

# County approves 2026 budget, hears road woes



Commissioner John Brocker signs his approval on the 2026 budget for Allen County. REGISTER/SARAH HANEY

**By SARAH HANEY**  
The Iola Register

Allen County Commissioners blended routine procedures with a shift in funding priorities at their meeting Tuesday night.

After approving revenue hearings for rural fire and sewer districts, commissioners unanimously adopted the county's 2026 budget — a plan that trims the mill levy but includes a significant reduction in funding for mental health services.

Commissioners approved

six resolutions that allow Allen County, Rural Fire District numbers 2, 3, and 4, and Sewer Districts No. 1 and No. 2 to exceed the revenue neutral rate, which limits spending to last year's funding levels.

**COMMISSION** Chairman Jerry Daniels then opened the 2026 Budget Hearing.

One of the most striking changes in the proposed budget was a \$159,960 decrease for mental health services, stemming from the commission's decision to reduce funding for the Southeast

Kansas Mental Health Center (SEKMHC) from \$167,000 to just \$1 for the upcoming fiscal year.

The drastic cut aligns with recent actions by other counties in SEKMHC's six-county service area, many of which have reduced or withdrawn financial support.

The move follows heightened scrutiny of the center's executive compensation packages, particularly the salary and benefits of CEO Nathan Fawson, who in 2023 received \$436,133 in salary

See COUNTY | Page A8

# A jam-packed weekend slate



Kathe Hamman shows a pictorial display of some of Yates Center's most prominent citizens, one of several attractions that will be featured this weekend as part of the community's sesquicentennial celebration. REGISTER/RICHARD LUKEN

## Yates Center celebrates 150 years

**By RICHARD LUKEN**  
The Iola Register

**YATES CENTER** — You wouldn't know it by looking at it, but a small well on the northeast corner of Yates Center's downtown square plays a part in the town's history.

The hand-dug well proved back in the 1800s that if residents wished to locate there, they'd still have a source of water.

Wells were dug, at the insistence of landowner Abner Yates, to prove there was suf-

See YATES CENTER | Page A7



Women are dressed as flowers during the 2024 Colony Day Parade. REGISTER FILE PHOTO

## Colony sets fun-filled Saturday

**COLONY** — It's difficult to know which will be the biggest draw; the homemade salsa competition or the pie-eating contest. Or maybe it will be the fish and chips for lunch. But then again, the ice cream social and the cakewalk are sure to tempt the palate.

Whatever your preference, Saturday's Colony Day will be a culinary delight as well as loads of fun for the entire family.

"Seeds of Tomorrow" is the day's theme, a testament to the small town's staying power.

All events will be held along Broad Street, beginning with an 8 a.m. walk/run through the town, sponsored by the Crest High School cross country team.

At 11 a.m. is the kids tractor pull.

Also at 11 o'clock, the Colony Lions Club will begin serving fish and chips.

The parade begins at 1 p.m. This year's grand marshals are Cathy and Dennis Allen, Debbie and Leonard Wools and Marilyn Thexton.

Following the parade is

See COLONY | Page A3

## Middle of Everywhere Music Festival finds its footing

**By RICHARD LUKEN**  
The Iola Register

**HUMBOLDT** — The fourth annual Middle of Everywhere Festival — a three-day celebration of blues and roots music — returns Friday through Sunday in Humboldt.

Damaris Kunkler of A Bolder Humboldt, the driving force and founder of the music festival, is once again bringing in a group of talented musicians from across the midwest.

"This year is probably the most diverse in terms of music genres," Kunkler said this week.

That's been her dream since she started Middle of Everywhere in 2022: to find musicians from across Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma and Arkansas, "and have them meet here, in the middle," she said. "Which is why we call it that."

Kunkler also is specific in finding the preferred music

styles, from electric blues, to ragtime, perhaps some soul and R&B mixed in. She also strives for a balance between male and female performers.

As Middle of Everywhere has grown in stature, the challenge of finding performers has shifted.

"The first year, I had to find everyone" to perform, Kunkler noted. "The second year, I still had to beat the bushes."

But word of the festival, and its large, appreciative crowds, soon spread.

By year three, she had to do minimal searching because performers had begun reaching out to Kunkler to be included in the set list.

Even more have reached out since then.

"This year I had to tell some people 'No,'" Kunkler said, noting the set list was already filled.

"And we already have next year booked, too," she added.



Damaris Kunkler shows off a new lighting system inside the Revival Music Hall in Humboldt, site of Saturday's Middle of Everywhere Music Festival. REGISTER/RICHARD LUKEN

**THE SETTING** changes for each night of the music festival.

Friday's shows are a "music crawl" in downtown Humboldt, with Emree Gabriel, a 15-year-old singer-songwriter from Lawrence opening the fun at Octagon City Coffee Company.

See HUMBOLDT | Page A3