tax of \$10,217 and divide it by 3 because the county collects 3 percent. Then take that times 100 to get gross hotel sales for the year of \$340,567. Divide that by .40 to get \$851,417 community-direct income from overnight travel in just one county.

Travel and tourism is not the answer to concerns about developing the economy and growing the population in northwest Kansas, Hrabec said; it's just a piece of the puzzle, and it takes a lot of pieces to make something happen.

Development director keeps fingers on projects from afar

PROJECTS, from Page 1a

get the information out to people.

Council member Steve West of Western State Bank asked McMinn what the next big step is for the planning process.

"We are approaching the end of year one," McMinn replied. "We have to raise a little bit of money. We want the action teams to hit their first year goals. The feeling is the health care group is too narrow and needs to expand to include more than the hospital."

Among her report items, McMinn:

- Said the winners of four business and home grants for \$1,500 each are working on their projects.
- "I have spoken with all to make sure they will be completed within the time frame to have the work done," she said. "So far, everyone should be done within the 90 days."
- She added the checks won't be handed out until the projects have been completed and documented.
- McMinn asked if the council wanted to consider doing a second round of housing and business grants. West said that is a great idea if there was enough money.
- Reported that she was building

advertising for the We Have Jobs virtual workforce center at the council office.

• Said the home-based business effort is moving forward. The project has been to identify all the more than 100 home-based businesses in the county, and the plan is to hold at least one or more information sessions to help these people understand what the economic development council office can do, and to give the business people an opportunity to network and learn from state and regional agencies ways to improve their business or expand into new markets.

She said she has contacted Pioneer Country Development of Hill City, the Northwest Kansas Business Development Center in Hays and the Small Business Development Center at Fort Hays State University to see when they could be here and will set up a date when she gets answers from them.

• Said Dobbs had met with the Goodland City Commission and it has selected a target area with about 77 homes for the Community Development Block Grant housing program. She said the next step is to hold a public hearing, and there would be notices in the paper and

she would send out information to contractors. The economic development office has been working with Amy Griffey of the Northwest Kansas Planning District to apply for a CDBG grant to do housing rehabilitation.

• Told the council a new micro loan had been approved, and the business will create two jobs. In the past year, she said, \$38,000 has been loaned out to two new businesses and one existing business looking to expand, creating six new jobs.

• Said for the High Plains Museum project, she was looking into tax credits to help with financing, but the city will have to be the applicant.

• Reported that for the skate park

planned by the Shine On Sherman County youth group in Steever Park, she is working with foundations for a grant, asking for \$15,000 for cement and \$45,000 for equipment.

• Noted she is working on a letter for the county, city and school board to recommend that the Neighborhood Revitalization Program, which gives tax breaks to encourage new construction and remodeling, be extended beyond the three-year trial that ends in December.

Later, Dobbs said she had a request from the Goodland Area Chamber of Commerce to refund half of the July rent since the office moved in the middle of the month. A motion to do pay the \$50 passed.

Hearing planned on housing rehab grant

HOUSING, from Page 1a

to rehab about 70 homes.

City Commissioner Dave Daniels said the target area he had seen was from Center to Montana and from 15th to 17th.

Dobbs said the target area had about 75 homes that needed some work, and that it was an area where the economic development office received a large number of applications for the housing grants the council approved in June.

City Manager Wayne Hill said it would be good to target an area where there are houses that need work. He asked if the people could qualify if there is a lien against the property.

City Clerk Mary Volk asked if the homeowner has to have the property taxed paid.

Dobbs said she did not see anything in the application dealing with either question.

Mayor Rick Billinger suggested doing all the homes in the southwest part of the city.

"Maybe if we do the whole area, we might end up with the number of

houses where people would be interested," he said.

Dobbs said invitations for the grant application hearing will be sent to contractors as well as homeowners in the target area.

She said the hearing is to deter-

mine interest and to give people an opportunity to ask questions about the project.

Griffey said under the housing rehabilitation program, work could include repairs or replacement of roofs, gutters, electrical, founda-

tions, floors, plumbing, heating, painting, handicapped accessibility and demolition of abandoned or dilapidated homes in the target area.

(A map of the target area and notice of public hearing is on Page 6a of today's Goodland Star-News.)

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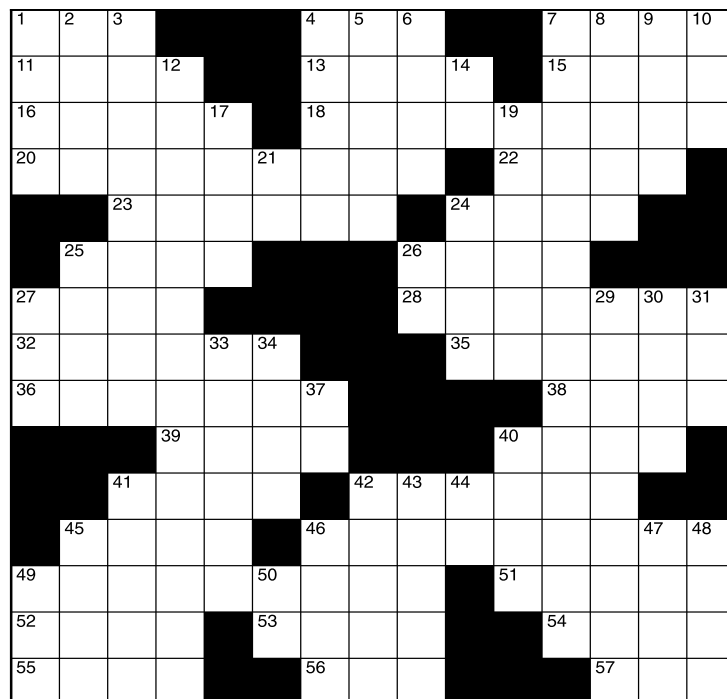
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Crossword Puzzle



CLUES ACROSS

- Total
- Food flavor additive
- Udders
- Egyptian sun god
- Beige
- Do quickly (acr.)
- Walking sticks
- Eleanor & Franklin
- Raining down
- Maltese money unit
- Fool's gold
- Male parents
- Prunus spinosa
- Seed cover
- Picasso's mistress
- Small eating area
- How one slept at camp
- Gasoline
- Notified of a risk
- Sock for sandals
- Polite interruption sound
- Flock of quail
- A center's hike
- West Russian city on the Volga
- Zodiac division
- Aromatizing with scent
- Offsetting some fault or defect
- Indigo bush
- Brewed from malt and hops
- Singer Horne
- One point N of NE
- Finale
- Decaliter
- Angle or temp. (abbr.)

CLUES DOWN

- Pouches
- American state
- Type of airplane
- Being deserving
- High tea treat
- Rum cut with water
- Late Show star
- Consumers
- Festivity
- Engine wear additive
- MSG hockey team
- We
- Wither
- ___ May, actress
- Rhode Island
- Faucet problem
- First king of Israel
- In the year of Our Lord
- License for Wall Street
- Toiled
- Type of jug
- ___ Lilly, drug company
- Colorless odorless fuel gas
- Intense shade
- Blood sugar disease (abbr.)
- Data transmission speed measure
- Took sides
- Genus Cassia
- Genus Ovis in central Asia
- Medium frequency
- Viewed
- Particoloured
- Northeast by east
- Sharks or Jets
- Ratanakiri Airport code
- Milliliter

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August 2 at 6 PM Central Time
Colby
Pioneer Memorial Library

For More Information contact:
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