TOPEKA, Kan. — Alexis Platt is looking forward to jumping and running.

The 7-year-old Topeka girl, diagnosed last fall with osteosarcoma, is undergoing chemotherapy and waiting for a prosthetic leg to be fitted following a rare surgical procedure that amputated her upper leg and then rotated and reattached the remaining limb so her ankle would serve as a knee joint.

After arriving at The University of Kansas Hospital, Alexis Platt receives a quick check-up from her doctor before beginning chemotherapy.

The surgery, called rotation-plasty, has been in use since 1995, but few doctors in the United States have actually performed the procedure.

"It's rarely done because there's not a lot of kids who need it," said Dr. Kimberly Templeton, an associate professor of orthopedic surgery at The University of Kansas Hospital in Kansas City, Kan., who performed the surgery on Alexis.

Dawn and Bill Platt, Alexis' parents, knew something wasn't right with their daughter last fall when she began complaining about pain in her right thigh and cutting back on her physical activity. After a series of medical tests — X-rays, an MRI and biopsy — Alexis, a first-grader at Pauline Central Elementary School, was diagnosed with bone cancer in mid-October.

The diagnosis was a shock to the family.

Bill Platt said osteosarcoma is a type of bone cancer commonly seen in young people but it occurs mostly in teenagers and rarely in children Alexis' age.

"At first, when you hear the word 'cancer' he said, then paused before explaining his father, grandmother and grandfather died of cancer.

"My dad died of cancer," Dawn added, "and when Alexis made the connection (that she had cancer, too) she asked if she would die."

Preparing for surgery

Chemotherapy was started immediately at the KU hospital because osteosarcoma is an aggressive cancer that spreads rapidly. One of the hardest things the Platts had to do was tell Alexis that the hair flowing down her back would fall out.

"We donated her hair to Locks of Love. " Bill Platt said, referring to a program that takes shorn hair and makes wigs for cancer patients. "One week after her first (chemo) treatment, her hair started tailing out. It took three days. She also lost her eyelashes and eyebrows."

Once the growth of cancer was successfully stopped with chemotherapy, Templeton said the rotation-plasty was the next step.

Alexis was prepared for the surgery, scheduled Jan. 4, by her parents. Templeton and Kathy Davis, a pediatric education coordinator with the KU hospital.

Bill Platt said Davis wrote a script about the preceding six months of Alexis' life, with the last few pages discussing the amputation of her leg. Templeton said a doll was used to show Alexis what would happen during the surgery and what to expect afterward.

"She cried probably for a day," her father said of his daughter's reaction when she learned she would lose part of her leg.

Templeton said the rotation-plasty took about eight hours. During the procedure, the femur was cut below the hip joint and below the knee. The lower leg then was turned 180 degrees and secured to the upper leg with a plate and screws.

Alexis' ankle will serve as a knee and her foot will become the base to support a prosthetic leg.

"She will have to learn to use her ankle backward," her father said. "The reason we did it is so she could have mobility."

Recovery process

After the surgery, Templeton said, Alexis' leg was placed in a cast so the bone could heal properly, and Alexis began a 10-week cycle of chemotherapy. A Hickman catheter will remain inserted into her chest throughout the 10 weeks to allow the medicine to be delivered more easily. The youngster also is taking four other medications.

Recently, the process of creating a prosthetic leg was started.

"The leg is ready to receive (the prosthesis) but we don't know when she'll get it. " Templeton said. "It takes time to get something that fits properly."

Bill Platt said Alexis will receive physical therapy for about eight months at Children's Mercy Hospital in Kansas City, Mo. Templeton said she will monitor Alexis' condition every month for about 1 1/2 to two years.

Although Alexis is progressing well physically, Templeton said she and Davis were worried about the reaction the youngster might receive from her
classmates when she returned to school. So they visited Pauline Central to explain the surgery to students, teachers and parents.

"The children were extremely attentive," Templeton said.

Alexis is able to attend school for a half day when she is feeling well. Otherwise, a tutor visits her home for one hour a day to keep her up to date on her studies.

Helping others

Bill Platt said "everything is different" since Alexis' diagnosis.

He quit his job as a truck driver for his father's transportation company at the end of October so he could be home with Alexis and their 5-year-old son, Nick. Dawn, who is pregnant and will give birth in about three weeks, kept working at Blue Cross/Blue Shield because the family's insurance plan is set up through her employer.

So far, their insurance policy has covered all but about $400 to $500 of Alexis' medical expenses. But Dawn is looking at two weeks without a salary and then four weeks of half-pay during her maternity leave to cover everyday expenses and all the additional costs associated with taking Alexis back and forth to Kansas City for treatment.

The Platts said several fundraisers have been organized on their behalf. A benefit dinner, dance and raffle will be Friday evening at The Vineyard, 2842 S.E. 29th St.

"It's taken a lot of pressure off of us," Dawn said. "Sometimes, it's difficult. I feel bad — it feels odd having to ask for help when you're used to being OK. It's hard to ask.

"We appreciate everyone's help. It's amazing the people who have come to us and say they are helping."

And in their own way, the Platts are helping others, too.

When they learned of Alexis' disease, Dawn and Bill said they felt alone and knew of no other parents in a similar situation. Now, they make themselves available to other families with children at the KU hospital for cancer treatment.

Alexis Platt, 7, left, watches television with her brother, Nick, 5, while waiting to start her chemotherapy at the University of Kansas Hospital in Kansas City, Kan., last month. (AP Wirephoto)
LAWRENCE, Kan. — Caney Valley High School journalism student Chance Harmon earned honors at the Kansas Scholastic Press Association’s state contest last Saturday at the University of Kansas.

Harmon won an honorable mention award in the class 3A division for news writing.

Other CVHS journalism students to compete at the state contest included Brice Metcalf, Paige Testerman, Becca Deal, Amanda Ballew, Lance Graham, Brooke Gaston, Brittany Roper, Molly Robbins, Allie Abilez, Tomy Ford, Apple Hoard, Apryl McCammon, and Samantha Henry.

Tom Nelson is the CVHS journalism instructor.
University of Kansas alumni in Harvey County recently awarded scholarships to Harvey County Kansas Honors Scholars who plan to attend The University of Kansas.

Two scholarships were presented to students at Newton High School. Spencer Titus, son of Rob and Mary Beth Titus, and Sandra Yoder, daughter of Sam and Sylvia Yoder, were both awarded scholarships during the school’s scholarship night.

Taylor Kaufman, son of Von and Marla Kaufman and senior at Halstead High School, was awarded a scholarship Tuesday. Dawn Schmidt, daughter of Mark and Anne Burch and senior at Hesston High School, will be awarded a scholarship today.

The scholarships, totalling $2,400, are made possible by contributions to the Kansas Honors Program by Harvey County alumni and friend of The University of Kansas.
E-marketing provides a chance for success for companies because of lower costs, competition.

By HUMA KHAN
Special to The Star

The long tail may be calling for your business.

"There is a mass market, but there are lots and lots of small niches. With the Internet, you have the opportunity to capture into demand that doesn't have the volume that popular items do," said Kissan Joseph, associate professor and a Stockton Research Fellow at the University of Kansas. "If you don't address that opportunity someone else will."

By capturing the "long tail," or the small niche market that is normally not serviced by large providers, Lenexa-based Freightquote.com has become a $200 million, 500-employee company in less than a decade. The firm emerged on the ecommerce scene in 1998 to specifically service small and mid-size firms that didn't have the resources and purchasing power to fulfill their shipping needs.

"On the one end of the tail, you have the very large enterprise, which we pretty much steer clear of," said Tim Barton, chairman and chief executive of Freightquote.com. "Then you hit that long tail where there are..."
$10 million perk aims to help prove engineering is the profession to pursue

Donation from Garmin co-founder will set up scholarship funds at six regional schools.

By DAVID HAYES
The Kansas City Star

In the comic world of Dilbert, engineers are socially inept and beset by bungling bureaucrats.

In the real world of Min H. Kao, chief executive of Olathe's Garmin Ltd., engineering is about making things that work. It's the profession to be in. And Kao is willing to put his money where his mouth is.

Kao today will announce that his family foundation is donating $10 million to establish scholarship funds at six regional universities for students majoring in electrical and computer engineering.

Kao, an electrical engineer who co-founded Garmin, said he decided to fund the program because he was concerned the United States was losing its edge in engineering and design.

"I learned more in the three months I was here than in a year of college," said Shannon Timmons, a new Garmin Ltd. employee who was an intern there.
KAO: Concern over U.S. losing engineering edge prompts donation

FROM AI

"As a business leader of a company like Garmin, and as an immigrant, I feel it should be a real concern for this country," Kao said. "I don't think it's good for a country to be a pure service business."

The education initiative is the somewhat private billionaire CEO's first significant endowment in the Kansas City area.

"Compared to Asian countries, the career of engineer is somewhat overlooked" in the United States, Kao said. "Young kids don't aspire to be engineers."

Such concerns increasingly are being heard from business leaders across the country.

Bill Gates, chairman of Microsoft Corp., told a U.S. Senate committee in March that the nation needed to fund 25,000 new undergraduate scholarships a year in math, technology and science to remain competitive.

"First, and foremost, the U.S. cannot maintain its economic leadership unless our work force consists of people who have the knowledge and skills needed to drive innovation," Gates told the committee.

Other groups, from the prestigious Business Roundtable to the National Academies, have echoed those concerns.

Business leaders are worried that Asian countries, in particular, are putting more emphasis on high-tech education and research than America.

For instance, while there is dispute about the magnitude of the numbers, the National Academies contends China graduates 2.5 engineers, computer scientists and information technologists for every one U.S. graduate in those fields.

Kao said Garmin served as a prime example that it was possible for a U.S. firm to compete successfully in the high-tech field.

Garmin is the largest manufacturer of navigation gear in America, controlling a 50 percent or better share of the U.S. market. "From a competitiveness point of view, Garmin has demonstrated that it's still viable to make things," Kao said.

The fast-growing company added more than 250 engineers in 2006, and 70 more during the first three months of 2007. Garmin has more than 1,000 engineers on staff, most of them in Olathe.

Cliff Pemble, Garmin's vice president of engineering, knows how important engineers can be to a company.

"Much of the work being done to innovate and develop new products is being done overseas," Pemble said. "Making things is done by other people. It used to be that way in this country as well, but over time things have blurred a little bit."

Because Garmin does most of its design and engineering work in Olathe, the company remains "very engineer-centric."

"For our core engineering positions, we've always said we'll just hire as many as we can," Pemble said. "We plan to fill 200-plus positions this year, but if 250 came along we'd take that."

Garmin hires more engineers each year than the entire graduating class of some engineering schools, Pemble noted.

"We need to attract the best and brightest into this field and increase the number of electrical and computer engineering graduating students," Pemble said.

A survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers found that, nationally, graduating engineering students would command the highest starting salary — about $55,000 in the case of electrical engineers.

Garmin starts engineers "in the mid- to high $50s," Pemble said.

That contributes to the company's $100 million annual payroll in Olathe.

"From a competitiveness point of view, it is somewhat overlooked," Pemble said. "Many companies might say, 'Oh, I don't have an engineer.'"

"We need to attract the best and brightest into this field and keep the competition going," Kao said. "We're trying to do something to make that happen."

"I think it's important for government to do whatever it can to support this type of initiative," Kao said.

The Garmin Electrical and Computer Engineering Education Initiative is used to fund 100 scholarships a year, offering students $5,000 annually. It will be tied in with Garmin's internship program, offering 75 or more summer jobs that include a furnished apartment and health and dental benefits.

"This initiative will help attract the best and brightest students to the field of electrical and computer engineering," Kao said. "We believe that this combination of scholarship money and a hands-on experience ... will convince college students to commit to an engineering career."

Kao is hoping the program will give students the incentive to stick with engineering programs once they enroll. Nationally, more than 40 percent of those who enter engineering school switch to other majors, or drop-out.

"In total, the Garmin package — scholarship, internship salary, housing and benefits — is worth about $20,000 a year for students," Pemble said.

The Garmin internship program, which could employ up to 65 students this summer, is itself a perk.
"I learned more in the three months I was here than in a year of college," said Shannon Timmons, a former intern who has been with Garmin full time for three months.

While Kao said he considered philanthropic giving to be a private thing, the scholarship fund is his second high-profile donation in recent years.

Kao, who earned master's and doctorate degrees in electrical engineering at the University of Tennessee, donated $12.5 million to help build a new electrical and computer engineering building there. He donated an additional $5 million to help fund the university's engineering program.

To reach David Hayes, call (816) 234-4904 or send e-mail to dhayes@kcstar.com.
American Pharmacists Association Foundation announces 2007 Scholarship Recipients

Washington, D.C. - The American Pharmacists Association (APhA) Foundation announces the 2007 APhA Auxiliary/APhA Foundation Student Pharmacists Scholarship recipients. Kaylene Mick (APhA Auxiliary/APhA Foundation Scholar), from the University of Kansas School of Pharmacy, is one such recipient.

There were nine student scholarships awarded across the United States to recognize high academic performance and demonstrated leadership skills through active involvement in the APhA Academy of Student Pharmacists (APhA-ASP). The scholarship recipients were recently recognized during APhA 2007 at the Foundation’s Annual Contributor Breakfast and honored again at the APhA-ASP Awards Ceremony.

Kaylene Mick previously worked for the Kansas Pharmacists Association as an executive intern; in that role, she researched and updated the Kansas Pharmacy and Related Laws book and helped plan the association’s annual meeting and fundraisers. She currently works for Dillon’s Pharmacy as a pharmacy intern. Among her honors and awards from the University of Kansas are the Dean’s Honor Roll (2003-2006), Rho Chi Scholarship Honor Society (2005), Phi Lambda Sigma Leadership Honor Society (2005), and the Jeremy A. Matchett Excellence in Pharmacy Award (2006). Kaylene has shown extensive involvement in APhA-ASP through her positions as APhA House of Delegates Representative, Chapter President, and APhA-ASP Awards Standing Committee Vice Chair. She also served as a member of the Kansas Pharmacists Association Board of Trustees.

The scholarships recognize those students who choose to invest their time through active involvement in their school’s APhA-ASP chapter. These exceptional students help shape the future of the profession while managing the demands of a full-time pharmacy curriculum.

The APhA Foundation is affiliated with the American Pharmacists Association, the national professional society of pharmacists in the United States of America. The APhA Foundation, a nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C., works to design solutions to medication use problems in the United States. The APhA Foundation’s mission is to improve the quality of consumer health affected by pharmacy.
for first and second-year college students. Membership is by invitation only, based on grade point average and class standing.

NSCS has more than 550,000 lifetime members and 226 chapters in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Scott is the son of Mike and Patti Peavey, Plainville has accepted membership in the National Society of Collegiate Scholars (NSCS). Scott will be honored during an Induction Convocation this fall on the campus of the University of Kansas.

“NSCS is more than just a symbol of academic achievement. Membership gives students access to a number of amazing benefits including career and networking resources, scholarships, travel, and service projects both on campus and in the community,” says Stephen E. Loflin, NSCS executive director.

NSCS is a member of the Association of College Honor Societies and is the nation’s only interdisciplinary honors organization.
Garmin co-founder to set up scholarships for 6 schools

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — Min H. Kao, chief executive of Garmin Ltd., the largest manufacturer of navigation gear in America, on Wednesday announced that his family foundation will donate $10 million to establish scholarship funds at six universities for electrical and computer engineering students.

Kao, an electrical engineer who co-founded the Olathe, Kan.-based Garmin, said he decided to fund the program because he was concerned the U.S. was losing its engineering edge. “Compared to Asian countries, the career of engineer is somewhat overlooked” in the United States, Kao said. “Young kids don’t aspire to be engineers.”

The participating universities are: University of Kansas, Kansas State University, University of Missouri-Columbia, University of Missouri-Rolla, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Oklahoma State University.

“As a business leader of a company like Garmin, and as an immigrant, I feel it should be a real concern for this country,” Kao said. “I don’t think it’s good for a country to be a pure service business.”
Scholarships totaling more than $23,000 awarded at 2007 achievement banquet

By DAVE BERGMEIER
Editor

More than $23,000 in college scholarships were announced as part of the Abilene High School Achievement Banquet Tuesday at Sterl Hall.

An Abilene senior who plans to study finance and banking at Fort Hays State University was the recipient of the $8,000 Moyer Brothers Scholarship. Robert H. "Hank" Royer Jr., a trustee, presented the scholarship to Adrian Geist, daughter of Paul and Cheril Geist.

Adrian Geist has been a consistent honor roll student, active in high school athletics and has received an all-North Central Kansas League academic-athletic award.

Two $8,000 scholarships are awarded annually through the generosity of the late Arthur and Henry Moyer of Chapman, Royer said. The two men farmed near Chapman and because of tough economic times they could not go to school beyond eighth grade. To their credit, they always valued education and even when one of the brothers became legally blind, he did not let that deter him from learning.

Their determination to learn inspired the two brothers to set up a fund that would allow two worthy students to obtain a college education. This is the 22nd year the scholarship has been made available to students at Abilene High School and Chapman High School.

Royer also presented the $3,000 Donald M. Stewart Scholarship to John E. Price II.

Price graduated from AHS in 2001 and has completed his liberal arts undergraduate work at the University of Kansas with honors. He is enrolled in the School of Pharmacy at KU. In addition to his outstanding academic achievements, he has been a volunteer at Lawrence's Memorial Hospital and has been involved in numerous community service projects throughout Lawrence.

Price will be completing his pharmacy studies at the University of Kansas, with a plan to become a hospital pharmacist.

The scholarship is made available to graduates from Abilene High School either planning to, or actually in attendance at, the University of Kansas in a medical-related field. The scholarship is in recognition of Stewart, formerly of Dickinson County, who, until retirement, served as vice president of the Kansas Health Foundation.

Royer said enough monies have been set aside to allow up to four students a year to receive a Stewart scholarship if they are involved in a medical-related field. They can be a candidate for graduation from AHS or be enrolled at KU, as long as they are an Abilene graduate.

Jenny Havice and Josh Linn were the recipients of the $3,000 Don Meeker Scholarship, presented by the Abilene Public Schools Endowment Association. Superintendent Marlin Berry said Meeker was born in 1939 and died two years ago. Meeker grew up in the Talmage area and attended Kansas State University. He was a long-time employee of Memorial...
MEEKER SCHOLARSHIP — USD 435 superintendent Marlin Berry presented the Don Meeker Scholarship to Josh Linn and Jenny Havice. (Photos by Kathy Haggman)

VICTOR VIOLA SCHOLARSHIP — AHS counselor Gene Hartman presents the Vic Viola Scholarship to Abby Kijowski.

DON STEWART SCHOLARSHIP — Trustee Hank Royer presents Abilene High School alumnus John E. Price II with the Don Stewart Scholarship.
Banquet
(Continued from page 1)
Hospital in Abilene and well-known for his volunteerism at the Abilene Area United Way. His stipulation was that the scholarship be awarded to someone who is in good academic standing, as well as being active in the fine arts and athletics.

Abby Kijowski was the recipient of the $1,000 Victor Viola Scholarship. The scholarship was established in 1971, said counselor Gene Hartman. Viola was always interested in academics, yet he also recognized the importance of athletics in his own life and as a result he established a scholarship that recognized that uniqueness in other student-athletes.

Kijowski and Jeb Flynn were the recipients of the $500 AHS athletic scholarships. The two $500 awards are presented to one male and one female student who excel in athletics. The scholarships were created to recognize students who were positive contributors on and off the athletic arena. The presenter was AHS assistant principal and athletic director Will Burton.

Nick Steffen was the recipient of the $500 Greg Wade Scholarship. Wade was a highly respected teacher and coach, said presenter Brandi McGivney. Wade was a believer in the balance of academic and athletics. He also thought highly of student who exhibited high moral character.

Eight students were the $500 recipients of the Margaret Wardrop Scholarship. Wardrop worked in the central office as clerk for 44 years — retiring in 1986, which is when a scholarship was started. An endowment was established after her death in 2005 so that the scholarship could continue.

Berry said Wardrop was a well-respected employee who believed that worthy recipients should embody good citizenship, have a good attitude about life and show proper maturity. The high school faculty nominates the students.

Recipients of the awards were: Kerry Burt, Rosamarie Fodrie, Jessie Hasselman, Jody Jones, Stephenie Klotzbach, Richard Palmer, Jessica Rempe and Jasen Sare.

AHS principal Mike Ford, who was the toastmaster and gave closing comments, wished the students well now and through the rest of the school year and future success for candidates who are graduating May 19.

“They have the work ethic and the desire to succeed,” Ford said.

One reason the principal looks forward to the annual achievement banquet is that it is set aside to recognize academic success.

Abilene Area Chamber of Commerce president Steve Gieber agreed in his welcome address to the crowd.

“What a great way to get together,” he said.

He asked those in attendance “who wanted to be wildly successful in life?” When many hands shot in the air, the chamber president challenged them to start by setting worthy goals.

The fact that many students and their parents were at the event showed they had achieved an important personal goal in the area of academics, he said.

Gieber asked students to set a worthy goal in the short run to thank volunteers and businesses who helped make the banquet possible.

Student council president Hillary Wilson expressed a similar theme. Students needed to read through the list of businesses and take time to thank those who provided resources for the banquet and for their educational opportunities.

She also saluted her fellow classmates.

"Take great pride in what you have done," Wilson said.

She also noted a prominent writer who encouraged people to appreciate inner and outer beauty of other human beings as well as their surroundings.

Fellowship of Christian Athletes president Jeb Flynn gave the invocation that was delivered before the serving of the meal, catered by West's Country Mart. The meal was served by members of the Abilene Optimists, Kiwanis Club, Noon Lions, Rotary Club and Abilene Area Chamber of Commerce.

Entertainment included the AHS Singers’ presenting Prints of Peace and trombonist Josh Linn playing Two Spanish Dances.

The annual banquet is sponsored by the Abilene Area Chamber of Commerce and U.S.D. 435. AHS business teacher Dawn James and Chamber of Commerce executive director Lynda Lowry spent many hours helping to plan the event, Ford said.

Other students recognized recognized include:
• Outstanding seniors (as presented by department):
  — Agriculture, Kylie Berger;
  — Building trade, Austin Roberts;
  — Art, Rosamarie Fodrie;
  — Auto-technology, Jasen Sare;
  — Business, Adrian Geist;
  — English-drama, Shane Wilson;
  — English-forensics, Kerry Burt;
  — English-English, Josh Linn;
  — English-journalism, Stephenie Klotzbach;
  — Family and consumer science, Chelsey Teasley;
  — Language-Spanish, Richard Palmer;
MARGARET WALDROP SCHOLARSHIP — Eight AHS students were recipients of the Margaret Waldrop Scholarship. From left to right are Richard Palmer, Kerry Burt, Jody Jones, Stephanie Klotzbach, Jason Sare, Jessie Hasselman and Jessica Rempe. Not pictured is Rosamie Fodrie. (Photo by Kathy Hageman)

—Language-German, Josh Linn;
—Mathematics, Jessica Rempe;
—Music-vocal, Lauren Davis;
—Music-band, Josh Linn;
—Physical education-boys, J.T. Jeffery;
—Physical education-girls, Jessie Hasselman;
—Biological science, Whitney Hedden;
—Physical science, Hillary Wilson;
—Social studies, Kerry Burt.
* Honor roll — 3.8 grade point average or better (two of three quarters):
—Seniors: Adrian Geist, Sarah Leckron, Josh Linn, Andrew Pankratz, Jessica Rempe, Hillary Wilson.
—All NCKL academic/athletic recognition:
—Seniors: Lauren Davis, Kathryn Guy, Jenny Havice, Abby Kijowski, Sarah Leckron, Jessica Rempe, Tiffany Roney, Jasen Sare and Hillary Wilson.
—Students who completed the Kansas Scholars Curriculum: Gunnar Anderson, Kayley Cardwell, Kathryn Gu, Kobi Jackson, Joshua Linn, Kristen Needham, Richard Palmer, Andrew Pankratz, Jessica Rempe, Matthew Rothfuss, Jasen Sare, Chasity Thomas, Joseph Tuszyinski, Hillary Wilson and Tiffany Zawacki.
—Designated Kansas State Scholars: Josh Linn, Richard Palmer and Andrew Pankratz.
—Outstanding Senior in Math and Science: John Linn.
Board votes to hire Posny as education commissioner

By CARL MANNING
Associated Press Writer

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — The State Board of Education voted Wednesday to hire Alexa Posny to be the next commissioner of education, ending a months-long search.

Posny has long been a favorite of moderates on the board, dating to her previous tenure with the state Department of Education. She is a former deputy education commissioner overseeing curriculum and accreditation programs, leaving that post in 2006 to work for the U.S. Department of Education.

"The way I view it is it is another opportunity, and what a great opportunity," Posny said in telephone interview from Connecticut where she was making a presentation. "My son attended Kansas schools there and received a great education. That's exactly what I want for each and every kid in Kansas."

Posny will start July 1 at a salary of $165,000 a year. The vote was 7-1, with conservative John Bacon of Olathe voting no. Two other conservatives were absent. She was not present when the board voted.

Board Chairman Bill Wagnon said Posny was chosen from 17 candidates. The finalists were Posny and Marilou Joyner, a former assistant education commissioner in Missouri and the current executive director of the Kansas City, Mo., School District Higher Education Partnership.

Experience was a factor as the board searched for a replacement for former education commissioner Bob Corkins, who resigned late last year. Educators across the state objected when he was appointed to the state's top education post despite having no experience as a school administrator. He was executive director of two conservative think tanks and supported school vouchers and lobbied against large increases in education funding.

"She really does have the skills and the experience and the talent for taking this thing called Kansas public education and harnessing its energies and moving it in the right direction," Wagnon said, adding that the board chose Posny after "a thorough vetting process."

Corkins replaced Andy Tompkins, a former school superintendent and university administrator, who resigned in 2005 to take a post at the University of Kansas. Recently he became dean of education school at Pittsburg State University.

Corkins, appointed by a conservative-leaning board, stepped down in December after the 2006 general elections shifted the board's political makeup to become more moderate. Deputy education commissioner Dale Dennis served as interim commissioner.

The hiring was viewed by board officials as one of the last actions to undo decisions made by conservatives who previously held majority control of the board. In recent months, the new moderate majority has reversed course on science and sex education standards that had drawn criticism for being out of mainstream thought.

Conservative Board member Kathy Martin voted for Posny, calling her "an excellent candidate."

"She has all the criteria she needs as commissioner," Martin said.

Bacon said he voted against Posny because he preferred another candidate, but didn't say whom. Asked if he could work with Posny, he responded, "I think so."

Posny worked for the state department during previous ideological shifts among the board and didn't anticipate that future changes would impede her job.

"The primary focus on the state board is to make sure every child is successful. How we go about that is different in everyone's eyes. No different from dealing with Congress or 50 states," she said.

Sherri Yourdon, vice president of the Kansas-National Education Association, said Posny's experience at the state and national level in special education also was important.

"She has the leadership ability to take Kansas where we need to be. We believe in great public schools and Alexa will lead us there," Yourdon said.

Posny also is well-known among the state's 296 school districts and knows the Kansas system, including many programs she put in place to meet the federal goals of No Child Left Behind law, said Mark Tallman, lobbyist for the Kansas Association of School Boards.