To the editor:

Who wants to take credit for denying Chetopa a moment in educational history? Many citizens in Chetopa would like to know the answer. Recently while attending a fundraiser in the multi-purpose room at Chetopa Elementary, it was brought to my attention the big mural was missing, “Koal- ity Education” using the Koala Bear theme.

Did all the twenty-plus murals get painted over? When asking a school official on the board what happened to the mural, his reply was, “I don’t know.”

As an alumnus of the Chetopa school, this was an honor for me to participate and work with teachers, staff, and students on the murals. Teachers and students collaborated on subjects such as reading, music, sports, or just fun stuff for each classroom.

Photographers from Kansas University of Lawrence came to photograph the murals for a book they were publishing; they were denied access to the building for viewing. We are listed, but we missed the opportunity of being photographed in the book, Kansas Murals, A Traveler’s Guide. This book has national recognition and is available in libraries throughout Kansas. Calvin Littlejohn and Joan Allen donated this book to the Chetopa City Library.

Where is the pride in our school and for our community? Why was this not taken to a vote? Who is responsible for painting over the historical murals? What will be taken from the community next?

Responses welcome

— Joan Allen
Bird watchers note population decline

Experts bemoan destruction of tallgrass prairies, loss of other critical habitats

MATT ERICKSON
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When Bob Antonio began bird watching about 25 years ago, he didn’t have to go far to find a northern bobwhite. Antonio could spot the ground-dwelling, robin-sized bird at Lawrence’s Burcham Park. Not anymore.

“I used to get them in Burcham Park nearly every year,” the Lawrence man said. “Now I haven’t gotten one in a decade. I’ve just been amazed.”

Declining populations

In the last 40 years, North America’s northern bobwhite population has sunk by 82 percent. It’s not alone: Several common Kansas birds have seen huge chunks of their populations disappear during that time.

At least eight of the 20 bird species named in June in an Audubon Society report reside regularly in Kansas. Several more pass through the state seasonally.

Each of the species in the Audubon Society report has seen its population drop by at least 50 percent in the past 40 years. Other Kansas birds on the list include the eastern meadowlark, whose population fell by 72 percent in 40 years; the loggerhead shrike, down 71 percent; and the common grackle, 61 percent.

An analysis of Kansas bird surveys shows that all three of those birds, as well as the northern bobwhite, have experienced similar declines within Kansas, said Bill Busby, a Kansas Biological Survey scientist.

“The big picture is, we’re experiencing the same thing here in Kansas that they are across the country,” Busby said.

Prairie life

While the national Audubon Society list contained a diverse group of species that included ducks and aquatic birds, most of Kansas’ declining birds share a link: They live in prairies and grasslands, where many of them nest on the ground.

Mark Robbins, an ornithologist at the Kansas University Natural History Museum, said this link pointed to the biggest reason for declining bird populations in Kansas: destruction of the state’s prairies.

“The major problem for many birds is the conversion of grasslands to cultivation,” Robbins said.

Many birds that are declining in population live in tallgrass prairies, which Robbins said was North America’s most-endangered ecosystem. About 98 percent of the original North American tallgrass prairie is gone, he said, and what’s left consists of small fragments.

The largest patch of tallgrass prairie left is the Flint Hills area in Kansas. Tallgrass prairie once consumed the entire eastern third of the state.

Greater prairie chicken

Robbins said the tallgrass prairie’s deterioration was evident in the population of its “flagship species” — the greater prairie chicken.

It was not on the Audubon Society list, but the greater prairie chicken population also has dropped. Robbins said it had disappeared from several Midwestern states where it was once prevalent. In Kansas, greater
prairie chicken populations have declined by about 56 percent since 1980, according to surveys by the **Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks**. Robbins said Douglas County’s last prairie chickens left.

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**MAGGIE ZIEGLER,** 7, brings a green heron into focus using her binoculars at the Baker Wetlands near Lawrence. Maggie and her brothers and grandparents visited the wetlands last week to bird watch in the morning hours. Declining bird populations have bird watchers concerned about species, including North America’s northern bobwhite, whose population has sunk by 82 percent.
Kansas wild bird populations are dwindling

about three or four years ago. He said the county’s prairie, which once took up about 80 percent of the area, has all but disappeared. “Douglas County has gone through a huge conversion,” Robbins said.

Most of the state’s tallgrass prairie has been plowed for cultivation or turned into pastures where farmers use intense, regular field-burning that damages the grassland habitat.

Robbins said the decline in grassland birds might not matter to someone who’s not a birdwatcher or an ornithologist, but the decline suggests a grassland deterioration that could be more troubling.

The plants in grasslands and prairies have deep roots, allowing them to absorb huge amounts of carbon, Robbins said. This means they could help reduce global warming by taking carbon out of the atmosphere. But when a prairie is plowed for farmland, its carbon absorption decreases significantly.

So a decline in grassland birds could indicate an increase in carbon.

“Birds are a good bellwether of what’s going on in the grassland,” Robbins said.

He said one measure to help birds that rely on grassland habitats would be to protect the federal Conservation Reserve Program, which prohibits cultivation on some land.

Stan Roth, a Lawrence birdwatcher with more than 50 years of experience, said bird populations always tended to ebb and flow.

“Many of these natural cycles are based on a wide variety of natural phenomenon that we don’t necessarily understand all that well,” he said.

Roth, a former high school biology teacher, said the eastern bluebird had a resurgence after a population drop about 20 years ago.

Robbins said humans’ presence had actually helped many bird species — such as blackbirds, robins and geese — that have adapted to cities or farmland.

Even the northern bobwhite may be bouncing back, as Roth and Antonio both mentioned seeing an increase in bobwhites in other parts of the state during the last two or three years.

POPULATIONS of Kansas birds have declined over the last 20 years. The list includes the northern Bobwhite, left, (Ashok Khosla photo) and the common grackle (Howard B. Eskin photo)
Greater prairie chicken/
Mike Blair (KWP) photo

Field Sparrow/
Howard B. Eskin photo
HOG HEAVEN

Lawrence man sells business, rides off into sunset

LAWRENCE (AP) — Last year Roger Haack sold his Lawrence software company, retired and made plans to fulfill a longtime dream.

He succeeded. This June, Haack got on his 2004 BMW motorcycle and did what many other people would love to do if they had the time and money. He took off on a three-week, 7,700-mile trip through the western United States.

Other than a few weekend trips, Haack said he had never done much motorcycle riding before that day.

"I always had this idea, always wanted to do this, but I spent too much time working," he said. "I had envisioned that once I sold the company, I’d be able to take a monthlong trip because that was a dream of mine."

Haack started out by himself on a cloudy day riding through Kansas on his way to Clayton, N.M.

"The goal was to have a great ride and maybe see some of the attractions," Haack, 56, said recently. "We wanted to get off the public path, stay off the interstates and take divided roads as much as possible."

His wife, Sharon Haack, flew to meet him in Las Vegas. She has a motorcycle driver’s license but chose to ride on the back of her husband’s bike.

"I decided I really didn’t want to ride my own," Sharon Haack said. "You really have to be a good rider for this, and Roger’s a good rider."

The trip took them through the southwestern states, up through California, Oregon, Washington, Montana and other northern states in a circular route back to Lawrence. Sharon’s leg of the motorcycle trip ended in Portland, Ore., and then she headed back home.

They passed through a variety of environments, including deserts and mountains. A few detours were made because some passes were snowed in, but the weather favored the Haacks as they rode through Death Valley, Calif.

"We wondered if we were going to fry, but it turned out that the temperature was great," Roger Haack said. "It was only 95 — 20 degrees below normal."

Other highlights were traveling the original stretch of historic Route 66 in Arizona and the giant redwood and sequoia trees in California, Haack said. He found that Montana lives up to its “Big Sky” handle.

"You really did feel pretty insignificant out there alone on a deserted road in Big Sky country, and I loved it," he said.

But visiting with people was as much fun as seeing the countryside, Haack said.

"People are not afraid to come up to talk to you if you are riding a motorcycle," he said. "This is especially true if you are a solo rider. Maybe it’s the mystique of me getting to ride and they can’t."

Haack found that the Kansas license tag and Kansas University Jayhawk on the motorcycle also attracted attention.

"The biggest question, the opening line was, ‘Did you ride that all the way from Kansas?’" he said.

Haack wrote a daily blog about his travels, which he posted on a Web site. Included on the site
is a page where he rated the best beers he found at microbreweries along the route. One of his disappointments, he said, was not being able to stop at some of those establishments.
Local students named as Dole Scholars

The Dole Institute of Politics at the University of Kansas recently announced 128 new Sen. Robert J. Dole Public Service Scholars for the 2007-08 academic year.

The recipients, all 2007 Kansas high school graduates, represent the largest class of Dole scholars since the program began in 2005. Funded by NASA, the scholarships are distributed among the state's four congressional districts to ensure the broadest statewide participation.

“This year, the Dole Institute received a second federal grant, and we are able to offer nearly three times the number of scholarships as in each of the previous two years,” said Bill Lacy, institute director.

The scholarship program began with a federal grant that funded 40 scholarships each in 2005 and in 2006. With the addition of the 128 scholarships awarded this year, the total number of Dole scholars comes to 208.

The new scholars will enroll this fall at one of the six Kansas Board of Regents universities or Washburn University in Topeka. Regents universities are KU, Emporia State University, Fort Hays State University, Kansas State University, Pittsburg State University and Wichita State University.

Aligned with the primary mission of the Dole Institute, the scholarship program encourages young Kansans to get involved in politics, government and community service.

“Dole scholars represent the best among Kansas high school graduates,” said Barbara Ballard, director of the scholarship program and associate director of the Dole Institute. “Dole scholars are required to engage in 100 hours of civic activities annually. We hope that their experiences will influence them throughout their lives to become involved citizens.”

Recipients receive a $1,000 scholarship, renewable for three years, and commit to completing 100 hours of civic activities annually. Kansas high school seniors who have volunteered in community and public service in their communities and who have a cumulative grade-point average of 3.0 or higher on a 4.0 scale are eligible.

Local students who are recipients include: Andrea Everhart of Gypsum, who graduated from Southeast of Saline High School and will be attending Kansas State University studying Food Science and Industry; Eric Johnson of Lindsborg, who graduated from Smoky Valley High School and will be attending Kansas State University and studying Mechanical Engineering; Alex Earles of Lindsborg, who graduated from Southeast of Saline High School and will be attending the University of Kansas and studying Political Science; Jillian Hulse of Lindsborg, who graduated from Smoky Valley High School and will be attending Emporia State University and studying Biochemistry.
Recruitment, retention strategy developed by USD 418 school board

By ANNE HASSLER
Sentinel Staff Writer

The McPherson USD 418 Board of Education met recently and the district's recruitment and retention strategy policy was again a topic of discussion.

Dr. Randy Watson, superintendent, and Angie McDonald, curriculum coordinator, originally presented the plan to the board at the June 11 meeting for information purposes. Since then, parts of the plan have been brought back before the board for its approval.

The latest strategies to receive board consideration were providing "the very best compensation and benefit plan possible" and year-round teacher recruiting.

Declining enrollment

Watson told the board the best way to provide better compensation to employees is to stop the declining enrollment problem in the district.

"The issue in getting the best compensation and benefit plan is we need more kids. Business funding is tied to profit, our funding is tied to how many students we have. In essence, we must solve the declining enrollment problem we have," Watson said.

Solving that problem will require some aggressive approaches and thorough research, he said.

Watson gave two ideas for tackling the declining enrollment issue.

He proposed a financial incentive to both employees and schools for any employee who refers a new student to the district.

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A bonus of $200 would be paid to the employees and a bonus of $200 to the school where the employee works. Watson said based on the fact that base state aid per pupil is $4,374, the incentive is roughly a 10 percent bonus.

He also suggested marketing the district through local media including newspaper, radio and cable television ads. He presented ads used by the Canton-Galva school district and the Solomon school district as examples of marketing used by other districts. Watson recommended using Channel 20 for free to promote the district.

Watson reported on a survey of local employees being conducted by Gary Hess and the McPherson Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber is tabulating the 1,500 surveys completed. It is planning on having focus groups with major employers to try and ascertain why employees who work in McPherson choose to live elsewhere -- whether it be affordable housing or some other issue, according to Watson.

**Year round recruitment**

One problem with attracting quality candidates to fill vacancies is that by the time notice is given, many recent graduates have already accepted jobs, according to McDonald. She suggested that the district adopt the approach of year-round recruiting.

McDonald presented data on where the district recruited most of their new hires over the last five years. Twenty-seven hires were from ACCK schools, 13 from Kansas State University, seven from Wichita State University, six from Pittsburg State University, five from Emporia State University and three each from Fort Hays State and the University of Kansas.

McDonald proposed pursuing students that will graduate and be endorsed in fields that are of high demand like science and special education before the typical spring interview fairs. She also suggested finding teachers to fill positions before they become vacant if it looks like a position might become available. December graduates would be one source of early hires.

"At those fall job fairs, looking at December graduates, we had a number come by and want to talk to us and really I interviewed several this last year. I thought 'Wow, if we could just get this person here now.' But in January we don't have the openings," McDonald said.

She proposed hiring that person a semester before they are needed.

"How cool would that be to have that person on board a semester early, shadowing with the person they are going to take the place of, team teaching, getting some really good mentoring?" McDonald asked.

McDonald would like to establish a database of sophomore and junior education students at top recruitment schools to track what areas of endorsement they are pursuing, personal contacts made and how they fit with possible future openings.

The board approved the administration's recommendation to pursue the approaches outlined after some discussion.

Board Member Donna Viola raised concerns about where the money would come from for the employee incentives.

Watson said the incen-
tives, which he estimated would amount to be
between $3,000 to $4,000, would come from the contingency fund.

In other business:
- The board approved keeping substitute teacher rates at $83 a day, the highest rate in the county.
- Three handbooks -- Safety and Security Policies and Procedures, Certified Staff and Classified Staff -- were approved with corrections pointed out by board member Damon Kleinsorge.
- A donation of a computer scanner and monitors was accepted from Chris and Mindy Allen.
- Board member committee appointments were approved.
- A report on the Advanced Placement National Conference held in Las Vegas was presented by Watson and Jeff Allmon, middle school guidance counselor.
The names of Alyssa Anne Neumann, Isabel, Ryan Thomas Soper and Benjamin Booth, both of Medicine Lodge, were omitted from the list of University of Kansas spring honor roll students submitted to the Tribune.
Dear Editor:

Before starting their annual August work period, the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate worked to approve important legislation. Kansas delegation members voted in favor of H.R. 2272, the America COMPETES Act. This legislation, supported by the University of Kansas as well as the business community, creates a comprehensive program to reverse the declining number of graduates in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

The America COMPETES Act provides more than $33 billion for undergraduate and graduate school research programs in STEM fields. KU is also pleased the bill will strengthen K-12 programs, not only for students but for teachers, too. Under the bill, elementary, middle school and high school teachers will have the opportunity to spend time at a research university, learning about the latest discoveries or theories in their fields of expertise.

Kansans should thank their elected representatives for their support of this bill.

Students at KU will have more resources available to help them earn college degrees, which will keep Kansas and the United States moving forward as global leaders in knowledge, technology and innovation.

Richard Lariviére
Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor
University of Kansas
Bradley J. Newell, 2008 Doctor of Pharmacy Candidate, was one of nine students at the University of Kansas School of Pharmacy to participate in a summer elective clinical rotation that took him across the equator to Iquitos, Peru. The rotation was one month in duration and covered a wide variety of areas, from holistic medications to culture and life in the Amazon Basin.

The experience is designed to allow students not only to learn about how medicine is practiced in South America, but to meet experts at the Hospital de la Luz and the National Institute for Traditional Medicine and attend workshops on medicinal plants and agronomy at the National University of the Peruvian Amazon’s Institute of Research. In addition, the students learn from internationally known shaman Rossana Nascimento about rituals and spiritualism of the Peruvian people. A bonus of the program for students is a five-day journey down the Amazon River to visit tribes of Bora, Huitoto, and Yagua Indians and to lodge at the gallery of internationally renowned artist, Francisco Grippa in Pevas, Peru.

The program is hosted by the Global Awareness Institute with founder Dr. Barbara Brodman of Nova Southeastern University, Florida. She illustrates in her lectures that medicinal plants can provide the basis for a wide range of sustainable industries that can create jobs and income for residents of the region while saving the rainforest. GAI has brought many students to Iquitos since 1999.

Newell is the son of Donald and Debra Newell of Stafford, Kansas and Grandson of Doris Witt of Hudson, Kansas and Dorothy Newell of Stafford, Kansas. Newell is currently in his last professional year of the KU School of Pharmacy where he will graduate in May 2008. Newell is pictured above with Dr. Barbara Brodman.
LAWRENCE — Two north-west Kansas students at the University of Kansas recently took part in semester-long research studying the exodus of African-Americans to Kansas in 1879. The project was part of a class, History of the Peoples of Kansas.

Members of the class included John Alexander Herman, Hays, son of John Herman, a senior in philosophy, and Jocelyn B. Lucas, Goodland, daughter of Jack and Linda Lucas, a senior in elementary education.
U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback doesn't regard the outcome of this Saturday's straw poll in Iowa as make-or-break for his bid to become the next president.

Brownback has campaigned hard in Iowa, but a poll conducted in late July among Iowa Republicans showed four other declared candidates — plus former Sen. Fred Thompson of Tennessee, who has not formally jumped into the race — ahead of the Kansas Republican.


Leading the pack with the Iowa Republicans, and ahead of Brownback, were: former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney; former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani; Thompson; Arizona's Sen. John McCain; and former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee.

About 25,000 Iowans could converge Saturday on Ames for a day of political speeches, music, barbecue and voting. Tickets cost $35 — it's a fundraiser for the state party — and campaigns often provide free bus transportation, food and tickets for participants.

The names of Giuliani, McCain and Thompson will appear on the ballot, although those three are spinning the event.

The Ames straw ballot is an important step for Brownback as he builds grassroots support for the Iowa caucus Jan. 14, according to an e-mail response from Brownback spokesman John Rankin.

"I wouldn't expect Brownback, if he didn't do well, to drop out at this point, but I think it's an important indicator for him," said University of Kansas associate professor of political science Donald Haider-Markel.

Haider-Markel would be surprised if Brownback doesn't finish third or better Saturday, in light of the absences.

"If he can't, I would argue that he really should consider just withdrawing completely," Haider-Markel said.

Brownback does not regard the straw poll as a "make-or-break event," according to Rankin.

Kansans have donated more campaign money to Brownback than to any other GOP presidential hopeful. Russell resident Gerald J. Thouvenelle calls Brownback a "fine man," but he donated money to Romney.

But, Thouvenelle said he is concerned Romney might not be electable.

"I'll tell you who has the best chance — Thompson, whenever he declares. He seems to be the nearest to the Reagan political beliefs that I hold, too," Thouvenelle said.