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HIGH WINDS CAUSE MULTIPLE FIRES IN COUNTY



Due to the high winds and low humidity Thursday afternoon, area fire crews were stretched thin trying to battle blaze after blaze that popped up seemingly right after the other. One such blaze had Cherryvale Rural Fire scrambling as they were called out to the Republic Services Landfill south of Cherryvale a little after 3:00 p.m. Thursday afternoon. Thanks to the help of the crew at Republic, Cherryvale Fire-Rescue, Liberty Rural Fire, Independence Rural Fire, Independence Fire/EMS Department, Dearing Rural Fire, Coffeyville Fire, Neodesha Fire and Coffeyville Resources Fire Department, crews were able to get the fire under control and were able to clear the scene a little after 6:00 p.m. **Cherryvale Rural Fire Department | Courtesy Photo**

Commissioners begin cutting through the red tape for new downtown RHID

BY BREA SANFORD
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The Independence City Commission met for their regular session Thursday evening at City Hall. Mayor Dean Hayse welcomed those in attendance and called the meeting to order promptly at 5:30 p.m. Leading the crowd gathered through the Pledge of Allegiance, the evening's agenda was adopted before the Commissioners approved the reappointment of Fred Meier to the Independence Housing Authority and the evening's Consent Agenda, which approved the following items:

- The minutes of the February 26, March 12 and March 18 regular and special meetings.
- Waiving the ordinance prohibiting food trucks at Riverside park July 24, during the Montgomery County 4-H Fair.
- A change order correcting connecting flange incompatibility issues related to the pump station for the water pipeline to Bartlett. The interface flanges between the pump station and the pipeline suction and discharge did not work, so a correction was designed and the contractor is in the process of implementing the correction. The cost of the correction is \$3,554.40.

David Cowan presented two more properties up for Public Hearing:

- 1312 North 10th Street — Cowan stated that the owner of the property is aware of the condemnation proceed-

ings, but has heard nothing from them. The property has not had utility service since 2022.

- 1924 North 10th Street — Cowan shared that the home has recently sold to an out-of-state buyer who plans to retire and return to Independence to live. They have submitted a repair timeline and have been issued a building permit to rehab/remodel the structure. The Commission agreed unanimously to adjourn the public hearing until July 23.

ITEMS FOR COMMISSION ACTION

The Independence Tree Board asked the Commission to approve a request to proclaim April 25, 2026 as Arbor Day. This request comes every year, as Independence was named a Tree City in 2016. According to Park and Zoo Director Scott Patton, the Tree Board plans to celebrate Arbor Day Saturday, April 25, by handing out 50 free Paw Paw saplings at the enclosed 4-H Building at Riverside Park. More information on the festivities will be included in a future Reporter issue. The Commissioners approved.

Police Chief Stafford and Police Dispatcher Bridget Hammer addressed the

♦ See **COMMISSIONERS**, page 2

ICC announces distinguished alumnus and commencement speaker Brad Underwood

STAFF REPORT

Independence Community College (ICC) has announced that distinguished alumnus and nationally recognized basketball coach Brad Underwood will serve as the 2026 Commencement Speaker and will be honored as ICC's Distinguished Alumnus.

Commencement will take place Saturday, May 16, at 10:00 a.m. in the FirstOak Bank and Oakes Family Fieldhouse. The ceremony is free and open to the public.

Underwood currently serves as the head men's basketball coach at the University of Illinois and has built one of the nation's most competitive Division I programs. During his tenure, Illinois has achieved six consecutive 20-win regular seasons, multiple Big Ten Championships and a 2024 NCAA Elite Eight appearance, its first in nearly two decades.



UNDERWOOD

Since taking over the program in 2017, Underwood has let the Fighting Illini to consistent national prominence, including multiple NCAA Tournament appearances and a No. 1 seed in 2021. Known for his leadership, player development and competitive success, Underwood has earned recognition as one of the top coaches in college basketball.

"Brad Underwood represents the very best of ICC," said Cody Oates, Executive Director of the ICC foundation. "His journey from ICC to eating one of the top programs in the country is a powerful example of what is possible for our students. We are incredibly proud to honor him as a Distinguished Alumnus and welcome him back to campus."

♦ See **ICC ANNOUNCES**, page 2

BCBS Foundation awards IHS Life Grant

BY BREA SANFORD
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The Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kansas Foundation has awarded Healthy Habits for Life grants to 102 Kansas schools, including Independence High School, supporting programs that help students build lifelong healthy habits through physical activity, nutrition, heart health and positive mental well-being.

The grants support school-based programs for students in kindergarten through 12th grade and will be used to support programs that address at least one of the four focus areas: reducing cardiovascular risk, increasing physical activity, encouraging healthy eating habits and reinforcing positive mental health among students.

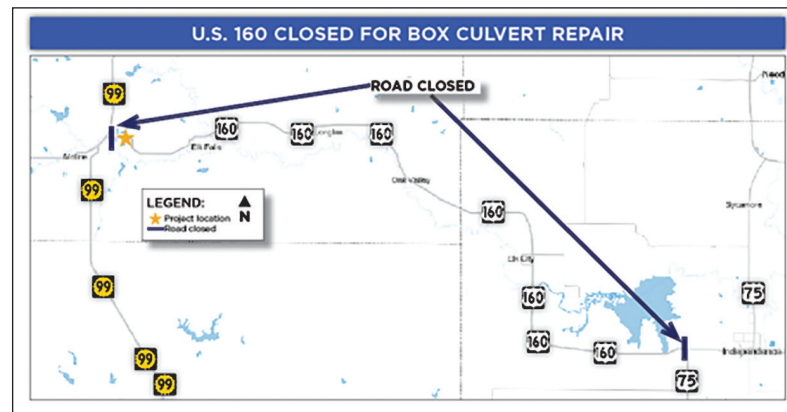
"Healthy Habits for Life grants are an investment in Kansas students and the com-

munities they call home," said Maralou Wegener, Chief Operating Officer of BCBS of Kansas Foundation. "By supporting schools, we're helping students build healthy habits that can last a lifetime."

This year's recipients included 91 public schools and eleven private schools, reflecting the Foundation's continued commitment to supporting student wellness in communities across the state.

Since the program began, Healthy Habits for Life has awarded thousands of grants to schools across Kansas, helping educators bring wellness programs directly to students where they spend much of their day-at school.

ROAD CLOSURE



Kansas Department of Transportation announced this week that a 38-mile stretch of US 160 east of Moline will be closed for a week to make emergency repairs to a box culvert bridge. The box culvert extends under US 160 and is located a mile east of K-99. Part of the culvert was constructed from wood, which was damaged by a recent grass fire and needs repair. US 160 will be closed from K-99 in Elk County, east to the US 75 junction in Montgomery County during repairs. No official detour is in place. KDOT urges motorists to stay alert and follow posted signs in all week zones. **Courtesy Photo**



Bulldogs beat Pittsburg-Colgan at home despite late rally in season opener

♦ See page 11



Gas prices rise again as some states consider tax holidays

♦ See page 10

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