



# THE OSKALOOSA Independent

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"Six Months Older Than The State Of Kansas"

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## Volleyball season is underway

by Bridget Weishaar

High School volleyball teams across the county headed back to the courts this week to begin the 2024 season.

The Oskaloosa Bears along with the McLouth Bulldogs traveled to Valley Falls to play the host team Dragons, while the Jefferson County North

Chargers traveled to Riverside to play the Cyclones and the Horton Chargers.

Following is a look into the upcoming seasons.

### McLouth Bulldogs

The McLouth Bulldogs head coach Jessie Bouza has returned for her second season.

Bouza retired Somer Wyatt, Anna Patz, and Marissa Caray last spring, but returns three seniors to the team in Abby Patz, Piper Sheeley, and Calleigh McColley. The trio will play universal roles on the court along with numerous underclassmen.

Brooklyn Mahon and Amora Cheeks are returning sophomores with varsity experience. Freshmen Maddy Turner and Macey Schempp will also play big roles for the Bulldogs, according to Bouza.

The Bulldogs have 16 rostered this season and will need girls to transition from junior varsity to varsity when asked.

"I think we will be better than last year, we're a very young team," Bouza said. "Out of my 16 girls, seven are freshmen and five are sophomores. The girls are very willing to work and want to help build this program and community spirit."

### Oskaloosa Bears

The Bears will once again start their season under a new head coach. Replacing Megan Haynie from the previous season is Lisa Gourley.

Gourley hails from Tulsa, Okla., where she coached club volleyball for the past five years. Born and raised in Kansas, she made the move to Jefferson County to be closer to her family.

"As a new coach to Kansas, this season will be a learning curve for all of us, but I have complete faith in these athletes to help not only me, but each other rise to the goals we have set for ourselves," Gourley said.

The Bears have three seniors on this season's team, Lexi Bradshaw, Ashlyn Logan, and Kyra King. The Bears lost Makayla Boyd, Dana Chavez, Cambrey Malsbury, and Lex Messale to graduation this spring.

Underclassmen Hallie Wright, Hadley Houk, and Lydia Turner will also see varsity playing time.

"I am really looking forward to the 2024 season. I'm excited to see what the girls will do," Gourley said. "They have been working hard in preparation for our upcoming games in Valley Falls."

### Jefferson County North Chargers

The Jefferson County North Chargers ended their season as the sub-state runner-up, just missing their chance at a repeat performance at the state tournament.

The Chargers boasted a 33-10 record in 2022 and were third in the Class 2A state tournament. Last season they held a 34-7 overall record.

The Chargers lost six to graduation, but return a core group of players to the court in 2024.

Returning to the varsity roster are Kennadi Hernandez, senior; Rylee Thompson, junior; and Taylor Schrick, sophomore. Underclassman who saw varsity playing time will fill in the holes for head coach David Schuler.

"We have a young team and will gain early season experience, but as always, we strive to contend for a league championship and post-season success," Schuler said.

Schuler is entering his 11th year as head coach. In 2022, he earned the Kansas Volleyball Association 2A Program of the Year and last season collected his 300th career win.

## Gives opinion on county sewer system issues

by Rick Nichols

A seasoned wastewater technician doesn't think the lagoon that is part of the sewer system serving the Hilldale subdivision and West Shore Estates is experiencing "excessive seepage," according to the letter Jefferson County Health Department Administrator Crystal VanHoutan, R.N., got from him last month.

The Aug. 16 letter penned by Kansas Rural Water Association wastewater tech Charlie Schwindamann was read aloud by VanHoutan during the Board of County Commissioners meeting Aug. 19 and addressed five issues involving the sewer system that he had discussed with her and environmental specialist Casey Keirns 10 days earlier.

In offering his opinion on what he called "the needed corrections" to the system, Schwindamann told VanHoutan that he was "not an engineer" but that his suggestions were based on "decades of experience working with wastewater utilities."

Possible lagoon seepage was the third issue Schwindamann covered in his letter. County Commissioners David Christy, Richard Malm and Doug Walbridge also have discussed the subject with Hilldale and West Shore Estates residents at multiple board meetings in recent months.

Here is what the wastewater tech wrote in his letter: "SOLUTION: Due to the limited flow to the lagoon, I do not believe excessive seepage is an issue. The flow enters Cell No. 1, the east cell. Then, at about 12 inches of depth, it flows through pipes to the discharge structure to Cell No. 2. This was noted by the height of weed growth in Cell No. 2 near the inlet pipe from the discharge structure."

The first issue dealt with in the letter was "Collection system - repair and/or replacement." This is what the wastewater tech had to say about the subject: "SOLUTION: Point repair breaks and line replacement as needed. I suggest utilizing the engineering report for this. This will be the most expensive issue for the two systems," with systems being a reference to Jefferson County Sewer District No. 3 (Hilldale subdivision) and Jefferson County Sewer District No. 12 (West Shore Estates).

The second issue looked at in the letter was "Lift station replacement recommended by engineer." This is what the wastewater tech had to say about the subject: "SOLUTION: Casey and I inspected the lift station. Although it is old, there were not any major signs that it needed to be replaced immediately. I suggest you ask the contractor who repairs this lift station for their opinion. The only things I saw that possibly needed correction were the electrodes, which may need replacing, and the discharge pipe, which has some surface cracks, which may need replacing. The contractor can complete both."

The noting of the erosion of dikes in Cell No. 1 and the absence of erosion in Cell No. 2 constituted the fourth issue Schwindamann covered in his letter. With this in mind, he wrote as follows: "SOLUTION: The best solution would be to drain Cell No. 1, reshape the dikes, compact the bottom and sides, and add erosion control, commonly referred to as riprap. Properly reshaping and compacting the dikes and cell bottoms would ensure the seal of the dikes is maintained. Riprap is 2-5 inches in diameter

and should be hard rock. Do not utilize shale or limestone rock, as these deteriorate quickly.

"The erosion repair of these cells will need to be completed by a qualified contractor or possibly by the county road and bridge staff if they have the required equipment. The slopes should be reshaped to a new 3 to 1 slope and compacted to ensure less than 1/4 inch seepage per day. To complete this, each cell must be lowered to allow for compaction and installation of riprap. Complete one cell at a time, then repair the next cell until completed. The county may want to repair only Cell No. 1 and then, after a year or so of use, repair Cell No. 2 if utilized.

"2-5 inch diameter riprap should be added to existing cells. The riprap should be placed fully around each cell with a width of 16 feet from the top of the inner dike slope to the 3-foot operating depth level to a depth of 8 inches of riprap. The ground under the riprap should be properly sterilized to prevent vegetation growth."

The fifth and final issue examined by Schwindamann was "Staff gauges and structures repair." Here is what he wrote in his letter: "SOLUTION: Add staff 8-foot gauges to both cells. Usually, they are a pipe buried at least 2 feet in the bottom of the cell and 8 feet above the bottom of the cells. These should have marks for every 6 inches and numbers at every foot. The pipe would need to be filled with cement to prevent crushing during freezing. Staff gauges could also be flat and placed inside the structures.

"The structures do not need repair or replacement. However, they do need control gates

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## Bridge project scheduled in Perry Lake State Park

The Kansas Department of Transportation began a bridge repair project on K-900 (commonly known as K-237) in Jefferson County Sept. 3.

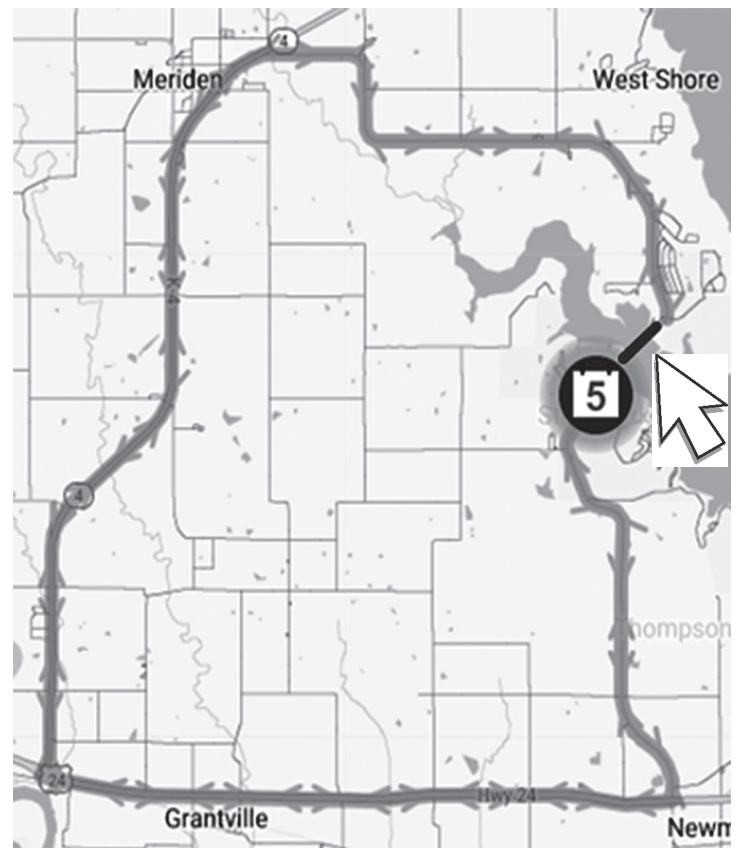
For the duration of the project, the Rock Creek bridge in Perry Lake State Park will be closed to traffic. Motorists can follow the signed detour on K-237, U.S. 24 and K-4, or use alternate routes that are not marked.

Work will occur Monday through Friday during daylight hours and is expected to be complete by May 2025, conditions permitting.

PCI Roads, of St. Michael, Minn., is the prime contractor for the \$266,000 project.

KDOT urges all motorists to be alert and obey the warning signs when approaching and driving through a highway work zone. To stay aware of highway construction projects across Kansas, go to [www.kandrive.org](http://www.kandrive.org) or call 5-1-1.

Map below shows the closure area marked with an arrow and detour route marked in grey.



## BOCC adopts budget for 2025

by Rick Nichols

Having heard from those who took full advantage of the chance to speak their peace, the Jefferson County Board of County Commissioners unanimously approved the proposed county budget for next year when Commissioners David Christy, Richard Malm, and Doug Walbridge assembled at Oskaloosa City Hall the afternoon of Aug. 26.

The action was taken on the heels of the required public hearing on the county's stated intention of exceeding the revenue neutral rate that had been calculated for it, 63.515 mills, for purposes of levying enough in property taxes to cover planned and possible expenditures.

That hearing brought about 25 people and several department heads to the city building and lasted an hour and 25 minutes. It was followed by a much shorter hearing on the budget itself.

The first hearing began with Christy mentioning the county's various sources of revenue (e.g., real property taxes and personal property taxes) before he touched on the subject of fluctuating expenses (e.g., gasoline and gravel) that make it "very difficult" for the county to "budget" for them. He then mentioned the "terrible decline" in the number of building permits for dwellings that were issued by the Planning and Zoning Department (now the Community Development Office) starting about 20 years ago.

The chairman of the board told his audience that the state of Kansas "has taken away a lot of our money" and went on to claim that the state is now in possession of about \$3.5 billion in ad valorem taxes that rightfully belong to its 105 counties. According to him, the county hasn't gotten any ad valorem tax money from the state for 20 years and could have reduced the property tax rate by four mills had it had some of this money.

The chairman also told his audience that when county leaders here and elsewhere asked state legislators how they were to make up the lost tax dollars, they were simply told, "Raise your mill levy. Raise your mill levy." According to Christy, the

first year of his current term as a commissioner (2021), the property tax rate was more than nine mills above the RNR, but during the years that have followed the gap between the rate and the RNR has decreased by 5.329 mills.

Christy also mentioned the Bledsoe settlement, which will cost the county \$7.5 million over a period of 10 plus years, before turning the floor over to those wishing to address the board.

A man who said he owns two properties along 118th Street told the board that he had appealed his valuations and went on to mention the multiple pages' worth of delinquent tax listings that had just been published in The Oskaloosa Independent, the official county newspaper.

According to Christy, who responded to the man's inquiry concerning the seemingly ever-increasing size of the county budget, the county is owed more than \$1 million in property taxes, enough to bridge the difference between the current property tax rate and the RNR.

Ed Buchanan, rural Grantville, was told in response to questions he had asked at an earlier board meeting that the county employed 170 people in 1994 and now employs 218 people. After quickly "doing the math," as they say, he wanted to know why the county's work force had grown by 25 percent in 30 years when its population hadn't.

Christy replied by noting both the creation of the Geographic Information Systems/Information Technology Department and the 911 system in the late 1990s, and reforms of a medical nature that have added to the county's continuing costs. In short, he said, the county needs more people.

Apparently frustrated by Buchanan's constant focus on the employment numbers, Malm asked him at one point, "What part of 'we need more people' don't you understand?" It was reported at one point that in 1994 the annual county payroll totaled \$606,000, while these days it tops the \$2 million mark. Buchanan jumped on the 300 plus percent increase in the outlay for wages and said, "You can't justify that."

In responding to Buchanan, both Christy and Walbridge

focused on the challenge the county faces in trying to hire the employees it needs in a very competitive labor market, and both of them noted the sharp rise in the cost of motor graders over the years in discussing county expenses in general.

Richard Quimby, Oskaloosa, asked the commissioners what the RNR really means and received a non-technical explanation from Christy along the lines of it is when a governmental body's spending matches its income. Quimby then went on to assert that "that doesn't work for the rest of us" and reminded the commissioners that they had the power to control spending on the county level.

"It (raising the mill levy in response to inflationary pressures) can't go on forever," Quimby emphasized to Christy, Malm, and Walbridge.

McLouth area resident Kevin Montgomery wanted to know why the commissioners couldn't hold off for a year, or at least until the general election is over, before taking any actions with financial ramifications. "Wait one year to see how things go," he commented. "Just postpone this tax increase."

"By statute, we have to meet the county's needs," Christy replied.

A woman wanted the concept of the RNR explained to her and ultimately got an explanation from County Counselor Josh Ney, who observed that the RNR falls as appraised values rise, and that it would increase were appraised values to decline.

A Nancy Leek immediately let the commissioners know about her financial situation, telling them that she is living on a limited income. "I don't envy you, but be aware that there are people struggling just to pay their taxes," she said.

A few minutes later, after Christy had mentioned the state's decision to lower property taxes on so-called "big box stores," Leek offered this conclusion in reacting to the move: "We're all having to make up for the mistakes they make in Topeka."

Perry area resident Wayne Sylvester asked the commissioners about property owners who fail to pay the taxes on

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