

from our viewpoint...

Grocery store good news for city

Getting a grocery store for Goodland has been a long time goal, and the announcement on Monday by Sam Mancini was a giant step in that direction.

Many people have worked behind the scenes for several months on this project. With the cooperation of the city commissioners and city staff the efforts of the Sherman County Economic Development Council members resulted in a positive step forward for the community.

Having a choice for groceries will be a benefit to those who live and shop in Goodland. Walmart has been the lone grocery store for nearly 10 years, and other efforts to open a second store have fallen short.

We salute the city staff and city commissioners for their willingness to enter into a long term agreement with Mancini to open his ninth store. He said this will be his first to open from the ground up, and believe he will work to make this a great store people who work and shop at will be proud to support.

The Development Council's willingness to support the effort with the financing of a feasibility study (\$6,500) showed good faith, and gave Mancini valuable insight into the community. It was a special effort of the council to agree to assist Mancini with \$25,000 to put up good signage at the new store.

The council was in position to assist in this economic development effort, and showed what can be done when the right opportunity presents itself. In the past the council put together a similar effort to try to keep J.C. Penney's open. That corporate decision was made long before anyone in Goodland had a chance to provide input.

Mancini has been looking at Goodland for some time as a possible site for his store, and we are fortunate he found the support and encouragement to choose our city for this store. His decision to choose Goodland is a good sign for the future, and as a community it shows the long term strength of those who came here more than 100 years ago.

We are sure Ed Wolak will be pleased with the transformation of the building that bears his name back into a grocery store. Mancini has indicated he will spend about \$1.2 million to upgrade and stock the store, which will be quite an investment in the city.

People who have been looking for an alternative place to buy groceries will probably find the prices at Mancini's store will be competitive, but in some cases a few percent higher than at Walmart.

Not having to drive an extra two miles each way should be worth the difference in price, and we are certain having competition will actually bring more people to our city to shop at both stores.

Expanding the shopping opportunities will help Goodland continue to grow as a regional shopping location on the Kansas High Road (K-27). — *Tom Betz*

Letter Policy

The Goodland Star-News encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, and must include a telephone number and a signature. Unsigned letters will not be published. Form letters will be rejected, as will letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive. We reserve the right to edit letters for length and good taste. We encourage letters, with address and phone numbers, by e-mail to: <star.news@nwkans.com>.

The Goodland Star-News

(USPS No. 222-460. ISSN 0893-0562)

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Inland Press Association Colorado Press Association
National Newspaper Association
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Published every Tuesday and Friday except the days observed for New Year's Day, Memorial Day, July 4th, Labor Day, Thanksgiving and Christmas Day, at 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

Periodicals postage paid at Goodland, Kan. 67735; entered at the Goodland, Kan., Post Office under the Act of Congress of March 8, 1878.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Goodland Star-News, 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

TELEPHONE: (785) 899-2338. Editorial e-mail: star-news@nwkans.com. Advertising questions can be sent to: goodlandads@nwkans.com

The Goodland Star-News assumes no liability for mistakes or omissions in advertising or failure to publish beyond the actual cost of the ad.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: In Sherman County and adjacent counties: three months, \$29; six months, \$46; 12 months, \$81. Out of area, weekly mailing of two issues: three months, \$39; six months, \$54; 12 months, \$89 (All tax included). Mailed individually each day: (call for a price).

Incorporating:

The Goodland Daily News

1932-2003

The Sherman County Herald

Founded by Thomas McCants
1935-1989

THE SHERMAN COUNTY STAR

Founded by Eric and Roxie Yonkey
1994-2001

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which once levied rarely go away.

It will remove the sales tax exemption on lottery tickets, a move that could potentially cost the state money. In order for Kansas to be eligible to participate in multi-state drawings such as the Power Ball, the Kansas Lottery agrees to defined ticket prices. By adding the tax, we would be effectively withdrawing Kansas from the multi-state drawings and foregoing the additional \$36 million dollars in revenue it brings in every year.

House Budget Approach

Some new data shows the House position is in step with Kansans' concerns over the budget and government spending. An unprecedented 92 percent of registered voters agree that because federal stimulus dollars are no longer available, Kansas must have a "serious overhaul of the budget". Additionally, 85 percent of voters agree the state needs to live within its means. Further budget questions revealed similar attitudes of voters regarding the budget:

- 70 percent of voters believe the state spends or wastes too much money and should or could cut.
- 54 percent of voters named an element of fiscal restraint as the most important budget priority for Kansans.

The House is continuing to identify responsible ways to balance the budget without a blanket tax increase. Now that the House has passed the Governor's partial rescission of FY10 spending, we are focusing in on balancing FY11 without causing further turmoil to our fragile state economy. The House is leading the way on creating new policy which will restructure how Kansas budgets and spends your tax dollars.

Energy Efficiency

This time of year finds many of us thinking about ways to save on energy costs. If you are considering improvements at your home or workplace, you should know the State offers several programs to improve the energy effi-

Ignition Interlock Devices

Last week Laura Dean-Mooney, Mothers Against Drunk Driving national president, testified in front of the House Judiciary Committee Hearing on SB 368, which weakens current DUI statute, advocating amendments to the bill. She was in favor of striking the language weakening the ignition interlock law and urged the committee to amend the bill to include a requirement of interlocks for first time offenders.

Kansas was one of a very few states to see an increase in drunk driving deaths from 2007 to 2008. In 2008, 131 people lost their lives in alcohol related crashes on Kansas roadways. We need to strengthen the statute not only for those convicted of a DUI, but also for those who refuse the administration of a breathalyzer, as a crucial step in preventing the increase of DUI offenses. States with the interlock requirement show marked decreases in repeat offenders.

Currently, Kansas statute is succeeding by increasing compliance rates and decreasing violations and offenders driving illegally while unlicensed and uninsured. Removing of this requirement will increase non-compliance and put repeat DUI offenders back on the road without any method to insure public safety. I will continue to encourage the House Committee to take a strong stand. I will support their work to prevent the weakening of Kansas DUI statutes and their goal of increasing the scope in which the interlock devices will be employed in this state.

Repeal of Religious and Utility Tax Exemptions

HB 2549, as passed out of the House Tax Committee, would repeal the sales tax exemptions on certain property and services purchased by religious organizations. Additionally, it would remove the sales tax exemption on your utilities (gas, water, electricity, coal, wood and heat for residential use) which would impose the 5.3 percent sales tax on those purchases.

I oppose this bill and the removal of these exemptions. Adding to the already high tax burden faced by Kansans is irresponsible. We will not be able to tax ourselves out of this recession. The state does not have a revenue problem we have a spending problem. We must demand accountability and ensure that taxes,

Farmers in western Kansas need affordable, readily accessible crop insurance. Today's stakes are too high not to have this important tool available to them.

That was the consensus of nearly 100 landowners, producers, suppliers and others vested in agriculture at two meetings held in Goodland and Ulysses sponsored by Kansas Farm Bureau.

Held Feb. 25, the two meetings were designed to allow producers to provide input and voice their concerns about the Risk Management Agency's (RMA) proposed elimination of crop insurance on continuous planting of some non-irrigated acres. A part of U.S. Department of Agriculture, RMA has concluded this practice is too high risk to warrant insurance coverage.

RMA has proposed cancelation of insurance products that provide coverage for these second crops in 18 counties in western Kansas and also parts of eastern Colorado and western Nebraska. "I would really like RMA to sit back and take another look at what they're proposing," says Maurice Miller, who farms in Lane and Scott counties in southwestern Kansas. "We must have the opportunity to put in that second (summer) crop and we need insurance on that second crop. Insurance is an integral part of our farming program."

One of the younger producers at the meetings was Clayton Janicke, Cheyenne County. This northwestern Kansas farmer is 100-percent no till.

Janicke says he no longer drags iron through his fields and operates a more intensive rotation without any fallow periods. He believes mini-



Insight this week

• john schlageck

mum till and no-till farming will provide higher production yields on his farm which in turn make crop insurance all that much more important.

"With the potential for greater yields and more income, crop insurance is absolutely essential for my farming business," Janicke says. "One hailstorm or another year of drought would be catastrophic for us. Without insurance for my crops, I'd be hung out to dry if and when I suffer a crop failure."

Like the other western Kansas producers who attended the two meetings, Janicke believes RMA has used data from too narrow a time period 1999 – 2008.

According to records this 10-year period was the second driest period dating back to 1895, second only to the dust bowl period of the "Dirty Thirties." Western Kansas producers would like RMA to consider a 20 to 30-year period.

These same producers would also like RMA to consider the changes in more recent cropping practices in western Kansas including no till and minimum tillage, improving crop genetics and safer pesticides.

Another northwestern Kansas producer, Gerry Franklin from Sherman County, would like RMA to consider the current culture of farming in this region of the state.

ciency of homes, small businesses, and public buildings. The following is a continuation of my efforts to coordinate with the Kansas Corporation Commission in order to highlight the efficiency programs.

Weatherization Assistance Program (www.kshousingcorp.org/programs/wap.shtml)

This long-standing grant program, operating by the Kansas Housing Resources Corporation, targets Kansas households with incomes up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level or 75 percent of the state median income, whichever is higher. Eligible Kansans can receive weatherization assistance for improvements in single- or multi-family residences, including manufactured homes. The program is open to renters. For more information, contact Kansas Housing Resources Corporation (785) 296-4990.

Facility Conservation Improvement Program (FCIP) (www.kcc.state.ks.us/energy/fcip/index.htm)

The FCIP is designed to help public entities — state, cities, counties and schools — use energy savings performance contracting to access financing for energy-efficiency projects. The State Energy Office operates it. For more information, call the State Energy Office (785-271-3170).

Energy Manager Grant Program (www.kcc.ks.gov/energy/arra/energymgr.htm)

This new grant program, operated by the State Energy Office, provides coalitions of local governments (cities, counties, school districts) with a \$50,000 annual stipend for up to two years to enable them to hire an energy manager. Energy managers will develop both short- and long-term plans for each of the coalition members, with the goal of reducing energy usage in both the public and private section. The application deadline for this grant is April 15. For more information, download the program description and application (www.kcc.ks.gov/energy/arra/energymgr.htm), or call the State Energy office (785) 271-3170.

In addition to the programs listed above, USDA Rural Development offers the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) grants and loans, targeting agricultural producers and small rural businesses. For more information about REAP, contact David Kramer (david.kramer@ks.usda.gov; (785) 271-2736.

"We must be opportunistic out here," Franklin explains. "When we have enough moisture and the conditions look favorable to produce a crop, we need to be able to plant such a crop and know if we do have a drought, hail or some other act of God, we can protect ourselves."

The protection he and the other producers were talking about is crop insurance. Western Kansas crop producers have always been quick to seek new cropping rotations that benefit their bottom line. This includes continuously planting non-irrigated acres.

"You can't penalize these producers for hail, drought and Mother Nature," says Steve Baccus, KFB president and Ottawa County farmer. "Because of their high input costs, machinery costs and cash rents, they cannot afford to let this land lay idle. It has to be placed into production throughout the year."

Eliminating crop insurance will not work for producers in western Kansas, Baccus says. He pledged to take the suggestions and ideas of producers in attendance at the two meetings to RMA.

"We're going to tell RMA not to make any changes immediately," Baccus says. "Let's hold the line for 2010 and 2011. We are committed to a workable solution for our farmers and RMA."

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau has been writing about farming and ranching in Kansas for more than 25 years. He is the managing editor of "Kansas Living," a quarterly magazine dedicated to agriculture and rural life in Kansas.