

Pawnee County holding its own in difficult state economy

By MIKE GILMORE
News Director,
Hi, Neighbor!
Newspapers

Falling oil and gas prices hit neighboring counties hard in 2015. But while Pawnee County escaped the crunch felt by Barton, Ellis and other county neighbors, other issues down the road have the Pawnee County Commissioners looking at measures to hold the line on its resources.

“Comparatively, we’re

doing pretty well,” remarked Chairman Gary Caplinger as the three-member county commission looks ahead to 2016. “I don’t know that we are in total survival mode. But, we’re trying to look ahead and anticipate where we can - what we may need to do or change to try and hold the line on mill levies and taxes.”

As in past years, Pawnee County continues to wrangle with the general, road and bridge and law

enforcement expenses that make up half of its annual budget. While there are some aspects within the county’s 755-mile domain that Pawnee County shares with its similarly-populated rural neighbors, there are some that set it apart.

The commissioners rely on the road and bridge department to set and meet its own goals, to maintain its infrastructure.

“One of the things

that I have seen in the past year and continue to see, is a collaboration between the Pawnee County Highway Department and the City of Larned,” Caplinger said. “We’ve done quite a bit of work for the city as far as sealing and so forth, because of their limited resources. They are paying us to do it, but that’s something we’re going to continue to look at, looking at collaboration as a way to save both entities money. It’s working in

other counties; there are other counties that have had some success with that.”

Caplinger noted that the recent collaborative effort between the county, the city and the school district through quarterly meetings to share ideas is helping.

“We are all different entities, but we’re all in the same boat,” Caplinger said. “for us, road and bridge and law enforcement our two biggest expenses, but if you can get a handle on those, the others will fall in line.”

Counties, however, continue to receive directives from Topeka that challenge the ability to maintain a stable budget. For Pawnee County, that includes such directives as updating the Pawnee County Courthouse courtroom to state technology management standards, as well as law enforcement’s directives in managing caseloads and registration databases for the state’s Sexual Predator Treatment Program at Larned State Hospital.

On the revenue side, Pawnee Valley Community Hospital continues to be a success story for Pawnee County.

“We’ve all three been really happy with the financial success of the hospital at this point,”

Caplinger said. “That’s with the understanding that it can vary greatly at any given time. So far, as a whole, we’ve been really strong,” Caplinger said.

“We look at the number of people we have working, and we continue to add people. We’ve developed the facilities a bit more, added more parking, and we want to keep growing that. The hospital has become a very viable source of employment for the county.”

Other goals looked to down the road include keeping on track to paying the school board bond issue off as early as possible. “That’s one of our goals, to get the bond issue paid off early. We are making strides toward that. We can’t pay it off for 10 years, but after 10 year’s it’s possible. We’d all like to see that happen.”

Caplinger also said the county commissioners will be looking at grant participation in the future.

“Grants are good to a certain degree, but I think that we are trying to be a little more selective,” Caplinger said.

“Every grant comes with strings and those strings are in the form of dollar bills. We’re wanting to look at those a little more carefully.”

Rozel

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 be scooped by the farmers from the wagons into boxcars.

There are several farm-connected business enterprises in the town. A fourth-generation industry is Blattner Inc., started from a blacksmith shop built in 1906.

Rozel schools evolved from a one-room school in 1883 to a modern school plant in 1950. They are probably the first school system to transport students using horse-drawn school wagons in 1914. The first Rozel school building was built in 1905 to handle the lower grades. In 1913 a consolidation between Rozel and Elm Grove brought the need for high school classes. The first class of eight students to graduate from Rozel High School was in 1917. The current building was dedicated in April 1950 and was called the Rozel Con-

solidated Schools. In 1968 the merger of the Rozel and Burdett schools took place with the new name of Pawnee Heights, USD 496. From 2005 to 2009 Pawnee Heights entered into a cooperative agreement with the Hanston School District and jointly operated attendance centers at Burdett grades (K-5), Hanston grades (6-8), and a high school at Rozel.

In 2010, the cooperative agreement with Hanston was discontinued, and the Pawnee Heights district moved all grades to the Rozel campus. The school is widely recognized for excellence and high achievement in the classroom. The school district also operates a virtual school that is headquartered in the Burdett school building, along with a community activity center, and the Pawnee Heights Community Library.

Not only is Rozel a thriving agricultural community. Additional businesses are Sweet Traditions, a catering business, and the Reiderer Inn Tea Room, both owned and operated by Faye and Gary Grandy; Style Station, a hair salon owned and operated by Kim Galliant; Galliant Electric, owned and operated by Travis Galliant; Colglazier Crop Production/Seed Sales, owned and operated by Doug Colglazier; Rozel Family Fitness, a Pride Project; and Cycle In Style operated by Kelsi Williamson.

The community food pantry is located at the Rozel United Methodist Church for those residing in the 67574 ZIP code. Hours of operation are 2 p.m. - 4 p.m. on the third Sunday of the month.

The city of Rozel was notified by Governor Bill Graves in December

2002 that the city had been awarded a Community Improvement Grant through the Kansas Small Cities Community Development Block Grant program. With money from the grant and local contributions, a handicapped accessible, 40- by 72-foot community center was built with a full kitchen and restrooms, and was dedicated in January 2003. The city and community are very proud of the building and feel that it can be used for years to come.

The City of Rozel was notified by Governor Mark Parkinson on July 24, 2009, that the City had been awarded a Community Development Block Grant. Through the Kansas Small Cities Community Development Block Grant Program, this award will provide the needed financing for the water treatment project.

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