Seven named to oversee Research Triangle funding

BY FINN BULLERS
Special to The Olathe News

Starting in December, seven elected Johnson County officials will team up to oversee funding for a new taxpayer-supported economic development venture known as the Johnson County Education Research Triangle.

Appointed today to four-year terms are:
• Michael Boehm, mayor of Lenexa, appointed by Kansas State University President Jon Wefald
• Karin Brownlee, state senator from Olathe, also appointed by Wefald
• Ed Eilert, Johnson County commissioner, appointed by the state Board of Regents
• Lynn Mitchelson, Johnson County Community College trustee, appointed by the board
• Sue Storm, Kansas Board of Education member-elect, appointed by Gov. Kathleen Sebelius
• Annabeth Surbaugh, Johnson County Commission chairwoman, appointed by the board
• David Wysong, state senator from Mission Hills, appointed by University of Kansas Chancellor Robert Hemenway.

On Nov. 4, voters in Johnson County approved a one-eighth-cent sales tax, which will generate approximately $15 million annually. The tax begins April 1.

The oversight body, known as the Johnson County Education Research Triangle Authority, represents a unique partnership between Johnson County, the University of Kansas and Kansas State University to provide cancer and food safety research and animal health, engineering, business, science and technology degrees in Johnson County.

“This is an outstanding group of Johnson County leaders and the Triangle will be well-served by their leadership,” said Gary Sherrer, who was appointed by the Board of Regents to serve as the convening chairman for the triangle’s first meeting.

Proceeds from the sales tax will fund the construction and ongoing operations and maintenance of three new facilities:
• The University of Kansas Edwards Campus Business, Engineering, Science and Technology Center in Overland Park.
• The Kansas State University Innovation Campus National Food and Animal Health Institute in Olathe.
• The University of Kansas Cancer Clinical Research Center in Fairway.

The board will oversee funding, conduct annual independent audits and produce year-end reports.

Each member is appointed to a four-year term, and each member may serve two terms. The authority is expected to spend the next few months getting organized and establishing how they will operate.
Johnson County adopts resolution for ResearchTriangle sales tax to start in 2009

A one-eighth cent sales tax to fund projects and programs for the Johnson County Education Research Triangle Authority becomes effective on April 1.

A resolution to adopt and levy the sales tax was approved Nov. 20 by the Johnson County Board of Commissioners. By state law, the tax becomes effective at the end of the next calendar quarter.

The board’s action follows approval by the voters in the Nov. 4 general election of a countywide question regarding creation of the Education Research Triangle Authority and authorization of the proposed sales tax. The question was approved by 57 percent of the voters with 154,360 voting in favor of the new sales tax and 115,917 voting against it.

Procedures for creation of the Education Research Triangle Authority and for imposition of the sales tax were authorized in legislation passed in 2007 by the Kansas Legislature. The legislation authorized the county to propose funding for the authority by a mill levy up to 2 mills or a sales tax up to 0.2 percent, or both. The November ballot question proposed only a sales tax of 0.125 percent. The one-eighth cent sales tax is expected to raise approximately $15 million per year.

Proceeds from the sales tax will support education and research projects and programs at facilities now located or proposed for construction or acquisition in Johnson County. They include:

• The University of Kansas Edwards Campus Business, Engineering, Science and Technology Center in Overland Park;

• The Kansas State University Innovation Campus National Food and Animal Health Institute in Olathe; and,

• The University of Kansas Cancer Clinical Research Center in Fairway.

The sales tax revenues will be equally divided among the three institutions. The sales tax, as authorized by statute and the public vote, has no sunset date and will be used to ensure that ongoing operations, maintenance, and research are provided in the future.

The Johnson County Education Research Triangle Authority is a local board composed of seven members who must be elected officials in Johnson County. Members of the authority will be appointed by the Governor, the Kansas Board of Regents, the Board of County Commissioners, KU, KSU, and Johnson County Community College. The Board of Regents will maintain its constitutional authority over the universities.

In separate actions, the board affirmed the creation of the authority and established a special fund for proceeds from the sales tax imposed for support of the authority, and appointed Chairman Annabeth Surbaugh to serve as the board’s representative to the Authority.

The state of Kansas and Johnson County both have authority to audit the Triangle Authority at any time. The authority also will have a regular independent audit.
Holiday quintet slated for Fredonia

The Kansas Brass Quintet will present a Holiday Season Spectacular at 3:30 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 7 at the Fredonia High School theater. This will be the 11th performance in Fredonia for the ensemble-in-residence of the Department of Music and Dance at the University of Kansas.

A member of the Kansas Arts Commission touring roster, the Kansas Brass Quintet has performed throughout the Kansas and the Midwest. This ensemble also performs at national music conferences, including the National MENC, the National Association of Wind and Percussion Instructors Convention and the National Music Teachers Association Convention.

Their CD of both chamber and solo works, “Rare Breeds and Dog-Eared Classics,” was released in fall 2000 and will be available for purchase at the concert.

The ensemble presents numerous clinics each year on a variety of musical topics in schools and communities. Their artistry and rapport with audiences has made the quintet a hit with audiences year after year.
63 KU students to volunteer during winter breaks

LAWRENCE — Mauntell Renee Ford, Cedar Vale, and Erin Aili Birney, Winfield, are among sixty-three University of Kansas students who will spend a week during winter break volunteering at site across the United States.

Mauntell Ford, the daughter of Howard Ford, is a sophomore in pre-business. Erin Birney, the daughter of Don and Sue Birney, is a senior majoring in Spanish. Both area students will both be working at No More Deaths, No Mas Muertes, Tucson, Ariz.

KU students in Alternative Winter Breaks will work Jan. 5-9 with agencies in Arizona, Florida, Illinois, North Carolina and Texas that focus on human rights, health care, environmental preservation and rehabilitation, education and help for people with disabilities. The program costs participants $275 ($235 for site leaders) and covers their transportation house and meals.

KU’s student-run Alternative Breaks program centers on service-learning trips that provide opportunities to include volunteer efforts in a student’s educational experience. Following their selection for the program, students attend two-hour weekly class sessions to prepare for their trip. They may participate in weeklong winter or spring breaks or in shorter weekend breaks.

KU students have volunteered at six of the locations in previous years. A new destination this year will be the U.S.-Mexico border human rights organization No More Deaths/No Mas Muertes based in Tucson, Ariz., where 14 students plan to work.

The program was established at KU in 1995 with a spring break trip to El Paso, Texas. Since then it has expanded, with volunteer opportunities being added annually. Alternative Breaks works in partnership with KU’s Center for Community Outreach, a student-run and student-funded organization that runs 15 core volunteer programs plus additional local programs and serves as a coordinating group for KU students interested in volunteer projects.

Alternative Winter Break sites include:
• AIDS Foundation Houston, Texas.
  This foundation collaborates with other organizations to reduce the incidence of HIV/AIDS and to support those living with HIV/AIDS.
  Web site: www.aidshelp.org
• Give Kids the World, Kissimmee, Fla.
  This nonprofit wish-granting resort facility near Orlando, Fla., creates memories for children with life-threatening illnesses.
  Web site: www.gktw.org
• Misericordia/Heart of Mercy, Chicago, Ill.
  Operated by the Sisters of Mercy, Misericordia is home to more than 550 individuals with developmental disabilities ranging in age from infants to adults offering individually designed programs to help them achieve and maintain the highest level of independence possible.
  Web site: www.misericordia.com
• Mountain Housing Opportunities, Asheville, N.C.
  This North Carolina program provides safety-related repairs to homeowners of Asheville and Buncombe County, whose income meets or falls below the local median.
  Web site: www.mtnhousing.org
• No More Deaths/No Mas Muertes, Tucson, Ariz.
  This organization’s mission is to work within legal protocols to end death and suffering on the U.S.-Mexico border through civil initiatives to uphold fundamental human rights.
  Web site: www.nomoredeaths.org
• Teach for America, Chicago, Ill.
  This national corps consists of college graduates from all academic majors who commit to teaching for two years in under-resourced schools in urban and rural areas.
  Web site: www.teachforamerica.org/about/regions/chicago.htm
• United Cerebral Palsy of Metropolitan Dallas, Texas
  This program works with people of all ages and backgrounds to improve the independence, productivity and full citizenship of people with cerebral palsy and other disabilities.
  Web site: www.ucp dallas.org
Quinn Richert, an eighth grade student at Clark Middle School of Bonner Springs, participated in the Duke TIP scholar weekend at the University of Kansas.

Students who scored 21 or higher on the ACT exam were invited to the Nov. 7-9 event.

Students chose from many subjects including King Arthur, physics, magazine design and mathematics. Quinn studied magazine design with a KU professor.

He is the son of Brandy Modin of Bonner Springs and Ron Richert of Mulvane, the grandson of Martha Dittman of Woodbine and Duane Dittman of Lincolnville, and the great-grandson of Eldon and Charmaine Oesterreich of Woodbine and Alice Dittman of Hope.
Deer Endanger Suburban Kansas City Park

SHAWNEE (AP) — A suburban Kansas City park is grappling with a whitetail deer population that is so large that it could pose a threat to other wildlife, a fragile ecosystem and the health of around 2 million people who visit the park each year.

Shawnee Mission Park, which spans about 1,280 acres and is part of two suburbs in the state's most populous county, possibly has the highest deer density in the U.S., a state wildlife official said.

"They've got 200 deer per square mile. We don't have anything anywhere else near that magnitude," said Lloyd Fox, big-game program coordinator for the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks. "There's some land owned by KU north of Lawrence with about 33 per square mile. That's about as close as we come."
Kansas Brass Quintet to appear in Fredonia

FREDONIA — The Kansas Brass Quintet, comprised of some of America’s most outstanding brass artists, will present Sunday, Dec. 7 at 3:30 p.m. a Holiday Season Spectacular at Fredonia High School theatre. This is the 11th performance in Fredonia for the Ensemble-in-Residence in the Department of Music and Dance at the University of Kansas. The ensemble, presents numerous clinics each year on a variety of musical topics in both schools and communities. Their artistry and rapport with audiences has made the Kansas Brass Quintet a hit year after year.

The quintet is made up of artists that are also dedicated music educators. Stephan Leising and William Munox will perform on the trumpet and Lisa Bergman on the horn, Michael Davidson on the trombone and Bo Atlas will play the tuba. A medley of favorite holiday selections will be featured.

Their CD of both chamber and solo works titled “Rare Breeds and Dog-Eared Classics” was released in the fall of 2000. CDs will be available for purchase at the concert.

Funding support by the Kansas Arts Commission and National Endowment for the Arts through the Fredonia Arts Council makes this program available.
Great Bend Greats

Grandchildren light up life for Debbie Wise

By ARLEEN WHITTAKER
Special to the Tribune

Debbie Livingston Wise keeps busy attending the many activities of her grandchildren, 10-year-old Kaeli and 6-year-old Kaeden. Their parents are Craig and Melissa Amerine of Great Bend. The children are involved in baseball, basketball, dance and motor cross racing. Wise says, “Being grandma is one of the greatest things that I have ever done — they are truly the light of my life.” The children both attend school at Central Kansas Christian Academy, which also has many events and activities.

When Wise was 2 years old, she nearly lost her life. She was on the second-story staircase on the outside of her grandparents’ house when the cat she was playing with jumped to a tree. Debbie tried to catch it and fell to the cement below. They rushed her to the hospital, and the doctors didn’t give her parents much hope — she was not expected to live through the night. Miraculously, through her parents’ prayers, she survived.

For a short time, she was totally paralyzed, but she recovered completely. At the time she was referred to as the “miracle baby,” and was written about in the local Lyons paper. “I feel God has a plan for me or he would not have pulled me through this ordeal,” she said. “I thank God every day for my many blessings.”

Her parents were Bea and Deb Livingston, and her grandfather, D.C. Livingston, was the sheriff in Lyons for many years.

Since her father was in the oil business, they moved around a lot. She was born in Lyons, then moved to Susank, Hoisington, Medicine Lodge, back to Lyons, and then finally to Great Bend. There, she met and married Dennis Wise, who has always been her best friend. They have been married 41 years.

Dennis served in the Navy when they were first married so they traveled all over the United States — from Texas to Maine, before they settled in Great Bend. Dennis now works at Kansas Machine Works in the tooling department.

They have one daughter, Melissa, who is married to Craig Amerine. They both graduated from KU, then returned to Great Bend, where they are both vice presidents for Amerine Utilities Inc.

Wise worked for Bank of America for 33 years, before retiring as assistant manager. Presently, she has accepted a position as customer service officer at First Kansas Bank.

Dennis has multiple talents. While Melissa was in Harrison Junior High School, he and his daughter restored a 1957 Chevy for her to drive. She drove the car for two years before deciding she wanted a smaller car and one that did not require the upkeep needed for a classic car. They sold the car to A&M Recording Studio in Hollywood, for display and publicity photos with recording stars. He has built many other show cars, and has won many prizes.

Dennis loves to build and work with wood. He constructed a complete bedroom set for his daughter, as well as innumerable woodworking projects. His model railroad layout is another interest he shares with his grandchildren.

Three generations of the family have been involved in school leadership. Wise was a twirler all her years at Great Bend High School, and Melissa was a cheerleader at GBHS. Now, Kaeli is a cheerleader at Central Kansas Christian Academy, where her mother is the cheerleading coach.
Pictured are Debbie and Dennis Wise (back) and their daughter, Melissa, and her husband Craig Amerine (center front) and the Wises' grandchildren Kaeden and Kaeli Amerine.
Lindsborg film set to begin production

By Anne Hassler
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LINDSBORG — Could Little Sweden become Little Hollywood?

A film called “Au Pair, KS” is set to begin shooting in early December, according to its producer, Catherine McCabe.

The film was written by J.T. O’Neal, a graduate of the University of Kansas who also has a master’s in screenwriting from UCLA. O’Neal’s degree from KU is in art history and he wrote his thesis on Birger Sandzen. Frequent trips to Lindsborg made him familiar with the surrounding area and its Swedish heritage.

According to his blog, O’Neal said he drew inspiration for the screenplay from watching Swedish actor Håvard Lilleheie in the movie “United” while still at UCLA.

Lilleheie will play the main character, Oddmund Lindeflaten, a scruffy semi-pro soccer player from Sweden who has come to Kansas to be an au pair for bison rancher Helen Hazelton. The movie is based in and around Lindsborg, including a shoot at the Swedish Pavilion following the Old Fashioned Christmas event on Dec. 6.

Producer Catherine McCabe approached the McPherson County Commission for permission to use the pavilion at a recent meeting.

According to McCabe, the movie is an “ultra-low budget” dramedy. She invites anyone interested in being a background dancer to come out to the pavilion Dec. 6.

The production is also looking for extras between the ages of six and 18. Photos with the child’s name, age and permission from parents can be sent to aupairkansas@gmail.com.

“People in Lindsborg, and the whole county for that matter, have been so generous and supportive of the film,” McCabe said.

A screening of the movie in Lindsborg is planned once it is complete. McCabe also hopes to enter it in the 2009 Sundance Film Festival and Cannes Film Festival in April.

More information about the film is available at aupairkansasmovie.wordpress.com.
Student teachers should undergo background checks

Other than their parents, we can't think of anyone who spends more time interacting with school-age children than their teachers. And, unfortunately, children in some households probably spend more time with teachers than with their parents.

That's reason enough to suggest that the background checks required of teachers seeking licenses to work in Kansas be extended to the student teachers working in schools across the state.

Students planning careers in education today spend a lot of hours in the classroom before graduating from a university and receiving a teaching license. Their opportunity to do harm is just as real as that of a full-time teacher or other school employee, and their fitness for the job should be scrutinized just as closely before access to students is granted.

The University of Kansas requires its teaching students to undergo the same scrutiny they will face when seeking a state teaching license, right down to the fingerprinting. Washburn University does background checks of its students, and Kansas State University checks for felony convictions. Emporia State University asks it students to self-disclose any issues that might affect their fitness to teach.

The approach taken by KU seems most reasonable, and should be copied by other universities and colleges in the business of training teachers. If they don't agree, however, school districts would do well to follow Auburn-Washburn's lead in doing their own checks.

There's no reason to allow into our schools a student teacher who wouldn't be able to pass through the standard licensing process. Someone who has been convicted of theft, acknowledged their transgression and put their life back on track, though, may well bring lessons in life to the classroom that can be just as valuable as those covered by the curriculum.

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