

Listed below are news stories as covered by the news department of KVOE-AM, KVOE-FM and KFFX-FM from January 1, 2024 to March 31, 2024. This list is by no means comprehensive.

## **EDUCATION**

1-3: USD 245 Southern Coffey County has had quite the past few days. The district has been the subject of an ongoing social media threat under investigation by the Coffey County Sheriff's Office since before New Year's Day. On Wednesday, the district issued a social media post saying deputies and Kansas Highway Patrol troopers searched the interior and exterior of all district buildings Wednesday morning. Calls to the district office have gone unanswered, but the post says all four buildings were clear of explosives. Sheriff Tom Johnson says he called the Highway Patrol after a special board meeting Tuesday evening. The Highway Patrol brought three explosives-trained K-9s and searched the buildings early Wednesday. Johnson says this stems from a vague threat against the district. While law enforcement does not believe the threat is credible, Johnson says the investigation continues and law enforcement is doing what it can to find the person or people responsible.

1-5: Simulated training for Emporia State's nursing students will be state-of-the-art, thanks to a recent decision by the Newman Regional Health Board of Trustees. At its December meeting, the hospital board approved a \$500,000 donation to Emporia State's Nursing and Student Wellness Building -- specifically for a Simulation Hospital Suite. Nursing Professor Kari Hess says simulation is a key component of nursing education. Foundation Director and Vice President for University Advancement Shane Shivley says the facility has excited a lot of people connected to ESU. He also says this helps Emporia State fill a longstanding employment gap in the nursing field.

1-9: Flint Hills Technical College's newest program is off to a promising start according to President Dr. Caron Daugherty. Daugherty provided an update on the college's new early childhood education program during the most recent installment of KVOE's Tech Talk Tuesday morning where she took time to thank the city of Emporia for its support of the program from a financial standpoint. As of the fall semester, Daugherty says there were six to seven students enrolled in the program which she found encouraging for a first year program. She would add that college administration is hoping those numbers will continue to grow in order to help meet a significant need in the community, a lack of qualified early childhood educators.

1-12: Change is in the offing -- again -- for the National Teachers Hall of Fame.

Ralph Draper has officially submitted his resignation, doing so last month. Draper was named as the Hall of Fame's leader in early 2023 but suffered a stroke in

May. Carol Strickland has been serving as interim CEO in Draper's absence, but she is now serving as a consultant as Maddie Fennel has agreed to serve as acting leader. Fennel currently serves as the executive director of Great Lakes Center for Education Research and Practice. Before assuming that role, she was the Nebraska State Education Association's executive director. She was also an elementary teacher for Omaha Public Schools for 27 years.

2-13: Long in need of space at its main campus, Flint Hills Technical College is in the early stages of meeting that need. The master planning conversation has been ongoing for months, and the college's Board of Trustees heard a presentation from Lloyd Builders as part of its meeting Monday. On KVOE's Tech Talk on Tuesday, College President Caron Daugherty said this will mean a significant construction project near West 18th and Graphic Arts -- perhaps to the tune of 40,000 square feet -- and the entrances would face the roundabout nearby. As renderings get fleshed out, Daugherty says the immediate next steps also involve discussions with Lloyd Builders over the next two to three months will include locations for programs.

2-16: Corky's Cupboard is now in its new home. The Emporia State food pantry, which opened in 2014, recently underwent a significant expansion which has seen it move locations to the basement of the ESU Memorial Union. ESU faculty, leadership and local residents all gathered at the new location Friday afternoon for a special ribbon cutting celebrating the move and the many benefits it will bring to the campus community. Basic Needs Coordinator Cale Bolen says two of the main benefits that come along with the expanded space will be an increase in offerings and efficiency. Since its inception, Corky's Cupboard has served more than 3,000 students who are suffering from at least one kind of basic need insecurity which is roughly 59 percent of the student population according to a survey from 2020. In addition to a new and updated space, Corky's Cupboard has also begun a new food reclamation program called "Nourish the Need."

2-17: After several years of hard work and support from the local community, Emporia State University made a historic announcement Saturday night. ESU leadership, donors and students all gathered inside of the Memorial Union Ball Room to unveil the total of the Together Forward fundraising campaign. The campaign went public silently back in February of 2021 and by homecoming of that same year had surpassed its original goal of \$50 million leading to the announcement of a stretch goal of \$75 million. The final total eclipsed both of those goals as the generosity of more than 13,000 donors led to a final total of just under \$92 million making it the most successful campaign in the university's history. For reference, the Now and Forever campaign which took place between 2013 and 2016 ended with a grand total of \$58 million.

2-22: Two Emporia High School seniors were recipients of the first-ever Jones Premier Scholarships to Emporia State University during a special ceremony

Thursday morning. Up to six high school seniors in Lyon, Coffey and Osage Counties applied for the scholarship, which benefits students attending Emporia State University for nursing or education. Vianet (Vee-nuh-NAY) Umana (oo-MAH-nuh) received the Jones Premier Education Scholarship. Umana says one of teachers, Sarah Sweet, gave her encouragement to apply for the scholarship. Umana says she was worried about going to college. Umana's dad was someone that pushed her to pursue her dreams to become an educator. Addison Gutierrez received the Jones Premier Nursing Scholarship. Gutierrez says she's very fortunate to receive the scholarship.

2-23: USD 417 Morris County has its next superintendent. Board members chose USD 216 Deerfield superintendent Tyson Eslinger after a special meeting Thursday. Eslinger has been Deerfield's superintendent since 2020 and has "broad educational experience as a teacher, administrator and an educator of educators," according to a news release from USD 417. Board President TinaRae Scott says Eslinger emerged as the leading candidate after a "very thorough search process." Scott says the board is "confident that under his leadership, USD 417 will continue to be recognized as an outstanding school district." Eslinger replaces Aron Dody, who separated from USD 417 last year.

2-24: Flint Hills Technical College honored one of its longstanding business partners Friday night. Vektek Inc. received the college's second annual Prairie Fire Award. Vektek President Troy Estes says the partnership dates back to Vektek's origins in the mid-1980s and is rooted in the high quality of training provided by the college. Flint Hills Technical College Foundation President Mike Crouch says this is a mutually beneficial partnership. The Prairie Fire Award reflects a college partner's ongoing support of and commitment to the college. In Vektek's case, the company has hired numerous college graduates for company positions, provided scholarship funding and equipment, underwritten the annual Gala Benefit and Auction and had employees serve on the college's Board of Trustees or different college committees.

3-27: Flint Hills Technical College is the focus of a recent feature by Viewpoint Project. Viewpoint features noted actor, director and producer Dennis Quaid as its host. It creates documentaries on a range of issues and topics with the goal of making "meaningful documentaries that inspire audiences to take action." The Flint Hills Technical College documentary focuses on the college's Health and Human Services, Arts and Information Technology, Industry Technology and general education programs. From the college's perspective, the documentary highlights the "transformative role of technical education in shaping the region's workforce."

## **ECONOMY**

1-3: A new mobile pharmacy is coming to Emporia later this year. According to Dillons Food Stores Corporate Affairs Manager Sheila Regehr, the Emporia store will be establishing the pharmacy inside of the former Goodwill location at 904 East 12th Avenue. Regehr tells KVOE News there is no exact date for when the pharmacy will open, however, they are aiming for the springtime. Regehr adds, the pharmacy's opening will not involve any expansion of other department's although the possibility for future expansion is always on the table. Regehr couldn't comment on what led to the decision to open the pharmacy except to say it was an opportunity to increase the variety of services offered to local customers.

1-4: Judging from the business' answering machine, one of Emporia's most popular restaurants is closed for good. Shanghai Chinese Restaurant says it is permanently closed. No reason was given. The answering machine thanks customers for their support and wishes them a great year. The building at 2002 West Sixth was erected in 1970 as a restaurant. In 2016, the property and another nearby was listed for an estate sale to settle the Kenneth Thomas estate. Restaurant owner Frank Lu purchased the restaurant property later that year.

1-7: Graves Drugs will close for its final time next week. Store owner Melissa Daniels has confirmed to KVOE News the business will close for good at the end of business Jan. 15. Sunday's announcement follows the near-immediate closure of the pharmacy Dec. 11. All other store goods have been in a liquidation sale process since then. The decision to close the pharmacy and the store follows the death of longtime owner/pharmacist Glenn Hadaway last summer.

1/18: The Regional Development Association of East Central Kansas is now searching for a new permanent director following a special meeting Thursday afternoon. During the meeting, the board voted to accept the resignation of now former president Chuck Scott effective immediately. That action comes almost a month after Scott was placed on paid leave for undisclosed reasons. Scott was named the RDA President back in 2022 and replaced Kent Heerman who had been the organization's only president to that point. The board is planning to begin a search for the next permanent president soon, however, an exact timeline has yet to be announced. In the meantime, the president role will be filled by Emporia Special Projects Coordinator Jim Witt on an interim basis for a period of six months. RDA Board Chair Kaila Maxfield says the board is very excited to have Witt stepping into the role.

2-9: Flint Hills Music will have a new name within the next two months. That's because it's affiliated with a different music business. Flint Hills Music has sold to Ernie Williamson Music, effective Feb. 1. Terms are not being divulged. Flint Hills Music owner Tom Silkman tells KVOE News the Emporia store will be the newest Ernie Williamson retail location, meaning the company now has six stores in Kansas and Missouri. Silkman also says all local staff will stay on as part of the transition, while the instrument rent-to-own plan for current customers will remain

unchanged. Silkman says conversations began in September with Flint Hills Music's school service business growing "at a rate that was hard to manage," prompting Flint Hills to consider investing in an expansion or finding a partner business.

2-13: One of the funding mechanisms is now in place for a planned downtown revitalization project in Emporia. Tuesday morning, local leadership and representatives from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development convened at the Citizen's National Lofts building at 529 Commercial Street for a check presentation of \$500,000. The dollars come from HUD's Hope VI grant which the city applied to back in early October. The funding will be put towards a \$2.8 million revitalization project at 502 Commercial Street being led by developer Ben Moore, who has been involved in previous downtown revitalization efforts from an architectural standpoint. Moore says the decision to take on this project himself was inspired by the work he has done in the past. Plans are to construct seven residential units in the basement and second floor of the property with the ground floor set to be used as a commercial space.

2-21: Construction continues for the Emporia Pavilions shopping development. Above-ground work has been underway since November and now involves three stores -- the future homes of Five Below, Maurices and Old Navy. Updated construction timetables are pending. Developer Spencer Thomson says he is nearing completion on leases for two more nationally-known tenants. Thomson also continues to work towards bringing several restaurants to the development.

## **AGRICULTURE**

2-5: For the first time in about three weeks, water conservation measures are not needed for large areas of Lyon and Coffey counties. The city of Burlington says the mandated conservation measures in place since Jan. 18 are no longer required. The emergency measures affected Burlington, New Strawn and residents served by Coffey County Rural Water District 2, essentially covering west-central and southeast Lyon County just south of Emporia as well as southwest Coffey County just south of Burlington. Burlington city officials say there were "multiple major and minor leaks" found during the last three weeks.

2-8: Kansas Governor Laura Kelly is asking the federal government for more time to request a major disaster declaration for the winter weather that hit most of the state a month ago. The governor has asked FEMA to extend the paperwork deadline to April 15, thus giving state officials more time to assess damage caused by occasional heavy snow, high winds and wind chills that reached almost -30 just in the KVOE listening area at times between Jan. 7-16. The state is seeking federal cost-share assistance through the Public Assistance program for damaged public infrastructure, including roads and bridges.

2-8: The Kansas Department of Health and Environment has announced a stream advisory for part of central Greenwood County. This involves Onion Creek east of U Road and north of Willow Creek, an area a few miles north of Hamilton. KDHE says this is due to water contamination from a crude oil tank leak, meaning crude oil contaminants may be present in the creek. Residents are told not to enter the stream and not to allow children or pets to get into the stream.

2-15: There is now less areawide drought on the US Drought Monitor map than at any time since this past spring. The Thursday update has Lyon County almost completely removed from drought, save for the far northwest and southeast corners. The southeast half of Chase County is removed from drought, as is far north Coffey, far northwest Greenwood, all of Osage and the southeast quarter of Wabaunsee counties. Abnormally dry conditions cover the northwest corner of Chase County, as well as most of Coffey, Greenwood and Morris counties. Much of the area, including the vast majority of Lyon County, was out of drought in the May 23 update, but the area was in moderate to extreme drought by mid-June. A year ago, the north half of the KVOE listening area was abnormally dry, but the south half deteriorated from moderate drought to exceptional drought the further south you went.

2-16: There haven't been a lot of controlled burns so far this season just because of how wet and snowy it has been. However, the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve has officially opened its prescribed fire season this week. The fire season lasts through April, depending on weather conditions and moisture. This is important for preserve management because it helps to promote a healthy prairie, foster native plant and animal diversity and control woody vegetation. It's also important for visitors because certain trails and areas may well close on short notice because of the fire and resulting smoke. As a result, visitors are asked to not cross any fire lines or go past any barricades or signage.

2-18: USDA Rural Development Director for Kansas Christy Davis has been busy this month. Davis stopped at the KVOE studios to discuss her department's economic development work with another visit coming before month's end. On KVOE's Morning Show, Davis says USDA Rural Development played a "small role" in helping with funding for Coffey County's nearly \$2 billion semiconductor production facility now under construction near Burlington. Rural Development also helps in other ways through partnerships at the local, state and federal levels. Davis is meeting with Emporia Main Street Director Casey Woods and community leaders from across eastern Kansas on Thursday to discuss collaborations when it comes to economic and community development. Davis credits Main Street for its work with upper-story development, saying it's an effective and efficient way for cities like Emporia to meet housing needs. Davis also says housing is such a critical need for many cities and towns at a time

when prices for traditional homes are becoming less attainable, so upper-story development also becomes a more attractive option.

2-5: Emporia Fire has a controlled burn coming Tuesday. Firefighters will burn about six acres at Jones Park beginning around 1 pm. The fire department says it will last about four hours. Wind speeds are expected at or below 20 mph Tuesday. Burn policy varies slightly in Lyon County -- namely depending on whether you live inside or outside the Emporia city limits. In town, Emporia Fire Battalion Chief Ryan Conley says In-town residents need to call the Emporia Fire headquarters at 620-343-4230 at the start and end of their burns. Out of the city limits, residents need to get burn permits. Lyon County Emergency Management Director Jarrod Fell is urging residents to go online to [lyoncounty911.org](http://lyoncounty911.org) to report both the start and finish of their planned burns. Fell says there are numerous benefits to the burn permit policy from an emergency management perspective. Fell also says the online policy has lowered dispatcher workload by around 10,000 calls, but residents uncomfortable with going online can call the Lyon County Emergency Communications non-emergency phone number at 620-343-4225.

3-7: Rain has been in short supply for over a month, but Kansas Governor Laura Kelly has adjusted the state's drought emergency map issued last summer. All area counties are now in a drought watch. As part of the last update in mid-August, the governor had placed Lyon, Chase, Coffey, Greenwood and Morris counties in a drought emergency, while Osage and Wabaunsee counties were in a drought warning at that time. Governor Kelly says conditions have improved recently, but a lot of counties are still dealing with declines in water supply and resulting strains on resources. Kelly is encouraging residents across Kansas to conserve water before summer comes.

3-21: Senator Jerry Moran says Congress should be acting now to craft a new Farm Bill, saying lawmakers need to "provide certainty to those who provide our food, fuel and fiber." Moran says the inability to resume work on a new Farm Bill reflects a new attitude in Congress, where there are indications the current Farm Bill may get a significant extension with no adjustments. Moran says weather, economics and supply chain issues make agriculture challenging, but he also says inflation has constrained producers even more. He says input costs -- things like loan interest, feed, fertilizer, labor and fuel -- have risen \$100 billion since the last Farm Bill was approved. He also says USDA has forecast a better than \$40 billion fall in farm productivity, or almost 25 percent, since 2022.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE**

1-3: Work to replace the Interstate 35 bridge over Lincoln Street may begin as soon as April. Once the project is done by mid-to-late 2025, City Engineer Jim

Ubert says it won't look nearly the same. Gone will be the "tunnel effect" in place for decades. Coming with the project will be detours because the project will close the bridge for about 18 months. This also overlaps the 24th and Prairie waterline replacement project, which starts later in the year and could last 15-18 months as well. The Kansas Department of Transportation approved a better than \$4.3 million bid from King Construction and Subsidiaries out of Hesston for the project.

1/18: Cashless tolling comes later this year to the Kansas Turnpike. When it does, there will be a significant change in tolling. Currently, tolling involves a set fee for travel between different exits or terminals. Starting this summer, there will be a flat, per-mile rate based on axle count and whether the vehicle in question has a K-TAG transponder or is identified by license plate. The rate structure is online at KVOE.com. The Turnpike Authority says this will benefit a lot of short-distance travelers through lower payments because prior practices like rounding to the nearest nickel or quarter are no longer needed. With this step now announced, the Turnpike Authority is expanding its customer service call center hours. Those will be 7:30 am-6:30 pm weekdays. There will also be a new K-TAG logo unveiled soon.

1/18: The city of Emporia has received state funding to help plan for infrastructure improvements near city schools. Communications Manager Christine Torrens says the city got a Safe Routes to School planning grant from the Kansas Department of Transportation. The amount hasn't been specified. The grant is a collaboration involving the city, USD 253 Emporia and the city's Multi-Use Path Planning Board. The grant will help local entities design a plan for all the city's elementary schools and Emporia Middle School, with analysis of existing conditions, identifying possible infrastructure and non-infrastructure issues and public outreach.

2/5: Work continues to bring a new information page to Lyon County residents. County officials spent much of last year periodically discussing the need, ultimately partnering with CivicPlus -- the same company that developed the city of Emporia website -- for \$32,000. On KVOE's Morning Show recently, Lyon County Public Relations Manager Vici (like vicky) Smith said work is moving towards the actual design stage. Smith says the finished product will be a major improvement for several reasons, including easier access to county information and online payment options as well as improved security -- especially after the Kansas court system was brought to a complete standstill after a cyberattack last fall.

2-20: Previously unplanned repair work will mean a change in traffic flow for a section of roadway in Emporia over the next week. Beginning Tuesday, eastbound traffic on South Avenue between Peyton Street and Carter will be closed due to "an unforeseen sanitary sewer service line repair" according to Emporia Communications Manager Christine Torrens. Eastbound truck traffic on



south avenue will have to find an alternate route for the duration of the project which is scheduled to last 10 days weather permitting.

2-20: Planning work may be complete by late summer for a replacement of the bridge that collapsed over Dry Creek earlier this month. According to Lyon County Engineer Chip Woods, the tentative schedule has BG Consultants completing its surveying for the project by mid-April with field check plans set to be submitted by late June. Woods says final plans should be ready and submitted by the end of August allowing the Highway Department to begin identifying and ordering materials for the work. Woods estimates bids for the project could go out by sometime in mid-October, however, an exact date is currently pending. The bridge on Road 170 collapsed either late in the evening of February 3 or the early morning hours of February 4.

2-21: Local residents will notice an uptick in their wastewater fees come next month. As part of their regular action agenda Wednesday morning, city commissioners approved an increase in wastewater fees of 7.14 percent which is equivalent to approximately \$3 for an average household using 5,000 gallons of water per month. Conversations on the increase began back in January after City Treasurer Janet Harouff noted a significant decline in wastewater fund reserves over the past several years. Harouff says the decline in reserves was due to the city's bond payments on the wastewater treatment plant. Commissioners approved the increase by a vote of 4-1 with Commissioner Susan Brinkman serving as the lone no vote stating she did not feel there was enough time dedicated to the matter.

2-23: Valuations are going up for Lyon County residents, but not to the level of the last two years. On KVOE's Morning Show on Friday, County Appraiser Ryan Janzen said 2024 residential valuations are up between 2.7-8.2 percent on average -- a far cry from the nearly 10 percent increase from two years ago or the almost 15 percent average increase last year. Janzen says the number of home sales locally is down from past years, so occasionally the supply-demand balance can also drive up valuations. Other property categories, including commercial and ag, are also closer to the standard increase range.

3-8: Several area airports, including Emporia's, are benefiting from the most recent round of funding through the Kansas Airport Improvement Program. The Emporia Municipal Airport got \$900,000 total. All of it is for apron design and construction so the airport can handle larger aircraft, a long-mentioned economic development goal for the city and area. Meanwhile, Coffey County Airport in Burlington gets nearly \$94,000 for a hangar door replacement. Osage City Municipal Airport got \$50,000 as the state's match for a pavement rehab and airfield lighting project.

3-19: Waterline repairs have been a concern across Emporia for years, whether for the sheer number of breaks, the significance of certain failures or the loss of

water during droughts, but the city says residents can play a part in conserving water. This happens to be National Fix a Leak Week through the Environmental Protection Agency. The city is encouraging residents to find and fix water leaks, both inside and outside their homes. Public Works Underground Utilities Manager Kevin Wiggins says residents can find out if they are dealing with a water leak by taking a few easy steps. Overall, the EPA says leaks can cause up to a trillion gallons of water loss per year. Wiggins, meanwhile, says fixing leaks can save customers up to 10 percent on their monthly bills, depending on the length and severity of the leak. Residents can call the Public Works Department at 620-340-6339 during regular business hours or the Lyon County Emergency Communications non-emergency line at 620-343-4225 if they notice waterline leaks or breaks. We also have the EPA website link on Fix a Leak Week with our story at [KVOE.com](http://KVOE.com).