

**KVGB-FM NEWS & PUBLIC SERVICE ISSUES – 4th QUARTER,  
2023.**

**Broadcast times.... 6:00am, 7:00am and 8:00am Monday  
through Friday**

**The following stories were broadcast and posted online  
during the reporting period listed above.**

## **Getting to know local candidates before elections in Barton County**

**10/2**

The League of Women Voters of Great Bend and Barton County will give the public a chance to find out more about the candidates that are running for election this fall. Candidate forums are scheduled for Great Bend this week and Hoisington next week. League of Women Voters President Janice Walker said local elections often get pushed to the side because citizens are thinking about presidential or state elections.

**(WALKER – ATTENTION)                      25 Seconds**

The first forum is scheduled for Thursday at the Great Bend Senior Center at 2005 Kansas Avenue from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. The event will be livestreamed by Eagle Radio on [greatbendpost.com](http://greatbendpost.com). After each candidate answers two questions, they will have a chance to mingle with the audience.

**(WALKER – ANSWERED)                      17 Seconds**

Candidates running for mayor, school board, city council and the Barton Community College Board of Trustees will be invited.

A second forum is scheduled in Hoisington on October 12<sup>th</sup> at the Friendship House at 419 East 3<sup>rd</sup> Street from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

## **Oil spill into creek near Quivira National Wildlife Refuge 99% cleaned up**

Time will tell whether an oil spill upstream on Rattlesnake Creek will harm the birds that flock to Quivira National Wildlife Refuge in Stafford County.

Its manager, Mike Oldham, said the refuge, owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, had deployed absorbent barriers to catch any oil in case it made it downstream.

So far, the refuge hasn't seen any oil reach its waters or contaminated birds fly in.

The spill took place earlier this month a few miles from the refuge where a lead line crossed Rattlesnake Creek. Linda Berry, spokeswoman for the Kansas Corporation Commission, which regulates oil and gas, said in an email that the wells using the line had previously been abandoned. When the wells turned back on, the line burst from the weight of the fluid.

About 10 barrels — or 420 gallons — of oil and 1,500 barrels of saltwater spilled into the creek.

Berry said the remediation is 99% complete, but staff will continue to inspect and take samples. She said no regulations had been violated in connection with the spill.

## **Community members voice support of closed SRCA Dragstrip**

**10/3**

Publicly sorting out the root of the reason why the SRCA Dragstrip in Great Bend is closed has been left up in the air. The SRCA, and their volunteer board, canceled the 2023 race season because the racing surface was unsafe and needed substantial remedial work. The City of Great Bend, the owner of the track, noted in July that repairs to the recently surfaced track are a legal matter and were advised not to discuss the details of the proceedings. If and when the track will be repaired have yet to be answered, but a few racers went before the Great Bend City Council Monday night to voice their support of keeping the track. Caleb McDonald was introduced to junior drag racing at the age of seven at the SRCA.

**(McDONALD – SOON)**

**28 Seconds**

For \$1.6 million, Suchy Construction completed the reconstruction of the historic dragstrip in May 2021. The SRCA notified the city there were several high spots on the surface which required grinding. Grinding and polishing the track has exposed the air pockets in the concrete, leaving holes throughout the dragstrip. SRCA board members questioned if the project was done right in the first place and the proper steps to fix the issues were not taken. Joe Fross has been coming down to the race track since 2001.

**(FROSS – TRACK)**

**18 Seconds**

The SRCA was formed in the 1950s.

## **USD 428 Great Bend Open House includes Job Fair on Oct. 11**

USD 428's Support Services building on East 10th Street in Great Bend survived some hiccups, namely the large explosion of a neighboring residence in March. Now, the district is ready to show off the \$4.82 million facility that will house its Central Kitchen and Maintenance, Grounds and Transportation departments. Public Information Director Andrea Bauer encourages the public to attend an open house on Wednesday, Oct. 11, from 3:30 to 6:30 p.m.

(BAUER-EIGHT)

14 seconds

The district purchased the existing structure and surrounding property at 625 E. 10th Street in December 2021 for \$1.55 million. In August 2022, the board of education approved plans to renovate the building. Renovations were expected to begin in January of this year but started in late 2022. Large components of the project included a new HVAC system and new equipment for the kitchen.

(BAUER-COMMUNITY)

19 seconds

The Open House will also include a job fair with the district seeking applicants for a plumber, bus drivers, and food service workers. Review or apply for those jobs ahead of the Oct. 11 event at [www.428jobs.net](http://www.428jobs.net).

## **Barton Co. treasurer's office moving to first floor of courthouse**

Many a party guest has been entertained by a game of musical chairs. Barton County will play its own version of the game at the Barton County Courthouse. As part of the HVAC Renovation Project, several offices will change locations. Most notably, the treasurer's office will move from the second floor to the first. Commission Chair Shawn Hutchinson called it the easiest and least expensive way to accommodate the public.

(HUTCHINSON-STAIRS)

16 seconds

County Administrator Matt Patzner said the moves will add nearly \$227,000 to the renovation cost. Much of that will come from remodeling to current administrator and human resources office on the first floor to house the treasurer's office.

(PATZNER-WAS)

15 seconds

The treasurer's office and most county operations were moved to the former JC Penney building at 1500 Kansas Ave in July. County personnel was set to tour the old courthouse building for updates Tuesday morning.

## **USD 395, La Crosse voters to decide bond, tax issues in Nov. 7 election**

**10/5**

The Nov. 7 general election ballot may be a relatively light one across most of Kansas in a non-presidential election year. But an important issue will be decided for USD 395 and La Crosse residents. Bill Keeley, superintendent of La Crosse schools, said district residents will vote on a \$10.975 million bond question, and residents within La Crosse city limits will also vote on a proposed one percent city sales tax to help fund the bond.

(KEELEY-PRACTICES)

16 seconds

The new elementary school would be constructed on the north side of the existing middle and high school. The bond would also include a connection corridor from the technical buildings to the school, as well as renovations to increase safety at the school, including the addition of storm shelters.

(KEELEY-SERVICE)

22 seconds

The bond would be paid over 20 years. If approved, the school district would increase taxes 19.75 mills to pay for the project. If the one percent sales tax is also approved, that increase would drop to 15.74 mills. On a \$100,000 home, that amounts to \$18.93 in additional taxes each month without the one percent sales tax, and \$15.08 a month with the additional sales tax. Read more about the bond at [Great Bend Post.com](http://Great Bend Post.com).

## **Bald Eagle nestlings in Barton & Stafford counties; study continues 10/9**

In the spring of 2021, a research study on the ecology of Kansas-hatched bald eagles began with just 13 birds and plans of fieldwork lasting three years. This year – thanks to voluntary contributions made to the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Park’s nongame species donation program, Chickadee Checkoff – that research project has been extended; and, the total number of birds studied has increased to nearly 30 bald eagles.

KDWP and a team of partners from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Conservation Science Global, Evergy, and private landowners are confident data derived from the study will help wildlife managers and developers better address potential conflicts between bald eagles and development infrastructure, as well as further the scientific community’s understanding of bald eagle ecology in the central Great Plains.

Background Research on Kansas bald eagle populations began in 1989 with the first contemporary documentation of an active bald eagle nest at Clinton Reservoir in Douglas County. Since then, approximately 299 nesting territories have been reported to the USFWS and Kansas Biological Survey. And, new nesting territories are reported each winter and spring,

Continued data collection will offer researchers a robust assessment of juvenile eagles’ seasonal ranges and airspace use in the context of topography, weather, land cover, and energy infrastructure, while potentially allowing conservationists to document their movements from the time of fledging through establishing nesting territories of their own.



## **Larned man charged with possession of 115 grams of marijuana**

**10/12**

A 30-year-old Larned man was charged Tuesday afternoon to be in possession of 115 grams of marijuana.

Kyle Stevens appeared in custody in the Pawnee County District Court Felony First Appearances on a six count criminal complaint. Stevens is charged with possession of 115 grams of marijuana with intent to distribute within 1,000 feet of a school and possession of drug paraphernalia suitable to cultivate marijuana.

The charges stem from an ongoing investigation by the Pawnee County Sheriff's Department and Larned Police Department resulting in the execution of a search warrant at Stevens' Larned residence this past Sunday.

If convicted, under the Kansas Sentencing Guidelines for Drug Offenses the defendant faces between 92 months and 144 months in the custody of the Department of Corrections. A Preliminary Hearing has been scheduled for October 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**Childcare licensing begins with a phone call to Barton Co. Health Dept.  
10/19**

When Gov. Laura Kelly attended the groundbreaking of the new childcare facility in Great Bend in July, she spoke of the relationship between worker shortages and childcare shortages. In Barton County alone, she said, there is a shortage of more than 800 childcare slots. Felicia Fyler, a childcare licensing specialist at the Barton County Health Department, said that shortage extends to the six counties she oversees.

(FYLER-CHILDCARE)

7 seconds

The good news is the state is always accepting applications for home childcare centers. Applicants must be 18 years of age or older and a high school graduate or the equivalent. Getting a license begins with a simple phone call.

(FYLER-WELL)

19 seconds

To become licensed, providers must pass a background check, be CPR certified, and their homes must pass a fire inspection by the state fire marshal's office. Licensed providers are also subject to annual inspections. Check out [Great Bend Post.com](http://GreatBendPost.com) for links to more licensing requirements.

## **Ducks at Cheyenne Bottoms testing positive for avian influenza 10/20**

Duck season in Kansas began on Oct. 7. Despite a lack of water in much of Cheyenne Bottoms, Wildlife Manager Jason Wagner said there were still plenty of hunters and plenty of ducks at the refuge. One party was not welcome for Opening Day: avian influenza. As part of a national program, Wagner swabbed 30 ducks for the virus that day. Fifteen of the birds tested positive.

(WAGNER-AREA)

15 seconds

Wagner said avian influenza will typically not affect humans, but it is a good idea to thoroughly cook duck meat. More important is keeping it away from other animals. Wagner suggested using different sets of boots for hunting and taking care of poultry at home, and keeping cats and dogs away from the dead ducks. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the current strain of the virus has impacted 7,300 wild birds, 59 million poultry, and one human.

(WAGNER-IT)

18 seconds

Other birds listed on CDC reports in Kansas include mallards, great-tailed grackles, great horned owl, and several species of hawks.

## **Unsolved Great Bend murder documentary to air on PBS 10/23**

“The Dolly Madison Murders” new documentary will air on Smoky Hills PBS (SHPBS) on Saturday, Oct. 28 at 8 p.m. and then re-air on Oct. 31 at 10 p.m.

The documentary, created by Great Bend-native Aaron Mull, goes back to September 2002, where two women were found dead inside the Dolly Madison bakery in Great Bend. With interviews, evidence analysis, and community involvement, the film investigates potential suspects, including someone who may be hiding in plain sight. The documentary debuted at the Crest Theater in March.

There are many ways to watch this documentary on Smoky Hills PBS. The channel is available over the air, on many cable systems, DirecTV, DirecTV Stream, Dish Network, and HULU + LIVE TV. You can also access Smoky Hills PBS via the FREE mobile app for Android and iPhone devices,

## **Two arrests made in vehicle theft in Great Bend**

**10/24**

The Great Bend Police Department made a pair of arrests in a case regarding a stolen vehicle.

Last Friday, officers were dispatched to the 2200 block of Tyler Street in reference to the theft. Upon arrival, officers were advised a 2015 Nissan Altima was taken from this location within the last few minutes. While officers were still on scene, a State Trooper with the Kansas Highway Patrol spotted a vehicle matching the description eastbound on Highway 56, exiting the City of Great Bend.

As the State Trooper turned around to check the vehicle, the vehicle stopped on the shoulder of the road and two occupants fled from the vehicle. Kansas Highway Patrol troopers and the Barton County Sheriff's Office were able to locate and detain both subjects.

Joshua Kelly was arrested and charged with theft of a motor vehicle. Tyler Partington was a passenger in the vehicle and was also arrested on charges from the Kansas Highway Patrol.

## Great Bend's SRCA legal issue could linger until 2024 summer

10/31

There is not much City of Great Bend officials can say regarding the cancellation of the race season at the SRCA Dragstrip and future repairs needed to the track. The SRCA Board canceled the race season this past spring because they deemed the track unsafe and in need of substantial repairs. After a \$1.6 million reconstruction of the dragstrip in May 2021, there have been problems with the surface meeting required standards. Figuring who's responsible for the repairs, Great Bend City Administrator Brandon Anderson said the case is in the middle of a legal arbitration.

(ANDERSON – PATTERN) 20 Seconds

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After completion of the dragstrip reconstruction in 2021, the SRCA volunteers told the city there were high spots on the track that needed to be polished. The polishing caused the top sealing part of the concrete to come off, resulting in exposed holes. Anderson said when the legal matter gets resolved, the city is hopeful a track rebuild will create a product that makes everyone proud.

(ANDERSON – US) 22 Seconds

The SRCA Board and volunteers operate the track, but the facility is owned by the city.

**Today is the final day to register for UWCK's Poverty Simulation  
10/31**

Today (TUESDAY) is the final day to register for United Way of Central Kansas' Poverty Simulation Event, which is made possible by the generous funding from Communities Organizing to Promote Equity (COPE)-Barton County. The program aims to provide the community with a firsthand experience of living in poverty and foster a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by families living in low-income situations. UWCK Director Charrell Owings said participants will be given a situation, like a family who must determine who stays home to take care of a sick child.

(OWINGS-POVERTY)

20 seconds

The Poverty Simulation is scheduled to take place on November 2nd from 6 to 8 pm in the basement of the First United Methodist Church. Following the simulation will be a panel discussion. The ultimate goal of the Poverty Paradigm simulation is to initiate shifts necessary to activate great generational change.

(OWINGS-PEOPLE)

16 seconds

The simulation is free to attend but United Way does request preregistration to the event. Find a link to register at [Great Bend Post.com](http://GreatBendPost.com).

## **Kansas Cold Weather Rule takes effect Nov. 1**

**10/31**

The Cold Weather Rule, designed to help Kansans who are behind on their utility payments avoid disconnection during the winter months, will begin on Wednesday, November 1<sup>st</sup> and remain in effect through March 31<sup>st</sup>.

While the Cold Weather Rule is in effect, utility companies cannot disconnect a customer's service when the local temperatures are forecast to drop below 35 degrees within the following 48-hour period. The Kansas Corporation Commission, the agency that regulates public utilities in the state, implemented the rule in 1983 to prevent utility companies from disconnecting a customer's natural gas or electric service during periods of extreme cold.

The Cold Weather Rule also requires utility companies to offer a 12-month payment plan to allow consumers to maintain or re-establish service.



**Great Bend-native being hailed as hero in Dodge City shooting  
11/1**

A Great Bend native is being hailed as a hero after a fatal shooting in Dodge City Sunday morning. Forty-year-old Austin Zink is the bouncer at Central Station Bar and Grill on Wyatt Earp Blvd. in Dodge City. His sister, Jessica Zink, said Austin tackled the shooter after he shot three people and killed two inside the bar.

(ZINK-FREE)

20 seconds

The gunman, later identified as 36-year-old Ricardo Cadena-Garcia of Dodge City, shot Zink in the hip, arm, and abdomen. Cadena-Garcia fled the scene and was later arrested by authorities near Forgan, Okla. Zink, a father of three who grew up in Great Bend before moving to Dodge City in 2010, remains hospitalized.

(ZINK-RIGHT)

13 seconds

Twenty-year-old Abraham Morales-Santos, and 29-year-old Antonio Cabrera, both of Dodge City, were killed in the attack. Jessica has established a Gofundme page for her brother. That link can be found at Great Bend Post.com.

## **Hoisington school district examines future nonresident enrollment**

**11/2**

The educational landscape of which schools students are allowed to attend and where they can compete in athletics is consistently being reviewed and tweaked. The Kansas Association of School Boards (KASB) recently released a revised policy regarding enrollment for nonresident students. In the future, out-of-district students will need to apply to attend specific school and meet certain requirements. USD 431 Hoisington Superintendent Patrick Crowdis said the new revision from KASB recommends current out-of-district students be required to apply through the new enrollment process if the Hoisington school district was over their established capacity.

(CROWDIS – IN)

30 Seconds

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Kansas law requires the board to allow nonresident students to enroll in and attend the schools of the district if the board's capacity determination finds there are open seats. Crowdis said the Hoisington school district had 133 out-of-district students during the 2022-2023 school year. Crowdis and school board member Don Fisher discussed eventually all nonresident students will be evaluated to see if they meet the criteria for students in good standing.

(CROWDIS - CONTROL)

25 Seconds

The USD 431 school board was in favor of making the application process for nonresident students begin after the next school year. Current nonresident students would be grandfathered into the district's enrollment. The board will take an official vote on the policy at the November meeting.

## **Fundraiser to fight Alzheimer's this Friday in Great Bend**

**11/2**

The VFW in Great Bend will be hosting musical bingo and trivia as a fundraiser in support of the fight against Alzheimer's. The event is Friday, November 3<sup>rd</sup> from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m.

There will be four games of musical bingo with trivia sessions in between with a chance to win prizes. Plus, there's a 50/50 raffle at the end.

General admission is \$25 per person, including 1 card for four games and a complimentary beverage. Players can purchase additional game boards for \$5 each upon registration.

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The event will benefit the Alzheimer's Association for Central and Western Kansas.

## **Second suspect turns himself in from car chase in Great Bend**

**11/3**

Both suspects from Wednesday's chase that resulted in a crash within Great Bend city limits have been apprehended. Two suspects fled away from a Barton County Sheriff's Office deputy after being pulled over for a speeding violation. Law enforcement discovered the vehicle was stolen and the chase ended when the driver crashed the vehicle trying to make a turn near the 10<sup>th</sup> Street and McKinley Street intersection. Both suspects in the vehicle fled on foot, with one being captured and another escaping.

Barton County Sheriff Brian Bellendir said a juvenile male turned himself in Wednesday night after a search ensued following the crash earlier that morning.

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(BELLENDIR – HIM)

18 Seconds

During the search, the officers from the Great Bend Police Department made sure nearby Eisenhower Elementary School was secure.

(BELLENDIR – COUNTRY)

25 Seconds

Bellendir said the juvenile was charged with obstruction to a law enforcement officer and was released to the Juvenile Justice Authority (JJA).

## **Bellendir: Fentanyl here to stay in Central Kansas**

**11/6**

Throw the conspiracy theories out the window. Barton County Sheriff Brian Bellendir said the current drug trade, like most other businesses, is all about the profit margin. A rise in fentanyl cases is likely because of the cheap nature of the drug. Last Wednesday, Barton County deputies found approximately one pound of suspected fentanyl during a traffic stop on an out-of-state driver. Bellendir said the drug puts everyone at risk.

(BELLENDIR-CHEAP)

21 seconds

Bellendir and other law enforcement officials know they are merely scraping the surface of the drug trade, which has changed dramatically over the past two decades. Bellendir said poorly-manufactured methamphetamine used to be the primary drug found in Barton County. Fentanyl is now a close second or has even surpassed meth.

(BELLENDIR-CONSISTENTLY)

20 seconds

Last Thursday's traffic stop on the western edge of Great Bend resulted in the arrest of 54-year-old Lisa Gomez of Sioux City, N.M. Along with fentanyl, deputies confiscated methamphetamine, oxycodone, and drug paraphernalia.

**Arrival of cranes impacting hunting at Bottoms, Quivira refuge**  
**11/7**

With fewer than 800 whooping cranes remaining in the wild, it's always a big deal when the migrating birds make a stop in Central Kansas. That rarity of the birds may also impact hunting. Kansas Wetlands Education Center Director Curtis Wolf said the first whooping cranes of the season were spotted early last week at Cheyenne Bottoms.

(WOLF-SOUTH)

27 seconds

More than two dozen whooping cranes have been spotted around Quivira National Wildlife Refuge since the end of October, including two adults and a juvenile last Wednesday. Hunting is stopped completely when the birds are spotted around Quivira. Cheyenne Bottoms shuts down only the pools the cranes are using, and may also shut down goose hunting on the south end of the Bottoms.

(WOLF-ISSUES)

15 seconds

Sandhill crane hunting is allowed in Kansas, generally west of Highway 183. The sandhill cranes that migrate through Kansas are one of nine crane populations in North America, and the largest at approximately 500,000 birds.

## **Planned 3% water rate increases roll into effect for Great Bend customers**

**11/8**

In September 2020, the Great Bend City Council approved a 22% increase in water rates to help offset the city's expense to provide the service. A study showed if rates were not addressed, the city's expenditures would exceed revenues by \$2.5 million by the year 2025.

Beyond the large jump in rates in 2020, the council approved 3% bumps each year for the next five years. City Clerk Shawna Schafer said those increases were included in the master fee schedule the council voted in favor of Monday night.

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(SCHAFFER – FEES)

13 Seconds

Base water fees per month for a 5/8" pipe was \$13.10 prior to October. That rate is now \$13.50 and will jump to \$13.90 next October. Usage fees per 1,000 gallons per month went from \$3.29 to \$3.39 for commercial and residential users.

Sewer rates were increased 33% in 2020 and will undergo 3.5% jumps each year.

**Barton Co. Treasurer: delayed tax statements not a county issue**  
**11/8**

The local taxing system is a bit like a puzzle. Certain pieces are required before the puzzle can move forward. Kansas state statute requires that all ~~taxing~~ <sup>taxing</sup> entities have their budgets turned in to the county clerk by Oct. 1. At Tuesday's Barton County Commission meeting, Clerk Bev Schmeidler noted the final budget was turned in Tuesday, Oct. 31. Barton County Treasurer Jim Jordan explained how that's going to delay tax statements for residents.

(JORDAN-FIRST)

16 seconds

Jordan said his office would like to have the statements out each year by the second week in November, but in his six years in office, that has yet to happen. This year, the South Homestead taxing unit, located between Hoisington and Great Bend, turned in the late budget. Even after all the figures are approved, Jordan has to get the statements to a printer, go through another round of checks, and get them in the mail. County Counselor Patrick Hoffman noted that's why deadlines are important.

(HOFFMAN-IN)

14 seconds

More than 30 taxing entities submit budgets to the clerk's office each year. Jordan said treasurers of the entity that does not meet the statute may be subject to a fine or 90 days in jail, but the matter is difficult to enforce. With the delay, the treasurer's office is looking at Dec. 1 to get the statements 2023 mailed.



**Vietnam War exhibit opens today at Barton Co. Historical Society**  
**11/9**

The Wall That Heals shined a light on the 2.7 million American men and women who served in the Vietnam War, and the more than 58,000 of those men and women who paid the ultimate sacrifice. But the Wall was only in Great Bend for a few days. Veteran Larry Parsons was instrumental in bringing the Wall to Great Bend, and he's also been a driving force for a more permanent display at the Barton County Historical Society.

(PARSONS-HAD)

17 seconds

That exhibit, titled "The Least We Can Do: Say Thank You and Welcome Home," will open at the Historical Society just in time for Veterans Day at 1 p.m. today (Thursday). Admission is \$5 and veterans and members will be admitted for free. Light refreshments will be served. Parsons said it's an important exhibit to remember that time in history.

(PARSONS-IT)

19 seconds

Parsons said he and others are interested in hearing from other veterans in the area. Anyone wishing to share stories or donate items from the Korean Conflict or Vietnam War, can reach out to Parsons. That contact information can be found at [GreatBendPost.com](http://GreatBendPost.com).

## **EPA to demolish building at contaminated site in Great Bend**

**11/10**

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) began work to clean up contamination at a site near the Great Bend Municipal Airport in 2008, and 15 years later the EPA is prepared to begin remedial action. The former Plating Inc. building, on west 6<sup>th</sup> Street, used to be a chromium and zinc plating facility until filing for bankruptcy in 2006. Clint Sperry, EPA Remedial Project Manager, said a thorough site removal will take place.

(SPERRY – THING) 31 Seconds

The remedial process will demolish the building by January and then treat and remove soil. Sperry said the EPA is hopeful to have the project finished by the spring 2025 and hopefully have the property available in the future.

(SPERRY – KNOW) 19 Seconds

Chromium is a metal used mainly for making steel and other alloys and is considered a contaminant of concern. The Plating Inc. facility has been abandoned since 2006.

## **Great Bend Eco Devo finding new ways to foster entrepreneurship**

**11/10**

Following last month's IGNITE Rural Business competition that awarded \$95,000 to entrepreneurs in Barton County, Great Bend Economic Development is hoping to keep the momentum with fostering entrepreneurship. This year, there will be three different learning opportunities to support those that are new businesses as well as those businesses that just need support, according to Economic Development Director Sara Arnberger.

(ARNBERGER – ENTREPRENEURS) 18 Seconds

The next IGNITE competition is already in motion. Interested entrepreneurs can sign up online until June 13<sup>th</sup>.

(ARNBERGER – BUSINESS) 9 Seconds

The IGNITE competition consisted of judges determining which business proposals were the best, with first place receiving \$50,000.

## **USD 395 La Crosse voters approve \$10.975 million bond issue 11/13**

Bond issues can be difficult for school boards. Four school districts saw their bond proposals fail during last Tuesday's General Election. That was not the case for USD 395 La Crosse. Superintendent Bill Keeley said a lot of work ahead of time paid off with a 566-247 vote approving a \$10.975 million bond that will allow the construction of a new elementary school, complete with a gymnasium.

(KEELEY-EVERYONE)

24 seconds

The effort included sending out flyers, going door-to-door, posting information at gas stations and grocery stores, and sending out mailers. The district did not so much advocate for a yes or no vote on the matter so much as it informed voters. An original estimate put the project at \$22 million but financial experts suggested a project about half that size.

(KEELEY-THAT)

22 seconds

The bond will add a new elementary school to be constructed on the north side of the existing middle and high school. Voters in the city of La Crosse also approved a one-percent sales tax increase. Groundbreaking is expected to take place shortly after the 2023-24 school year ends in May. The new facility is expected to be completed by the start of the 2025-26 school year. Read more about the bond at [Great Bend Post.com](https://www.greatbendpost.com).

## Great Bend keeping watchful eye on sales tax impact

11/14

Once every five years, Great Bend Convention & Visitors Bureau Director Christina Hayes likes to pay for a Sales Tax and Revenue (STAR) report from the State of Kansas. The report dives into what dates and events caused jumps in a municipality's tax collection. Whether a change in sales or transient tax is positively or negatively impacted, the results are not usually felt until several months later. Hayes said it is a waiting game to see if this year's tax collection numbers drop due to the cancellation of the SRCA Dragstrip racing season this past summer. There are also concerns of fewer tax dollars circulating due to weakened hunting conditions at nearby Cheyenne Bottoms.

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(HAYES – A LOT)

22 Seconds

Great Bend collected \$434,649 in transient guest tax in 2022. The 6% guest tax is applied to anyone that rents a room at a motel or Airbnb in town. The 2022 amount was the most ever collected. Hayes accredits the banner year because local hotels slightly increased their rates last year, and the Great Bend Events Center, Sports Complex and SRCA Dragstrip were constantly booked and bringing out-of-town visitors. With many hunting guides and tours in the area, Hayes felt those dollars could help in the future.

(HAYES – PAYING)

27 Seconds

The transient guest tax is used to fund the Great Bend Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Events Center.

**Barton County to offer property taxes via email  
11/15**

As the old adage goes, there is nothing certain except death and taxes. Part of that certainty has included receiving those property tax statements in the mail. Barton County Treasurer Jim Jordan announced at Tuesday's commission meeting that property owners will have options beginning with this year's tax statements.

(JORDAN-ONLINE)

14 seconds

Jordan said the county sends approximately 61 cents a parcel to mail the statements, but the email system would cost the county just 14 cents per statement. Opting into an emailed statement is entirely up to property owners, and Commission Chair Shawn Hutchinson saw the benefits of the new system.

(HUTCHINSON-HANDY)

14 seconds

In an effort to increase transparency, this year's tax statements will also feature a pie chart showing the general allocation of tax dollars in Barton County and how each taxing entity increased or decreased tax rates from the year before.

**Barton Co. adds \$63K to courthouse renovation for pipe replacement  
11/15**

The situation at the Barton County Courthouse stinks for county commissioners. In February, the board approved \$4.2 million in renovations to the 104-year-old building, largely centered around the building's heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning. Last week, the commission approved \$125,000 more in change orders while the project is underway. Tuesday morning, the body approved another \$63,000 for the project. County Administrator Matt Patzner explained the issue to the commission.

(PATZNER-BATHROOMS)

16 seconds

Commissioner Duane Reif said his big fear is doing all the work inside the building now only to have a water leak in the future. Commissioner Tricia Schlessiger recalled several patches on pipes that were meant to be temporary but still exist today. Commissioner Donna Zimmerman mentioned the sewer line break near the old HVAC unit.

(ZIMMERMAN-IT)

13 seconds

Orazem & Scalora Engineering will create the design for the work and it is unknown how much the work will cost. Patzner said the goal is to keep the additional work within the time frame of the original plans.

## USD 428 BOE finalizes new policy regarding non-resident students 11/16

In 2022, the Kansas State Legislature passed a bill that will allow students to enroll in any public school district, regardless of where they live, beginning in the 2024-25 school year. School districts may begin accepting applications from potential non-resident students in June 2024. Superintendent Khris Thexton outlined Great Bend's new policy to the board of education Monday night.

(THEXTON-LOOK)

12 seconds

The district will determine the capacity for non-resident students at each building, and some applicants will be given priority before that open-seat lottery system, including any sibling of a non-resident student who has been accepted, military students, any child in the custody of the Department of Children and Families, and any student who has a parent or person acting as a parent employed by USD 428. Thexton also listed conditions where non-resident students will be automatically deemed not in good standing and denied entrance.

(THEXTON-DISTRICT)

16 seconds

Other automatic disqualifiers pertain to out-of-school suspensions, violence or threats of violence, drug possession, use or sale, and being on track to graduate on time. Districts may receive applications from June 1-30, and must make a decision on the application on or before July 15.



**USD 428 officials noticing fewer vape incidents in Great Bend schools  
11/17**

In July, the USD 428 Board of Education finalized a new vape policy to be implemented in Great Bend schools for the 2023-24 school year. At Monday's board meeting, Assistant Superintendent John Popp provided an update to the board. So far, the policy seems to be working.

(POPP-SCHOOL)

16 seconds

More than half of those instances, including all three at the middle school, happened in November. The policy includes a growth and education option or a non-compliance or punitive option when students are caught vaping. Popp said one instance did not qualify for the growth path but nine of the other 10 students chose the educational option.

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(POPP-SUSPENSION)

13 seconds

In September, the board also heard about the positive impacts of no cell phones in classrooms at Great Bend High School. Principal Tim Friess credited that policy with cutting down on some vaping incidents.

## **Great Bend council to hear info on unsafe structures**

**11/17**

The Great Bend City Council will review multiple unsafe and dangerous structure resolutions at next Monday's meeting.

The roof is open and several windows and doors are broken on the house at 750 Jefferson Street. At 1622 19<sup>th</sup> Street, the building inspector noted deficiencies to the overhead door and damage to the roof. Referencing 2421 12<sup>th</sup> Street, the building inspector said there are leaning walls and deteriorating materials.

The city council will hear the information on the unsafe and dangerous structures and will entertain a motion to set public hearings for all the properties in January.

The council meeting Monday begins at 6:30 p.m. at City Hall.

## **Woman sentenced for arson fire that killed Great Bend woman**

**11/20**

A Barton County court Thursday sentenced 44-year-old Lyndsay George to life in prison. On October 8, 2021, officers and firefighters responded to a fire at 59-year-old Teresa Dutton's home in the 2800 block of 29th Street in Great Bend.

First responders found Dutton inside and despite performing life-saving measures she died. A preliminary investigation indicated arson was determined to be the cause of the fire. Investigators also determined that the Dutton's death was the result of foul play, according to Sheriff Brian Bellendir.

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Later that morning, the Great Bend Police Department responded to a residence in the 1500 block of Adams Street in Great Bend in reference to an aggravated burglary and battery related to the arson, homicide investigation.

The suspect left that area on foot and was reported to be at Park Elementary School. Police officers located the suspect identified as Lyndsay George, in the 2000 Block of 19th Street. After a physical altercation with police officers, George was arrested.

After further investigation and interviews, George was booked into the Barton County jail on requested charges of murder in the 1st degree, aggravated arson, aggravated battery of a law enforcement officer, aggravated burglary, battery and criminal trespass.

On July 6, 2023, George was found guilty of murder in the first degree for Dutton's death.

## **Boxberger out as Central KS Community Corrections director**

**11/22**

Barton County officials cannot comment on personnel matters, but they have confirmed that Amy Boxberger is no longer the director at Central Kansas Community Corrections. The Barton County Commission held a special meeting last Friday afternoon. The only agenda item was an executive session, for which non-elected personnel matters would be discussed.

County Administrator Matt Patzner did say the county's plan with Community Corrections is to remain in contact with the Kansas Department of Corrections for guidance and to make every effort to fully staff the department.

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Boxberger began with CKCC as an intern in 1996, then was hired as an Intensive Supervision Officers I/Day Reporting Officer in September 1997. After serving ~~as~~ a period as interim director, she was officially named CKCC Director in February 2006.

Central Kansas Community Corrections serves the 20th Judicial District in Barton, Ellsworth, Rice, Russell, and Stafford counties.

**Barton Commission tasked with decision on solar development moratorium**

**11/29**

The players have to know the rules before they can play the game. That is the issue the Barton County Planning Commission, Board of Commissioners, and Acciona Energy are dealing with as the moratorium on developing commercial solar energy in the county nears its conclusion at the end of the year. Zoning Administrator Judy Goreham spoke to the board of commissioners about an extension on the moratorium Tuesday morning. Commission Chair Shawn Hutchinson said not so fast.

(HUTCHINSON-OPTION)

15 seconds

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Acciona officials attended a Barton Commission meeting in January to discuss the possible development of a large-scale solar farm in the county. Few details were provided, and the proximity of Cheyenne Bottoms to any such developments became a cause for concern. In May, the commission approved the moratorium until the end of 2023 so the planning commission could research the issue and come up with appropriate regulations. Goreham said the planning commission heard from more than a dozen wildlife organizations at its October meeting.

(GOREHAM-THAT)

18 seconds

The Barton County Planning Commission will host an open meeting on Thursday, Dec. 7 at 9 a.m. at the Hoisington Activity Center. The meeting is open to the public. Officials from Acciona will provide updates about the project. The board of commissioners will vote on extending the moratorium at the Dec. 12 meeting.

## **Cram the Van gives \$13K to Barton County food bank**

**12/1**

Wheatland Electric has raised nearly \$91,000 in cash and food donations for a dozen local food banks during the 2023 Power the Pantry campaign. This includes a \$13,080 cash donation to the Community Food Bank of Barton County in Great Bend.

In addition to the monetary gift, Wheatland employees also delivered 7,051 pounds of food earlier this month following the Great Bend School Competition, held in late October. A total of 12 Great Bend schools competed for \$1,500 in cash prizes, generously sponsored by Gifting Forward, a local foundation.

This year's collection is the equivalent of just over 45 tons of food (\$1 = 1 lb.), is an 66% increase over last year's collection (54,599 lbs. in 2022). This brings the combined 10-year food drive total to 317,693 lbs., or just over 159 tons of food.

Barton County's donations were the highest around Kansas. Scott City raised more than \$12,000, and Harper and Wichita counties each raised more than \$8,000.

**GBMS, Family Crisis Center teaming up for Winter Clothing Drive  
12/4**

Cold weather has arrived and that's a good time to clean out the closet. Not everyone can afford warm clothing, and Andrea Bauer, public information director for the Great Bend School district, said that's why USD 428 is teaming up with the Family Crisis Center.

(BAUER-WINTER)

21 seconds

From now until Dec. 20, new or gently used coats, winter hats, and gloves of all sizes, from adult to infant, may be dropped off at the Great Bend Middle School. District Family Engagement Coordinator Tayler Stegman said the collaborative effort will not only benefit those in need, but also support the Family Crisis Center's free clothing storefront. Donations of any size can make a difference.

## Proposal to consolidate Juvenile Services & CKCC in Barton's district

12/5

Following the removal of Amy Boxberger as the director of Central Kansas Community Corrections, the Barton County Commission heard an idea to consolidate the district's juvenile services and adult program. Marissa Woodmansee presented to the commission Monday morning, stating the consolidation makes sense and now might be a good time to consider the idea for a reset on the departments. Woodmansee, whom serves as the Juvenile Services director for the 20<sup>th</sup> Judicial District, was named interim director of Central Kansas Community Corrections in November with the absence of Boxberger.

(WOODMANSEE – ADULT) 30 Seconds

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Out of the 31 judicial districts in Kansas, there are only four that separate their juvenile services and adult corrections programs. While the county currently is advertising the job opening for director of Community of Corrections, Woodmansee said she would be willing to oversee both departments. Saving money by reducing a director position, Woodmansee said the funding could be used to assist in the hiring of more probation officers.

(WOODMANSEE – HELP) 21 Seconds

While both juvenile services and CKCC are state funded, they are governed by the Barton County Commission. Commissioners said they would consider the consolidation proposal from Woodmansee.



## **Operation of SRCA Dragstrip reverting back to City of Great Bend**

**12/6**

The Great Bend City Council approved a new agreement for the operation of the SRCA dragstrip. The Sunflower Rod and Custom Association (SRCA) canceled the race season this past spring because they deemed the track unsafe and in need of substantial repairs. With a one-year agreement to maintain the track and facility set to expire at the end of the year, the City of Great Bend will take over responsibility for the track beginning January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024 since the track is not operating. Great Bend City Attorney Allen Glendenning said the SRCA volunteers will still store chemicals and equipment at the facility located on the fairgrounds.

**(GLEN DENNING – BUILDING)**

**22 Seconds**

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After a \$1.6 million reconstruction of the dragstrip in May 2021, there have been problems with the surface meeting required standards. The legal issue is in arbitration, and not expected to get arbitrated until June 2024.

The new agreement will continue until a rebuild of the track is complete and operation resumes at the Motorplex.

## **Wildlife officials investigating dozens of dead birds at Cheyenne Bottoms 12/6**

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) continues to be a threat to poultry providers around the Midwest. A dead duck found at the Sedgwick County Zoo two weeks ago tested positive for the virus, resulting in the shutdown of most bird exhibits. Kansas Wetlands Education Center Director Curtis Wolf said HPAI is one possible cause of several dead geese at Cheyenne Bottoms, where thousands of migratory birds remain.

(WOLF-EXPECTED)

16 seconds

The dead birds are visible throughout the shoreline of Pool 1A. One concern is that birds of prey, such as bald eagles, that eat the dead birds may become infected themselves.

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(WOLF-MEANS)

17 seconds

Right now, there's little staff can do. Some of the birds have been sent off for testing, and the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks does have a protocol for handling infected birds. Wolf advised hunters that come into contact with waterfowl to take precautions when cleaning the birds, including wearing gloves and maybe even a mask.

**Barton Co. Clerk: small error may be included in 2023 property tax  
12/8**

The Barton County Treasurer's Office announced Tuesday morning that property tax statements would be mailed to residents on Friday, Dec. 8. Later that evening, County Clerk Bev Schmeidler issued a release stating some residents may receive incorrect statements.

(SCHMEIDER-LEVIES)

13 seconds

Schmeidler added any errors would be very small numerically and affect only a portion of Barton County residents. Her office is taking steps to ensure ~~future~~ mistakes do not happen in the future. Anyone with questions or concerns about their tax statement is encouraged to call the county clerk's office at (620) 793-1835, or email [clerk@bartoncounty.org](mailto:clerk@bartoncounty.org).

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**Fingers crossed...new Great Bend police station move-in date next week**

**12/8**

When the groundbreaking ceremony for the Great Bend Justice Center took place last summer, the thought was to have the roughly \$9 million project finished by August 2023. Construction and material delays and a drainage issue caused rescheduled openings to September, October, November and eventually December. Housing both the Great Bend Police Department and Municipal Court, Police Chief Steve Haulmark said his department is tentatively planning on moving in next Thursday, December 14<sup>th</sup>.

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(HAULMARK – GO)

17 Seconds

The police department and city staff plan on moving the majority of their equipment and office supplies from the current station on Williams Street. Haulmark said the bigger items will be moved by The Gentlemen Moving Company.

The 20,000-square-foot facility will mostly be funded by the .10% sales tax increase approved in 2021.

**Cheyenne Bottoms Christmas Bird Count numbers up from 2022**  
**12/26**

Each winter, the National Audobon Society conducts hundreds of Christmas Bird Counts around the nation, including approximately 40 in Kansas. The Cheyenne Bottoms count, which covers a 15-mile radius that touches most communities in Barton County, was held on Dec. 18. Kansas Wetlands Education Center Director Curtis Wolf said the count went from 61 species last year to 77 species this year.

(WOLF-THOUGHT)

19 seconds

Nineteen volunteers helped with the count this year, up from 16 a year ago. The mild winter has kept birds in the area with 15 species of waterfowl counted, and more than 147,000 total birds counted. A snow geese count of just over 126,000 birds - the highest recorded for the Bottoms count - played a large role in that figure. Just 339 red-winged blackbirds, the second-lowest figure in the last 15 years, kept the overall number down.

(WOLF-FLOCKS)

13 seconds

Wolf said cattail control at the Bottoms is likely the reason the blackbirds have gone away. This year's count also included 25 bald eagles, 55 sandhill cranes, and a lesser black-backed gull that made just a second appearance in the local count.

## **Jobless rate down in Barton County, across the state 12/26**

Preliminary estimates reported by the Labor Market Information Services division of the Kansas Department of Labor and the Bureau of Labor Statistics show a seasonally adjusted unemployment rate of 2.9% in November. This is unchanged from 2.9% in October and unchanged from 2.9% in November 2022.

Seasonally adjusted job estimates for Kansas indicate total nonfarm payroll employment increased by 2,700 from October. Total nonfarm includes private sector and government employers. Private sector jobs increased by 2,100 over the month, while government increased by 600.

~~The unemployment rate in Barton County is down from 3 percent in October to 1.9 percent. The rate also is down significantly in counties across the region.~~

Since November 2022 Kansas' seasonally adjusted total nonfarm jobs have increased by 14,300. This change is due to an increase of 6,600 private sector jobs and an increase of 7,700 government jobs.

## **Golden Belt Community Foundation's Giving Tuesday raises \$300,000 12/26**

Golden Belt Community Foundation just completed its 10th Giving Tuesday campaign, wrapping up and announcing the results during a Great Bend Chamber of Commerce Coffee last Thursday morning. The event raised \$288,000 last year. GBCF Development and Communications Coordinator Mackenzie Mitchell said that increased to \$300,000 this year and will benefit 106 non-profits in four counties.

(MITCHELL-UP)

10 seconds

More than 1,000 donations were made this year. The foundation received a \$70,000 matching grant from the Patterson Family Foundation. With the ~~total dollars raised and the matching dollars, a grand total of \$370,000 will~~ be going straight to organizations or growing the organization's endowment funds. St. John received the 2023 Most Generous City award, and the foundation will make a grant of \$1,000 for a program or project in that community. More than \$40,000 was raised for Prince of Peace Catholic Church in Great Bend, and nearly \$35,000 was raised for Stafford County Economic Development.

(MITCHELL-INCREDIBLE)

11 seconds

GBCF serves Barton, Rush, Pawnee, and Stafford Counties. In 2024, Giving Tuesday will be celebrated on Dec. 3.