

Voters say yes on ballot

By a nearly three-to-one margin, Midwest Energy members voted to allow the cooperative to regulate itself, giving its member-elected board most of the decision-making authority previously held by the Kansas Corporation Commission.

Nearly 50,000 ballots were mailed to members in April. A total of 11,115 completed ballots were returned to Adams, Brown, Beran and Ball of Hays, an independent accounting firm retained to count the ballots and certify the results. The final count was 8,001 members (72 percent) voting "Yes" for self-regulation, with 3,114 (28 percent) voting "No."

"We were very pleased with the strong ballot response," said Midwest President and General Manager Earnie Lehman. "We made every effort and took every opportunity to inform members how self-regulation would help our cooperative, and the strong turnout is an indicator we hit our target."

The drive for self-regulation began in January, with an employee and member education campaign using direct mailings, radio and newspaper ads to outline the proposal. Town-hall-style meetings were held in Great Bend, Colby, Scott City and Hays in March and April for members who wanted to discuss the proposal.

"I appreciate the vote of confidence the membership has placed in our board," said John Blackwell, board chairman. "While this ultimately makes our board more accountable, it positions us better for future opportunities while eliminating significant overhead costs for our members."

With the vote, Midwest becomes the 28th of 29 electric cooperatives in Kansas to become self-regulated since the Legislature authorized the system in 1992. The commission still has final oversight over board decisions, the co-op says, but the change will eliminate much of the paperwork and cost of regular rate filings.



Kids and staff play game

THE TRADITIONAL sixth grade-staff kick ball game took place last Wednesday, the day before the last day of school, at Oberlin Elementary School. Drew Juenemann (above) took a turn pitching the kick ball to the kicker while Madelaine Johnson watched from behind. Cindy Sheaffer (left) fielded the ball. After several innings, the game was declared a tie.

— Photos by Carol Dixon

County to get equipment from the government

By STEPHANIE DeCAMP
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It's one thing to turn down equipment from the federal government when you're concerned about cost, maintenance or other strings that may be attached, but when they up and offer it to you for free, why not?

After deciding not to participate in a federal Homeland Security program, which included computer technology called Mobile Unit Express, Decatur County commissioners went ahead and took the feds up on the deal after Emergency Preparedness Director

Jacque Boultinghouse told them at the May 14 meeting that the agency had ordered too many of the units and was offering them to the county for free.

The mobile units are basically laptop and tablet computers, she said. They were offered as part of an identification system. The commissioners were wary of the program, however, and didn't want to implement the identification system, so they turned it down.

"If there is... a disaster, we can log the people, workers and equipment that comes in," Ms. Boultinghouse said at a meeting in November. "It

would make it easier to work with, (the federal agency) since it would all be logged.

In some respect, it will help all the players in the county follow an incident command system, as well as know how to use it if we go help another county, out."

The commissioners agreed to accept the computers, but that wasn't all. Ms. Boultinghouse told them that the agency would be sending them a thermal imaging camera as well, also on the house. She said each county in the northwest region of Kansas would be receiving one. She said the cameras have

proven useful in car accidents and disasters where people have to be found after dark or under difficult circumstances, since they register body heat.

In other business, commissioners: • Gave approval to Road Supervisor Tim Stallman to use \$7,000 for road culverts, purchase \$8,000 in road-grader blades and buy a split load of on-road and off-road diesel fuel, one which the price was to be reported at this week's meeting.

• Heard from Noxious Weed Control Director Gaylen Huntley that his department is already starting

to find musk thistle and had treated a patch of hoary crest on the golf course.

Mr. Huntley said he has sent out over 100 letters to area farmers encouraging them to check their low-lying areas for musk thistle in particular.

"Our spring must have been Saturday and Sunday, and now we're in summertime," said Mr. Huntley. "We're about a month behind because of the weather.... It's going to be a mess this year, because we'll have multiple stages of (weeds) coming up."

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