

Welcome

It's become a tradition at Nor' West News-papers that all the editors and reporters get together each year to produce an in-depth examination of some subject of interest to all our readers across northwest Kansas.

These special sections have focused on water, schools, hospitals and health care and our aging population, among other issues. The project on Rural Schools won both the Burton Marvin Award from the University of Kansas for News Enterprise, and the Victor Murdock Award for outstanding journalistic standards from the Kansas Press Association.

The staffs of our newspapers — *the Goodland Star-News*, *Colby Free Press*, *Saint Francis Herald*, *Bird City Times*, *Oberlin Herald* and *Norton Telegram* — sometimes joined by other area newspaper, typically work over two months to produce one report.

It's a far more in-depth look at the subjects

than we can afford to do in any one issue or paper.

This year's section focuses on economic development across the region, giving readers an idea of what's going on and what may or may not be working. It includes a "report card" for each county, shows expenditures, along with job and population trends.

Cynthia Haynes of *The Oberlin Herald* was the lead editor in putting the section together. Kim Davis, managing editor in Oberlin, handled assignments, and Mary Lou Olson read proof. Karla Jones did pages and Steve Haynes served as copy editor. Writers and editors from each papers contributed.

Finally, our advertisers deserve thanks for making this edition possible.

We couldn't do it without their support, but in return, they get exposure in all six of our community newspapers serving the northwest corner of Kansas.

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Help is available

By Tom Betz

The Goodland Star-News
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You woke up at 2 a.m. with a great business idea, and unlike most people you got up and wrote it all down so you could look at it in the light of day.

The notes sound good, but now the question is where or who can help transform the idea into a business success. From the federal, state, region and local level, help is available to the entrepreneur with answers to questions ranging from simple to complex.

The Internet can be a great way to research details to help flesh out a business idea, and to find contact people and organizations that may be able to help convert the idea into reality.

At the state level, the Kansas Department of Commerce has a wealth of information. The First Stop Clearinghouse was created to help people wanting to expand or start a business, said Dan Steffen, project manager for the northwest Kansas office of the Business Development Division.

Available from the state site is a Steps to Success guide which Steffen said can help the entrepreneur find his or her way through the federal and state regulations and includes information about financial assistance programs from federal and state agencies.

"One phone call to the First Stop Clearinghouse will provide all information, rules, regulations, licenses, and forms necessary as a condition of doing business," he said. "The office will determine the registrations required specific to occupation, legal status, employment choices and taxation and provide a packet of forms and expanded resource information."

Steffen said the state clearinghouse and the U.S. Small Business Administration are two of the avenues his regional office, at 332 E. Eighth Street in Hays, can use to help a new or existing business.

One of the first things a new business person finds is they need a business plan, and Steffen said his office and others in the region are willing to help.

"Taking time up-front to explore and evaluate the business and personal goals can increase the success of a business," he said. "The information can be used to build a well-thought-out business plan that will help the entrepreneur reach these goals.

"Starting and managing a business takes motivation, desire, and talent. It also takes research and planning. The process of developing a business plan will help the person think through important issues that they may not have considered. The plan will become a valuable tool as the entrepreneur sets out to raise money for a busi-

Non-profit groups help

By Patty Decker

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Hill City in Graham County is home to three nonprofit organizations that together injected more than \$20 million last year into the 18 counties of northwest Kansas.

Pioneer Country Development, the Northwest Kansas Planning and Development Commission and Northwest Kansas Housing Inc. all work under one roof help create economic opportunities, stimulate business and enhance the quality of life for people in northwest Kansas.

Steve Hanson, business finance officer, says the organizations are there to help.

"If someone has a good business plan, we can finance them," Mr. Hanson said, "or if a city, rural area or county wants to improve their infrastructure, we can assist, or if towns are looking for help in building affordable housing for low to moderate incomes, we can do it."

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

When cities or counties want to improve their facilities by building a new water tower, upgrading or adding sewer and water systems, buying fire trucks or ambulances, building a new fire station or rehabilitating housing, the commission can help.

"The commission can write the grant (applications) to make these infrastructure improvements possible," Mr. Hanson said.

The one requirement is proof that 51 percent of the people served by a project are in low to moderate income ranges, he said.

"We might have to go in and do a survey us-

ing the 2000 census report," he said, "but if this requirement is met, then we can write the grants for specific upgrades."

The commission does not charge for the grant writing, he said, but does take an administration fee on the grant. Based on a county's assessed valuation, the commission could receive anywhere from \$10,000 to \$15,000 on a grant, he said.

By administering grants, the commission continues to sustain itself financially — thus offering help to other towns or counties.

The commission has a board made up of representatives from each of the 18 counties it serves. Members include Doyle Brown representing Oberlin and Decatur County; Ken Christiansen and Gerry Fulwider of Colby for Thomas County; Elmer Kellner of St. Francis for Cheyenne County; Robert Scott and Rose Wessel of Oakley for Logan County; and Ron Schamberger and Eric Washington of Hoxie in Sheridan County. Fred Stacker represents Wallace County; Mitch Tiede Sherman County; Charles Unger for Rawlins County; and Rose Wessel for Oakley.

PIONEER COUNTRY DEVELOPMENT

In the same office, Pioneer Country Development, helps to finance business ventures by working with the U.S. Small Business Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture, banks and the state, Mr. Hanson said.

"We have two revolving loan funds available," he added.

An example of the revolving loan fund, known as the 7A, Mr. Hanson explained using



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