

# Logan County director does it all

By Jan Katz Ackerman

*Colby Free Press*  
ackermanjk@ruraltel.net

Business growth in Logan County is under the watchful eye of a relatively new economic development corporation and its director.

"I'm the do-all person," Jamie Bell joked. "I'm the janitor, the bookkeeper, the marketer and financial manager. I do it all."

Mr. Bell, executive director since last July, said Logan County Development Corp. was established May 8, 1997. Corporate bylaws adopted on April 24, 2001, list the directors of the nonprofit organization as Lynn Marcy, Jerry Robben, Linda and Shelly Plummer and Barbara Shelton. The first executive director was Gorden Pfannesteil, who served from 1997 to 2001.

"The corporation basically started from a Community Capacity grant through the Kansas Department of Commerce," Mr. Pfannesteil said. "It was a grant for communities to basically make improvements, for example, opening an economic development office."

Following Mr. Pfannesteil was Fred Jones, who served as executive director until June 2006.

Mr. Jones said the agency needs to continue to focus on Logan County's largest assets, which he believes are its location and its people.

"Logan County intersects with three federal highways and a Class 1 railway," Mr. Jones said. "That should be something that gets interest. I

think the community needs to rally behind continued development of the Interstate 70 and U.S. 40 interchange. The potential economic impact is great, especially if you are talking about tapping into a market that will leave money in the community and not require all the other services that government provides."

Local people volunteered time and talents to the Ivory Street Apartment project, which Mr. Jones oversaw in 2005. Located on the east side of Oakley, the four duplexes are income-based rental units built through a Community Development Block grant from the Department of Commerce.

Like Mr. Jones, Mr. Bell said he believes Logan County needs to focus on what it already has rather than look at attracting large businesses.

"Everybody is competing for those businesses," he said. "We need to look beyond that and focus on small business owners. We need to provide them an opportunity to grow."

The agency gets most of its money from tax support, he said. The City of Oakley gives \$20,000 a year, Logan County \$24,000, and \$20,000 comes in from private donations.

Mr. Bell said he believes if the economic picture of agriculture does not improve, or at least remain where it is at, the county will suffer.

Mr. Bell said while his predecessor supported trying to attract dairies to Logan County, he does not.

"I know Fred (Jones) worked with wKREDA (the Western Kansas Rural Economic Develop-

ment Alliance) and I have not," Mr. Bell said. "I have visited some dairies, but I don't think they are the economic solution we are looking for. On the other hand, I'm glad to see dairies go in, but I don't think they are a big part of (economic development)."

wKREDA covers 26 counties in western Kansas. Mr. Bell said it is a grassroots organization that promotes working together to provide an exchange of ideas and information about community and rural development activities. Part of the dialogue focuses around attracting dairies to western Kansas.

Mr. Bell said the most significant economic development for Logan County in the past 10 years has been construction of the ethanol plant four miles east of Oakley at Campus, actually in Gove County.

"Fred and Logan County Development did a lot," he said. "Although not located in Logan County, the ethanol plant provides several well-paying jobs. And I always welcome the opportunity to help out a farmer or rancher."

Mr. Bell is promoting a Jericho Convention in Oakley on Sept. 14-16, planned to draw fans and stars of the CBS prime-time drama about the fictitious town known as Jericho, which replicates Oakley's location on I-70, at the intersection of U.S. 83 and U.S. 40.

The convention is expected to draw some 3,000 fans to meet with television producers and actors. Bell, along with volunteers, hope the three-day convention will address thoughts pre-

## Logan County

- **Money spent** for economic development in Logan County in 2006 — \$64,000.
- **Population** today 2,675, in 2000 3,046, in 1990 3,081, in 1980, 3,478.
- **People working** today 1,387, in 2000 1,579, in 1990 1,541, in 1980 2,190.
- **Economic Development Director** — Jamie Bell, seven months service.
- **EDC office** at 216 Center Ave., Oakley. Phone (785) 672-4550.
- **Median family income** in 2000 — \$33,007.

sented in the program about what residents would do in the aftermath of a nuclear disaster.

Board members are Troy Faulkender, president; Mark Watkins, Cora Lee Samuelson, Matt Mildenerger, Donita Sparks, who represents the county, and Rose Wessel, who represents Oakley.

Not all of the corporation's achievements are understood by the public, Mr. Robben said.

"Sometimes it has been hard for people to see what the director has done," he said, "because they are used to a business coming to town on its own and not realizing that nowadays a business needs a lot of information about the area or workforce before making a decision on where to locate."

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