

# Economic group keeps costs below budget

By Veronica Monier

The Norton Telegram  
vmonier@nwkansas.com

The economic development office works hard to help keep Norton County a good place to live, while staying under budget.

Outgoing Economic Development Director Wade Carter said they stayed well under their \$100,000 budget in 2006, spending \$62,459. Payroll, he said, was the biggest expense. The office also spent money on office equipment and rent, memberships to associations like Northwest Kansas Planning and Development and advertising.

He said they are still well under budget for 2007 and have spent only \$40,515, or 36.6 percent of their budget, halfway through the year.

The budget comes from a combination of Norton County and Norton city money. The county pays 60 percent of all office expenditures and payroll, while the city pays 40 percent. The cities of Almena and Lenora both pay dues of \$500 a year, while the city of Clayton pays \$100. Edmond opted out of the board last year.

The board, formed in 2005, has two representatives from the Norton County Commission, two from the



Diane Becker



Wade Carter

Norton City Council, one each for Almena, Lenora and Clayton, two county at-large representatives appointed by the commission and two city at-large representatives appointed by the council.

Mr. Carter said they have been busy this year, working on housing, business expansions, prison labor, the Neighborhood Revitalization Act, a promoting Norton County campaign, which includes a self-guided tour, extensive web site updates, a water project in Edmond, expansion of the industrial park in Norton, grants to fix the Clayton City Hall roof and the Norton Public Library, housing in Almena and an open-air market.

"Personally, I think we're doing well," Mr. Carter said. "A lot of projects are coming to fruition. I'm kind of sad I won't be here to see them

finished, but, hopefully, the new director, will be able to complete them.

"There are also a lot of projects we're working on that we can't talk about. When they're finished, I think people will be surprised."

Mr. Carter said they've had some success and people are getting more involved with community efforts.

"The No. 1 asset here has to be the people, the work ethic," he said.

He said the county has a thriving manufacturing industry, including New Age, Natoma, Miltech, Otter Manufacturing and Brooks Manufacturing. The Sebelius Reservoir, he said, is an ace in the hole.

"The minute it fills up, it will bring in a lot of revenue," he said. "It already does bring in quite a bit of revenue — motels, meals and shopping dollars that recycle in the community."

Mr. Carter said the area has jobs at the Norton Correctional Facility, the Kansas Department of Transportation district headquarters, several confined-animal feeding operations, Rural Telephone in Lenora and Valley Hope, on top of a many smaller businesses. A golf course, race track, movie theater and many entrepreneurs and self-proprietors help make Norton County great, he said.

"Norton is such a thriving community," he said. "It's one of only five profitable counties in northwest Kansas. We need to keep working hard, keep pushing to get youth to come home."

Mr. Carter said the county needs to work on its youth retention.

"We need to increase the interest in what we do well here with the younger generation," he said. "Starting at Eisenhower (Elementary) and on into junior high and high school, we need to keep these kids. They are the future."

Toward that goal, he said they have been working with the alumni association to get lists of graduates, whom they are contacting to find out what it would take to get them back. They are trying to get a job fair organized with the school districts and are making several other attempts, like the [www.discoverNorton.com](http://www.discoverNorton.com) website, to get the county's name out there and bring people back in.

He said another thing needed is work force development. Right now, he said, there are between 45 and 60 jobs open on the economic development website. The major problem is they can't get anyone to fill them.

"It hampers expansions and pro-

ductivity," he said.

To help, they have been working with the Hays Workforce Center and Manpower and listing the jobs on the web site.

"This situation circles back into youth retention," he said. "If young people come home or new people move out here, we could fill these open jobs. That, in turn, would increase expansion possibilities and productivity, which would increase money coming into the county."

The office will be moving on Aug. 1, to 117 N. Norton, Suite B as the present location has been sold.

There will also be a new director. Mr. Carter is leaving for law school and his last day will be Aug. 15. Diane Becker will take over.

Members of the board are John Miller and Richard Thompson, county commissioners; Donna Foley and Elaine Mann, Norton City Council; Gayle James, Lenora City Council representative; Barb Brooks, Clayton City Council representative; Brad Hopkins, Almena City Council representative; Deena Wente and John Engelbert, Norton at-large representatives; and Curtis Eveleigh and Ada Arford, county at-large representatives.

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### As of August 1st:

the Norton County Economic Development office  
will be located at:  
113 N. Norton, Suite B, Norton, KS 67654  
785-874-4816



Learn more about Norton County at

DiscoverNorton.Com