Alice Kuo is on a journey that might never end. It’s a path where her steps are taken by strokes of her paintbrush.

Her progression could be seen by the evolving style of her paintings. Eventually, she wants to reach to the highest ideal of her own expression, she said.

Her quest led her to blend her Chinese heritage and her ongoing American experience. It also led her to the yellow fields, placid ponds and iconic silos of the Kaw River Valley that surround her Eudora home.

“I took a drawing class, and I had this special project where I had quite a few drawings and scenes of Eudora, and the professor indicated ‘Oh someone should hire you to do a Eudora documentary,’” Kuo said. “I don’t think there is such a documentary.”

Although her professor joked, Kuo tapped into the local scenery in different ways to expand her talents as a painter.

She was raised in Kaoshang, Taiwan, but has been living in Eudora since about 1990.

A series of her works are on display until Tuesday at the Johnson County Central Resource Library, 9875 West 87th St., Overland Park. The art will be displayed next from April 26 to June 28 at the Leawood Pioneer Library, 4700 Town Center Drive, Leawood.

With her works and weekend jaunts into the Eudora countryside, Kuo wants to emulate the manner in which ancient Chinese painters used to approach painting, she said.

“The paintings strive to express the inner spiritual belief of the ideal world,” Kuo said.

Her connection to the Chinese painters, known as the Chinese literati or literal painters, expands to more than the function of painting.

In ancient Chinese society, the art of a literati painter was an aspect of a well-rounded individual, Kuo said.

“They serve their role in society and also cultivate their art when they have leisure time,” she said.

Likewise, Kuo’s art is just one aspect of her life. She has earned several degrees, including a doctorate in education. She works part-time at Kansas University for the Transportation Research Institute and teaches an Asian art history course at Johnson County Community College. She even moonlights as a Chinese language journalist, covering local happenings for the Asian community in the Chinese language World-Journal.

“This is more like a weekend-type activity,” Kuo said.

Interspersed with her professional life, she also takes one art course per semester at KU.

She keeps a studio at the Art and Design Building on the KU campus filled with books, works in progress and supplies. Portraits, interior scenes and a light sketch of the Yellow Mountains in China hang at one end, while paintings of Eudora and the surrounding Kaw River Valley can be seen throughout the studio.

Through them, she can point to her evolving style.

Her subject matter has ranged from isolated farmlands, to bends in the Kansas River to the blue silo at Eudora’s Intech Business Park.

Her largest piece, a 60-inch-by-40-inch landscape currently on display, reflects her early style, she said.

“At that point I was driving for color and for more realistic depictions of things,” she said.

As time passed, she’s focused more on abstract expression. Books with work by Henri Matisse and Richard Diebenkorn lay on a table in her studio next to an unfinished painting.

Although her method of translating a scene onto canvas has changed, the way she searches for pictures remains constant.

When she goes off on her own, she focuses on back roads, Kuo said.

“I just want to find something near in the country. I try to find angles that appeal to me,” she said.

She looks for contrast of light and shadows or a particularly striking composition while searching for paintings, she said.

“I like to take cameras and take pictures and then try to form my scene in a way that I can copy the scene,” Kuo said.

She attempts to make connections...
with local farmers in order to feel comfortable while painting. By meeting people while paintings, she has developed friendships with those in the community, she said.

“I find people are very friendly,” she said.

Alice Kuo points out a detail in her painting of a local pond.
Couple hopes to fill rescue niche

ELVYN J. JONES
EJONES@THEWORLDCO.INFO

- For years, Cathy and Matthew Cain had a local reputation as the couple to call when emergency responders needed help with particular water emergencies.

  "We responded quite a few times," Matthew said. "Even years ago, I'd get phone calls to go look for people because fire departments couldn't do it."

  What the Cains had that emergency responders didn’t was an airboat, or shallow-draft craft pushed by a rear-mounted propeller, which could easily navigate the Kaw too shallow for traditional craft.

  Matthew started making airboats for his own recreational use on the Kansas River more than a decade ago. The Eudora couple's interest was such that he is president and she secretary of the Kaw Valley Air Boaters Association.

  Those rescue calls eventually made Matthew wonder if there was an opportunity to make and market airboat rescue craft. With a little research, he learned available rescue airboats were little more than traditional recreation craft with a windshield stuck on the front and a canvas cabin hung behind the controls.

  Two years ago, the Cains decided they could do better.

  "The last couple of years, has been a lot of trial and error before we arrived at a point we were ready to go into the open market," Matthew said. "We developed a lot of boats, but we weren’t ready to go on the market with them."

  The couple developed several models of airboats with polymer-coated aluminum hulls and reinforced with enough braces and structure to cut through icy rivers and lakes. Their boats also have fully enclosed heated aluminum cabins.

SEE CAINS, PAGE 3A

Boatwrighting right

Matthew and Cathy Cain are finishing their first airboat ambulance they sold to the city of Groove Br. Mich. Long-time airboat enthusiasts, the Eudora couple started Rescue Master Airboats Inc. to fill a demand for tough, quality built rescue airboats and are building the craft in De Soto East Bottoms.
Cains crafting niche
in water rescue market

FROM PAGE 1A

“All the comforts of home,” Cathy said.
The enclosed cabin also protects
their airboats from swamping in
rough water, which is a problem
with traditional craft, Matthew said.
The first order was from
Kansas University Biological
Survey near the start of the trial-
and-error period in the fall of 2005.
Jim Thorpe, a KU professor and
senior scientist with Biological
Survey, said the airboat would
enter its second and most intensive
summer of service this year.
“We use it for two purposes,” he said. “One is when we are
working on Plains rivers like the
Kansas River with sand beds. The
Arkansas and Platte, many parts of
the rivers need an airboat to operate. We also use it on some sec-
tions of reservoirs, wetlands or any
shallow environment.
“We’re really happy with the
boat. I think they are the best kind
of airboat that you can get in the
country by far.”
The second order was for a larger
Ambulance Master, which has
room to carry and treat two patients.
Also on the drawing board is a Fire
Master that will be equipped to
pump water on fires and a Dive
Master for underwater searches.
The Grosse Ile, Mich., Fire
Department ordered the first
$160,000 Ambulance Master for use
on the Detroit River and Lake Erie.
The Cains said they got the
order after placing an advertise-
ment in a fire and rescue trade
magazine.
“They were looking for a res-
cue airboat, but weren’t satisfied
with what was out there,” he said.
“When they saw that advertise-
ment, they decided this was what
they wanted.”
A Web site and word of mouth
from a demonstration on
Michigan’s Saginaw River has
also created interest. In the
February 2006 demonstration,
their airboat proved its superiority
to rescue airboats with fiberglass or
composite hulls that couldn’t stand
up to the punishment of breaking
through ice or the effect of “ice
channeling” when the parted ice
presses in on both sides of the hull,
Matthew said.
“There were about four inches of
ice on the river,” he said. “This boat
broke the ice and survived the chan-
neling.
“They were very impressed.”
“So were we,” Cathy said. “We’d
never seen that much ice before.”
That demonstration, a Web site
and advertisements they’ve placed
have drummed up interest from fire
departments and emergency medical
services in the northern half United
States and Canada, the couple said.
“We thought the military
would be our big client, but it looks like it’s
going to be fire departments,”
Matthew said. “Since the ad
appeared in the magazine, we’ve
had about 700 requests for informa-
tion.”
Building an airboat strong
enough to break through four in-
ches of ice is a labor-intensive
process. The Cains said it takes
them and employee Randy
Canaan, De Soto, about 10 weeks
to build a boat. They have jigs for
the hull, cabin and propeller cage,
but structural pieces that reinforce
the hull have to be hand crafted.
“We don’t want to go with a
cookie-cutter type of thing,” Cathy
said. “We want to deliver a good
product.”
The term airboat sells the craft
short. The powerful push from the
ambulance’s 572-cubic-inch, 620
horsepower motor allows the
4,000-pound craft to operate on
ice, snow, wet sand and even pave-
ment. It can move the boat over
water at 50 mph, Matthew said.
“There’s a hurricane force wind
coming off the back of that thing,
so you don’t want to stand behind
it,” he said.
The boats are now built in a
shop the couple leases from Dave
Penny in De Soto’s East Bottoms,
but the Cains said they would have
to relocate to a bigger facility in
time. The uniqueness of their prod-
cut has them optimistic even
should others decide to copy their
success.
“I figure we’ve got a head start
in experience and design,”
Matthew said. “We’ve done a pre-
tty good job of getting our name out
there.”
Award-winning KU intern earns praise at De Soto Multi-Service Center

EVAJN J. JONES
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Majoring in social work at Kansas University, Paula Pyle understood the need for programs to help those in need. But nearly eight months at the De Soto Multi-Service Center has opened her eyes to how much poverty can exist amongst affluence.

“That so much need exists in Johnson County,” she said when asked what she found surprising about her student internship. “There’s poor people in Blue Valley.”

Pyle’s internship has put her among those on the frontline responding to that need.

De Soto Multi-Service Center coordinator Jodi Hitchcock said Pyle wasn’t asked to answer the phone or straighten out the files since starting her internship late last August. With traffic steadily increasing at the De Soto site of the Johnson County Human Services, an intern is a resource too valuable to waste on such trivial tasks.

“She works with clients; she’s doing case management. She went through the whole routine,” Hitchcock said. “She has the basic skills to just jump in and go. Sometimes students are a bit shy, but Paula just jumps right in. If she doesn’t know something, she’ll find out.

“I’ve been really fortunate with the students I’ve had. It’s vital with the amount of work we do out of this office. It’s just one of the best places to get experience because you get a taste of about everything.”

On the two days a week Pyle commutes to the center from her home in Gardner, she is usually the first person people see as they walk in the door.

“We have a nice steady stream,” she said. “It gives you a general feel of what people need and struggle with — definitely health care needs but also things like mortgages, rent and utilities.”

Two committee assignments added to the experience and workload. With Hitchcock, Pyle sat on the committee that monitors the De Soto FlexRide transit program and the Johnson County K-State Extensions Family Nutrition Program Committee.

That latter committee seat led to an assignment that Hitchcock said took advantage of Pyle’s excellent organizational skills.

SEE INTER, PAGE 3A
KU intern gets chance to do it all

FROM PAGE 1A

“She concentrated on compiling a nutrition resource book,” Hitchcock said. “It has budgeting information, meal planning, grocery shopping tips — everything you want in a resource guide to give people a way to make their lives a little less chaotic.

“It will go countywide soon.”

Before she was married, Pyle worked as a secretary in the social work department at Olathe Medical Center. The good feelings about the experience stayed with her as she raised a young family and worked part-time as a substitute teacher.

“I enjoyed the work and always had the desire to one day return to school,” she said. “I had my associate’s degree so I was admitted right in.”

This month, Pyle was awarded the Margo Award as the outstanding undergraduate intern in the KU social work program. The award is one of four named for KU social work professor emeritus Margaret Schutz Gordon, which are given annually to one undergraduate and three graduate students.

KU social welfare professor Jean Peterson, who directs social work internship program, said field supervisors nominates students and the school’s facility makes final selection for the award.

Pyle’s stay in De Soto is about over. She will graduate in May and will start graduate school in June with her next internship posting coming in August.

She will miss De Soto and Hitchcock, Pyle said. “If one revelation from the internship was the amount of need that exists amongst affluence, another lesson was that people care, she said.

“Since last August and early September I’ve seen the generosity of a small community,” she said. “I’ve experienced that people do care. I think that has to do with the small community De Soto is.”
Sunflower Village ‘sprung up like a mushroom’ to meet defense plant’s housing needs

The first school building was built in 1944. Before the completion of this building, children attended classes in various buildings. Some went to school in a building retained from Trailertown, and some were transported to the overcrowded De Soto Grade School. Mrs. Bartholomew taught the first kindergarten class at 202 Lane M, but later moved to the nursery building.

Additions to the school were made in 1945 and again in 1954. In 1951-1952, enrollment at Sunflower Grade School reached 1,029 in kindergarten through eighth grade. The building could not accommodate this many students. There were four first-grade teachers, each had two sections of one in the morning and one in the afternoon. One kindergarten teacher had three sections.

A new grade-school building was built on the east side of the new village in 1953 and an addition added in 1956.

The Sunflower Child Care Center, more commonly known as the nursery, was opened in 1945. It was designed to take care of children while parents were employed in war production work at the plant. Following the war, need for the service still existed, although it was no longer possible to operate it through Lanam Act funds. Arrangements were made for the services to continue, first by help of the village council and U.S.O. and later the Sunflower Civic Association.

A village non-denominational community church first met Aug. 15, 1943, in the Old Trailertown building. This was arranged by the Rev. C.L. Harnen, pastor of the De Soto Methodist Church. The Rev. W.O. Watson became the second full-time pastor in October 1944.

The need for Catholic services in the village was recognized early. The Rev. Lorenz Reith of Holy Family Church in Eudora arranged for mass each Sunday morning in the game room of the community building. Later, when the recreation center was opened, the use of the theater portion was offered. Subsequently, both the non-denominational and Catholic congregations met in the grade school.

When Sunflower was at its peak during World War II, the population of the village was approximately 6,000 people living in 1,432 dwelling units. The units were furnished with refrigerators, gas ranges and stoves for heating. Rent including trash and garbage removal ranged from $29 to $3.50 a month, depending on the number of bedrooms.

Sunflower sprang up like a mushroom. It was called the fastest-growing town in Kansas. The population turnover was high during the war when families moved from war plant to war plant.

When the war was over, Sunflower was faced with the prospect of folding up. Instead, the government authorized the use of empty units for service men from military bases in Olathe, Topeka and Leavenworth. The service families were gradually replaced by Kansas University students, and the place was nicknamed Jayhawkville. Approximately, 1,000 single male students occupied 26 buildings acquired by Kansas University. More than 1,000 student families moved into Sunflower also, and the nickname switched to Nursery Junction. Maternity and children’s shops opened in the commercial section and a nursery was added to the recreational center.

By 1950, the college student population was decreasing, and Sunflower was on the
decline. But the Korean War started and the ordnance plant was reactivated for powder production and Sunflower’s population increased once again.

But with the war’s end, the population again slacked off. In December 1955, the federal government transferred title of the housing units in Sunflower to the Sunflower Ordnance Works, which started selling unoccupied units to private buyers. By September 1956, there were 977 dwelling units remaining, with only 147 occupied.

Frank Rother, who had operated the grocery store for nearly 11 years, cancelled his lease March 16, 1957. Paul Milberger, who operated the theater, bowling alley and restaurant, dropped his lease in May.

In 1961, Sunflower was sold to Quick Way Homes and is now (1972) low-rent housing.

The two school buildings, Sunflower building and the annex building are now owned and operated by De Soto USD 232.

This is the conclusion of a two-part look at the history of Sunflower Village believed to have been written by Floyd Talley, who was De Soto School District superintendent from 1961 to 1967.
Two Wyandotte Countians were among the 68 University of Kansas students who have returned to school after spending spring break on service-learning projects at Alternative Spring Breaks sites in the District of Columbia, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, Utah and Wisconsin. They are Hannah Marie Nusz and James Michael McIntosh.

They worked March 18-25 with agencies at 10 locations that address such issues as animal rescue, urban homelessness, conservation, health care, linguistics, environmental preservation, hurricane relief, education and help for people with disabilities.

Nusz, daughter of Christy and Ricky Nusz, was a site leader for the National Coalition for the Homeless in Washington, D.C. A graduate of Piper High School, she is a freshman at KU. Her major is African-American studies.

McIntosh, who graduated from Sumner Academy of the Arts & Sciences, is the son of Marvin and Deborah McIntosh. He is a sophomore at KU, majoring in human biology. He volunteered at Best Friends Animal Sanctuary in Kanab, Utah.

KU’s student-run Alternative Spring Breaks program offers students a unique opportunity to make service part of their university educational experience. After students are selected for the program, they are required to attend the Special Projects in Community course. If they complete all course requirements, they can earn two college credit hours.

An Alternative Spring Breaks project counts as one honors unit for the University Honors Program, which now requires students who want to graduate with honors to complete one or two honors units outside the classroom.
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Coalition presses to hold off legal restrictions on stem cell research

By GREG LOWER
Staff Writer

A Kansas group wants to hold off legal bans on cutting-edge research, and an Independence woman has joined the debate on behalf of her son.

Margaret Botts of Independence is visiting other parts of southeast Kansas with the Kansas Coalition for Life-saving Cures, a group seeking to prevent legal restrictions on stem cell research. The group is urging people to contact their state legislators about the issue.

Brad Kemp, a spokesman for the group, said the state Legislature has considered several bills to restrict stem cell research, which supporters say could provide cures for various neurological diseases including multiple sclerosis, Alzheimer’s disease and spinal cord injuries. Opponents argue the research could lead to human cloning and abortion opponents say destroying embryos takes human life.

Six bills were introduced to the Kansas Legislature this session dealing with stem cell research.

"Anything that's legal on the federal level should remain legal in Kansas," Kemp said. He said that is not a radical concept.

Rochelle Chronister of Neodesha also is touring with the group. Chronister, a former legislator and Kansas Secretary for Social and Rehabilitation Services, is a Kansas University graduate who grew stem cells as a research virologist working with polio.

"They were mice cells," Chronister said.

For Margaret Botts, the issue has a personal side. Her son Darrin was paralyzed from the waist down after he fell 18 feet from a deer stand and landed on his neck on Oct. 1, 2005.

"I'd give that guy my legs if I could," she said. "I want him to have a chance."

But Kemp said some of the laws under consideration would make those first steps a crime.

"He'd be stepping into a jail cell," Kemp said.

Federal regulations restrict funding for certain types of research, but do not ban the research itself. Voters in Missouri recently passed Amendment 2, an amendment to the state Constitution that allows stem cell research.

The Missouri campaign began as an initiative petition, and Chronister said Kansas does not have that process. Constitutional amendments must begin in the Legislature, and she said that can be an extremely difficult process.

Kemp said the goal instead is to keep stem cell research legal through legislation.

"We want the same protections in Kansas," he said.

Kemp said stem cell research relies on two methods of growing cells. One uses fertilized embryonic cells created through in vitro fertilization. Kemp said the embryonic cells are often discarded, and would be used with the couple's permission.

"They're being discarded and destroyed anyway," he said.

The second method uses unfertilized egg cells. Kemp said both methods should be available.

Two of the proposed bills would ban a technique called somatic cell nuclear transfer. Unlike embryonic cells from in vitro fertilization, which are genetically unique, SCNT places the nucleus of an existing cell into an unfertilized egg. Opponents say that if the embryo is allowed to grow, it will become a clone, which is genetically identical with the donor human.

Chronister said a lot of people object to what cloning would do. She said cloning of more complex mammals has not been terribly successful so far, and both cloning and stem cell research raise serious ethical issues.

"They're legitimate discussions," Kemp said. "We've grappled with those in the past."

At one time, the presence of a heartbeat determined whether a person was alive. Kemp said some people opposed heart transplants on the grounds that it would kill the donor.
Today, doctors use brain activity to determine if a person has died. Kemp said 50,000 people are alive with heart transplants that would have died without the research.

The coalition, which is made up of approximately 60 organizations, reports 80 percent of voters support federally-permitted stem cell research in Kansas, including 72 percent of Republicans, 65 percent of conservatives and 60 percent of those who say they strongly oppose abortion.

Kemp said opponents of the research don’t recognize who it affects and how.

“We’re talking about real people,” he said.

Chronister said they are not promising the cures will happen, but the direction of the research is promising.

“We’re not saying they’re going to be the answer,” she said. “It’s one of those next things.”

For Botts, it is a chance to see her son recover.

“I pray every day the stem cell will pass,” she said.
Career Day at KHS includes College Fair

Career Day/College Fair Day was held at Kingman High School on Tuesday. Guest speakers on Tuesday included Rene Steven, Director of Operations for Spangles Restaurants and Jack Taylor of Kansas State University who presented a session on “What Happens After High School”. This 6th annual event was organized by Mrs. Bradshaw and Mrs. Twiner. Stuco and other instructors provided assistance as well.

Twenty-five professionals were invited to speak to the students about their careers. A few of the speakers were Kingman High School graduates Chasity Helm, Michael Armour, Justin Reid and Lacey Tiesmeyer.

Following their presentations, the speakers were treated to a steak dinner held in the consumer science rooms.

The students were given an extended lunch hour to give them enough time to visit with the college representatives in the old gym where 23 schools had brochures and a representative that could answer questions about their facility. Kansas University had a conflict and couldn’t send a rep, but provided information to display. Schools included: Baker University, Bethel College, Emporia State University, Fort Hays State University, Friends University, Kansas State University, Kansas Wesleyan University, McPherson College, Newman University, Southwestern College, Tabor College, Washburn University, Wichita State University, Barton County Community College, Butler Community College, Cowley College, Flint Hills Technical College, Hutchinson Community College, North Central Kansas Technical College, Pratt Community College, Seward County College and Wichita Area Technical College.

CHASITY HELM (left) an alumnus of KHS, and now a lawyer in Wichita, was one of the presenters at Career Day at Kingman High School. All the presenters were treated to a steak dinner in the Consumer Science classroom following their sessions.
RENE STEVEN, Director of Operations of Spangles Restaurants was guest speaker at Career Day. Posing with Steven is KHS instructor, Mr. DeWeese.

SR. AIRMAN Swan Milton, from McConnell Air Force Base spoke to students at Career Day.
MR. SAWYER, (at the grill) and Mr. Wright, along with several students cooked steaks that were served to the guest speakers at Career Day.

SHOWN above is Barton County Community College representative, Kala Steffen.
Jayhawks ink $65M marketing agreement with Kentucky-based Host Communications

BY ADAM KNAPP

One of the country’s premier marketing agencies will take over the multimedia rights at the University of Kansas, paying Jayhawk athletics $65 million over the next decade.

Host Communications, located in Lexington, Ky., will enter into a partnership with ESPN Regional Television to market KU’s rights. The deal gives KU the eighth-most lucrative multimedia rights contract in the country.

The new deal is not expected to have much impact on Wichita broadcasts of KU games.

“If we didn’t think Kansas was worth it, we wouldn’t be paying it,” says Tom Stultz, president and CEO of Host. “If you take a look at our lineup, we may not have the most schools, but I think we’ve got the most elite schools. Kansas is a wonderful fit. It’s a school that totally dominates the state. Those are the schools we try to get, and we give them 100 percent of our attention.”

Host’s clients also include college heavyweights Arizona, Kentucky, Tennessee, Michigan and Nebraska.

“It is a big deal,” says Jim Marchiony, associate athletic director for external affairs at Kansas. “Host Communications practically invented the art of collegiate sports marketing. This is what Host does and does well. They will make the most of this opportunity to grow the sponsorship program at Kansas, and for us to be a part of that is very exciting. The clients they have are of the upper echelon of college athletics, and those are the folks we’d like to be affiliated with.

“We felt Host had a real appreciation for what the University of Kansas was worth as a client, and we certainly respect their outstanding history in this field.”

Marchiony and Stultz say the deal will not likely affect Jayhawk radio broadcasts, which are currently aired locally on KFH, 1240-AM and 98.7-FM.

“Our plan is definitely to still have them on KFH,” says Tony Duesing, the station’s program director. “The pregame, the postgame, everything. KU football and basketball have been really popular there and I can’t imagine things will change. I’m thinking next year people won’t even be able to tell a difference.”

The Jayhawks previously had a seven-year, $40 million agreement solely with ESPN Regional that was supposed to expire in 2012.

Learfield Sports was also believed to be competing for KU’s rights, and more than a month ago posted an internal blog saying it had agreed to a deal with the Jayhawks. However, that item was quickly removed.

The issue may have been with the fact that Learfield already owns the rights to KU’s two biggest rivals, Kansas State and Missouri.

In addition to handling KU’s radio broadcasts, Host will sell, produce and distribute any KU games not included in the Big 12’s television package. Host will also take over advertising for game programs, while handling signage, hospitality, corporate sponsorships and the Jayhawks’ Web site, www.kuathletics.com.

Linda Brantner, president and CEO of Delta Dental of Kansas Inc., says the deal will not likely affect Delta’s sponsorship of KU.

“Our support for KU will remain the same and the people we’ll be dealing with will remain the same, at least from what I’ve been told,” Brantner says. “There may be a few changes, but I expect them to be minimal. We look forward to it.”

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CHANGES NOT EXPECTED LOCALLY
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* Estimated value; Texas deal is a revenue share instead of a guaranteed figure. ** Host paid another $10 million to buy out action sports signage rights. Source: SportsBusiness Journal archives.
Governor signs tax-cut measures into law

Associated Press

TOPEKA — Gov. Kathleen Sebelius signed a series of bills Thursday designed to cut the tax burden of businesses and some Kansans by about $32 million in the coming fiscal year.

The largest of the eight new laws phases out over five years the tax businesses pay for the privilege of operating in Kansas, a cumulative savings of $135 million.

Other cuts would help seniors by exempting Social Security benefits from state taxes, increase a property tax refund for homeowners 55 and older and increase a tax credit for the working poor.

Legislators approved the cuts in early April before taking their three-week spring break. They also have approved a $12.3 billion budget that covers the bulk of the state’s spending for the next fiscal year, which begins July 1.

Sebelius sought to raise the threshold at which businesses pay the franchise tax so that it applied to firms with a net worth of $1 million or more. But legislators maintained that eliminating it altogether would improve the business climate and create more jobs.

In signing the bill, Sebelius cautioned that eliminating the tax could create revenue problems in future years.

“As we move forward with this multiyear proposal, I intend to continue to urge the Legislature to reconsider the ... (later) years of this tax cut, and instead substitute other business tax relief measures which could result in increasing jobs and growing the economy,” she said in a statement.

Sebelius said the state cannot afford to erode its tax base, “so we have to make choices.”

Legislators were pleased with Sebelius’ decision to sign the bills. House Speaker Melvin Neufeld said legislators were right to return some of the state’s unanticipated revenue growth to taxpayers, while still funding state government.

“We will stimulate much more in job and revenue growth in Kansas by returning unexpected revenue back into our economy than if we increase state spending,” said Neufeld, R-Ingalls.

Business leaders also praised the tax cuts, saying the reductions will allow companies to invest more in their operations and work force.

“Our members have been frustrated with the franchise tax for years,” said David Cross, president of the Kansas Livestock Association. “The franchise tax is a burden on farming and ranching operations trying to build equity to maintain financially strong business.”

Sebelius also signed a bill that would establish the Johnson County Education Research Triangle, allowing local officials to raise property and sales taxes to fund development of bioscience facilities. Revenue generated by the taxes, if approved by voters, would go for the construction of research centers for the University of Kansas and Kansas State University in Johnson County.

The measure is the latest in the state’s ongoing efforts to attract and expand bioscience research and industry in Kansas.

“Bioscience research has an amazing potential for new treatments and cures. We want those cures to be discovered in Kansas,” Sebelius said. “That’s why we’ve made the recruitment of bioscience companies a top priority and why we’ve invested in bioscience research and education at our universities.”

Now you know

HOW STATE TAX CUTS WILL ADD UP

The most significant tax measures signed Thursday by Gov. Kathleen Sebelius:

FRANCHISE TAX
- Relief over the next fiscal year: $7 million.
- Relief over five years: $135 million.

The tax is a fee for the privilege of doing business in Kansas and is assessed against the value of a business’ assets, $125 for every $100,000, for all businesses with at least $100,000 in assets. It is capped at $20,000.

The threshold would rise to $1 million for 2007. The tax rate would then drop to $10.5 million.

SOCIAL SECURITY
- Relief over the next fiscal year: $5.4 million.
- Relief, over five years: $56.9 million.

The state taxes a portion of earned Social Security income if a person’s household income is below $50,000. For 2008, the threshold would rise to $75,000.

EARNED INCOME CREDIT
- Relief over the next fiscal year: $7.5 million.
- Relief over five years: $45.8 million.

The federal government provides an income tax credit to low-wage workers. Single workers with no children qualify if their incomes are less than $12,000; married workers raising two or more children can receive a credit if their household incomes are less than $38,000.

The state provides its own income tax credit, which is 15 percent of what a person receives as the federal credit. The state’s credit would rise to 17 percent of what a person receives.
$94 for every $100,000 of assets for 2008, $63 for 2009, $31 for 2010 and be repealed for 2011.

For 2007, Social Security benefits would be exempt from tax.

That would make the top state credits $70 for a single worker with no children and $771 for a married worker with two or more children.