



Council addresses Economic Dev. *Music lifts the spirit of Christmas*

By Rosalie Ross

When Atwood City Council met in regular session Dec. 19 they opened with a public hearing concerning amendments to the 2024 budget. Hearing no public comment, the amendments were passed.

Deb Minkler, Rawlins County Economic Development Director, presented an oral and written report of her activities during the last quarter. She reported that work toward the new day care center is ongoing but progress is slow mainly due to many state government regulations.

Minkler said she is working with the Department of Commerce on a project 'Love Kansas,' which is an effort to bring new residents to the state, or better yet, to Rawlins County. She is also working with two new businesses on securing Community Development Block Grants. A McDonald organization benefited from a grant and was able to demolish three old houses.

Council voted to authorize Mayor Janet Stice to sign a contract for Lifeline Assessments with Northwest Kansas Environmental Innovation Center.

Cedric Green, representing SurePoint Ag Systems, was present to discuss the project of getting city water to the rural site where the company is expanding their business. Engineer David

Blau from Miller and Associates contributed to the discussion. The council voted to move forward with Miller and Associates in an investigation of the water project's possibilities in design and construction.

Approval was given for the adoption of the airport's new Minimum Standards for Aeronautical Activity guidelines. County commissioners had already given approval.

Council passed an ordinance regarding the regulations of land disturbance which will take effect after publication.

City Superintendent Rick Kramer reported that the street work on both Blaine and Pearl Streets is complete. He said the pump at the sewer had been repaired and is working well.

Council voted for a 3% cost of living pay increase for all city employees and set the 2025 city employee holiday schedule.

The meeting was conducted by Mayor Stice. Council members present were Dakota Dunker, Dietrich Kastens, Diana Tongish, Sandy Mulligan and Mark Vrbas. Also present were Dana Philpott, city clerk; Rick Kramer, city superintendent; Brian Withington, chief of police and Charles Peckham, city attorney.

The next regular council meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m. Jan. 16 at City Hall.

By Rosalie Ross

Music filled the air and it began with the audience joining in Christmas carols at the Community Christmas program Dec. 19 at the First Christian Church in Atwood.

Musicians included young pianists Charlie Hatfield, Landon Hatfield, Reece Dunker, Grayson Dunker, Aurora Dill, Emily Sis and Rysley Wilkinson making their piano debut. The RCHS show choir and the Sacred Heart church choir sang seasonal selections.

There were duets by Steve Woody and Sara Schmidt, James and Robin Brown and Adam Ketterl and Scott Ross. Soloists who brought both traditional Christmas hymns and livelier current numbers included April Miller, Elayne Eunson, Michelle Moses, Virginia Heble and Elizabeth Thomas.

Among the accompanists were Brenda Henry, Virginia Heble and Gleneva Higley. Michelle Moses was the program's emcee and Pauline Micek the organizer and director.

Refreshments were served after the performances to guests who visited while enjoying cookies made by church women of the community.

"This evening is a great way to catch the spirit of Christmas," was one guest's comment.



Rysley Wilkinson (above) plays a piano duet with her teacher, Virginia Heble. Several youngsters delighted the audience with their performances at the community Christmas program. Michelle Moses (left), Master of Ceremonies, kept the program moving as choirs, duets and soloists shared their music Dec. 19.

Photos by Kathy Ross

Board of Education approves use of jr.-sr. high gym for home games

By Kati Latulip

USD 105 Board of Education met Dec. 16 in regular session.

The board approved minutes from the Nov. 18 regular meeting, Dec. 4 and Dec. 9 special meetings. The payment of claims was approved as presented.

Superintendent Eric Stoddard discussed the district's Kansas Education Systems Accreditation (KESA) plan process.

The district has continued to work on opening the existing jr.-sr. high school gym for games and events. Sports teams have already been using the gym for practices. The board approved several home games and wrestling matches.

The board approved the district's updated meal guidelines as presented.

The board discussed concerns about heating issues on one of the district's activity buses.

Superintendent Stoddard walked through the district's new student information portal, which will show information like testing scores, grades and absences. Staff will familiarize themselves with the program in January before introducing it to parents.

Stoddard also shared principal building and superintendent organization reports and discussed various impacts to budgeting.

Jr.-Sr. High Principal Report

Principal Jeff Samson reported the following:

- The second round of FastBridge testing complete.
- The jr.-sr. high school band and choirs held a winter concert and it went well.
- Jr.-sr. high band members are selling blankets as a fundraiser.
- The RCHS show choir will be performing at the Community Christmas program Dec. 19.
- Peyton Juenemann was selected for all-state choir. Dorian Culwell is an alternate.
- Creative Arts Club (CAC) held a gingerbread house competition.
- Eighth grade wood shop classes will switch at semester.
- Kyle Grafel's residential construction class has been working with the Rawlins

County Historical Society on a handicap-accessible outhouse restroom for Stevens Chapel.

- High school girls basketball team were back to back champions at the Castle Rock Classic tournament.
- The school hosted both jr. and sr. high scholars bowl meets.
- The new 7-9 English teacher and music teacher will be starting at semester.

Elementary Principal Report

Principal Lacy Sramek reported the following:

- Elementary students have already held their Christmas program.
- Students began FastBridge testing after Thanksgiving break and are nearly finished.

- There is a new teacher who will be teaching second, fourth, fifth and sixth grade music. Third grade schedules could not be rearranged to accommodate the changes.
- Students will go to the Jayhawk Theatre to see a movie.
- Sramek noted that Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) training, a state-mandated teacher licensure requirement for elementary teachers, is estimated to take between 137 and 168 hours outside of school time for teachers to complete.

Following executive session, the board approved the hiring of Jennifer Emahizer as an elementary paraprofessional and

accepted the resignation of Victoria Hadley as a high school math teacher, effective at the end of the school year.

Board members Terry Ballard, Jordan Dunker, Matt Finley, David Horinek, Tim McFee and Amber Timm; Administrators Stoddard, Samson and Sramek; District Clerk Emily Green, IT Director Chandler Pettibone, and educators Jennifer Kastens, Sara Schmidt were present.

No action was taken upon return from an executive session for student issues.

The next regular meeting is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Monday, Jan. 20 at Rawlins County Elementary School.

Sip n' Shop event a festive sendoff



Several local vendors set up for a Christmas shopping event inside Mojo Espresso & Bistro Friday. Some of the items for sale included Christmas ornaments, antiques, cookies, honey, essential oils, Mary Kay products. It was recently announced on Mojo Espresso's Facebook page that their final day of business will be Dec. 31, as the owners have been unable to find a buyer.

High speed chase ends near Atwood

By Steve Haynes
for the Oberlin Herald

A 20-year-old woman led officers on a chase through downtown Oberlin at 55 to 60 mph about 8 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 5, then a few minutes later, out U.S. 36 to Atwood, where a sheriff's deputy bumped the back of the pickup she was driving, causing it to skid to a stop.

The alleged driver, Takota Alexia Malone, 20, was being held in the Thomas County Jail last week; bond was continued at \$250,000 after a first appearance Friday before Decatur County District Magistrate Judge Jay Tate. Then she was taken to jail in Colby.

During the chase, at least one Decatur County patrol vehicle was damaged. Speeds ranged

from about 30 mph past 90. Officers learned there was a gun in the pickup and prepared for a "felony stop," weapons drawn. Later, one deputy was taken to the Atwood hospital to be checked for possible injuries.

The incident began as an Oberlin Police officer, Assistant Chief Dennis Wangari, went to investigate a family disturbance. The young woman apparently jumped into a pickup and fled, with speeds first at 35 mph, quickly jumping to 90 while still in town.

She drove down Penn Avenue into downtown. There, the officer was instructed to "back off" because of the speed and reported erratic driving. She took off east on Commercial Street,

See CHASE, Page 2