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# THE *Smith County* PIONEER

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## Chamber Banquet approaches fast

BY JOLEEN BREWER  
 Smith Co. Pioneer

Big changes have been made for the 2026 Chamber of Commerce annual banquet.

This year the Chamber board of directors decided to move the banquet back to an evening event.

They also decided to bring in entertainment. The board agreed upon Trooper Ben, a retired Kansas State Trooper.

After serving 26 years as a Trooper, Ben Gardner continued his service and became a figure know for

his comic traffic safety tips and community engagement.

With this special guest speaker, the Chamber board has opined to open the invitation to the public.

The banquet will be held at the VFW Post #1141 on Saturday, March 21, 2026.

This year guest will be given a meal choice of Smoked Pork Chop or a Chicken Fried Steak dinner. Guest are asked to dress accordingly with the theme of Denim and Diamonds.

Tickets must be purchased no later than March,

13, 2026. The cost of a ticket is \$25 for all chamber members and \$35 for non chamber members.

Tickets may be purchased at the Chamber of Commerce office located at 118 S. Main Street in downtown Smith Center.

This will be a night filled with fun and friends, so dig out your Canadian tuxedo and come out and enjoy the evening.

Alcohol drinks are Not included in the meal cost, and will need to be purchased through the VFW.

## Talking to the youth is encouraged

The Conversations That Can Save a Life  
 By: Leah Wiehl M.D.

I work as a family doctor at Smith County Family Practice, but before that, I'm a mom to four young girls. My days are full of ponytails, bruised knees, bedtime prayers, and cereal bowls left on the counter. I also spend time in exam rooms, looking at medical charts, and having tough talks with families who never thought they'd be asking me, "How did this happen?"

Today, I'm writing not only as a doctor, but as a parent who loves her children deeply and wants them to grow up strong, healthy, and hopeful.

In North Central Kansas and all over the country,

we're seeing something heartbreaking. Substance use and thoughts of suicide are appearing in younger and younger kids. These are children who still play with toys, still need help tying their shoes, and should be dreaming about their future, not questioning if life is worth living.

As a doctor, I see the numbers. As a mom, I feel how heavy they are. And as a person of faith, I believe God wants us to face this moment with strength, wisdom, and love.

Many of us grew up in homes where things like drugs, depression, and suicide were hardly ever talked about. Our parents thought avoiding these topics would keep us safe. But now we know that staying

silent doesn't protect our kids. Talking to them does.

Kids are already hearing about these things on social media, at school, from friends, and on their phones. If we're not talking to them, someone else will, and not everyone cares about their well-being.

Difficult conversations don't have to be harsh. You can start them simply by asking, "Have you ever heard kids talking about vaping or drugs?" or "If you ever feel really sad or overwhelmed, you can always tell me." or "Some people use substances when they're hurting. Let's talk about healthier ways to handle big feelings."

You don't need to say  
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## Story hour to start soon

Story Hour for Preschoolers will resume at the Smith Center Public Library on Tuesday, March 3. Any four or five-year-old child, not yet in kindergarten or home school, is welcome to attend any or all Tuesday morning sessions from 10 AM to 11 AM. Children must have turned four years old on or before December 31, 2025. As a rule of thumb, if school is cancelled due to weather, Story Hour is also cancelled for the day.

The children will participate in a variety of activities

throughout the school year including, stories, songs, fingerplays, games, crafts and field trips within walking distance of the library. Because of "messy" activities, parents are reminded that the children should wear play clothes.

Each preschooler needs a large backpack (preferred) or a large book bag which can hold oversized books. Believe it or not – the smaller the kid, the larger the book they will pick! The child's FIRST NAME and LAST INITIAL need to be clearly

marked on the OUTSIDE. This will make it easier for the staff and volunteers to make sure each child gets home with that day's borrowed books, activity projects and hand-made crafts. If parents have a concern over their child's name being visible on the backpack, the name can be written on the "back" side which faces the child when it is being worn. Please send the bag with the child each week.

Children who attended the fall session are already  
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## Montgomery

During the High School basketball game, Kharrison Montgomery received his official invitation to play in the Shrine Bowl.

Dale Stephens Photo

## Big Help



Bristol Hrabe helps her dad, Kyle Hrabe during the Smith Center Firemen pancake feed, held on Saturday, February 14.

Pam Gibble/SCP

## USDA to open Continuous General Conservation Reserve Program

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today announced the enrollment periods for agricultural producers and landowners to submit offers for the Continuous and General Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) is accepting offers for

Continuous CRP starting Feb. 12, 2026, through March 20, 2026. Enrollment for General CRP will run from March 9, 2026, through April 17, 2026. FSA will announce dates for Grassland CRP sign up in the near future.

CRP is USDA's flagship  
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## Community EVENTS

SMITH COUNTY COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Submit your "Community Connection" the Pioneer today!

Stop By the Office or Call 785-282-3371  
 Email your notice to pioneer@ruraltel.net

### Upcoming Events

- Feb 18- Ash Wednesday
- Feb 24- Flag Day
- March 10- Smith County YEC Trade Show & Presentation in Kensington
- March 21- Smith Center Chamber of Commerce Banquet
- March 6- 1:30 PM World Day of Payer @ the First Christian Church in Smith Center

### Regular Meetings

- Smith Co. Commission, Mondays at 8:30 a.m.
  - USD #237 School Board, 2nd Monday of each month at 7 p.m.
  - S. C. City Council, 2nd and 4th Mondays of each month at 6pm
- Deadlines: Mondays at noon for ads. Fridays for Legals and Obituaries

### Regular Meetings

- Smith Co. Commission .....Mondays at 8:30 a.m.
  - USD #237 School Board .....2nd Mondays at 7 p.m.
  - USD #110 School Board .....2nd Mondays at 7 p.m.
  - Smith Center City .....2nd and 4th Mondays at 6 p.m.
  - Kensington City .....2nd Mondays at 5 p.m.
  - Lebanon City .....2nd Tuesdays at 7 p.m.
  - Gaylord City .....2nd Wednesdays at 7 p.m.
  - Athol City .....1st Mondays at 7 p.m.
  - Cedar City .....1st Monday at 7 p.m.
- Deadline: Mondays at noon for 'Community Connection' notices.

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**SCHS**  
**Thursday, 2/19**  
 - FFA Week  
 - JH MCEL WR tournament at Ellis (1706 Monroe St) @ 1:00pm. Admission is \$6 for adults and \$5 for students.  
 - HS Forensics at Sylvan Grove @ 3:30pm  
 - HS BB at Smith Center vs Hanover @ 4:30pm. The order of play will be JV Boys, Varsity Girls, and then Varsity Boys. This is Senior Night for basketball. The JH Cheerleaders have a fundraising dinner. At halftime of the boys game, there will be a Chuck-A-Duck Post Prom fundraiser. See attached flyer. Admission is \$6 for adults and \$5 for students (USD 237 students get free admission).  
**Friday, 2/20**  
 - FFA Week  
 - HS BB at Trego (1200 Russell Ave). The order of play is unknown at this time. Admission is \$6 for adults and \$5 for students.  
**Saturday, 2/21**  
 - FFA Week  
 - HS Regional WR Tournament at Norton (513 W. Wilberforce) @ 9:30am. Admission is \$8 for adults and \$6 for students.

Good Luck, Redmen & Lady Red!!

### Weekend Outlook

**FRIDAY**  
 High: 39°F Low: 21°F  
 Partly cloudy  
**SATURDAY**  
 High: 44°F Low: 20°F  
 Sun and a few passing clouds  
**SUNDAY**  
 High: 48°F Low: 22°F  
 Generally sunny despite a few afternoon clouds

Information from The Weather Channel printed is current as of press time; subject to change

**Crop Report**  
 Prices effective at closing of February 16, 2026 courtesy of Trinity Ag in Smith Center  
 WHEAT...\$4.58  
 CORN...\$3.47  
 MILO. \$3.07  
 SOYBEANS...\$ 10.04

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