HIGHLIGHTING REGIONAL LIFESTYLE, BUSINESS & ARTS

NORTHWEST KANSAS TODAY

Winter 2021 | VOLUME 2, ISSUE 3

Feature Story

THE CHILD CARE CHALLENGE

Communities, employers explore options for quality child care

See Page 4

BACK IN BUSINESS

New owners of closed Plainville firm bring back three product lines – and jobs that go along with them

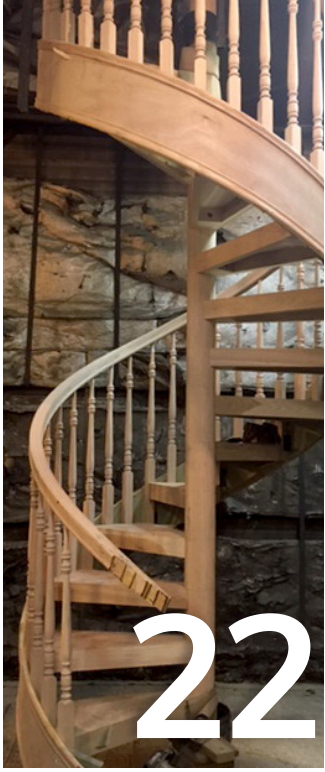
See Page 18

WASTE NOT

Sheridan County leads the way in conserving area's precious water resource

See Page 26

Inside this issue



Northwest Kansas Today is a publication of the Dane G. Hansen Foundation
P.O. Box 187, Logan. KS 67646

OUR MISSION:
The Dane G. Hansen Foundation is committed to providing opportunities for the people of Northwest Kansas to enjoy the highest possible quality of life.

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
Erin Mathews
Betsy Wearing, editor

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS
Erin Mathews
Betsy Wearing
Alex Begler

PUBLICATION DESIGN
Julie Hess Design

CONTACT US
Northwest Kansas Today is designed to share stories for and about the people and communities in the 26 most northwest counties in Kansas. If you have a story idea, please contact us at: NWKansasToday@danehansenfoundation.org.

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION
Northwest Kansas Today is distributed at no cost to all verified post office addresses in the Hansen Foundation's 26-county service area. In order to efficiently provide the magazine to all residents, we are unable to remove an address from our mailing list. If you do not wish to enjoy the magazine, please share it with someone who might.

After enjoying *Northwest Kansas Today*, please help us preserve beautiful Northwest Kansas and recycle your copy.

Learn more about the Hansen Foundation at: www.danehansenfoundation.org.

ON THE COVER: Colson Thomas, 3, peeks out on the left, as he plays with his cousins Raegan Thomas, 3; and Baker Thomas, 5, in M&M Daycare's outdoor play area on the roof of the Phillipsburg accounting firm Mapes & Miller LLP, where their mothers work.

26

30

Mostly Ghostly 30

The Brown Grand Theatre in Concordia is ready for the return of audiences, with new seats and improved lighting. During the COVID-19 pandemic, ghosts have had the run of the place.

Find more online!

For decades, WaKeeney's unique Christmas Tree and year-round North Pole display have drawn families to the community. Recent improvements made 2020 special even during a pandemic.

Welcome!

Growing up and still living in Graham County, I am no stranger to the work of the Dane G. Hansen Foundation. Northwest Kansas residents don't have to look far to see how the Foundation has touched this quarter of the state in dramatic ways. It could be a new fence at the local ball field, or lights at the fairgrounds. Perhaps it's a local student attending school on a Hansen scholarship, or a child opening her mailbox and pulling out a new book to read, courtesy of the Foundation.

The list of ways the Hansen Foundation has touched the lives of my friends, family and neighbors is long. So, it is with great pleasure that I join the Dane G. Hansen Foundation as its newest trustee, and that I get to introduce this issue of *Northwest Kansas Today*.

What a joy to read about all the good things happening around us! In this issue, we'll share stories about things to see and do, such as the renovated miniature train in Ellis and the beautiful – if slightly haunted – Brown Grand Theatre in Concordia. You can read about how the community of Oberlin has created a shared office space out of an old bank building. Spoiler alert – it's so popular they need more room. Learn how former employees and others divided and conquered – reopening three new businesses from one that closed its doors in Plainville.

Regional issues, including water preservation and the critical need for child care, are also covered. See how your neighbors are responding to these larger issues. There's more, too. So, enjoy!

As the great-granddaughter of Irish immigrants who settled in Northwest Kansas with their families and a dream for economic success, these rural stories ignite my passion to help make our communities vibrant, accessible, and successful places to live and work.

I look forward to serving *with* the board and staff, and *for* the people of Northwest Kansas!

Rhonda S Goddard

Rhonda Goddard

Staff and children of Citizens Clubhouse in Colby enjoy a snowy day in October. (COURTESY PHOTO)

Maddax Flanagin practices standing on his own at the Citizens Clubhouse child care center in Colby. (COURTESY PHOTO)

The Child Care Challenge

Communities, employers explore options for quality child care

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ERIN MATHEWS

When Meghan Goding stopped by the classrooms in Ellsworth Child Care and Learning Center, she used to get hugs and high fives. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, she's stayed in the hallway or outside the window as children blow kisses, wave or show her a favorite toy.

It's still a good way to start the morning.

"It just brightens my day," said Goding, executive director of the community child care center owned by the Smoky Hill Child Care Foundation.

One silver lining to the dark cloud of the global pandemic in 2020 has been the light shined on the importance of essential workers, many of whom have served without much recognition in previous years. Essential to the essential workers are the child care providers.

"I think the pandemic has highlighted the crucial role of child care overall," said Kelly Davydov, executive director of Child Care Aware of Kansas. "If you don't have child care, where are the nurses and the EMTs and the first responders going to leave their kids? What happens to the Dillons employee that has no place to bring their child?

"It just undergirds the economy, and I think we've taken it for granted.

KELLY DAVYDOV

"From a broader, more system perspective, I think we want to value child care but certainly haven't created an infrastructure that emphasizes early care and education the same way that we do K-12 and even higher education," Davydov said.

That lack of emphasis is in spite of the fact that research shows that 90 percent of a child's brain development happens before age 5.

"If you want to really impact later life outcomes, make sure you have quality child care," she said.

You get what you get

In rural places such as Northwest Kansas, finding child care was often a challenge for parents even before the pandemic.

"Depending where you are, you might find yourself experiencing a child care dilemma where your provider is 30 miles to the east of your home and your job is 30 miles to the west of your home, so how do you navigate that in a day?"

KELLY DAVYDOV
CHILD CARE AWARE OF KANSAS

According to the *2019 Child Care Supply Demand Report*, compiled by Child Care Aware and the Kansas Department for Children and Families, 77 percent of Kansas counties – including 19 of the 26 counties served by the Dane G. Hansen Foundation – have more than 10 children younger than 3 for every reported child care opening.

All young families are not seeking child care, but typically, more than three of 10 are. In some communities, parents don't have any child care choices. Access is a big issue, especially in rural areas. Families of children with special needs or families needing care during less traditional working hours are even less likely to have options.

"Depending where you are, you might find yourself experiencing a child care dilemma where your provider is 30 miles to the east of your home and your job is 30 miles to the west of your home, so how do you navigate that in a day?" Davydov said.

The need for affordable, quality child care almost always ranks near the top during community needs assessments. Working parents have solved the problem in a variety of ways: Arrangements with relatives, friends or neighbors, taking different shifts from a spouse, or through the services of a home care provider or a center.

The people who care for children typically are not well paid, many of them in rural communities pocketing only about $600 every couple of weeks. Few receive benefits such as health insurance, and their hours can be long. But by showing up every morning, they ensure that the other parents in the area's workforce can clock in, too.

Helping the hospital

In Colby, the Citizens Medical Center Foundation board had known for years that something needed to be done about the lack of available child care.

"We were having a major issue with staff leaving," said Megan Carmichael, executive director of the foundation. "They would go on maternity leave and wouldn't come back because they couldn't find anybody to care for their kids, or we would have

See **CHILD CARE**, page 6

Sam Clark and Henley Wark love to listen to Ms. Robin Brown read them stories at the Citizen Clubhouse child care center in Colby. (COURTESY PHOTO)

Colson Thomas, 3, presents his mother, Ashley, with an ornament of his hand he made while at daycare Dec. 18.

CHILD CARE, from page 5

a hard time hiring people because they couldn't find anybody to watch their kids."

In September 2018, Denise Juenemann, a preschool teacher and child care provider from Nebraska, was hired to start a child care center for hospital staff.

"We didn't know where it was going to be, how big it was going to be," Carmichael said.

Juenemann, who had attended fifth grade in a modular building, thought such a facility might work for the hospital's child care center. In an online search she found a used one for sale in Wichita.

When Citizens Clubhouse opened nine months later, on July 1, 2019, all 38 spots were filled. The center, which provides a full preschool curriculum and operates from 5:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. weekdays, covers both a normal 8 to 5 shift, as well as the 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. nursing shift.

Carmichael said although the child care center operates at a loss, it's an important employee benefit. The reduction in turnover makes it cost-effective for the hospital. She said it's also helped with staff morale.

Another child care issue arose after COVID-19 hit and local schools went online.

Because there were already child care workers on staff, Citizens could respond quickly. Additional office space was cleared, and in two days there was a plan in place for about 50 school children. The kids even received help with their homework.

"The stress level when all of the sudden you're told, 'OK, we don't have school anymore. Figure out how to teach your own kid and work at the same time,' was through the roof," Juenemann said. "To be able to offer something where nurses and doctors could come in and go to work stress-free was huge."

An employer approach

For Ashley Thomas, mother of 3-year-old Colson, child care is also stress free. Over the last 10 years, all four of her children have been cared for at a cost of just $1 an hour in a daycare above the Phillipsburg office where she works for the certified public accounting firm, Mapes & Miller LLP.

"Every once in a while, we hear them stomping around up here, but we're used to it," she said. "It's really nice having it here."

She said one of her children had diabetes, but she was able to make sure he had the care he needed and keep her job.

"I never had to worry," she said.

Sue Miller, office manager for Mapes & Miller LLP, said the firm has two child care workers on its staff of about 15. Child care has been an employee benefit for about 18 years.

"We've had it since the secretary's daughter was a baby, and now she's a senior in high school," she said. "We started it because at the time we had several kids, and our hours are definitely not 8 to 5."

She said that at that time, tax credits were offered to employers who provided child care.

"We're small potatoes, but it works for us," Miller said. "We're sure that we've gotten people to come to work here because of the daycare."

Davydov said the pandemic has made the need for reliable child care more apparent to employers. In the absence of a systemic approach, they've started stepping in to develop public-private partnerships.

"Employers were starting to see the impact on their bottom line in terms of productivity and employee retention, and they were starting to say 'we have to do this,' " she said.

See **CHALLENGE**, page 8

Patrick Pugh and Parker Green arrived at Sunshine Learning Center in Norton decked out for Christmas.

Caring for Kids

Child care workers are charged with our most important asset – our children. The Hansen Foundation is working to help recognize and stabilize the critical child care industry.

STORY BY BETSY WEARING

When looking to provide the most positive future for Northwest Kansas, or any place, look no further than what opportunities there are for children.

"How we care for and prepare our youngest citizens will determine how well our communities perform in the future," said Hansen Foundation Board Chairman Brien Stockman.

In 2017, the Hansen Foundation launched its first strategic initiative – aimed directly at Northwest Kansas children. NWKansas READS is designed to provide high-quality, age-appropriate books to children, from birth to age 5, in the Hansen Foundation service area. Research shows that access to quality reading materials is a gateway for kindergarten readiness and better lifetime performance in school, including scores in both reading and math.

NWKansas CARES FOR KIDS

The same year that initiative was launched, the Foundation introduced a process called Strategic Doing to all its counties. Strategic Doing is a tool to help communities, organizations, or a group of interested citizens define needs, create a team and follow a process to find and implement solutions.

While each individual county used Strategic Doing to identify local needs and issues, the Hansen Foundation Trustees reviewed the collective data to identify issues that crossed borders and affected the region as a whole.

"Pretty quickly, we could see that child care, and in particular, the lack of available child care openings, was a big issue in the area," said Doug Albin, a Hansen Foundation Trustee. "It is really both a quality-of-life issue for families, and an economic development issue for businesses."

Without available child care, the younger workforce is unable to relocate to a community. Houses are not sold; businesses are not able to fill openings, and schools miss out on increasing enrollment.

After nearly three years of discussion and study, the Foundation announced an initiative specifically aimed at early childhood education, focusing on child care centers in Northwest Kansas. NWKansas CARES for Kids was announced in September and includes three different grant opportunities.

The Early Childhood Education Staff Support Grant is designed to provide financial recognition for early childhood staff, reduce costs associated with staff turnover, and stabilize the workforce. Fewer staff changes are also a quality factor for children attending the centers. The grant provides bonuses every six months for full-time (30 hours/week) staff who remain at the same center. Bonus amounts range from $250 to $800. In addition, center directors are provided funds for additional discretionary bonuses.

A second grant covers the cost of materials for Montessori education curriculum. The Montessori kits include training videos and instructions for teachers as well as time-tested, high-quality learning tools and manipulatives designed to last for many years. Each center may apply one time for up to $5,000 in materials.

The third grant in the initiative offers child care centers up to $1,000 each year for up to five years to purchase high-quality children's books to create or enhance the center's library.

See **CARING**, page 9

CHALLENGE, from page 6

The COVID question

COVID-19 has compounded the child care challenge everywhere. Affordability became more of a concern for those who lost jobs or had reduced hours. And then there was fear. Is it safe to have a young child around a group of other young children?

Fortunately, if existing procedures for controlling infection are followed, the answer to that question, for the most part, has been yes. In May and June, Yale University surveyed more than 57,000 child care workers nationwide. Results showed no greater infection rate among those whose facilities stayed open and those that closed.

"We had to close a toddler room for two weeks because one of our teachers ended up having it," Brandy Schoenberger, owner of Kidz Korner, in WaKeeney, said in late December. "The families had to quarantine with their kids for two weeks, but not a single kid got it. We haven't had any of the kids get it yet– knock on wood."

Schoenberger launched her for-profit child care center six years ago in a building that previously housed a hospital clinic. She said that in the early days of the pandemic when businesses closed and parents shifted to working from home, she saw a dip in the number of kids, but by December, enrollment had bounced back. The facility, which is licensed for 59 children, had a total of 81 kids enrolled – some on a part-time, drop-in basis.

Schoenberger said she worked in child care before she had children of her own. She ran a home-based child care for 19 years before opening Kidz Korner.

"I love everything about it – all the little ones," she said. "My day goes by so fast. I'm in the preschool for the most part, and we're busy from the minute we start till the minute they go home."

Staffing and regulation concerns

The biggest obstacle has been finding and retaining staff, Schoenberger said. She can't afford to offer health insurance, so she recently lost a good preschool teacher who took another job for the insurance.

"I wish there was some answer to that," she said.

In September, The Dane G. Hansen Foundation announced a new initiative, NWKansas CARES for Kids, to help recognize the importance of child care workers and to try and help stabilize staff turnover rates. The initiative includes bonuses every six months for staff who remain at the same center, as well as funding for curriculum and books to enrich the quality of care.

The Northwest Kansas Economic Innovation Center Inc. offers similar support for for-profit centers. (See page 7.)

Schoenberger said she was back to full staff in December and was hopeful that the new program would help keep it that way.

Part of the problem with child care affordability is the cost of meeting regulatory requirements. Facilities all over the state must abide by the same staff-to-child ratios. In a rural setting, where volume is less and fees typically must be set lower to fit a family's budget, profitability is reduced.

"It makes the infant/toddler care much more difficult to operate under because the ratio is higher, so it makes it more expensive," Davydov said. "Then again, infants are the ones that are more care-intensive, so it's not without rationale or basis."

Meeting the challenge

To meet the challenge, area communities have used a variety of approaches. Some, including Ellsworth, have raised funds for nonprofit community centers that are supported by donations.

"There was a needs assessment of the community, and daycare wasn't available," said Cory Rathbun, a member of the board of the Smoky Hill Child Care Foundation. "Ellsworth had the prison and other industry was moving in. Community leaders got land donated, and they raised money from several foundations. It was truly a community effort. It's had some ups and downs, for sure, but we feel really good with the way things are going now."

> *"Without us doing our very best and doing what we can for the health and safety of these children, our parents can't work."*
>
> **CORY RATHBUN** | SMOKY HILL CHILD CARE

He said the center's services are "really important for our community."

"Without us doing our very best and doing what we can for the health and safety of these children, our parents can't work," he said.

The Ellsworth center is licensed for 99 children, but COVID-19 caused enrollment to drop below 70. Enrollment figures were back into the 80s by December.

"I think things are starting to pick back up," Goding said, adding that she's appreciative of Dane G. Hansen Foundation grant funds that will make it possible to pay her staff bonuses.

"It's an opportunity to reward people

Care provider Crystal Berry holds Baylor Pfannenstiel at the Sunshine Learning Center in Norton.

Children arrived at Sunshine Learning Center in Norton on Dec. 18 wearing Christmas sweaters. Front row: Ella Sattler and Britton Kachel. Back row: Vail Griffiths, Axel Knapp and Amylia Gilmore.

who have stuck it out through some of these really difficult months," Rathbun said.

'We just never left'

Jennifer McKenna, director of Sunshine Learning Center in Norton, was also thrilled to be able to give her staff bonuses. She said the extra cleaning and precautions they've taken have kept the virus from spreading in the facility, even when individual children had to quarantine after someone in their family was exposed.

JENNIFER MCKENNA

"My girls cried. There are so many of them that live paycheck to paycheck," she said. "After having to cut hours and having COVID, I told them we got this grant and you're going to get $800, and they cried. I cried because I was so happy to be able to do it for them. That's a whole new level of appreciation."

The center is at capacity caring for 56 kids, including six infants. There are three more babies on the waiting list.

"The babies coming in have a waiting list until 2022 just with our current parents," she said. "Rarely can we get anybody else in. People who move into town don't realize how hard it is to find something."

She said the center has plans to expand, but it probably won't happen right away.

McKenna has been working at Sunshine for 25 years, and she has a handful of other long-term staff members. She said every year they get graduation announcements from former daycare children.

"We all started because our kids were here, and we just never left," she said. "My baby's 23."

She said it's rewarding to know she's making a difference in so many lives and that the children have also made a difference in hers.

"They're so happy – pure joy," she said. "They come in, and they're glad to see you. I can go out to my car and come back in the door, and they're glad to see me all over again." ▪

CARING, from page 7

"When we designed the initiative, we wanted to provide economic assistance to the industry," said Stockman, "but also give recognition to the people working in child care centers. They are providing a critical service and yet are some of the least recognized and compensated workers.

"We were also hoping that earning a bonus twice a year would incentivize good employees to stay in the industry," Stockman said. "If you are an individual or business looking for the quickest and most direct way to help your community, there are few things better than to volunteer or donate dollars toward making your local child care center sustainable. Most people in a community have no idea how hard it is for these providers to find quality staff and to keep their centers operating on a positive cash-flow basis."

The first grants were awarded in December to 13 different child care centers and two group homes operating in communities where there is no child care center.

The Hansen Foundation worked with the Northwest Kansas Economic Innovation Center, Inc., (NWKEICI) based in Norton. NWKEICI created a similar support program for the for-profit child care centers in the same geographic area. Four additional centers received assistance through NWKEICI.

Qualifying applicants were required to meet the following criteria:

- Licensed by the State of Kansas for at least 13 children
- Accepting children ages 2 weeks to 6 years of age
- Open at least three hours a day and fewer than 24 hours a day
- Located within the Hansen Foundation's 26-county service area

Home-based day care businesses and preschools are not eligible.

Applications for the next round of grants are due April 25. More information is available on the foundation's website at *www.danehansenfoundation.org*. ▪

The secret life of pets

Rural Delphos artist finds joy in painting animals as their owners see them

STORY AND PHOTOS
BY ERIN MATHEWS

[DELPHOS] On 40 acres at the end of a dusty road near Delphos, Clarissa Thaden lives with her husband, Steve, their 5-year-old son, Sam, and 17 cats, three dogs, a llama, two sheep, three goats, two pot belly pigs, three mules, a horse, a steer and two chickens.

"Everything is welcome, from cats — which all get fixed — to a sickly little steer calf that nearly died but miraculously went on to live eight happy and peaceful years here, to the wild things that wander through," she said. "They are all welcome, fed, and loved for as long as they want to call this place their own. I'm so grateful to share this with Steve and be able to raise Sam in this compassionate way."

Thaden is passionate about being a mother and a caretaker of the animals at her A Place to Be animal sanctuary, that is clear. Her other passion is more surprising — and quite unique. In her small studio in a renovated garden shed — or "Mama House," as Sam calls it — she paints elaborate, one-of-a-kind portraits of people's pets.

Rural Delphos artist Clarissa Thaden specializes in portraits of people's pets.

"I've sent several to Germany, and I have two more going to Switzerland for Christmas," Thaden said in November. "It just turned into this global thing. I've gotten to translate things into German, and it's been so fun and unexpected. I have customers around the world. That's crazy to say out loud."

Turning animals into art

Her animal-inspired artistic career was launched about


Thaden greets Bear, a mini mule, who makes his home at her family's A Place to Be animal sanctuary.

TOP: A black cat as Gandalf was a Christmas present for a *Lord of the Rings* fan; a digital painting of the Thadens' goat, Sugar; This acrylic painting of Timber the Golden Retriever was a Christmas present.

RIGHT: Thaden won second in the acrylic category in a national pet portrait competition this summer with this painting, which features a stray cat named Extra. The feral cat showed up at A Place to Be with a massive tumor on his lip. Thaden trapped him and took him to the vet, and after several months she had him tamed. "Now he is the most loving and spoiled cat ever, hence the noble status!" she said.

seven years ago with a friend's request for a portrait of her pet pug. This friend wanted the artwork to capture her dog's rather immense personality and knew of Thaden's creativity and talents as a painter, so she asked that the pug be wearing a red cape and watching Rome burn.

"That's what started all this crazy, elaborate pet portrait stuff," she said. "I never wanted to paint pets because I thought I would have to capture that little spark that only you see in your pet, so I was scared of it for a long time. But you jump in with both feet on something like that, and it's been really fun. Now I don't want to do anything else."

For Christmas, Thaden was working on a Golden Retriever wearing vintage goggles and a Harley bandana, and a black cat version of Gandalf.

"I didn't know how a black cat and a beard were going to go together, but they did," Thaden said.

Thaden, who grew up in Longford in Clay County, has had no formal artistic training, except oil painting lessons at age 12 from her pastor's mom, and art classes she took at Clay Center High School. She earned an associate degree in hospitality from Cloud County Community College.

However, she has painted her whole life. She said that before she focused on pet portraiture, she had done a variety of projects, but nothing that really inspired her as much as her animal subjects.

New ways to create

Thaden started by making labor-intensive, detailed acrylic portraits, but more recently she added watercolors to her portfolio. She can paint a watercolor portrait in an afternoon, while she usually works on her acrylic canvases off and on over the course of a month.

"I never did watercolor until this summer," she said. "My son was painting with watercolor in the kitchen, so I picked up his stuff and kind of just took off. It was like picking up a new instrument and going, 'Oh, where have you been?' It's been really fun to discover a looser, less contrived and less labor-intensive way of painting. It's been really therapeutic and nice, and it's a good year for something like that."

Thaden built up her watercolor pet portfolio by painting Instagram cat photos she liked, including one posted by Hockhockson Farm Foundation. She said the idea was to get practice by making art for people who loved animals as much as she did. When she offered to send a digital version of her work to the Instagram pet owners, people would often express interest in buying the original.

On her studio wall hangs a photo of former Daily Show host Jon Stewart and his wife, Tracey, holding a watercolor she did of their cat, Zorp. The Stewarts created the Hockhockson Farm animal sanctuary in New Jersey.

Another format she's learned is digital painting. She started that because she's begun work on a children's book about her family's dog, Tilly.

"She was our first child, and we thought she was going to be our only child," Thaden said. "She had a really special place in our hearts. The book is my way of immortalizing her and the love she had for just every creature she encountered."

Thaden's digital customers get a high-resolution PDF they can upload and have printed on coffee cups, cards or a variety of items.

The cost of Thaden's art ranges from the $100 watercolors to the more elaborate acrylics, with a base price of $200 or $1.75 a square inch. The cost of digital art falls somewhere in between.

Pets, not people

Thaden works from photos, so she needs a clear image of the pet in the pose she will paint. She won't paint images depicting death, and she doesn't want to paint something as standard as a hunting dog posed in front of trees. She doesn't put human bodies on animals, or for that matter, paint humans at all.

"I don't do people," she said. "I prefer animals. I feel a

See **STUDIO**, page 13

WANT TO SEE MORE?

INSTAGRAM: @cmarie_paint
FACEBOOK: Mama House Studio
WEBSITE: *mamahousestudio.com*
EMAIL: *clarissa1221@gmail.com*

Favorite characters escape the Russell library in search of readers

CRASH

Hays artist Dennis Schiel, Patty Driscoll, president of the Russell Original Art Review, and Jessica McGuire, director of the Russell Public Library, show off a mural Schiel painted on the side of the library building.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ERIN MATHEWS

[RUSSELL] Early in 2020, just when reasons to smile seemed to be getting fewer and further between, a giant elephant busted its way onto Russell's Main Street.

Hathi, from Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, also freed a host of other favorite storybook characters when he forced his way through the brick wall on the side of the Russell Public Library. Harry Potter soared out of the elephant-sized hole on his broomstick, and he was joined by the Cat in the Hat, Curious George and Winnie the Pooh, just to name a few.

The characters are part of an 11-by-27-foot mural painted by Hays artist Dennis Schiel. It was an instant hit.

"It was so fun," said Jessica McGuire, director of the Russell Public Library. "People say it gives them a big smile every time they drive down Main Street and see it."

Patty Driscoll, president of the Russell Original Art Review, said the group has promoted the arts in Kansas for more than 50 years. In 2020, the board decided it was time for a public art project aimed at children, and the library seemed like the right place for it.

The library board agreed. They gave approval, not only for Schiel to paint the escaping elephant on the library's west side, but also a giant bookshelf featuring Kansas favorite titles on the building's northeast corner.

"You definitely can't miss us now," McGuire said.

Drawing a crowd

Schiel, who started painting in January and finished up in May, said he enjoyed both projects. He said he attracted a lot of attention while he was working.

"The kids enjoyed it a lot – especially the elephant and all those characters there," he said. "Every time I paint outside, I get a lot of people that come by. Some are artists, and they tell me what I'm doing wrong. I kind of ignore them. I have all kinds of stories about different people I've met."

Driscoll said Schiel started with the children's mural because even in January and February, he could usually paint in the afternoon on the west side once the sun had warmed temperatures to at least 60 degrees, whereas, the bricks on the north side of the library were too cold.

Since he could paint only when the weather cooperated, library patrons never knew if he'd be there. It was especially fun for the children who attended storytime when they could watch him paint afterward, McGuire said.

STUDIO, from page 11

deeper connection to animals, and fur is more forgiving than skin."

Thaden said sometimes customers choose a theme that reminds them of their pet, and sometimes they just choose something they like.

"It doesn't have to be a full character," she said. "The royal thing is very popular, because pets are big, pampered princesses. What makes it fun for me is combining things that have only been in a person's head up to this point with a pet."

Thaden said that despite the challenges of 2020, demand for original pet art is still going strong. She is happy that her work can give people joy, especially now.

"We have a lot of unique going on out here," she said. "We are top to bottom Kansas unique." ▪

A giant bookshelf holding a variety of books, many with Kansas themes, wraps around the northeast corner of the Russell Public Library.

"You'd drive by and wonder if there was any change to it," she said. "It was exciting posting updates on Facebook. One of the most liked posts we've ever had was about the mural."

Driscoll said that she, too, loved watching Schiel paint.

"It's one thing to paint a picture, but it's another thing to paint on a large surface that's brick and not smooth," she said.

Filling the shelf

Driscoll, a retired third-grade teacher, said she consulted with other teachers about which old and new characters should be part of the children's mural. Library board members suggested some titles for the bookshelf mural, which includes such Kansas-themed classics as *The Wizard of Oz, In Cold Blood, The Last Cattle Drive*, and *Paper Moon*.

"There's a wide variety of books, which I like, because everybody should be able to identify with at least a couple of the books," Driscoll said.

More than $20,000 in funding for the murals came from ROAR, a Russell County Economic Development storefront grant, a Dane G. Hansen Foundation grant and donations from individuals and businesses.

Schiel's work is well-known in Kansas, and the library murals are not his first work in Russell. ROAR had previously commissioned him to paint a large mural on the VFW building there.

Driscoll is pleased with the finished product.

"Hopefully we can do more murals – that's our goal," she said. "I think they add so much to our community." ▪

All Aboard!

TOP: A fresh coat of paint for the train depot made it match the train's newly constructed garage, on the right.

LEFT: Sophia Henrickson, executive director of the Ellis Alliance; her son, Theodore, 6; and Pauleen Edmonds, board president of the Community Foundation of Ellis, sit in the newly refurbished cars of Ellis' miniature train.

RIGHT: Ellis Railroad Museum volunteer Brian Lefebvre (left) acts as conductor and engineer, and museum employee John LaShell (right) has been an engineer for the train for about 30 years.

Background photo by Alex Begler

Miniature train in Ellis is back on track

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ERIN MATHEWS

[ELLIS] The train is back at the station, and the time is coming when the conductor can call, "All Aboard!"

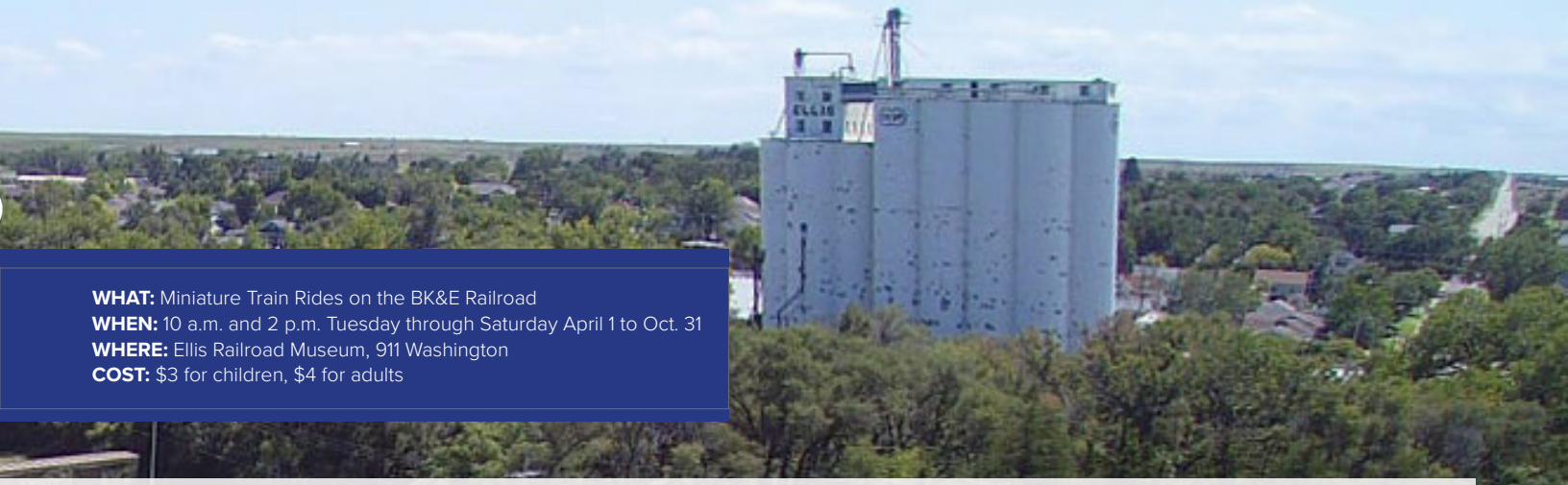
Starting in April, Ellis' popular miniature train again will be hauling small groups of delighted passengers along a 3/4-mile track. They will pass the old roundhouse and railroad machine shop areas near the Ellis Railroad Museum, which owns the train.

Community members are hopeful that highly anticipated holiday traditions featuring the newly refurbished train can return this year.

Pauleen Edmonds, board president of the Community Foundation of Ellis, said she – like everyone else in town – looks forward to being entertained by the Headless Horseman riding next to the Haunted Train on Halloween or being greeted by Santa and Frosty the Snowman on the Polar Express at Christmastime.

The two popular annual events have twice gotten derailed. The first time was in the summer of 2017, when vandals placed debris on the tracks, causing damage when the train hit it. Then in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic made it too risky for the large crowds that typically attend the popular holiday events.

After the vandalism, Edmonds said the community foundation board knew that refurbishing the train and providing a building to store it in would be their next big project.



WHAT: Miniature Train Rides on the BK&E Railroad
WHEN: 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday April 1 to Oct. 31
WHERE: Ellis Railroad Museum, 911 Washington
COST: $3 for children, $4 for adults

Train tradition

"Our city's history is really tied to the railroad," she said. Ellis was incorporated on Jan. 10, 1888, at the site of a steam train water station. Most of the town's first settlers worked for the railroad in some capacity.

"If they were not working on the train as the conductor, an engineer, a brakeman or a fireman, they worked in the machine shops or roundhouse," Edmonds said. "All the engines came here. They had enough room on the turntable to repair, maintain or house up to 14 engines at a time."

That railroad heritage is carried forward by the Ellis High School mascot, the Railroaders.

"Everyone in town has really been proud of being a Railroader," Edmonds said.

So, in 1993, when Francis "Buddie" King, then mayor of Ellis, came across a miniature train for sale in Michigan, he bought it and made arrangements with the Kansas Pacific Railroad Association to bring it to his hometown. Volunteers constructed a track, and soon the train – one of a handful built by Ottaway Amusement Co., of Wichita, in the late 1950s – was carrying its first passengers in Ellis.

The General Motors Aerotrain is a one-third-sized replica of a somewhat futuristic looking streamlined, experimental, full-sized train that never made it into widespread use.

"Everyone loves the train because it is something really unusual that nobody else has, and it fits with us being the Railroaders," Edmonds said. She said when the train was vandalized, "You could just see the passion of the people in town and just how that little train was a treasure to us. Right away people knew we had to get the train fixed."

Railroad restoration

Over the next two years, the community foundation spearheaded the effort to raise $250,000. The funds paid for a complete overhaul of the train, as well as construction of a garage to house it and other improvements on the grounds. A $40,000 Dane G. Hansen Foundation grant was part of the funding mix, as well as grants from Heartland Community Foundation, Union Pacific Foundation and the Beach Family Foundation and generous gifts from individual and corporate donors.

Dustin Vine, of D&D Body Shop in Ellis, said when the train arrived in his shop it was in "pretty poor condition."

His shop completely overhauled the brakes and engine, and they outsourced the rebuilding of the transmission. Needed parts for the four-cylinder, industrial Ford motor were impossible to find and had to be fabricated, he said. The engine and all but one passenger car were repainted.

The train was operational for three months in the fall. Sophia Henrickson, executive director of the Ellis Alliance, which encompasses the community foundation, Chamber of Commerce and Ellis Development Corp., said when the train came back, the number of visitors to the Ellis Railroad Museum increased.

"With the train running again, the museum has had an influx of people coming," Henrickson said.

Glen Keller, museum board chairman, said a Facebook post about the train got responses from across the country.

"There are a lot of train buffs in the world," he said.

A major spruce up

In addition to refurbishing the train, the former Union Pacific Penokee depot, which had been relocated to Ellis in 1994 to serve as a boarding area, was painted to match the mini-garage in white and green, the original colors of the Ellis depot.

Hays artist Dennis Schiel was commissioned to paint murals on the garage. An old caboose on site also was repainted, and Guy Riedel of CCR & Landscaping in Ellis was brought in to beautify the grounds. New lighting, new sidewalks and a perimeter fence were installed.

Edmonds said a few additional projects remain for a second phase of fundraising, which will launch soon. The train's last passenger car needs painted, and additional work is planned for the depot.

Donors purchased planters and benches in memory of loved ones as a part of the grounds project. Among them is a bench that honors King, who died the year after he brought the train to Ellis. The miniature train's name, BK&E Railroad, honors Buddie King and the city of Ellis.

The little train is again ready to bring joy to families, Edmonds said.

"It's overwhelming when you see what it looked like before and what it looks like now," Edmonds said. "It looks fantastic." ▪

Lighting

PHOTOS BY ERIN MATHEWS

[BELOIT] Throughout the holiday season, cars lined up in the dark at the entrance to Chautauqua Park with their headlights turned off, so their occupants could fully appreciate the dazzling display to come.

"This year particularly it's something you can do," said Michele Heidrick, president of the 10-member Chautauqua Isle of Lights board. "There's so much you can't do. We've got kids that want to come every night."

Admission was by donation. As drivers entered the park, more than 460 glowing figures – from festive

the way

to farm to patriotic to playful – stood waiting. The display of lighted figures, each with its own story and many made as memorials to area residents, has grown each year since it first appeared in the park in 1999. David Scott, of Tonkawa, Okla., individually crafts each piece to order.

City workers and volunteers, including NCK Technical College and middle school students, start in mid-October to set up everything from the large combine cutting wheat to the rainbow where Dorothy stands. Lights always need replaced, and more volunteers are always needed, Heidrick said.

"But we enjoy it," she said. "We're really proud of it." ▪

BACK

New owners of closed Plainville firm bring back three product lines — and jobs that go along with them

"Plainville's very resilient. It's a great community, and everyone's bounced back in some way, bigger and better than ever. There's a lot of 'feel good' stories out there – from the ashes, if you will."

SCOTT HAMEL | MANAGING PARTNER, FOURNIR COLLECTIONS

Palmer Hargrave craftsman Justin Klein can turn brass to any of the colors displayed above through various finishing processes.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ERIN MATHEWS

[PLAINVILLE] Well before a global pandemic created both health and economic concerns, the community of Plainville was already working to recover from the loss of a long-time employer.

The Dessin Fournir Companies (Dessin Fournir translates from French to English as "to design and to furnish") sold handcrafted furniture, lighting and custom textiles to interior designers and architects across the United States and around the world. It had been headquartered in Plainville since 1993, the year its founder, Chuck Comeau, decided to return to his hometown.

At its peak, the company employed about 90 people. But after decades of operation, the financial situation had become untenable, and Dessin Fournir declared bankruptcy in April 2019. For the community of 2,000, the loss of a major employer was significant.

"It was devastating for this area, not just for the employees but for the town," said Scott Hamel, who had worked for the company for 20 years.

But that's not where the story ends.

"Plainville's very resilient," Hamel said. "It's a great community, and everyone's bounced back in some way, bigger and better than ever. There's a lot of 'feel good' stories out there – from the ashes, if you will."

The Northwest Kansas Economic Innovation Center Inc., based in Norton, worked with potential buyers, and today, nearly all aspects of The Dessin Fournir Companies – a lighting line, the textile

IN BUSINESS

lines and the furniture lines – have come back as separate businesses under new ownership. The jobs The Dessin Fournir Companies once provided have started to come back as well.

A bright future

The lighting line

A popular lighting line offered through The Dessin Fournir Companies was Palmer Hargrave, which originated in California in 1946. DFC Holdings bought the company in 2000 and brought it to Plainville, where the lights were handcrafted for nearly two decades.

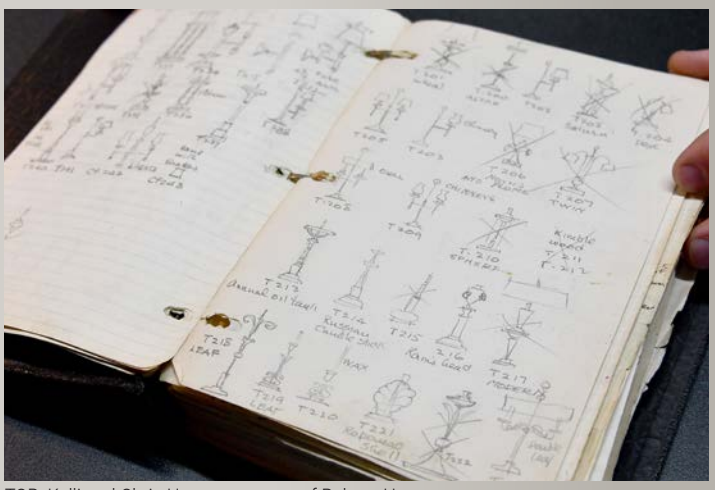
A few months after the bankruptcy, Plainville couple Kelli and Chris Hansen purchased the downtown manufacturing facility where Palmer Hargrave lights were made. In November, they celebrated their first year of independent operation. They've rehired two of the skilled craftsmen who made the lighting fixtures and plan to add to their workforce.

"I love being able to walk through the factory every day and see them handcrafting our lighting," Kelli Hansen said.

The Hansens were high school sweethearts. They went away to college but returned to Plainville to raise their family.

"We wanted to give our kids the same experiences we had growing up in a small town," Kelli said.

Chris landed a job with The Dessin Fournir Companies in 2000, and Kelli joined the staff about a year later. Chris had worked in other divisions of the company before moving to the Palmer Hargrave line in 2013. He worked in order-processing and customer service, dealing with clients and showrooms. Kelli worked in sales and marketing and performed various administrative roles for all the brands.



TOP: Kelli and Chris Hansen, owners of Palmer Hargrave

BOTTOM: When they purchased the company, the Hansens received notebooks kept by Palmer Hargrave's original owner, including sketches of lighting designs dating back to the company's founding in 1946.

The pandemic pivot

Their first year as an independent company included a huge challenge that no one saw coming. The COVID-19 pandemic forced them to institute operational changes, some of which might become permanent.

"What was good for us is we weren't stuck in a rut of always doing something one way and not being able to adapt and change," Kelli said. "It's made us be more thoughtful in our approach. We were able to pivot and do things a little differently."

In November, Chris was still working to get sample lights into showrooms that had reopened around the country. Still, sales representatives they partnered with were bringing in more orders. To supply designers with the product information they needed, a digital catalog, or click book, was developed. They also created a social media presence. On Instagram, the company's page has almost 2,000 followers.

"Designers had experience with the company, and that made the transition easier," Kelli said. "Palmer had been around for so long and was such a trusted brand."

In addition to changing some processes, the pandemic also proved to be helpful in driving sales. People were adding home offices or growing weary of their current décor.

"Instead of home just being a place they come to in the evenings, they're there all

See **BUSINESS**, page 20

LEFT: Kenneth Meyer trim and tassels are handmade on looms in the warehouse.

ABOVE: Rolls of textiles in about any color combination, weave or design line the shelves of the Plainville warehouse, waiting to be shipped to designers for use in home decor.

Gwen Hitchcock, corporate manager, walks down one of many rows of fabric rolls in the Classic Cloth warehouse.

BUSINESS, from page 19

day, and their homes are more important than ever," Kelli said.

Soon, there will be even more choices for their customers. Recently an unexpected opportunity came their way. A long-time, family-owned lighting company in Sacramento, Calif., was closing. Chris and Kelli flew out to meet the owner and decided the company's lights would be a perfect addition.

"The owner hadn't planned on selling the iconic designs or brand name," Kelli said. "After a day with us, he extended the offer for us to purchase the company. He said he felt like he was dropping his kids off at his best friend's house and knew that they would be well taken care of.

"He didn't want to see the craftsmanship and quality diminish. He wanted to see it really cherished."

Preserving a classic

The textile line

Houston designer Lauren Hudson just couldn't imagine the Rose Cumming and Classic Cloth home décor textile lines, not to mention Kenneth Meyer Trim, going to anyone else, so she bought them herself.

The lines are made up of carefully chosen textiles produced by mills and printers around the world. They were sold out of a warehouse in Plainville as part of Dessin Fournir.

"I fell in love with Rose Cumming and Classic Cloth when I first got into interior design," she said.

Hudson called Rose Cumming a historic brand in American design, well known for its classic chintz – traditionally a floral or toile design on a glazed cotton or linen. She described the Classic Cloth line as "a beautiful line of basics" that were developed by Comeau.

"I've got it all over my house," she said. "We've used it in multiple design projects. It's fabrics that I am familiar with from a design perspective, which is really the reason I was so keen to acquire the brands. I just really felt very connected to them."

Hudson, who owns showrooms in Dallas and Houston under the name Wells Abbott, initially planned to relocate the fabric warehouse to Texas, but she quickly realized that would be a mistake. Instead, she rehired the people with decades of experience handling the fabrics and wallpaper in Plainville. In December, she had six full-time and three part-time employees with plans to expand.

"Boy, would we have lost out on a really crackerjack team," she said. "I feel like our team is really one of the best in the industry."

Showroom success

Despite COVID-19, Hudson said she's already gotten the fabrics into showrooms in London, Boston, New York City, Washington, D.C., Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Florida, as well as her showrooms in Texas. In December, she was working on expanding into Seattle, Denver, Scottsdale, Ariz., and San Francisco.

The textile collections are available only to designers and are not sold in any retail market.

"Those showrooms are all out there selling our goods. As they receive an order from a designer, they place the order with our warehouse team, and we do all order fulfillment out of Plainville," she said. "We've gotten a great response. People really missed the brands."

Thanks to COVID-19, more ordering is being done online, and the industry has shifted in another way.

"It used to be that there was a lot of money in commercial design, and that has come to a screeching halt," she said. "Residential interior design business has just gone through the roof as everyone has sat in their house for the last year and looked around and decided to get rid of it all and redo it."

This year, Hudson expects to expand the Plainville staff as new services are added. Two new collections were launched in January, and more are in development. She said the goal is to get back to the level of sales Dessin Fournir had during its heyday.

"We're not there yet, but give us another couple years," she said. "We'll have a nice little business cooking in Plainville, Kansas."

"All in all, it's been a good year," she said. She has confidence that 2021 will be even better. "Things are looking really good."

Furnishing the future

The furniture line

Three co-workers in two states — Scott Hamel and Amy Brown in Plainville, and Bill Caballero, in California — were shocked and saddened when The Dessin Fournir Companies declared bankruptcy.

Hamel said that after decades of work in customer support and sales, it felt wrong that the high-end furniture lines they'd become so familiar with were no longer available. The former coworkers had been discussing the possibility of buying the lines when the pandemic hit. That gave them pause.

But by the summer of 2020, they decided to take a chance, and on Sept. 30, they closed the deal to purchase the four furniture lines: Dessin Fournir, Gerard, Therien and Quatrain. It's a decision they have not regretted.

In December, they were in negotiations to continue to manufacture the Erika Brunson furniture line, which would bring their total collections to five.

"For us to be able to have the lines under our creative and financial control so we can handle them and do them justice, we just feel like we've been given a gift from the universe," Hamel said.

Brown said it's been a dream come true.

"I pinch myself every morning and say, 'Did this really happen?'" she said.

Like a light switch

The three quickly realized they weren't the only ones who had been missing the furniture brands. Brown said when the contact information was updated on the website, "it was like a light switch went on, just boom."

"We were getting calls, emails – it was business as usual," she said. "We were just really impressed with the immediate response."

Hamel said the first order received was for a pair of Lancaster club chairs. That was soon followed by a custom desk. The pieces were made to order by the same artisans in the Los Angeles area who had previously made all the pieces for the collections.

"We've been quoting orders from Day One," he said. "We're up and running full speed ahead."

Hamel said the furniture is back in six showrooms in key markets and is also available through outside sales representatives. It can be seen online, but no prices are listed because purchases must be made by a registered designer or architect.

"We've developed these relationships with designers and showrooms," Hamel said. "We consider so many of them not just customers or clients, but friends, and some of them are considered family. We're grateful to have the opportunity to be able to work with everyone again."

In Plainville, Hamel and Brown handle the administrative side of the business, including orders, marketing and sales. In California, Caballero maintains contact with about two dozen gilders, upholsterers,

See **FURNITURE**, page 28

COURTESY PHOTOS

SPIRALING UPWARD

A Logan business makes custom spiral staircases for customers all over the country

STORY AND PHOTOS BY BETSY WEARING

[LOGAN] Jerry Goddard's life's work turned out to be something other than he originally planned.

His company, Goddard Spiral Stairs, has been producing custom spiral staircases and shipping them all over the country for 42 years.

"I graduated from Fort Hays in December of '76, with my teaching degree," Goddard said. "I got a job at Logan High School, but it didn't start until the fall of '77, so I had eight months to kill."

He did not use that time to kick back and relax. On the contrary.

Back at the family ranch near Penokee, his dad wanted to remodel the basement, and Goddard was happy to help.

"We got it all fixed up into a nice family room, but there was only an outside entrance – so it was hard to get to it from the main floor. I had been on a ski trip and seen a spiral staircase. They don't take up much room, so we looked for one," Goddard said. "All we could find were kits out of Pennsylvania. So, we decided to build our own in the machine shop on the ranch. That was the first one.

"Since we knew no one was making them, we decided to try and sell them. We advertised in the Hays Daily News. We were about to give up when we sold one. Then we advertised again and were about to give up when we sold another one. We used that money to advertise in some national magazines like Better Homes and Gardens, architectural magazines, and others like that. Then things took off."

Coast to Coast

Indeed. In the office, a map of the United States hangs on the wall. Pins show every place a Goddard staircase was delivered in the first 10 years the company was open. There are 1,600 pins.

"We stopped after ten years because my secretary at the time said she wasn't doing any more. Her fingers couldn't take it," Goddard said with a smile.

GODDARD SPIRAL STAIRS
107 S. Mill St., Logan
800-536-4341
www.spiral-staircases.com

RIGHT: Jerry Goddard, owner, Goddard Spiral Stairs

CENTER RIGHT: Wood railings are made from multiple layers of wood bent and glued to create the required arc.

FAR RIGHT: Craftsman Jerry Hallaum welds the frame of a staircase that was headed to McCook Nebraska. Hallaum has worked at the company for 12 years.

A quick glance shows pins all over the country, from Florida to Maine to California and Washington State.

"We sell nationwide," Goddard said. "We used to ship more to the coasts, but freight has gotten so high. I used to ship to New England for $200, now it's about $2,000."

Today, the company ships mostly within about a 700-mile loop that includes Denver, Kansas City and Omaha. However, shipments to farther locations are not entirely gone.

"We sent a solid wood staircase to Illinois last week," Goddard said in December. "Last month we shipped one to Washington State."

Most of the units are for residential customers, though they also have commercial clients. The tallest unit he has constructed, about 60 ft, is in a Cargill elevator in Wichita. Other commercial units are in airplane hangars in Stockton, Calif., and Denver, or in restaurants, like a triple-bannister unit in Kansas City's J. Rieger & Co. Distillery.

After this many years, he doesn't know where they all are.

"I was with a friend on the Lake of the Ozarks a while back," he recalled. "We were on jets skis and were pulling into the marina to get a sandwich when I spotted a white spiral staircase. I told my buddy I was going to check it out. I always like to look for ideas. Turns out it was one of mine."

Choices galore

Goddard's shop in Logan has a small showroom area with a few of the seemingly endless design choices for railings, spindles, and treads.

Spindles in both wood and iron come in dozens of styles. Metal can be finished white or black or metallic colors, such as nickel.

For the wooden treads and rails, Goddard said they use mostly oak, but also ash, hickory, walnut, cherry, and maple. On occasion, they have also used more exotic woods, such as a Brazilian hardwood called Ipe – known as Brazilian Walnut.

The railings are what really gives each unit a custom look. Goddard says they are an increasingly complicated part of the stairs. For metal units, clients can choose a continuous curved handrail in a square or round shape.

Bend, layer, and glue

The wood handrails are truly a work of craftmanship. They can be used on both metal and all-wood stair units. The handrails are one continuous piece but are made by layering multiple pieces of wood. The pieces are cut into quarter-inch strips the width of the railing. These thin strips are flexible, so they can be arched and twisted to accompany the spiraling stairs.

A typical railing might include up to eight strips. They are bent to specifications, glued and clamped together to form a single, curvy railing.

Goddard said they used to also do more railings in short sections, set apart with decorative pieces, but code changes now require a railing to be one, continuous piece.

Every staircase built in Goddard's shop is unique. There is no cookie-cutter pattern. "We are a completely custom shop," he says.

The customization makes pricing equally unique. Each staircase is priced based on height, diameter, materials, and if it is indoor or outdoor.

"Exterior stairs are more expensive in part because they are usually longer, and they require more paint and other details" Goddard says.

Adding diameter, adding steps, including landings, different woods and finishes all affect the material and labor costs that go into the construction.

In mid-December, Goddard said he was working on orders for four different six-foot units, and they were all different prices, ranging from just over $3,000 to $6,500.

"We've been building for some million-dollar homes in Colorado — pretty fancy," he said, "If you are spending that much on construction, the cost of the stairs is a small part of it." He said those staircases run in the $4,000 to $6,000 range or higher. Typically, staircases he sells are in the $2,000 to $3,000 range.

Stairs and cars

Figuring out how to create the complex, custom rails was just one example of Goddard's ability to teach himself a craft. Back when he was working on the family basement and launching his staircase business, Goddard went to work for a body shop in WaKeeney.

"I really paid attention and learned everything I could," he said. After three months, he opened his own shop in Hays. "Doing things on my own I think I learned faster. You have to know how to figure things out."

In the fall of '77, when he moved to Logan to begin teaching, he rented a building downtown and started a body shop where he worked evenings and weekends. He continued his stair business in the same shop.

After two years in Logan, between the body shop and the increasing sales of staircases, Goddard stepped away from teaching. In 1980, he was able to buy the building he had been renting. He believes it was built in the early 1900s.

Originally a hardware store, the building has been home to several different businesses. A flat elevator in the back was once used to lift cars to the second floor, perhaps for a dealership or repair shop.

"It would fit a model A or a model T," Goddard said.

The elevator is handy because the shaft offers a place where taller units can be constructed. The stairs are built vertically, so the 14-foot ceilings are a bonus. Really tall units that are too high for the

See **SPIRAL**, page 31

What's the BUZZ

Effort begins to add more office space in the BEE Building, Oberlin's business incubator

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ERIN MATHEWS

[OBERLIN] The BEE Building, a business incubator in downtown Oberlin, has launched several successful businesses and remains a hive of activity. Soon, there may be space for more workers at the BEE.

Known officially as the Business Entrepreneurial/Enhancement Center, the BEE stands on the southeast corner of the intersection of Penn Avenue and Commercial Street. In 2005, the former bank building was purchased by local investors who donated it to the Oberlin-Decatur Area Economic Development Corp.

"It's been wonderful for our community," said Shayla Williby, executive director of the EDC and office manager for the Chamber of Commerce. "It's an awesome building."

In addition to the chamber and economic development office, the building is home to eight other businesses, including a spa, insurance and financial offices, a nail and tanning salon, a tax preparer, a business that provides custom window treatments and a home health agency.

The diverse array of businesses has kept office space at the BEE full for about the last six years, and Williby has had to turn away other people interested in starting businesses there.

"Over the last couple of years, there have been several inquiries," she said. "It's been very difficult to tell them, 'I'm sorry. We're just full right now.' "

The carpet's got to go

She's hoping that situation soon will change. Williby is utilizing Strategic Doing, a step-by-step, collaborative process for planning and completing projects, to remodel and expand the BEE. The plan is to add four new offices in existing space and to complete needed updates, such as replacing the turquoise-striped, orange carpet.

"We have a business in almost every nook and cranny in the building, in the developed spaces," she said. The new offices would be constructed in common areas that are currently used for meetings and storage. Williby said there would still be plenty of meeting space available. That's important, because it is used often by a variety of community organizations and for pop-up events that promote area businesses.

Current tenants in the building are assisting Williby in identifying priorities for the project. Replacing the carpet is on everybody's list.

In December, she was collecting estimates and was nearly ready to begin applying for funding from government programs, charitable foundations and other sources.

Striking it (not exactly) rich

The approach to economic development is a bit atypical in Oberlin. Most economic development organizations don't own a retail business. In addition to the BEE Building, the EDC in Oberlin owns two-thirds of a triplex that houses the town's six-lane bowling alley and a digital movie theater staffed by volunteers. The county owns the third part, which houses the senior center.

The economic development organization gets $10,000 a year from the city and $30,000 from the county. The balance of funding comes from bowling alley and theater proceeds and BEE rent.

"We operate on a shoestring, but we keep plugging along every year and we seem to make it," Williby said. "In economic development, as a rule, so much of what is done is behind the curtain. Economic development directors and board members can't go out there and beat their chest about helping this business or that business get started, expand or make acquisitions, because that's kind of personal."

However, Oberlin residents "can see some of what economic development is doing for them at the BEE and rec center," she said.

It's hard to argue with the results in the retail sector. Downtown Oberlin remains a bustling place.

"There's only one empty building on the main street right now," Williby said in December. "It's lined with mom-and-pop stores on both sides. Everybody is working toward the same goals. There's a lot of people committed to the community."

The BEE adds to that activity.

"What we found is in small-town America, or really any place you go, these businesses stand the best chance of long-term survival if they don't have that high overhead of a building with all the expenses of that – the taxes, the insurance and all the stuff that goes with it," Williby said.

Rent at the BEE, which ranges from $200 to $350 a month, includes utilities, WiFi, maintenance, snow removal and

LEFT: Tax preparer Jill Reichert was among the first professionals to establish an office in the BEE, a business incubator in downtown Oberlin.

MIDDLE: Susan Plunk, owner of Susan's Designs, makes handcrafted window treatments at her shop in the BEE.

RIGHT: Tyler Bruggeman, field agent for Knights of Columbus insurance, said he could work out of a home office, but he enjoys working at an office in the BEE.

BUSINESSES IN THE BEE

- Anderson Reichert LLC
- Farm Bureau Financial
- Farm Credit of Western Kansas
- Lash360
- Knights of Columbus
- Susan's Designs
- Good Samaritan Home Health
- Prairie Sky Day Spa
- Decatur County Chamber of Commerce
- Oberlin-Decatur Economic Development Corp.

housekeeping in common areas. The building has an entrance lobby, a large central foyer used for meeting space, handicap-accessible restrooms and a kitchenette. Four safes left over from when the building was a bank are used for storage, and a basement serves as a storm shelter.

"They come in and unlock and go to their business, and other than that they don't have to worry about the rest of that stuff," Williby said.

She said while 20 percent of small businesses fail in the first year of operation, only one business located in the BEE has failed since she started acting as the building's landlord seven years ago.

"Being here gives them that edge because they don't have all those overhead expenses to try to pay while they are trying to establish their business," she said. "Once they get here, they're very comfortable in this environment. They all watch out for each other, and it's like this indoor mall family."

Having coworkers – sort of

Tyler Bruggeman, field agent for Knights of Columbus insurance, said he could work out of a home office, but for the last three years he has enjoyed working at an office in the BEE. It's affordable, and it makes him feel like he has coworkers, he said.

"It's basically as if we worked in the bank," he said. "We come in every day. We see each other. It's almost like we work together, but we don't."

Leta Meitl, owner of Lash360, said if not for the BEE she probably wouldn't have started her own business. A cosmetologist with 35 years of experience, Meitl does nails, facial waxing and eyelash extensions. In 2020, she rented a second, adjacent office and added a new pedicure chair and tanning bed.

"I love being here. This is my home away from home," she said. "This made it possible for me to come in here and be doing what I'm doing."

She also enjoys seeing the BEE's other tenants.

"We're a little mini-family in here," she said. "We get along really well, and we support each other."

Tenants at the BEE use their varied skills to help each other out. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, the home health nurses have provided advice about protocols and cleaning products, and the tax preparer was able to help other businesses apply for assistance through government programs, Williby said.

There is no limit on how long a business can stay in the BEE. Some tenants have been there for almost as long as the BEE has been in operation. The newest business opened a little more than a year ago.

Tax preparer Jill Reichert said she was one of the earliest tenants in the BEE. The low cost of rent has been important to the viability of her business.

"I couldn't have done it anywhere else," she said. ▪

Strategic Doing is a process to help create solutions. It asks four important questions:

What could we do? What are all the possible opportunities before us, based on the resources that we currently have, that would help us move toward the future we'd like to see?

What should we do? We can't do everything – which opportunities, out of all the possibilities, should we pursue right now?

What will we do? What commitments are we going to make to one another to start pursuing that opportunity that we've identified as the best one?

What's our 30/30? When are we going to get back together (usually about 30 days from now) to talk about what we've learned, to adjust our direction, if needed, based on those lessons, and to set our course for the next 30 days?

Learn more about Strategic Doing in NW Kansas at *danehansen foundation.org*; click on Special Initiatives, then Strategic Doing. To learn more about the history and current Strategic Doing work across the globe, visit strategicdoing.net.

Strategic Doing™
Do More Together.

Waste not

Sheridan County leads the way in conserving area's precious water resource

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ERIN MATHEWS

[HOXIE] Farmers in Sheridan County have gotten pretty good at talking to the media.

"We've made the *National Geographic*; we've made the *Wall Street Journal*," said fifth-generation farmer Brett Oelke. "There are all sorts of prestigious magazines that have talked to a bunch of farmers in Sheridan County."

With good reason. Irrigators there did something about a decade ago that no other group of people in the world had managed to do: They voluntarily agreed to pump less groundwater than allowed by the state. Then, they created a five-year system for monitoring water use in an area where water levels in wells had been in sharp decline. In the process, they changed state water law and created a producer-driven model that others could use to pursue water conservation goals.

"There was no law that allowed them to do what they wanted to do," said Shannon Kenyon, executive director of Northwest Kansas Groundwater Management District (GDM) No. 4, based in Colby. "So, with the help of a lot of state agencies and a lot of great people, they came up with the LEMA law, which stands for Local Enhanced Management Area."

In 2008, the GDM No. 4 board scheduled public meetings in six areas identified as having the most severe water decline problems. Only the producers in Sheridan 6 agreed to take action.

The Sheridan 6 LEMA was officially launched in 2013. It covers an area of nearly 100 square miles with about 50,000 acres of farmland. The action was not born without name calling, finger pointing and raised voices. In fact, after it was enacted, it continued to inspire choice words from farmers in neighboring counties.

"We'd go to a few weddings here and there, and boy, if they found out you were from this area, you wanted to leave," said Hoxie-area farmer Roch Meier.

Stuart Beckman, whose farm can be seen from Meier's place, said Sheridan County producers thought it would be better to come up with their own plan than to face forced compliance from the state, but he remembers there being "quite a bit of disagreement."

"I would say when we first started discussing, about half of us were really in favor, then as we kept talking about it, it got to be three-fourths, and then it got to be about 90 percent," he said. "When we voted as a group at the Hoxie Elks at that last meeting, I think it was all but unanimous."

The results are impressive

At the conclusion of the first five years, state officials arrived at the Hoxie Feedyard to unveil the results: Producers had substantially exceeded their 20 percent water conservation goal, and water levels in 193 non-domestic wells in the area were holding steady – and in some had even risen. After everyone celebrated with a steak dinner, the LEMA was renewed in 2018 for another five years, this time without a fuss.

Jim Butler, senior scientist in the Geohydrology Section of the Kansas Geological Survey, said although they probably have not yet reached a sustainable level of use, the reduced pumping between 2013 and 2017, at a minimum, doubled the life of the Ogallala Aquifer in that area. If pre-LEMA usage had continued, estimates had wells running dry in about 26 years, he said.

"We'll have a better idea of exactly how many years they've extended the aquifer lifetime in the next four to five years, " Butler said.

> *"We'll have a better idea of exactly how many years they've extended the aquifer lifetime in the next four to five years."*
>
> **JIM BUTLER**
> SENIOR SCIENTIST, GEOHYDROLOGY SECTION OF THE KANSAS GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

That's because during the first five years of the Sheridan 6 LEMA, rainfall was at or above average levels. The full impact of low-moisture years or drought is not yet known. The LEMA gives producers the flexibility to bank water they save in wet years for years that are dry.

Less water, higher profits

A study of the economic impacts of farming with less water in Sheridan County, completed by Kansas State University ag economist Bill Golden, revealed that although yields declined, the decreased costs of inputs and power to run irrigation pumps made farming in the LEMA more profitable than comparable fields within two miles of the LEMA.

Oelke, who owns land both inside and

outside the LEMA area, participated in the study. Now he manages all his fields as if they were in the LEMA.

"What we have done personally in our operation is started to recognize that we cannot grow 290- to 300-bushel irrigated corn, but with decent Mother Nature, we can grow 250, so we started ratcheting our seed population back, our fertilizer bills back," he said. "We still had close to the same gross return, but our inputs were way less. All in all, from a water saving standpoint it was great, but it also increased our profitability."

'What we do stays here'

Oelke said readings from small radio transmitters floating on the top of monitored wells revealed even more important information: While the water table decline slowed, stopped or even reversed course within the LEMA area, it continued to go down at the same rate outside of it.

"So, what we do stays here," he said.

Kenyon confirmed that there is not a lot of flow or movement in aquifer water.

"When people make changes on their own farm, it's their farm that benefits," she said.

Over the first five-year period, Kenyon said producers set a goal of reducing total pumping to 114,000 acre feet of water, but they actually only ended up pumping, on average, 89,200 acre feet. That represents a whopping 32 percent decrease.

The conservation mindset had taken hold. Wells were getting shut off immediately when it rained, and they stayed off longer.

See **OPPORTUNITY**, page 28

Brandon, Stuart and Brent Beckman have added drop-down hoses to their irrigation equipment to reduce water evaporation before it reaches their crops. Below, the water meter on Stuart Beckman's well shows him how much he's pumped.

FURNITURE, from page 21

frame-makers, woodworkers, carvers, painters, finishers, leather workers and metalsmiths who build each piece to order.

Furniture as art

Handmade from start to finish, each piece of furniture is an heirloom that will be passed down from generation to generation, Hamel said.

"If you buy something that's gilded, the gold leafing is applied leaf by leaf onto the piece and burnished," Hamel said. "It's literally Old World-type craftsman techniques."

Caballero said designers can choose from many options based on their client's needs, including different finish colors, techniques and upholstery options, such as density of foam and nailhead trim. They can scale pieces up or down depending on a person's size. There are about 1,000 pieces in the furniture collections on the website, but if someone asks for something that is totally unique, it can be made.

"If a designer has a special project where they need a piece that's totally custom, we can quote it; we can draw it; we can build it," Hamel said. "There are very few things we can't do in terms of our customization capabilities."

At present, Brown and Hamel are the only two Plainville residents working for the Fournir Collections. However, they eventually plan to hire administrative and sales support staff.

As they communicate over the phone and online with designers across the U.S. and in places such as Australia, Russia and Dubai, Brown said she looks forward to being able to travel and see the pieces being made and in the showrooms again. She said many pieces are being ordered for second homes in the country as people build away from the cities where they normally live.

"When you see one of our pieces in a room that a designer has beautifully done, it makes you feel good," Hamel said. "That's someone's home. It's their sanctuary, which is truly important right now." ▪

Cattle at Hoxie Feedyard are eating a more varied diet in recent years.

OPPPORTUNITY, from page 27

"We measure bushels per gallon, not bushels per acre," Meier said.

Opportunity for future farmers

Meier, who farms with his son, believes saving water today is preserving the future for his heirs.

"I've got five grandsons and two granddaughters within six miles of my house. I'll be dead and gone and pushing up daisies, but hopefully when they get to my age there will still be water out here to raise crops," he said.

He and other Sheridan County farmers committed to not pumping more than 11 inches of water on average annually, for a total of 55 inches of water over the five-year period. At the same time, he was aware of irrigators in neighboring counties who continued to pump 22 to 28 inches a year.

"They'll say, 'We had 280-bushel corn,' but they might have put on 25 inches of water," he said. "More water makes more grain, we know that, but you can have a lot of grain with a lot less water and still make a living out here. We've cut our input costs so much we can get by with less bushel per acre and still net the same money as people who make 30 or 40 bushel per acre more than us."

He sees the LEMA as another step in a progression of conservation efforts.

Meier said he was 13 in 1969 when his father had the farm's first irrigation well drilled. They used flood irrigation, sending water down the rows and pumping overflow back onto the field. In 1978, they installed a pivot with sprinklers, which could raise crops on half the water. By the mid- to late-'80s, they had added drop hoses to the pivots, so that water was dispensed near the ground instead of spraying into the air, where significant amounts evaporated.

"Every year we try something a little different," Meier said. "When we were kids, we worked the ground all the time. We worked it and worked it and disced it. That was the worst thing we could do because it dried the ground out so fast. Now we're all no-till. We haven't worked the ground in 15 years."

> *"We measure bushels per gallon, not bushels per acre."*
>
> **ROCH MEIER** | HOXIE AREA FARMER

The crop residue left in the field holds moisture, as well as preventing topsoil from blowing away, he said.

"If we get an inch of rain it would be like getting four or five inches on open ground," he said. "That's how much water it saves."

Second LEMA starts

Some producers are using less water simply because it's not available. Wells in the area that historically pumped 800 to 1,000 gallons a minute now pump between 400 or 500 gallons a minute, Kenyon said.

In 2018, a LEMA was formed for other areas of GMD No. 4 that were

Scott Foote, of the Hoxie Feedyard speaks during U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran's annual conservation tour in November. Brett Oelke, president of the GMD No. 4 district board, looks on.

In 2017, Roch and Marilyn Meier were the first in state to get 100 bushel to an acre in soybeans. They grew the record-setting crop in the fifth year of the Sheridan 6 LEMA.

showing declines. The GMD 4 LEMA encompasses parts of Cheyenne, Rawlins, Decatur, Sherman, Thomas, Sheridan, Graham, Wallace, Logan and Gove counties. Kenyon said in the first three years of the LEMA, producers seem to be prioritizing water conservation through cropping choices, technology purchase and farm management decisions.

Depending on location, the GMD 4 LEMA limits annual water use to between 12.9 and 18 inches. At the end of five years, violators could face penalties from the state Division of Water Resources, including a two-year suspension of their right to pump.

Many farmers use soil moisture probes that send data to an app in their phone so they only water when required. Technology like the probes, improved irrigation equipment and new seed hybrids that grow with less water are making conservation easier.

Help from Hoxie Feedyard

Conservation efforts have also been assisted by Hoxie Feedyard, located near the middle of the Sheridan 6 LEMA. Scott Foote, who owns and manages the business with his family, has begun buying a wider variety of silage and feed crops from area farmers. By giving them a market, he makes it possible for them to plant crops that require less water, such as forage crops or triticale.

Foote said area producers who created the Sheridan 6 LEMA "set the stage for Northwest Kansas starting to conserve. Now other people have to talk about it, even if they don't want to, because we're having success with it, so it forces their conversation. Change is hard. What we have realized is that we are still able to grow corn with water conservation practices in place."

Kenyon agrees.

"When you start talking about restricting somebody's irrigation rights, that water puts bread and butter on their table," she said. "It's their family livelihood."

Still, Kenyon believes that most farmers know that water conservation is needed.

"There are still people out there – not very many – but there are still people out there who think we ought to just pump it dry," she said. "I think the more we talk about it the more progress we can make."

A lot to gain

Since 1997, when Foote moved to Hoxie, the feedyard has grown from 10,000 head of cattle to nearly 60,000. The cattle eat nearly 2.5 million pounds of feed, including 20,000 bushels of corn per day.

"Our family has a large capital investment in the feedlot here, and we have to have feed for our cattle," he said.

When the Sheridan 6 LEMA negotiations first began, he remembers thinking he had a lot to lose.

"I was so nervous about it," he said. "Then I thought, 'Wait a minute. I'm thinking about it wrong. I have the most to gain.' It makes the investment we have here last a lot longer."

Elsewhere in Kansas, GMD No. 1 and 5 are exploring establishing LEMAs.

Oelke, now president of the GMD No. 4 district board, remembers how hard it was to effect change in Sheridan County. He said eventually some people agreed to the self-imposed water use limits, even though they didn't believe they'd be able to successfully farm that way.

"Since then, a lot of them have come up to me and said, 'You know what? We were pumping too damn much water. We were wasting water,' " he said. ▪

Mostly ghostly

Brown Grand Theatre ready for the return of live performances

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ERIN MATHEWS

[CONCORDIA] When the audiences went away, Jason Grogan had mostly ghosts to keep him company in the Brown Grand Theatre. Fortunately, there are a lot of them.

"Various groups (of people interested in the supernatural) have identified like 40 different supposed entities that hang out in here," said Grogan, the theater's executive director. "The most famous ghost is Earl, the founder's son. He's been seen the most. There's a little girl we don't have an explanation for that hangs out in the first balcony over by the box seats. We've also got one that hangs out in the basement that tells every group to 'get out.' "

JASON GROGAN

Thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic, the basement-dwelling ghost is getting more alone-time. The historic opera house, built in 1907, cleared its calendar of live events last year when bringing crowds together became too risky. However, small groups hunting for evidence of paranormal activity continued to rent the building.

"It was not new this year, but it's one of the few things we've been able to allow – five to seven people in small groups," Grogan said. "Depending on the type of equipment they bring, a lot of them end up being locked in for the night. It's definitely interesting, I'll put it that way."

Col. Napoleon Bonaparte Brown and his son, Earl. The ghost of Earl is most frequently identified by ghost hunters who visit the facility.

Take a seat

Downtime at the theater has been put to good use preparing for the return of live performances.

At a come-and-go open house on Oct. 4, supporters got to try out any of the 432 new seats in the theater's main floor and first balcony. Cost-saving electrical upgrades also have been completed. A Dane G. Hansen Foundation grant, as well as contributions from individuals, businesses, and other foundations, paid for the improvements, totaling $240,000.

New seats installed in the Brown Grand Theatre in Concordia were custom made to look like the old seats.

The seats that were replaced were not original to the theater, having come from Presser Hall at Bethany College in Lindsborg. They were already 50 years old when they were installed at the Brown Grand during a restoration in the 1970s.

Grogan said the old seats were uncomfortably small for modern audiences, and it was hard to find parts to repair them. In addition, the seats had originally been designed for a floor with less slope, so sitting in them gave many patrons the sense that they were tilting forward.

More than 500 seats were removed and sold off in rows. A synagogue being converted to a church in Wichita took 150 of them, and others went to buyers in Florida, Colorado, Nebraska, South Dakota and Missouri, Grogan said.

New, but historic — and practical

Once the seats were removed, a lift was brought in so that repairs could be made to the stage's proscenium arch. Light fixtures on the arch were updated to more economical LED lightbulbs. The new seats were installed in September, afer the floor was sanded, repainted and resealed, and touch-up painting was done on the walls.

The new seats were custom made to look like the old seats by a Grand Rapids, Mich., company that specializes in vintage reproductions. Each forest green velvet seat is 20 to 22 inches wide, replacing seats that varied from 16 to 21 inches in width.

"They've got the same historical style and beauty," Grogan said. "My favorite thing is the seat goes back up automatically after you move. We won't have to spend an hour after every show now putting all the seats back up."

Grogan said another advantage is that the first three rows of seats in front of the stage are removable, which will make the facility a more flexible space for events such as dinner theater performances, weddings and dances. Areas to accommodate patrons in wheelchairs and chairs compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act also were installed, as well as aisle lighting on the end seats.

Chairs removed from the top balcony were replaced by cushioned benches, which are historically accurate to the original design and bring the balcony into compliance with fire codes. That area will be used for overflow seating, Grogan said.

Lightbulbs in the proscenium arch above the Brown Grand Theatre stage were replaced with more efficient LED bulbs.

Ready to entertain again

Grogan looks forward to the day the theater's new seats are filled with audiences enjoying live performance.

"We're starting to work on next year's budget to see what shows we want to try to get," he said. "Hopefully, we will be ready so when they do give the OK, we can be firing away and get stuff going."

In the meantime, the building has hosted a couple weddings – and the ghosts.

An episode of a new Amazon Prime ghost-hunting show was scheduled to film in January. The theater already has been featured on the A&E program Ghost Hunters, and it appears in several YouTube videos.

Grogan remains a skeptic, although he said there have been unexplained events. He hasn't spotted any of the apparitions others say they caught on video, but he once saw a floating blue orb. Lights have turned on; doors have opened, and costume jewelry from dressing rooms has turned up in odd places.

He said he doesn't mind letting groups in to ghost hunt and have fun, "but the first time I ever see something for real, I'm gone." ▪

BROWN GRAND THEATRE

Col. Napoleon Bonaparte Brown built the Brown Grand Theatre. It opened with a musical performance of *The Vanderbilt Cup*, on Sept. 17, 1907. Live performance gave way to movies in 1925, and for nearly 50 years films were shown. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973, and restored. With a nod to history, it reopened in 1980 with a performance of *The Vanderbilt Cup*. Learn more and find a schedule of events at *browngrand.org*.

SPIRAL, from page 23

ceiling or the elevator shaft have to be built in sections.

Shipping challenges and benefits

The increasing complexity of the customization and adapting to stringent codes in different locations means it takes longer to build each unit than it once did. Coupled with struggles to find labor, Goddard says the company has reduced its output to producing about two units a week.

"In the '90s and early 2000s we were busiest. We made and shipped about five staircases a week during those two decades," Goddard said. He had 10 employees at that time. Today, he has five, including himself and his wife, Ruth, a retired kindergarten teacher who does all the bookkeeping, payroll, and accounts payable. He employs a part-time secretary and two craftsmen.

"Two units a week is about all I can do with the smaller crew," he said. "I would like to hire at least two more people, but COVID has made it difficult. We can't get folks to come to work."

Once the stairs are complete, they must be shipped. Goddard has a variety of flatbed trailers he can pull with a pickup, and said he economizes by usually delivering more than one at a time.

For longer trips, the units are sent by commercial carriers. Goddard said he uses a broker who can find a truck heading to the customer's location that has room to add a staircase to his or her load. The unit that recently went to Washington cost the buyer only $800 in shipping, far less than if it had been the primary load.

Even when he delivers the unit himself, Goddard no longer does the installation, as he would have to be licensed and bonded in each location. But he consults with the installers and gives them instruction to help the process go smoothly.

Goddard says he particularly enjoys delivering to Denver and Kansas City, where his daughters live. "I get a free place to stay and a chance to see my girls. It's hard to beat that." ▪

DANE G. HANSEN
FOUNDATION
P.O. Box 187 | Logan, Kansas 67646-0187

Now is the time to Make a Plan

The last 12 months have been unlike any other. A global pandemic wasn't on anyone's radar. But here it came. It's a somber reminder that we can't see the future. It's also a reminder to have a plan in place to make things easier if the unexpected occurs. Easier for our families, and for our communities.

Between 2020 and 2064, nearly $30 billion dollars will transfer from one generation to the next in the 26 counties of NW Kansas. Most estates will transfer to heirs, many or most of whom will take their inheritance with them to a home outside of NW Kansas. If 95% of estates in NW Kansas went to children or family, heirs would be well cared for. If the remaining 5% went to our local communities, the future for NW Kansas would be forever changed.

The opportunity to capture a portion of that wealth is a remarkable one, and the time is now. NWKansas GIVES is an effort to encourage thoughtful, planned charitable gifts as a part of overall estate planning.

Why we give...

"Sylvan Grove is home, and it's been a really good place for us. I just think it's important to do what you can to help the area – to leave a mark. I want to see the area prosper."

SANDY LABERTEW | SYLVAN GROVE

"To give back to your community, in service or dollars, was instilled in me and my wife, and we have tried to perpetuate that attitude in our children. It's important to be a giver and not just a taker." **TOM KELLER** | ST. FRANCIS

NWKansas **GIVES**

Need help getting started? Contact Gennifer Golden House at *gennifer@gnwkcf.org* for information on estate planning assistance.