

Fire in the hole!



Linn County Fire Chief Randy Hegwald fires off a canon full of candy during the Pleasanton Easter Egg Hunt held Saturday at Pleasanton Elementary School. Kids were broken into age groups beginning with 4 and under. Two canons were wheeled into the gymnasium due to rain on Saturday; kids won prizes from bicycles to toys and every one of them walked away with a bag full of gathered candy. See more photos on Pg. B6.

JACKIE TAYLOR | LINN COUNTY NEWS

16 criminal cases from Tanglewood Lake incident dismissed

BY BARBARA PROFFITT
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Late Wednesday afternoon, April 16, orders were filed dismissing all 16 current cases on file in Linn County District Court concerning the Tanglewood Lake gate incident, 14 of which were filed against separate individuals that stemmed from the incident

in May 2023. According to documents filed with the court on April 16, those cases have been dismissed without prejudice, which means they can be re-filed at any time. The cases were originally filed by former Linn County Attorney Burton Harding following an incident on May 18, 2023, in which the gates were cut apart and taken down by a group of people and then, allegedly, dragged

through the roads of the lake community. Each case contained counts of criminal destruction of property; as well as, counts of rioting and obstruction of law enforcement officials in some. In March, Linn County District Court Judge Andrea Purvis ordered that the roads in Tanglewood Lake were public roads and the citizens that removed the gates were SEE TANGLEWOOD, A3

Tanglewood seeks clarification, aid from county

BY BARBARA PROFFITT
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During the April 21 meeting, Linn County Commissioner Jason Hightower reported to his fellow board members that he had met with the Tanglewood Lake board president and a resident the previous week and noted that they wanted a resolution or motion that clarified if the roads are public or private. Hightower stated they also wanted to speak with commissioners about various items he called “possible partnership things that could be done.” The meeting and subsequent requests stem from a recent ruling by Linn County District Court Judge Andrea Purvis in a criminal case that the roads in Tanglewood Lake

are public roadways. The list of partnership items included utilizing the county buying power for culvert orders, sign orders, salt orders; as well as, rock hauling with a set number of loads to be delivered to a set location. Hightower then stated they would like the county to set some criteria to plow the main roads within the lake development for snow accumulation over six inches. Hightower then stated that the lake would like to be notified if the county has equipment to sell as they are trying to make improvements. He added that they had asked if a neighborhood watch would require county approval as well as county codes enforcement, and the possibility of two trash days per year, one in spring, one in the fall along with an extra dumpster for those.

Hightower ended with the fact that the lake would like to see a document drafted in regards to these items so that everyone “understands the course of action going forward.” Commissioner Alison Hamilton stated she would not say yes or no at this time and Hightower clarified he was not asking her to, he was simply conveying their requests. Hamilton continued that the commissioners should look into each request and noted, “Take the culverts for example, that gets really confusing - they’re going to pay for it, but it gets ran under a Linn County bid.” She added that it would warrant a longer discussion, perhaps a workshop and Commissioner Jim Johnson noted it’s “not just Tanglewood.” SEE CLARIFICATION, A3

Commission workshop hears of justification for SEKMHC CEO \$600,000 salary

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With budget time coming in August and information circulating concerning the large salary of Southeast Kansas Mental Health Center (SEKMHC) Chief Executive Officer Nathan Fawson, five of six commissioners of the six-county area serviced by SEKMHC, plus the wife of Linn County Commissioner Jim Johnson, Pam, and reporter were present for a workshop/brainstorming session Thursday night at the Allen County Courthouse. The meeting was focused on justification for Fawson’s large salary and the fact that each of the six counties, Linn, Anderson, Allen, Neosho, Woodson and Bourbon, each contribute funding to the mental health entity. Dana Spencer, vice-chair of the SEKMHC board, was asked by the commissioners to present information to them on salaries and more at the meeting. Allen County Commissioner David Lee commented upon opening the door to the courthouse that it was a closed

meeting after the Johnsons entered. He allowed the Linn County News in for a specified period to hear Spencer’s report, after that he asked that they be allowed time to discuss the meeting amongst only the commissioners. SEKMHC, as explained by Spencer, is now an “integrated healthcare” non-profit as they own Ashley Clinic in Chanute and Yates Center Dental. Explained on the Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services, “They are part of the (Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs); were originally developed by SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) and CMS (Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services) and tested during a federal demonstration project from 2017 through 2019.” Spencer said that “CCBHC is an outpatient, integrated care model incorporating care coordination and a cost-based payment methodology.” There are 26 mental health centers in Kansas; all are CCBHC certified. After explaining the outline model SEKMCH uses for

operation, the commissioners then began asking Spencer how the wage for Fawson came about. She said that in 2021 they received provisional status for CCBHC and a wage study was conducted. She said SEKMHC went from an \$8 million business in 2015 to a \$75 million business in 2025 and increased employees from 200 to 600 last year. With that she said SEKMCH “had a clean audit.” Johnson asked Spencer where the biggest percentage of revenue comes from to SEKMHC and she answered, “Private insurance; we still bill CMS (Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services) and explained they are not FDHC or federally qualified healthcare. She said they have applied for FDHC and explained reimbursement rates of entities is the difference between CMS and FDHC. Allen County Commissioner David Lee asked Spencer, “In today’s world of trying to save money, why are we trying to duplicate services?” He referenced that in several of the member counties CHCSEK (Community Healthcare Cen- SEE SEKMHC, A2

Sen. Marshall visits Linn County



JACKIE TAYLOR | LINN COUNTY NEWS

U.S. Senator Roger Marshall speaks with Linn County Sheriff James Akes on the new dispatching system used at the new Justice Center. Dispatcher Emily Dixon looks on; Marshall was given a full tour of the facility in Mound City last Thursday.

La Cygne police get automatic plate readers

First Option Bank grant will pay for purchase

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La Cygne leaders have accepted a grant that will pay for automatic license plate readers. At last Wednesday’s regular meeting, the council voted 3-0, with Jerome Mitzner and Ed Smith not present, for a \$42,376 grant through First

Option Bank for the solar technology from Leonardo ELSAG Automated License Plate Readers. Zachary Mathies, police chief, said that the readers, slated to be placed at the city’s three main entry points, will allow law enforcement more readily to solve crimes. He pointed to the June 22, 2022, robbery at Silver Creek Pharmacy & Gifts, 945

Market, as an example of how tracking via license plate number could expedite apprehension. He said potential evidence is currently lacking because of La Cygne’s rural setting and the lack of cell towers and WiFi access. He listed vehicle burglaries and property crimes by suspects who drive in from outside the community as examples where

automatic license plate reader tape can assist. Mathies emphasized that the readers, which require no server nor information technology services, are “strictly an investigative tool.” He said the units do not collect such items as speed limits, “they’re not a way to spy on our citizens.” SEE PLATE READER, A2

Blue Mound discusses bonding for water tower project

BY ANGELA K. HOLT
LINN COUNTY NEWS

Members of the Blue Mound City Council met on Monday, April 21, to discuss bond options with water tower project. Present at the meeting was Edward D. McLiney, Senior Managing

Director at McLiney and Company. The company has consulted with other entities within the county over bond projects. McLiney explained that his company will not charge for services until their clients SEE WATER TOWER A2

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