



CITY OF GREAT BEND

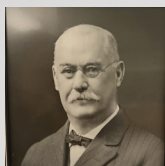
SESQUICENTENNIAL – 1872-2022



150th Meal & Car Show at June Jaunt 2022

THE CITY OF GREAT BEND

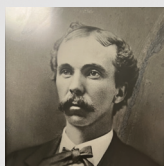
MAYORS PAST TO PRESENT



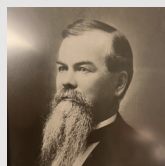
A. A. HURD
1872-73



SAMUEL MAHER
1874



RICHARD TAYLOR
1875



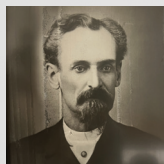
C. F. DIFFINBACHER
1876



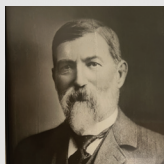
A. C. FAIR
1877



G. N. MOSES
1878, 1895-98



E. L. CHAPMAN
1880



J. V. BRINKMAN
1882



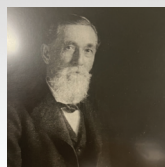
G. W. NIMOCKS
1883



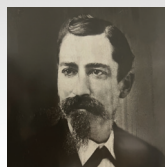
E. W. MOSES
1884-85, 1893-94, 1903-08



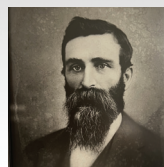
D. N. HEIZER
1886



A. J. BUCKLAND
1887-88



A. L. LAIDLAW
1891-92



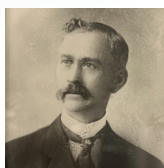
G. H. HULME
1899-1900



L. P. ABER
1901-02



O. W. DAWSON
1909-12, 1914-23



D. C. LUSE
1913



L. L. GUNN
1923-32



A. S. GIBSON
1932-35



CHARLES E. LISCHESKY
1935-41



DON MCILRATH
1941-45



H. P. (HODY) THIES
1945-49



JOE MERMIS
1949-51



J. E. MCMULLEN
1951-57



R. E. MORRISON
1957-59



DON WELTMER
1959-61



ELDEN HARWOOD
1961-65



H. C. DAVIS
1965-69



ROBERT PARRISH
1969-75



FRED MANETH
1975-79



RONALD HEGGEMEIER
1979-81



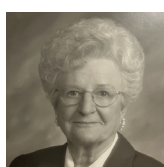
GAIL LUPTON
1981-85



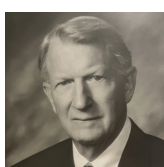
JIM THURMAN
1985-89



GEORGE F. DRAKE
1989-97



LILLAN PAPAY
1997-99



DR. MIKE ALLISON
1999-2017



JOE ANDRASEK
2018-2020



CODY SCHMIDT
2020 - PRESENT



THE CITY OF GREAT BEND

2022 CITY COUNCIL



Cody Schmidt- Mayor



Alan Moeder- First Ward



Lindsey Krom-Craven- First Ward



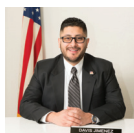
Jolene Biggs-Second Ward



Kevyn Soupiset- Second Ward



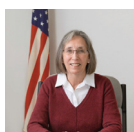
Cory Urban- Third Ward



Davis Jimenez- Third Ward



Brock McPherson- Fourth Ward



Natalie Towns- Fourth Ward

LEADERSHIP

ADMINISTRATION

Kendal Francis- City Administrator
 Allen Glendenning - City Attorney
 James Cell- Network Administrator
 Randy Keasling- Director of Human Resources

FINANCE

Shawna Schafer- City Clerk/Finance Director

CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

Christina Hayes- CVB Director & Community Coordinator

PUBLIC LANDS

Scott Keeler- Director of Public Lands

PUBLIC WORKS

Jason Cauley- Director of Public Works

FIRE DEPARTMENT

Luke McCormick- Fire Chief

POLICE DEPARTMENT

Steve Haulmark- Police Chief

FOUNDING OF GREAT BEND

Like many towns throughout the country, Great Bend was founded when railroads starting providing lifelines to expansion and settlements in the years following the Civil War.

The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad laid track into Great Bend in July of 1872. Nine days later, the track extended through Pawnee Rock.

The Great Bend Town Company was organized in August of 1871 and the following summer, Great Bend officially became a city of the third class with A.A. Hurd elected as mayor.

Some of the early structures in town were a hotel, residence/store, drug store, grocery store and hardware store.

The directors, officers and incorporators of Great Bend Town Company were C.R.S. Curtis, M.F. Bassett, J.L. Curtis, J.T. Morton, James Israel, A.R. McIntyre, T.J. Mitchell, R.F. Shinn, W.E. Johnson, T.L. Morris, D.L. Lakin, T.J. Peter and A.L. Williams.



Now vs. 50 YEARS AGO

In 1972, The Great Bend Housing Authority completed the High Rise Apartments in response to the need for a solution to the elderly housing crisis. In 2022, the High Rise Apartments were completed renovated from top to bottom to better fit the changing needs of those in the City of Great Bend.

ARK RIVER BRIDGE

The condition of the Ark River Bridge, located on South Main, became a major focus in 1972. With the growing population and traffic to Great Bend, the bridge was deteriorating and needed to be replaced to accommodate the growing City and increased commercial traffic to the area.

After many meetings and extensive planning, it was decided that the concrete bridge built in 1913-1914 would be replaced with a stronger, wider, slightly arched bridge, which still stands today.



Now vs. 100 YEARS AGO

A SECOND COURTHOUSE

By 1917, it had become obvious that the original courthouse could no longer adequately serve the needs of the county. The Hutchinson, Kansas, architectural firm of W.E. Hulse & Co. designed the new building and the Manhattan Construction Co., Muskogee, Oklahoma, contracted to do the construction. Work on the new building in a style called "Modern (Classical Eclecticism" began in November 1917 and the cornerstone was laid March 28, 1918 .

According to the Barton County Democrat of that date, "The building when completed will be approximately 125x101 feet in the size and 57 feet high, and will not only be one of the finest but also one of the largest county buildings in the state. It will be four stories in height, built of reinforced concrete, brick, steel construction throughout. The total cost will be in the neighborhood of a quarter of a million dollars.





AGRICULTURE IN GREAT BEND

Virtually everyone in Great Bend is aware that the co-op is the destination for farmers as they deliver their crops for local storage and, ultimately, transportation to all parts of the globe. However, that is just a segment of the services offered by the co-op in Great Bend, which opened in 1959 at its first location, 606 Main. It is still thriving there today.

"Cooperatives stand out as the only businesses that are completely patron-owned," said Cammie Vaupel, Communications & Brand Specialist. "Patrons provide input on how the business is operated, including choosing a board of directors."

Ag co-ops originally were created to help give groups of producers the power to market commodities at better prices and increase the purchasing power of inputs by buying in larger quantities. Great Bend Co-op was formed for these same reasons.

The co-op always has focused on grower-owners' needs. To meet those needs, Vaupel noted, "we have expanded over the years through mergers and acquisitions, while building new assets at our many locations." As of Oct. 1,

"The customers' success is imperative to our success. We strive to be the best in the business, with a focus on customer relationships that is second to none," Vaupel said. "Our local cooperative has been blessed with hard-working managers and employees who go above and beyond to earn your business. With our tradition of excellence, customers can expect the same great service at all locations. Our goal is to exemplify our core values of safety, pride, enthusiasm, relationships, integrity and unity."

2022, these locations included Great Bend, Ellinwood, Susank, Dorrance, Russell, Boyd, Albert, Pawnee Rock, Dundee, Radium and Seward in Kansas. Oklahoma sites are in Cherokee, Carmen, Ames, Aline and Drummond.

"Grain storage needs at all locations have increased dramatically," Vaupel commented. "There also has been a growing need to transition from scales and grain elevators that were built for small trucks, to those that can accommodate larger semi-trucks."

Along with grain-handling services, the co-op offers agronomy, bulk fuel, bulk and bagged feed, seed and retail. Part of the retail business is the Ampride convenience store at 2300 10th, which opened in 1992.

With 169 full- and part-time employees on Oct. 1, the co-op is a big employer that focuses on employee safety. Co-op employees work in tandem with farmers, ranchers and other ag-related business personnel, which combine to make up a large portion of the population. These partners support schools, churches and other local business ventures, making agriculture the backbone of the community.

While the co-op has been part of Great Bend's history for decades, it took another big expansion step on Oct. 1. Great Bend Co-op merged with Farmers Co-op of Carmen, Ok., and re-branded as American Plains Co-op. Along with the new name, a new logo and brand colors were implemented.



Taken by James L Hanks Jr. 10-13-98

AIRPORT HANGAR BURNING

A piece of local and national history went up in flames in October 1998 at the Great Bend Airport.

An aircraft hangar, which was built in 1943, housed the B-29s that were based here for training pilots and crews during World War II.

There were four bases in Kansas when crews were assembled, said Linda McCaffery, museum research/collections specialist at the Barton County Historical Society. Other B-29 training areas in Kansas were at Victoria, Salina and Pratt.

"The four original locations for airplanes, pilots and crews were within about 100 miles of Boeing in Wichita," McCaffery noted.

Locally, there were five hangars. One of these hangars, which could accommodate two of the huge B-29s, was used for maintenance. The 507th Squadron was here during the building of the air field.

"Very few records from the Great Bend Air Base survived after World War II," McCaffery noted.

"I would estimate that about 90 percent of the records are just gone," she continued. "They were destroyed because the federal government had no place for them."

— Linda McCaffery

"This was a classified air base. Some historical information is available but not very much.

John Stettinger was Battalion Chief at the time of the 1998 hangar fire; he retired in 2020 after 40 years of service to the Great Bend Fire Department.

"That wood hangar burned quickly," Stettinger recalled. "There was heavy timber in the old structure and once the fire got to the roof, it really went fast. I would say it was all over in about 45 minutes."

No one was hurt in the fire.

A business that manufactured wrought iron was housed in the old hangar at the time of the blaze, which was caused by an electrical short.

"There were cables stretched from end to end inside the business," Stettinger said. "They hung wrought iron from these cables."

No other structures were at risk but a few vehicles and power poles were damaged. "The water tower was protected because it was an important water source for us," he added.

B-29 MEMORIAL PLAZA

A man named Bob Kilburn came to Great Bend from Arkansas because he wanted to show his wife where he trained on the B-29.

“He was kind of upset when he arrived,” said Linda McCaffery. “There was not a sign, a plaque, anything to indicate the local airbase was a B-29 training location. Bob then contacted Bev Komarek at the Barton County Historical Society Museum. Bev put out a call to form a committee to address this oversight.”

Mccaffery, museum research/collections specialist, was a committee member. Her colleagues included many veterans and others interested in this local history.

“All of us chipped in to pay for an artist’s rendition of the memorial,” she recalled. “Then came the big task of raising money. I wrote letters and others sold bricks and plaques that would honor people involved with the B-29. “In addition, committee members took the Yellow Pages and divided up the businesses and went door to door. I cannot say enough about the committee members. They worked tirelessly on this project.”

The memorial plaza isn’t designed for only the B-29 pilots. It honors anyone who worked at the Army Air Base here, including crews, mechanics and airport personnel.

Even Paul Tibbets, Enola Gay pilot, came to Great Bend to help with the cause, which was quite successful. Approximately \$400,000 in private donations was raised and \$35,000 remained. It went to the City of Great Bend for maintenance.

The groundbreaking ceremony for the B-29 Memorial Plaza was Sept. 2, 1999, about two years after the committee was formed. This date was chosen for its historical significance. World War II ended with Japan’s formal surrender on Sept. 2, 1945.



Rob Graham Photo 2019.

The U.S. flag given to the committee at the ceremony by Senator Jerry Moran also is historically significant. This flag flew over the U.S. Capitol on Aug. 15, 1999, the 54th anniversary of Japan’s informal surrender. The memorial dedication was Sept. 9, 2000.

Memorial description/collection

The structure is cast in stainless steel, with bronze plaques and inscribed bricks honoring crews and individuals. The intersecting arches represent the emblem of the Global 20th Air Force.

“When visitors glance up through the memorial’s arches, they enjoy the feeling of looking through the nose of a B-29,” McCaffery noted. “Many people had poured over the plan specifications so the memorial would be as accurate as possible.”

McCaffery has been organizing B-29 information compiled by Mildon Yeager, which includes articles about the progress of the memorial from fundraising to construction. It joins a collection of memorabilia, memoirs and artifacts that tell the story of this state and national history.

Yeager served with the U.S. Navy Seabees and appreciated how the B-29 training base helped end the war.

BARTON COUNTY FAIR

The Barton County Fair faced a number of twists and turns during the 20th Century but has been a popular annual attraction in Great Bend for the past three decades.

The first Barton County Fair found a home at Brit Spaugh Park Sept. 2-5, 1900. The standard exhibits of vegetables, fruits, flowers and livestock were showcased.

“But they also had horseraces,” said Charles Atkinson, president of the Barton County Fair Association. “That circular drive around the park was used for horseraces, pari-mutuel betting and buggy races.”

The second location was 24th & Frey and next was the Railroad Roundhouse in Hoisington.

“During World War II, the Fair ceased to exist,” Atkinson noted. “It started up again in the early 1950s as a 4-H Fair. The impetus to re-start the County Fair concept began in 1991. 4-H is a major piece of this but we took back the name of Barton County Fair.”

Ron Koelsch was the first president, followed by Jim Vopat and now Atkinson, who has been at the helm since 1993. The president and board of directors, who don’t receive a salary, meet monthly to plan schedules and events. Fair dates always include the second weekend of July.



Barton County Fair Facebook.



The Barton County Fair Association is an independent, non-profit organization that oversees the community-wide event. Its revenues come from sponsorships.

“Since 1992, we have been at the Great Bend Expo Complex, which is a great facility for us,” Atkinson said. “We are one of the few county fairs that is on all concrete, including two of the three major buildings with concrete as well. For the first two years, however, we were under a tent with the animals.”

The Fair Association built the Expo III structure, which was completed in 1994. Over the years, the Fair has grown in the number of participants, events, concerts and exhibits. However, COVID-19 wiped out the carnival attraction.

“We are still trying to get a carnival but about 50 percent of them went out of business,” Atkinson reported. “This was a big blow.

“But it is not just about the carnival. We continually ask local residents what they want to see and do. We also look for trends, which recently led to axe throwing and belt-sander races. Our target is to always have something for all ages.”

Inga Atkinson, Charles’s wife and office manager during the Fair, noted that a group called Fair Friends works on themes, decorations and food stands. For example, “Hear the Sounds of the Barton County Fair” focused on many different music genres this year and “Everyday Heroes” saluted first responders earlier. The Fair has won 37 national awards from the International Association of Fairs and Expos in the up-to-100,000-attendees’ category. “We are very proud of this,” Inga commented.

She also noted the big need for volunteers. “Ideally, we could recruit 100 volunteers; the ones we have now are doing double- and triple-duty. 4-H families are a big help and we invite other local residents to join us. We help volunteers find their niche so they can enjoy themselves while helping their community.”

BARTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

When local history buffs describe the Barton County Historical Society, they are quick to note the extent of the museum displays and historic structures.



Village Buildings

The beginnings of the village came before completion of the museum building.

- First was the former St. Paul's Lutheran Church, which was moved to the site in 1967.
- The District 50 School House and Santa Fe Railroad Depot from Belpre were added in 1968.
- The Castleton Post Office came in 1971 and the Waupun Windmill in 1975.
- The E.J. Dodge stone house was moved and reassembled at the village in 1976.
- The most recent addition is the Lustron house, which was reassembled on site in 2005-06.

Facebook pictures



First was the former St. Paul's Lutheran Church, which was moved to the site in 1967.

It is not only a museum, it is a village.

"We encourage everyone to stop by and learn about Barton County by exploring the historic structures and viewing exhibits in the main museum building," said Director Richard Lartz. "The historical society is home to numerous items that represent the distant past, as well as more recent times. There's a wide variety of things to see and discover."

Early in 2022, Lartz submitted a five-year plan to the board of directors, detailing a proposal to update and re-orient the exhibits in the museum. Collections are already being updated and re-organized.

"We hope to fundamentally change the interior display areas into updated exhibits, while focusing on Barton County rather than general Kansas information that is featured in many other museums," Lartz said.

"We have a ton of potential to make

Barton County's past come alive."

Since the historical society's staff is small, volunteers are especially important. "They are invaluable to us," Lartz emphasized. "In addition to contributing to many ongoing projects, volunteers act as greeters. This allows us to be open to visitors on the weekends."

A BCCHS Timeline

The Barton County Historical Society, just south of Great Bend on U.S. 281, began work on this property in 1964; the land was donated by the Charles Hume estate. The first section of the museum was completed in 1974 and the second in 1976.

The west wing was remodeled in 1980-81 for displays, and an addition was made in 1999 for meeting space, work areas and storage. The Ray Schultz Research Library was added in 2006.

BIKE TRAILS/ROUTES

A number of years ago, an informal group of mountain-bike riders created a few cycling trails along the Arkansas River south of Great Bend and as far west as the bridge on Radium Road. Next came the Lake Barton Trail in the area of U.S. 281 and NW 60 Road.

“Sadly, the river trail is no longer maintained,” said Dale Hogg, local cycling enthusiast. “The good news is the lake trail has been expanded and is used by cyclists, runners and hikers.

“There also is the Great Bend Hike-Bike Path that follows the flood-control levee south of town. This paved trail runs for six miles – from Stone Lake to West Barton County Road. The trails see a lot of use by group and individual riders.”

Local cycling destinations are often called “bike trails.” However, Hogg noted, “the term doesn’t really cover the entire biking spectrum here. Yes, there are trails. But the Great Bend area is blessed with close to 400 miles of paved county blacktops, and state and federal highways that are used extensively by road cyclists.”

In addition, there are untold miles of township gravel roads traveled by “gravel grinders on gravel bikes,” Hogg added.

Future plans include the creation of bike-safe routes in Great Bend that would include bike lanes and shared routes. There is no timeline for this project, which has been discussed for a decade.

Great Bend sits on the Adventure Cycling Trans America Trail Route 76, which sees a lot of cross-country traffic. Those involved in the Make Great Bend a Bike Town committee, along with a host of other volunteers, established a campground for these riders behind the Central Baptist Church at Lakin and Harrison Streets.

The active Great Bend biking community also welcomes local newcomers. One way to get involved is becoming a member of Be Well Barton County and its subcommittee – Make Great Bend a Bike Town.

“You don’t have to be a Spandex-wearing diehard,” Hogg said. “All you need is a bike and a helmet.”

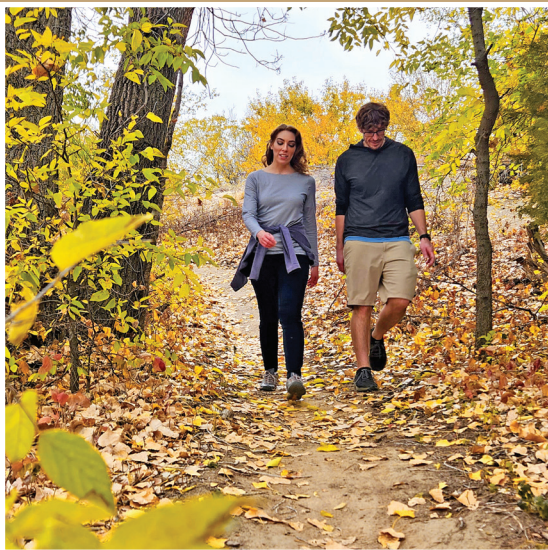
The experiences that he and other serious cyclists have had over the years can serve as a source of encouragement to those who want to start pedaling down the road now and then.

“I was a serious bike rider as a kid,” Hogg recalled. “But it wasn’t cool once junior high came around. So, I stopped. The addiction began again about 13 years ago with a mountain bike. I have expanded to road and gravel bikes.”

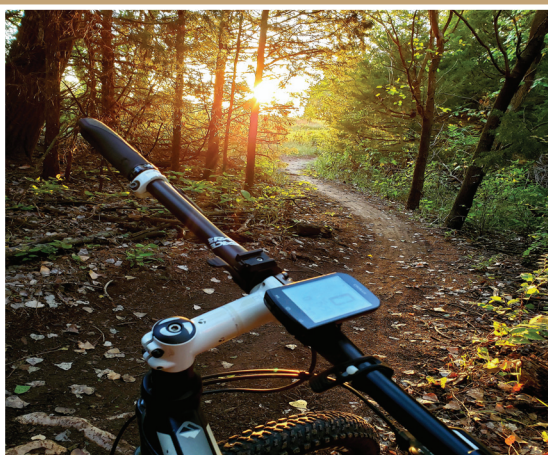
He also joined four Biking Across Kansas tours and is an avid bike commuter.

But it is not just the exercise that attracts Hogg and other riders. “Equally important is the peace of mind you gain on a bike. Worries tend to fade away and stress evaporates. There is the calming feeling of freedom.

“In general, biking is great for your physical and mental health. And the trails and routes provide safe places for folks to ride and experience these benefits.”



Lisa Sweden and Evan Olivier enjoy a fall afternoon walk at Lake Barton bike and hike trail. Photo by Hugo Gonzalez.



Pictured is Lake Barton's mountain bike trail. Photo by Hugo Gonzalez.

CINCO DE MAYO

The first Great Bend Cinco de Mayo celebration was in 1994 and the growth over the years has been remarkable. This annual, community-wide extravaganza attracts hundreds of participants who revel in fun activities and learning opportunities.

From its beginnings, Cinco de Mayo has grown into a popular showcase for Great Bend's vibrant Hispanic culture. It is always scheduled for a Saturday early in May at Jack Kilby Square, which many still refer to as the Courthouse Square.

Seven community leaders can be credited with the birth of this festival. They are Miguel Giner, Guill Burley, Luz Betty Gordon, Nancy Schuetz, Dr. Perry Schuetz and Steven Wolf.

"We are grateful to this group of people that wanted to demonstrate the importance and vitality of the Hispanic culture to the entire community," said Martha Delgadillo. "Their goal was to establish a link of unity and communication, which leads to respect between our Hispanic community and the community as a whole.

"These efforts can help bring our cultures together for the benefit of everyone. It is great to be able to celebrate our diversity together."

Martha and her husband, Fernando, help coordinate Cinco de Mayo, which is a day that commemorates Mexico's May 5, 1862, victory over France. The Delgadillos help bring

everyone together and prepare for the many aspects this festival entails.

These aspects include a parade, authentic Mexican food, music and dance. While the Hispanic community uses the venue to continue its cultural traditions, people from other backgrounds become more familiar with the customs of their neighbors.

Fernando noted "the participation of the whole community has had a great impact on Cinco de Mayo. In addition to everyone having a fun time, the event offers many resources for information about the ways we can all try to help one another."

Martha and Fernando made special note of how the City of Great Bend contributes to the success of Cinco de Mayo. "The city always supports and helps us by donating to and promoting the event. We are so thankful to be able to count on the city for support."

Christina Hayes, Great Bend Community Coordinator and director of the Convention & Visitors Bureau,

noted that Cinco de Mayo is one of the highlights of the year for families and friends to gather in celebration.

"Great Bend loves Cinco de Mayo because of the exposure it affords to the dancing, food and music of the Hispanic culture," Hayes explained. "Local and area residents see it as a fun-filled event to celebrate the Hispanic-American culture and the ethnic pride in our community. It is truly a time to enjoy diverse ethnicity and bring us all together."

"We want to thank everyone who has participated in Cinco de Mayo in any way," Fernando added. "Also, we extend an invitation to all individuals, businesses and organizations to continue supporting us with this wonderful community event. We always hope more people get involved to make this an even greater experience for everyone."



Great Bend Tribune photos.





City Band 2021

CITY BAND

When the Great Bend Town Band sounded its first notes in 1874, it consisted of just two guys with a couple of horns. Their names were Fred Miller and Creed Rankin. A 10-piece band was soon formed and it played at the first local Fourth of July celebration under Miller's direction.

Today, the official name of the group is Great Bend Municipal Band, commonly referred to as City Band. It attracts anywhere from 35-60 talented musicians "who love to play their instruments," said Kurtis Koch, current manager and now-and-then director. Grant Mathews is the full-time director.

"Audiences have been very receptive to our good mix of high school students and adults," noted Koch, who plays percussion. "People from other bands sometimes come here and say they can't believe all the support we get from our community."

Koch also noted the City Band enjoys good cooperation with the City of Great Bend. The Moses Bandshell at Jack Kilby Square, which was dedicated in 1927, has had quite a bit of tender-loving care in recent decades. "The roof has been replaced and bathrooms remodeled,"

Koch said. "And the City prepares the bandshell for our summer concerts."

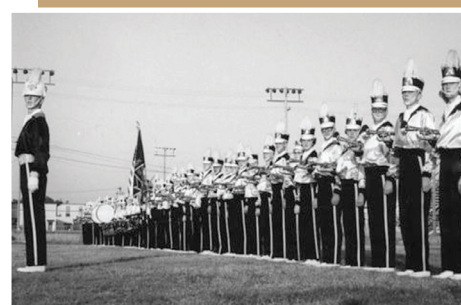
He also pointed out that the Great Bend Public Lands Department devoted time and talent to the stage extension in 2001. This was made possible by the Thelma Faye Harms Memorial Fund.

Koch, who was City Band director from 1980 to 2012, commented that "music is part of our American heritage. Bands have been in great demand for parades, circuses and political events."

A little more history

Joe Boley directed the Band from 1959-63 and enjoyed playing his trombone.

He noted the Band lost some members to the World War II effort when they left for work in factories and cities. High school students then became involved for the first time in



View of the Argonne Rebels Drum and Bugle Corps, at a band competition held in Great Bend, Kansas, from August 31 to September 1, 1961

the instrumental group.

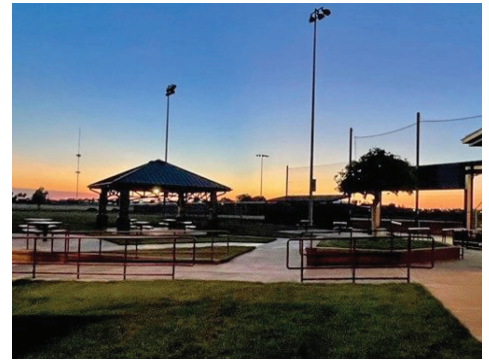
Band members regularly rehearse for eight concerts scheduled for 8:15 p.m. Thursdays from late May or early June to mid-July. Some attendees arrive early for seating on metal benches but most bring their own chairs.

There had been gaps in what is now an annual summertime program. The concerts have been continuous since Charles Price was director from 1914-1917. Other directors included Charles Gormly, Morgan Towsley, Frederic Reasoner, J. Lester Cox, John Taff, Wilbur Sherrard, Alton Foster, Marvin Downie, Jim Sanner, John Hensley, Glenn Peak, Eldon Hamm, J.B. Webster, Don Allen, Keith Temaat and Steve Lueth.

"We have these directors, musicians and our community to thank for the City Band's success over the years," Boley said.

CITY PARKS

Anyone who wants to spend a little leisure time with no particular schedule to keep has plenty of choices about town. After all, Great Bend's numerous parks offer many options for special activities. Or taking a stroll. Or just sitting on a bench and watching the world go by.



Brit Spaugh and Veterans Memorial parks offer the biggest areas and the most features.

For example, Brit Spaugh Park is home to Great Bend Brit Spaugh Zoo, Wetlands Waterpark Aquatic Center, two softball fields, horseshoe pits, picnic areas, playgrounds and skateboard park.

Veterans Memorial includes an 18-hole disc-golf course, fishing lake, sand volleyball courts, fitness playground, dog park, walking trails, and two ballfields, including Al Burns Field where the collegiate Bat Cats compete.

The Park Department also maintains Stone Lake, as well as the hiking and biking trails along the flood-control levees around the city.

Christina Hayes, Community Coordinator and Convention & Visitors Bureau director, strongly encourages families to take advantage of Great Bend's parks and other recreation spots.

"While Great Bend hosts many organized events at our parks and other locations, we realize sometimes you want a more leisurely pace," Hayes commented. "Our parks offer opportunities for fun, relaxation or just a little time away from the daily hustle and bustle."



Other parks/locations and a few of their amenities are:

- Eisenhower, Lakin and Garfield: playground, Little League fields and basketball court
- Expo Area: many community-wide events near the airport
- Harms Ball Park, Heizer & 24th: ballfields, concession and restroom facilities
- Heizer Park, 8th & Heizer: playground, areas for soccer, baseball, sand volleyball and basketball
- U.S. 281 Bypass Park, the bypass and Park St.: play equipment, shelter house and basketball goal
- Hike & Bike Trails: levee access points include Locust & Frey streets; river bridge; Stone Lake and West 10th flood-control parking lot
- Jack Kilby Square, downtown courthouse: bandshell, splash pad, ice skating rink, restrooms and home to many community-wide events
- K-96 Park, 10th & K-96: picnic area
- Langrehr Park: ballfields
- My BackYard Playground, 2715 18th: all-abilities playground and picnic area
- Stone Lake, Washington and Railroad Avenue: 43-acre lake, fishing docks with handicapped accessibility, limited boating and picnic areas.



"I always eagerly encourage our local residents to enjoy the parks on their own schedule. And, of course, when family and friends come for a visit, our parks cater to a lot of different tastes and hobbies to offer a bit of something for everyone."

— Christina Hayes

CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

A state law enacted in 1975 eventually led to a more concerted effort to attract visitors to Great Bend, while encouraging them to stay in local motels for a night, or two or three.

The state legislation authorized cities to collect a Transient Guest Tax, and just three years later, the Great Bend Convention & Visitors Bureau was born. Its job is to bring people to Great Bend and share local hospitality with out-of-towners.

A 2 percent guest tax was created in 1978. Today, it is 6 percent, with 5 percent funding all CVB operations and 1 percent helping maintain the Great Bend Events Center.

"The money is collected by motels and then sent to the state," said Christina Hayes, CVB director. "In turn, the state returns the money to the City."

When the CVB opened, a board of directors was created to promote conventions and tourism in Great Bend. It continues that quest today.

"Our mission is not only to promote Great Bend as a great destination for overnight visitors but also to develop statewide and regional partnerships that keep us on the Kansas Travel & Tourism map," Hayes said.

CVB offices have been located at several sites over the years. It used to share space with the Chamber of Commerce before moving to the back of the Highland Hotel. The next stop was the 2900 block of 10th.



CVB Director Christina Hayes wins a State Tourism Marketing Award in 2021 at the KS Tourism Conference



CVB Trade Show Booth taken by Christina Hayes

As of Jan. 1, 2016, the CVB became part of the City of Great Bend, with offices in the Great Bend Events Center.

"This happened because the City Council wanted to ensure the transient guest tax dollars were being spent to encourage overnight-stay options," Hayes explained. "This includes visitors who come to town for weddings, conventions, family and class reunions, as well as sporting and hunting events."

The CVB staff books and bids on big events and conventions, and compiles a new Great Bend Visitors Guide that is distributed locally and statewide every other year. "This serves to promote our premier Events Center, as the staff works to bring people to our wonderful town," Hayes commented.

In 2021, the City opened the renovated Events Center area; new breakout rooms and extra office space became available.

"These breakout rooms have opened wonderful new doors of opportunity to new and bigger

conferences," Hayes noted. "In 2022, the front bathrooms have been remodeled and we are adding a better security system put in place. There also are plans for new ballroom lighting."

A new program is set to begin early in 2023. The Be Our Guest program is designed, in part, to help front-line employees answer the questions they hear from visitors. The goal is to enhance the Great Bend experience for out-of-towners. The CVB's partners in this effort are Barton Community College and Great Bend businesses.

The City Council is the overall governing body for the CVB. However, there is an advisory board that makes recommendations and decisions based on tourism-industry needs. Board meetings are open to the public every other month, usually at the Events Center, which is designated as a Kansas Travel Information Center.

CREST THEATRE

The Crest Theatre opened Nov. 9, 1950, and 40 years later it was renovated for use as a live theatre for plays, concerts, dance, lectures and seminars. It was placed on the National Register of Historical Places in 2005.

When it opened, seating was provided for 985 in the orchestra and balcony levels. The Crest was one of 85 theatres operated by Commonwealth Amusement Corp. The first of these was the Plaza Theatre in Great Bend, which was just around the corner and to the south of the Crest on Main Street. The Kansan Theatre, also operated by Commonwealth Amusement, was at the Crest's current location, 1905 Lakin.

"The name 'Crest' was as innovative as the building's appearance and function," said Angela Meitner, Great Bend Community Theatre manager. "Management considered names such as Barton, Pawnee and Cheyenne."

"However, there were already businesses in town associated with these names. The graphic appeal also was considered important because the name had to look nice and fit well on the marquee."

The first and last letters would be tall and visually appealing, and Crest fit the bill. The name also was chosen for its meaning that suggested "peak of achievement."

"The Crest offered the ultimate in luxury, along with many innovations," Meitner commented. "It was the only theatre in the Midwest that featured direct-by-wire television programs and pay telephone service in the lobby."

"The modern design included technology that really was before its time. For example, originally the front sidewalk was heated by 1-inch copper pipes from the boiler to melt snow and ice."

The accommodation of television appears to have never been fully executed even though a platform in the balcony was built for a projector. It was thought that programs might be broadcast in movie theaters one day.

Elton Kuhlman, the first manager, speculated that sporting events would be a natural for movie television and big Hollywood premieres could be broadcast nationally the same night they debuted.



Alex Moyers photo.



Cinematreasures.org photo.

The Crest opening, along with the growing popularity of home television, accelerated the demise of Great Bend's other downtown theaters by 1958; only the Crest and Plaza theatres still showed movies.

In 1962, the Crest was the only downtown theatre that remained in the movie business. In the late 1970s the Village Twin Theater opened on the west side of town. The last shows at the Crest were in 1986.

A New Purpose

The Crest remained vacant until 1990 when Great Bend Community Theatre (GBCT) and the City of Great Bend devised a plan to reopen the building. The city would own the building and GBCT would restore the theatre and oversee operations.

GBCT replaced the roof and air conditioning system, and repaired seats to provide a comfortable environment. Most original features that made the theater so unique in 1950 were retained.

"The Crest remains the only theatre of its kind left in the Midwest,"

Meitner noted. "Other theatres designed in its style are long gone."

DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT

A few local guys went to breakfast one morning in 2008 and talked about Great Bend's quality of life and empty storefronts downtown. They soon contacted Sheryl Cheely and the next thing she knew, MyTown LP was born.



"The guys that met over breakfast knew their topics of discussion were important to me too. I guess you could say they roped me in," Cheely laughed.

The new organization didn't waste much time deciding their first major step – buying downtown buildings and encouraging entrepreneurs to open businesses. This was possible because MyTown raised \$2 million in private money.

"That says a lot about our community," Cheely emphasized. "I am very proud of Great Bend. We have been able to help businesses get off the ground with some management advice and maybe some financial help."

The first MyTown businesses to set up shop in the Zarah Building included a couple of jewelry stores, Heart of Kansas Mercantile, Perk's and R.B. Tellers. Treaders restaurant and some office space was involved too.

Later, the organization secured the Renue Salon, Spa & Fashion Boutique Building.

"The goal always has been to support new business prospects downtown," Cheely noted. "The intent is to fill buildings with retail outlets and physically upgrade our downtown.

"There were so many empty storefronts when we started. Now, if something is empty, there are plans in the works to fill the space. Yes, some businesses have come and gone but that is the nature of retail."

Downtown Lofts

Next on the MyTown agenda is a bold stroke to kickstart the loft apartments project. Plans are to build out eight residences on the third floor of the Zarah Building, Main and Lakin.

These will be 1- and 2-bedroom apartments and elevators will be included.

"Grant money has financed some of the background work, such as fire-prevention sprinkler systems," Cheely noted. "We are extremely fortunate to have city council members and county commissioners who are forward-thinking people. We needed them for this project and they came through."

It is estimated that more than 30 downtown residences can be available when considering the number of buildings that could accommodate them.

In addition, the new facades on some businesses add to the welcoming flavor of downtown, thanks to grant money. "The newer businesses and the updated facades on some older ones catch the eye of local residents and visitors," Cheely remarked. "This will only improve as we go along."



"I hope in the next five years, anyone who drives down our Main Street will be even more proud of all the changes. It will be great to see more people walking up and down the sidewalks around the square just enjoying our community."

— Sheryl Cheely



EVENTS/FESTIVALS

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Great Bend began the tradition of hosting many events and festivals to bring local residents together.

There was the Wolf Hunt, starting in 1876; greyhound races, starting in 1886 at Cheyenne Bottoms and hosted by the American Coursing Club; horse races for fairgoers in 1901; and Eddie Van Halen's appearance at the Summer Jam in 1978.

During other decades, events included the Bicentennial Parade with the Argonne Rebels Drum & Bugle Corps that attracted about 40,000 people; Chamber of Commerce Frontier Festival; Fourth of July Festival; and the Christmas Festival that entailed the Trail of Lights, Christmas Fantasy Village and Christmas Parade.

The July 4th and Christmas festival still exist – just in different forms.



A Great Bend wolf hunt in 1876.

"In 2010, the City Council wanted to start focusing on retail events, in addition to community festivals," said Christina Hayes, Community Coordinator and Convention and Visitors Bureau Director. "This is why the community coordinator position was created with an economic development sales tax."

"The purpose is to strive to support businesses that want to unify our common goals. We do this by inviting local citizens and visitors to shop, eat and play, while creating a sense of pride in Great Bend."

— Christina Hayes

These retail-focused events include:

- Annual Art & Wine Walk throughout downtown
- Summer Street Stroll & Farmers Market, in partnership with the Barton County Health Department
- Biannual Ladies Nights in participating stores
- I Heart Great Bend each February
- Jumbo Monopoly as part of the June Jaunt Festival
- Explore Great Bend Month in November to encourage buying local

And then there are the community-wide festivals that Hayes and her colleagues created.

June Jaunt has been popular for 11 years with entertainers, games, live music all day, vendors, cruise nights, car shows, free outdoor movie and much more. This brings in up to 4,000 people to Jack Kilby Square the first weekend in June as a summer kick-off.

The community fireworks display is supported by donations that help the city fund an eye- and ear-popping extravaganza at the Great Bend Expo Complex annually.

Party in the Park is an end-of-summer highlight that offers mud volleyball, obstacle course, eating contest, mega-kite display, inflatable fun zone, wet/dry parade with a huge water fight, anything-that-floats race, car show and concert.

"This is a city-funded event that attracts up to 5,000 people at Veterans Memorial Park," Hayes noted.

Home for the Holidays Festival & Parade entails a cookie contest, Small Business Saturday, Santa's arrival, lighting of the Mayor's Tree, food, entertainment, train rides, horse-and-wagon/carriage rides and Santas Around the World.

The 3-day Great Bend Airfest is scheduled every 3-5 years, with the help of the airport manager. It draws up to 15,000 people to see once-in-a-lifetime displays of warbirds and aircraft, as well as performances and memorabilia.



Photo by Cathy Vonfeldt in 1970s of Fuller Brush staff at July 4th Celebration at Vets Park.



June Jaunt photo by Alex Moyers.



Party in the Park taken by Alex Moyers



Airfest photo taken by John from ACI Images

"Whenever I am planning any type of event, I always have a main goal in mind," Hayes emphasized. "That goal is to provide an opportunity for families to create wonderful memories about Great Bend and its citizens."

FIRE DEPARTMENT

The first volunteer fire department was organized late in 1876 and the first big fire occurred on July 21, 1879. Firefighters relied on bucket brigades until 1886 when the city acquired two hand-pulled, two-wheel hose carts and a few hundred feet of hose; the chief's horns rounded out the equipment purchase.

The first motorized addition was a Buick purchased in 1911. A few years later came a truck named "Betsy" and a Seagrave truck came in 1924 at a cost of \$12,500. This was after a fire at the Kopke wholesale building in 1923 that illustrated the need for a new truck and ladders. The truck was called "Aunt Hudlie," which was the first motorized piece of equipment with the pumping apparatus attached.

Memorable fires in the 1930s and 1940s occurred at Miller's livery barn, two Safeway stores, Bentley's and the Santa Fe freight depot. The Parrish Hotel fire was in 1968.

The fire department started paying some of its employees in 1949.

The ambulance service started its Emergency Medical Technician program in 1975. The EMT service added defibrillators in 1985 and EMT Intermediate started seven years later. Today, EMTs can administer medication, and provide airway management and pain management. A mechanical CPR device does chest compressions.

In addition, each shift has at least two paramedics available; this advanced training started in 1999.

And, of course, these EMTs are professionally trained firefighters too, with expertise in wild land and structure fires.

"You are really getting two professionals in one individual," said Fire Chief Luke McCormick. "Great Bend is one of the few cities in Kansas that offers the combined firefighting and ambulance service. We are very fortunate here.



Photo taken by Maggie Glynn.

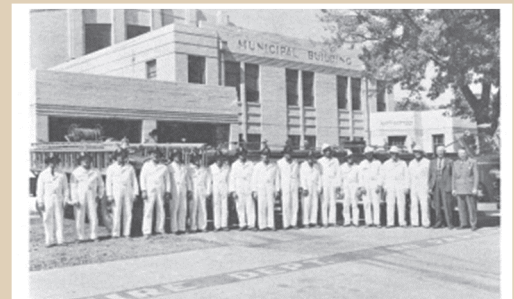
"Because of the extensive training, our personnel eventually will be involved in virtually any type of emergency situation. And they will be ready for it."

For example: The department has a search-and-rescue team; a dive team; swift-water rescue team; grain-bin rescue team; fire investigators who are cross trained with law-enforcement credentials; and fire-prevention programs that reach 2,000 youngsters annually.

"Great Bend is large enough that we have to be ready for major events such as aircraft accidents and water emergencies," McCormick noted. "We also are part of a regional response team for natural disasters in Kansas and around the country."

More dates of interest

- 1876: 20 volunteers were selected and Will Stokes was named the first fire chief
- 1938: The department moved from City Hall to what is now the police department.
- 1961: Station #2 was built at 5005 Broadway.
- 1966: The fire department took over the ambulance service.
- 1972: Fire Station #1 opened at 1205 Williams.
- 2003: Fire Station #2 moved to its new home at 5851 10th Street.



The fire department as it appeared in 1949. Before this time, the men, with the exception of the Chief, had been volunteers. Jack Morrison and Joe Mermis, city officers at the time, stand at right.



SMOKE AND SMOKE EATERS — Fire fighting equipment in Great Bend's infancy, compared with today's, was crude indeed as this picture of the three hose carts and volunteer members of the department indicates. This picture was taken from the present location of the Municipal Building looking northeast into the lot diagonally across the street that was filled with harvest machinery and now occupied by the Mering & Son Service Station. The first major fire in Great Bend took place in September, 1876 and originated in the furniture store on Maggie street, or the present location of the Kansas Power company building. Before the flames were extinguished the furniture store, with four other buildings, was destroyed. The loss was estimated at \$20,000.

Fire fighting equipment in Great Bend's infancy during the mid 1800s.

GREAT BEND BRIT SPAUGH ZOO

When a few deer found a new home at what is now Great Bend Brit Spaugh Zoo, many local residents were not happy. After all, a baseball field had to be forfeited to accommodate the newcomers.

Brit Spaugh was the first director of public lands.

"A lot has changed since those first arrivals in 1953," said Ashley Burdick, curator and zoo supervisor. "However, one of Brit Spaugh's dreams still holds true today. Our zoo is still free and attracts guests from all over the world. There are not many free zoos left anywhere."

One of the most popular exhibits today is the grizzly bear home, which was renovated in 2018. Three 9-year-old siblings live with Max, who is in his mid-30s. "They spend a lot of time playing and wrestling, and just being entertaining," commented Burdick, who started working at the zoo as a keeper seven years ago. "We also have large carnivores that attract a lot of attention."

For those who want to expand their animal education, the zoo this year started offering "Keeper Chats", a monthly program for all ages. Summer camp for elementary-school students is still on the agenda too.

When the zoo, 2123 Main, needs a little extra boost, the Great Bend Zoological Society helps with fundraising efforts. "They help with things not necessarily in the budget," Burdick explained. "For example, the Society helped us finish the alligator building in 2021 and is working on a new handicapped-accessible playground."

The zoo is open daily from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., except Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.



"If you haven't visited our great local zoo, we hope you will give it a try," Burdick said. "There is no need to travel to urban locations to get acquainted with a wide variety of animal life."



Dates of interest

- Two black bears were donated to the city by the Montana Fish & Game Commission in 1953. The older of the two had been the Montana University football squad mascot.
- The first international animals, two aoudads (Barbary sheep), were imported in 1958 to the United States from northern Africa by a New York company and were traded for a few of the zoo's surplus deer.
- Four spider monkeys arrived in 1959.
- Two polar bear cubs arrived in 1964.
- City Park became Brit Spaugh Park in 1965.
- Six rare Trumpeter swan cygnets hatched at the zoo in 1965.
- The zoo welcomed four Humboldt penguins in 1970; they were housed next to a pair of California sea lions that had arrived a year or so earlier.
- "Bear Sixty," also known as Maggie, arrived in 1980; she had been a repeat dumpster-raiding offender in Montana before ultimately retiring to the local zoo.
- The name officially changed to Great Bend Brit Spaugh Zoo in 2008.

GREAT BEND CITY GOVERNMENT

The Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad reached Great Bend in July 1872 and the first city election was held around the same time. A.A. Hurd was elected mayor, along with five councilmen.

Under this progressive leadership, 42 buildings were erected that same year to house families and businesses. A primary goal was to secure the cattle trade, which was centered in other Kansas communities at the time.

Their efforts were successful and Great Bend became a go-to cattle town by 1873.

Today, the goals of the mayor and eight city council members are to build on this legacy of foresight and prosperity.

Cody Schmidt had been mayor for only two years in mid-2022 but already cited some successes that can be credited to the city council and many other local residents.



The old City Hall, constructed in 1906-07 and razed in 1937. The fire bell tower is at right.



One success is the creation of Great Bend Economic Development in 2020. "This is one of the first jobs I had to tackle as mayor," Schmidt said. "But thanks to the efforts of many community leaders, we have hit the ground running with new services and a number of prospects."

Schmidt also takes pride in completing an upgrade at the historical drag strip near the Great Bend Airport. "This attraction is a big boost for the entire community because it brings in thousands of people who fill motels, go shopping and eat at local restaurants during racing season every year."

In some instances, the city can take only partial credit for progressive projects and programs. For example, thanks to support from local voters, the city opened avenues to the recruitment and retention of police officers and other first responders.

"Voters gave the go-ahead to a much-needed new police department building and enhanced retirement benefits for officers and firefighters. These are huge steps to making our community more attractive to first responders."

While the wish list is long for the future, Schmidt is eager to "see what we can do with the new Quality of Life sales tax to attract new families and keep current residents happy with what Great Bend has to offer."

Schmidt also noted that local city government is special in that the mayor and council members do not receive a stipend for all the work they do. "It takes a special person to be in our shoes," he commented. "We donate our time to the citizens of Great Bend and are glad to do it. The goal is to help Great Bend grow

while being conscientious stewards of our tax dollars."

The mayor is especially grateful that he and the city council mesh well together. "We are able to collaborate with one another instead of butting heads," he remarked. "I am so thankful that we work extremely well together. Yes, there are disagreements along the way. But we can move forward from them."

"I have never been a naysayer," Schmidt continued. "Instead of complaining, I would rather ask 'how can I help.' I want to make things better – not create a dark cloud over the city."



GREAT BEND EVENTS CENTER

The structure at 3111 10th that was once used by private enterprise is now a source of economic tourism energy for the City of Great Bend.

It had been part of the Highland Hotel & Convention Center. Now, the building is home to the City-owned Great Bend Events Center. It has enjoyed many successful years since 2012 but this year is shaping up to be a record-setter.

For example, the guest tax generated approximately \$48,700 in 2012; during other years it varied from about \$44,000 to \$58,000. During only three quarters of this year, the total was already more than \$52,000. The remaining quarter will establish the record.

"While the Events Center doesn't have a long history, it has become an invaluable attraction to locals and visitors, while generating income that spurs our economy throughout any given year," said Christina Hayes, director of the Great Bend Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB). "This year, there were only two open weekends at the venue and we will collect the highest recorded Transient Guest Tax ever."

One percent of this 6 percent hotel-guest tax finances maintenance of the Events Center. The remaining 5 percent funds the CVB.

About a decade ago, a group of investors purchased the property and donated it to the City.

"I am thankful for the foresight of these investors and the Great Bend City Council," Hayes said. "They saw the need for a premier convention center that would entice visitors and enhance our quality of life."

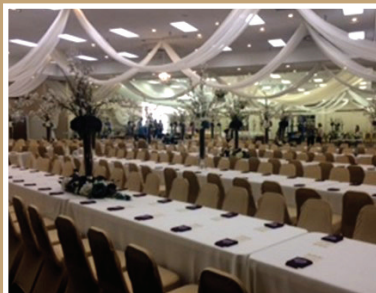
In the early days, the Events Center attracted conferences, weddings, reunions and other events related to the next-door hotel. Today, it is open to all those gatherings and more, including trade shows.

"The Events Center caters to our neighbors but we strongly encourage local residents to bring visitors to town for their events," Hayes emphasized. "When out-of-towners stay overnight, the money they spend circulates and supports many businesses, while providing funds for the Events Center's upkeep."

Improvements/Plans

Physical improvements since 2016 include: new exterior entrance, flooring, furnishings, breakout rooms and bathrooms; fresh paint; and a new air wall for the ballroom. Existing bathrooms were remodeled this year.

Future plans include parking-lot improvements, landscaping and a new security system.



"We also hope to eventually add more breakout rooms to attract even bigger conferences," Hayes noted. "A major item on our wish list is a hotel next door to the Events Center. We continue to pursue this project with the help of local economic-development leaders and governmental entities."



East Side of Roosevelt school damaged beyond repair by the Nov. 10, 1915 tornado.

GREAT BEND OVERCAME DIFFICULTIES/1981 FLOOD

(FOLLOWED BY FAST FORWARD TO 1981)

Great Bend residents demonstrated their gumption and commitment to one another from the very earliest days of the new town. They braved locusts, fires, tornadoes and floods, while facing their struggles together.

Great Bend had been officially on the map for only a couple of years when the first natural disaster struck its citizens. It came in the form of a grasshopper plague in 1874.

The locusts, or large grasshoppers, arrived in uncontrollable numbers, devastating vegetation in Great Bend and much of Barton County. Farmers lost their crops and, therefore, their incomes. And since farmers often consumed what they grew, their cupboards were bare.

Mary Bickerdyke, who had nursed men during the Civil War, happened to be in town during this calamity. She realized the severity of the plague and organized the collection of supplies and clothing that helped hundreds of local families survive the winter of 1875.

Just a few years later, in July of 1879, a horrendous fire occurred in Great Bend's business district when a coal oil lamp was dropped. It started on Maggie Street (now Forest)

in a furniture store, which was destroyed, along with a grocery house and warehouse space where many valuable farm implements had been stored.

A tornado on Nov. 10, 1915, tragically took the lives of nine people and caused widespread damage. Buildings affected were McMullen Laundry, the electric light plant, Walnut Creek Mills, Moses Brothers Mill, Chanute Oil Refinery, Great Bend Mills, Santa Fe Depot, several small businesses and Roosevelt Grade School.

Then came the water from the Arkansas River on June 19, 1921. The south half of Great Bend was inundated and two young men drowned. Six years later, Walnut Creek flooded the northern part of the city. Floods also occurred in 1942, 1951 and 1965.

In addition, dozens and dozens of homes were blown apart or severely damaged.

FAST FORWARD TO 1981...

Many current Great Bend residents vividly recall the flood of June 15, 1981, and it is safe to say each has a story or two or three about their experiences.

While these recollections vary in some details, many involve: sewage in basements; home furnishings floating around the house; waist-high water in streets and yards; ruined family mementos; canoes on residential streets; challenging, if not impossible, clean-ups; and 10th Street being transformed into a flowing river.

The up to 20 inches of rain that poured overnight had to work its way to the creeks and Arkansas River. The problem was Great Bend was between the rainwater and these natural water carriers.

"That storm just sat there west of town," said Bob Suelter, who was city attorney at the time. "Most floods occur when water pours out of rivers and creeks. This was different. The water had no place to go but through our town."

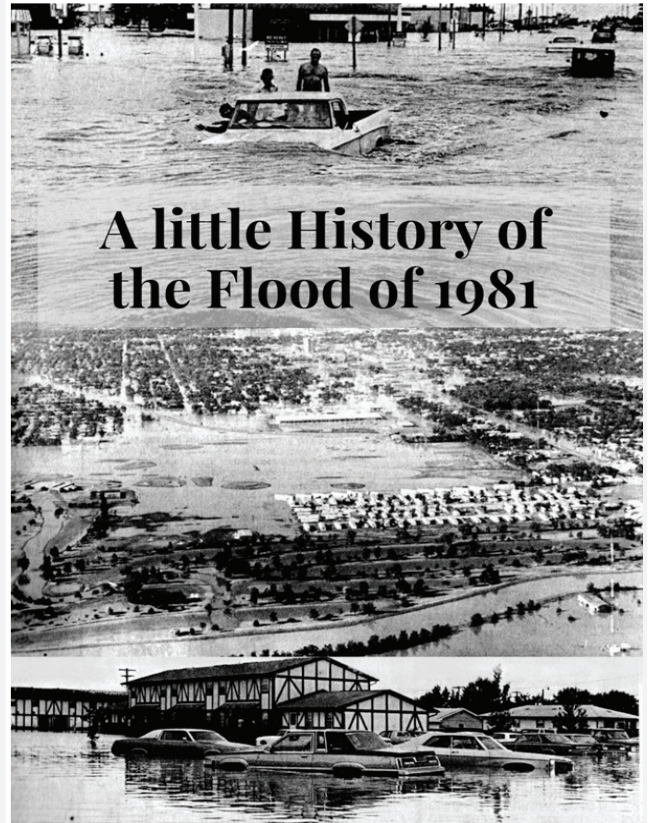
Suelter remembers that a friend called him that night and "asked if he could come to my house because his area was flooding. I, of course, told him they could come but I didn't know anything about the floodwaters - yet."

It didn't take long before Suelter understood the gravity of the situation. He and other city officials pulled together to help their neighbors in any way they could.

The flood itself was bad enough. But then came the clean-up of homes, offices and businesses. When people were trying to salvage their properties "they weren't dealing with clean water," Suelter said, noting the sewage problems.



Photo by Pauline Decker flood 1981



Prior to 1981, there had been about three public votes on a flood-control project. The issue failed each time.

June of 1981 brought a change of heart, with many people demanding the construction of a flood-control system. Nevertheless, the Great Bend City Council was divided on the topic and its meetings kept getting bigger and louder.

"Those who were against it were concerned about future development and eminent-domain issues," Suelter explained.

After thorough consideration, however, the city council voted in 1982 to move ahead with the project; it was not a public vote. With the help of the Army Corps of Engineers, the project has been deemed a great success.

"This flood-control project has saved much of the town many times during recent decades," Suelter said. "Now, when we have a heavy rain, there is some scattered street flooding that usually dissipates fairly quickly."

That we can live with.

GREAT BEND PUBLIC LIBRARY

First there was a circulating library started in 1877 by A.S. Allen, who asked anyone interested to call his drug store for information. A couple of decades later, a reading room and literary studies were supported by the Progress Club, Athenian Club and Commercial Club, which was the forerunner of the Chamber of Commerce.

The first Great Bend Public Library was formally opened to the public on Aug. 14, 1908, in the Carnegie Building, which was named for the man who gave the city \$12,500 to build the native-brick building that became a local landmark.

When this structure was about 62 years old, it came tumbling down with the help of a crane and wrecking ball in 1971. Engineers determined it could not be renovated to meet the community's needs. The City of Great Bend gave its official approval of a new library a few years earlier when it created a 2-mill tax levy for 10 years to be accumulated as a building fund.

The popular library location remained the same – on Forest between Stone and Williams. Nevertheless, the lot wasn't quite big enough so USD 428 was asked if its portion of the land could be donated for the library. The school district graciously agreed to this arrangement.

Grant money was added to the building fund; Rondeau, Williams and Smith handled the architecture and design.

During more recent decades

Over the years, libraries have shifted their priorities in how they serve their communities, said Erin Ferguson, adult services librarian.

"Our Great Bend Public Library has evolved into more of a community center rather than an institution that only displays and loans books," she noted. "With automation in 2008, meeting rooms, computers, free Wi-Fi, programming for all ages, and e-books and other e-content, our library serves the community in so many ways – even after hours."

Staff and volunteers encourage learning with classes and programs taught by librarians and other local professionals.

"Of course, we still have physical books and DVDs because people enjoy them," Ferguson commented. "But we also have the e-content because people enjoy the convenience."



"Our public spaces allow visitors to collaborate on projects, as well as encourage play in the children's area. We also provide space for teenagers to just hang out, read or play games. We acknowledge the library might be a bit noisier at times because of these accommodations but they reinforce the notion that the library welcomes everyone."

— Erin Ferguson

GREAT BEND RECREATION COMMISSION

Rolling back the pages of recreation history, the Great Bend Recreation Commission has progressed into one of the finest recreation systems in Kansas. It began with Carl Soden, the first Recreation Commission director in 1949, who was looking at an almost-blank slate. There were four grade schools, with only one gym; one softball field; one baseball field; and a city pool, said Diann Henderson, Executive Director until Oct. 31, 2022

BASEBALL IN Great Bend reached the Kansas State League stage in about 1909. This picture was snapped of a crowd witnessing a game when the park was located approximately a half block east of Frey street at its intersection with Lakin avenue. Many in the crowd are residents of Great Bend today, among them Ira Clark, Vernon Fryberger, Frank Brinkman and Jimmy James.



“There were no ballfields for kids to practice on,” Henderson related. “Vacant lots were found around town and snow fences were put up. They were called ballfields.”

The board of directors first met July 18, 1948, setting the first recreation budget as state legislation in 1945 empowered Great Bend to initiate and operate the public recreation system. The Rec Commission is a municipal governmental entity formed jointly with the school district and city that utilizes both city and school facilities. Their funding is provided by local taxes, user

fees, grants and donations.

In the 1950s and 60s, the Rec Commission's home base was the old leaky library building basement. The first adult programs met in the former Central School building. That building was sold to the Eagles and demolition of the library began to make way for a new one.

“The Rec Commission had no facilities for programming or offices,” Henderson said. “When Bob Parrish became mayor in the 1960s, a task force formed to secure permanent facilities. The City Council put the City Auditorium under the commission's domain and construction on a new recreation center was completed in 1969.”

The City and the Rec Commission secured a \$90,000 state matching grant to buy what is now Veteran's Memorial Park and Lake property. State matching bonds of \$200,000 helped develop the park.

During the early years, the Rec offered swimming lessons, Silver & Gold potluck dinners, twirling, art classes, summer playground, baseball, softball, football, adult volleyball, tennis, Middle School dances and basketball.

Collaboration with the City and USD 428 in recent decades has resulted in

additional recreation improvements: Great Bend Sports Complex; Great Bend Activity Center; My BackYard Playground; Veteran's Park tennis court improvements; Veteran's Park Toddler Playground; Wetland's Aquatic Park; Fit Trail and Musical Pieces at Veteran's; Disc Golf Course; and improvements to USD 428 playgrounds, with ballfields at Lincoln, Jefferson and Eisenhower schools.

“Through our innovative services, programs, events and partnerships, the Rec Commission contributes to our quality of life and economic vitality,” Henderson said. “Currently, we are partnering with the City and its Quality-of-Life Task Force in repurposing the Brit Spough South Park area to provide pickleball, soccer, horseshoes, basketball and playground spaces for all ages and abilities.”

After 40 years of service to the Recreation Commission, Diann Henderson retired on Oct. 31, 2022. Chris Umphres was named to succeed Henderson in the Executive Director position. Henderson leaves this comment for Chris: “You will have the best job in the world, ensuring the opportunity that recreation services are available for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations.”

GREAT BEND SPORTS COMPLEX

Three local guys traveled to Dodge City in 2007 for a baseball tournament. On the ride home Roger Sell, Roger Marshall and Rob Bowman started to wonder aloud: wouldn't it be nice to have an attractive sports facility in the center of the state to attract tournaments?

Dr. Mike Allison (former Great Bend Mayor) related this anecdote to illustrate how the local Sports Complex came to be.

Soon after the Dodge City trip, the three men approached Allison, who was mayor at the time, and Howard Partington, who served as city administrator.

"They got a few blank stares from me about their idea," Allison laughed. "We always wanted to be good stewards of local tax dollars. But a short time later, I realized the project would benefit the whole community. If we could entice tournaments to town, we could enhance the local economy.

"Visitors would patronize our hotels, restaurants, stores and gas stations. As soon as I understood this, I was on board."

Architect Stewart Nelson, who had experience with the Dodge City facility, offered a first drawing and the City opened bids for construction.



Taken by Mike Smith 2022.

Companies involved in the project were Schwab-Eaton, Gibson Mancini Carmichael & Nelson Architects, Dudley Williams & Associates and Professional Engineering Consultants. The Complex opened in 2012.

A local sales tax designated for infrastructure, economic development and a reduction in property tax helped finance the project.

"We also had a good partnership with USD 428 and the Great Bend Recreation Commission," Allison recalled. "This kind of teamwork was invaluable. In addition, Roger Sell and Roger Marshall got solidly behind the project and helped us be successful with the second round of the sales tax.

"Today, local residents have a premiere Sports Complex they can truly be proud of," he added. "It is a plus for all of us."

The Complex sits on 61 acres the City had already owned. It is close to all Great Bend amenities, and features five baseball/softball fields; quality fencing and backstops; air-

conditioned rooms for officials and meetings; plenty of parking space; batting cages; concessions; and restrooms.

New turf was installed by February 2022 in an effort to attract major tournaments.

One highlight for Allison is Musco lighting on all the fields. "This is a huge deal. Musco is the best lighting available; even professional teams use it."

The Complex is home to, USD 428 and Rec Commission leagues, KCAC Championships and the 2-1A KSHSAA State Baseball Tournament. Allison emphasized that the Complex is successful, in large part, because of efforts by Christina Hayes, Convention & Visitors Bureau director. "Christina has put this all together by promoting Great Bend and bringing in tournaments."

Hayes noted "it is easy to promote this wonderful attraction. Visitors are always impressed with our wonderful facility.

"Our Complex is an amazing source of sales and transient guest tax revenue," she added. "And as funding becomes available, our Master Plan indicates the Sports Complex can grow. Our wish list includes accommodating football and soccer, along with more baseball/softball fields."

— Dr. Mike Allison

KANSAS OIL & GAS HALL OF FAME AND MUSEUM

In 1989, Great Bend hosted the first Kansas Oil & Gas Hall of Fame Banquet, which inspired the late Danny Biggs to take the next step forward in honoring trailblazers in the energy industry. Biggs' inspiration came to life in 1990 with the opening of the Kansas Oil & Gas Hall of Fame and Museum, located at 5944 10th Street.

"Danny's desire to further recognize industry pioneers directly led to the creation of the museum," said John Francis, president of the board of directors. "This facility is designed to remind people of the industry's importance to everyone. The oil and gas industry brings in a great deal of tax revenue to the city and county, along with good-paying jobs. Great Bend is a hub for the industry and vitally important to its success."

Throughout the progression of the Kansas Oil & Gas Museum Foundation, the Kansas Energy Education Center also was built on site. This building houses educational kiosks displaying hands-on information about all forms of energy - from fossil fuels to alternative-energy sources.

The museum is financed entirely by private donations and grants; there are no local, state or federal tax dollars involved. "This is how Danny wanted it and I couldn't agree more," Francis said.

Dee Volpert, museum director,

encourages local and area residents and organizations to contact her for a tour by calling 620-793-8301. "We are eager to share information with schools, civic organizations, church groups and individuals, and re-engage with the community post-renovation," Volpert said.

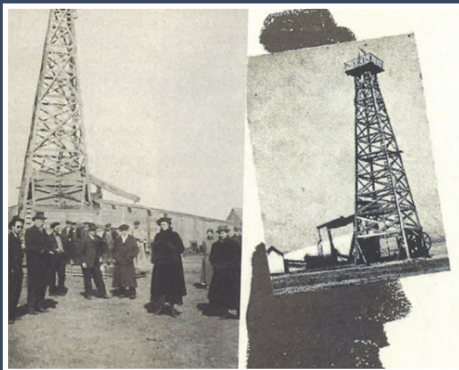
The facility's site consists of the Hall of Fame & Museum building, Kansas Energy Education Center, Biggs Family Conference Room and the original museum building. The site is available for scouting and youth programs, private-party rentals, industry meetings and more.

Two-year shutdown

It seemed simple enough at the time - the museum would close its doors for a little while for renovations in 2019. Then, along came the pandemic. "We were just about to wrap it up and get the exhibits back in shape when COVID hit," Francis recalled.

Warren Martin of Kansas Strong, who has great experience in the industry and museums, came to the rescue. "He volunteered to help us get the displays back together; some were re-purposed and some new ones were assembled," Francis said. "Warren helped us figure it all out and how to modernize our museum."

The facility re-opened in October 2021. It welcomes visitors with a brand-new entrance containing an eye-catching, historical timeline of the oil industry in Kansas, as well as the United States. Beyond that, the museum now has updated, interactive and educational exhibits and videos explaining the different areas of the oil and gas production process and its importance to products used every day. The goal and mission are to carry out those of our founding fathers - Danny Biggs and Thaine Francis, among many others. This is not only to preserve the industry's heritage through honoring the men and women who made it happen but also educate the public of that connection and importance.





Pelicans fight over fish at Cheyenne Bottoms by Alex Moyers

KWEC/CHEYENNE BOTTOMS

Since Cheyenne Bottoms is “the reason we are here,” it didn’t take long for the leaders of the Kansas Wetlands Education Center (KWEC) to find their niche, Director Curtis Wolf said.

“In the beginning, it was such a unique concept,” Wolf noted. “When it first opened, no one was really sure of what direction we would go.

“We knew we needed a nature center for visitors to get more out of the Cheyenne Bottoms experience. This was the niche we fell into – promoting Cheyenne Bottoms locally and zeroing in on school field trips.”

KWEC, 592 NE K-156 Highway, opened in April 2009. The facility is home to exhibits that help tell the Cheyenne Bottoms story in innovative ways.

“Our goal is to explain the wetlands and their importance, and to display the plant and animal life,” Wolf said.

Exhibits include a floor projection system that displays a wetland and the animals that live there. Visitors can ‘catch’ the animals as they listen to an audio narration.

In addition, an augmented reality watershed sandbox simulates water drainage and illustrates what happens in the Cheyenne Bottoms Basin.



The KWEC staff is the backbone of its 700 on-site and outreach programs, as well as the facility’s contacts with 24,000 people annually. Of that total, 8,000 are drop-ins, 14,000 participate in educational offerings and 2,000 are at trade-show booths.

From April 1 to Oct. 31, hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday, and 1 to 5 p.m. Sunday. From Nov. 1 to March 31, hours are the same, except KWEC is closed Mondays. It is also closed on major holidays. Admission is free and the auditorium is available for about 50 people after hours by reservation.

Fort Hays State University manages KWEC, in cooperation with the Kansas Department of Wildlife & Parks.



THE CHEYENNE BOTTOMS, 7 miles north of Great Bend, was the site for dog races sponsored by the American Coursing Club organized in 1886, the first organization of its kind in the United States. The club flourished for eight years. The first meet was held in October, 1886. Pictured above are some of the greyhounds with their owners and those enjoying the sport. D. C. Luse, Great Bend man, who was a member of the executive committee, is shown at the right. R. H. Smith of Worcester, Mass., was the club's first president; Colonel David Taylor of Emporia, Dr. P. VanHummel of Denver, C. G. Page of Minden, Nebr., Edward Kelley of New York, H. Boyd of San Francisco and S. K. Dow of Chicago were vice presidents and J. V. Brinkman of Great Bend, was treasurer.

Wolf noted KWECC is attractive for all ages and encouraged the community to learn about Cheyenne Bottoms, a Wetlands of International Importance. The facility is within the 20,000 acres of the state wildlife area; total acreage reaches 41,000 when Cheyenne Bottoms is included.

“This resource is right in our own backyard,” the director said. “No one else in the United States can say that. Cheyenne Bottoms is often referred to as a ‘hidden jewel.’ But I don’t know why it is still hidden. We need the buy-in from local and area people including outdoor enthusiasts, birdwatchers, hunters, nature photographers and those with more general interests.”



MURALS

Anyone who tootles around town to tour the fascinating local Mural Project is sure to come away impressed with the blending of talent and community spirit.

For quite some time, about a dozen murals were scattered about the city but four new ones have been added in recent years – three on the outside of structures and one on an alley.

Two of these more recent murals grace the intersection of Forest & Williams. One represents Great Bend's connection to the B-29 bomber, which World War II airmen were trained to fly at the local airport. The other depicts the beauty of Cheyenne Bottoms.

The third relatively new mural, 1100 block of Main, is known as "Starting Line," in honor of Great Bend's historic drag strip.

Other murals include:

Sign of the Time, 700 block of Main: a colorful view of Great Bend's good ol' days

El Baile/The Dance, 10th & Main: cultures that enrich Great Bend

Migration, 16th & Main: water fowl in flight over a quilt of farmland

Clara Barton, 16th & Williams, Great Bend Post Office: postage-stamp mural honoring USPS and Clara Barton

Something for Everyone, 1600 block of Williams: a tribute to agriculture

Santa Fe Trail, 2000 block of Kansas: intergenerational project

Delgado's Mexican Restaurant, 2210 10th: commissioned by the restaurant

The Bistro, 2920 10th: commissioned by The Page, an American Bistro

Other murals are located at Brit Spough Park & Zoo. They are:

Lions Mural: in 1998, children created African masks and transferred them to ceramic tiles.



Great Bend Post Ryan Christenson, aka ARCY, works on the mural in downtown Great Bend July 12, 2021.



North American Mural:

The Great Bend Recreation Commission created this in 1999.

Tiger Murals:

the City of Great Bend and its Parks Department, along with the Rec Commission, collaborated with local children on this 2001 project.



But it doesn't end there; the artists just keep on giving.

The most recent creation is not on a wall. It is on the alley between Forest and Lakin in the 2000 block. On Sept. 9, 2022, a number of creative minds gathered to paint a colorful geometric design on what is now called Art Alley.

Christina Hayes, Convention & Visitors Bureau Director, said "these spectacular murals throughout town illustrate the many faces of Great Bend – its people, culture and spirit. We all appreciate the artists and their creativity."



POLICE DEPARTMENT

Before new officers at the Great Bend Police Department can take to the streets, they attend the Kansas Law Enforcement Training Center, commonly called the “Police Academy.”

Back in the day, this academy training was only a four-week program. Today, it is 14 weeks.

Classroom and hands-on topics include criminal codes and investigations, traffic, DUIs and accidents, said Bob Robinson, who retired as captain in 2017 after 39 years on the local police force.

“These basics are still covered

today but in much more depth,” Robinson said. “Firearms training also has been expanded to include daytime and nighttime shooting, while survival techniques, tasers and pepper spray also are on the agenda.”

Early in Robinson’s career, bullet-proof vests were not part of the uniform and today they are mandatory. He also recalls that the K-9 program started during his tenure; salary and benefits, which are better now, left much to be desired; and 8-hour shifts are now 12-hours.

One issue that Robinson faced during his almost four decades on the department is often still a problem today.

“This was always heartbreaking to me. You find good officers, they show promise and they walk out the door.”

Today, the news is better on the turnover front.

Police Chief Steve Haulmark said last spring that the department has been “fortunate recently. We have had some really good, mostly local, people apply and be hired. We are now fully staffed.

The new facility: GB Justice Center

Construction on the new police department should be complete in the summer of 2023, if all goes as planned. But it can’t come soon enough for Haulmark and his officers.

The new 20,000-square-foot facility at 12th and Baker will be much more conducive to police work, as well as welcoming to the public.

The current building opened in 1938 and the department outgrew it long ago. “The choppy layout doesn’t make any sense and there is no meeting space,” Haulmark explained.

The new digs will have a “soft” interview room for victims and people reporting crimes; the “hard” interview room will be for talking with suspects in a more sterile environment.

“We are eager to move into a modern building that will help officers do their jobs better and give them a sense of pride,” the chief summarized.



“Turnover in manpower got to be something we dealt with every day,” Robinson noted. “Some officers didn’t stay on the job after we invested not only in the Academy, but also in field training when new officers ride with an experienced colleague.



Artist rendering of future Great Bend Justice Center
(Courtesy: City of Great Bend)

PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

When the layman hears about Great Bend's Public Works Department, a couple of items that might come to mind are streets and sewers.

The layman would be right – up to a point. Streets and sewers are certainly parts of Public Works but they are only the beginning of a long list of the department's responsibilities.

The four sub-departments under the umbrella of Public Works are Streets, Engineering, Code Enforcement and Utilities. Each has numerous areas of expertise.

Historically speaking, two of the bigger changes in Public Works came when the wastewater treatment plant was completely remodeled in the mid-1990s and when it purchased the Water Department from Central Kansas Utilities in the late 1980s.

STREETS

The Street Department employs 10 people when fully staffed. They tend to signs, lights, traffic control and street painting. One seasonal employee mows the flood control levee and multiple other properties. Overall, the department takes care of the levee system, compost site, streets and storm water.

"These dedicated employees take on these many overlapping duties and work where they are needed," Public Works Director Jason Cauley summarized.

ENGINEERING

The assistant engineer oversees the Engineering Department, with guidance from Professional Engineering Consultants, Wichita. "Even though we are under the direction of PEC, we do as much as possible in-house to minimize costs," Cauley noted.



City Sewer station taken by Christina Hayes.

"We are a department that is wide ranging in our duties," said Director Jason Cauley, noting it has expanded in recent decades. "Our men and women are expected to wear many hats. We take great pride in our work and try to do the job to the best of our abilities. This is not just a job; this is our home."

"Our assistant engineer holds a master's in civil engineering and multiple Kansas Department of Transportation inspection certifications, while continuing her education."

Responsibilities include permitting, inspections, planning and compliance.

CODE ENFORCEMENT

The two Code Enforcement officers and one seasonal employee tackle a wide array of tasks on any given day.

"Code Enforcement is responsible for resolving nuisance complaints on private property," Cauley explained. "They refer to ordinances on trash, overgrown vegetation, health and safety concerns, sanitation, abandoned vehicles and unsafe/dangerous structures."

But that isn't all. The department also provides weed-control spraying at Public Works facilities, and various streets and utilities departments' structures.

UTILITIES

The Utilities Department's divisions are water, and wastewater collections and treatment.

The approximately 13 employees maintain wells and lift stations, 400,000 feet of sanitary sewer lines, 200,000 feet of storm sewer lines and the wastewater treatment plant. Other tasks include water distribution, service work with customers, and laboratory and environmental collections and testing.

"I think most local residents would be surprised that Public Works handles all of these complex city operations," Cauley said. "And we do it all with only 42 employees when fully staffed."

SANTA FE TRAIL ASSOCIATION



Tribune: A Santa Fe Trail marker sits at the Santa Fe Trail Park in Great Bend. The park's decorative sign in the background was recently added.



Provided by the Santa Fe Trail Association.



Covered wagon crossing the Arkansas River at Great Bend, Kansas. 1872

“The National Park Service assists in the design of interpretive signs, while Chapters provide funding, and purchase and install the signs,” she added. “The Quivira Chapter has established an auto tour that closely follows the Trail in its three counties.”

— Linda Colle

The Santa Fe Trail Association (SFTA) was created as a non-profit entity in 1986 to help protect and preserve the Santa Fe Trail. The U.S. Congress likewise recognized the significance of the Trail to American history by proclaiming it a National Historic Trail in 1987.

SFTA was established to protect and preserve the Trail and to promote awareness of the historical legacy associated with it. In 2021, the SFTA commemorated the 200th anniversary of the start of the Santa Fe Trail in 1821 with many events along the Trail.

The Association has always placed a high priority on educating the public. To encourage this, it has received funding for projects through an agreement with the National Park Service. These projects take place at both the National and Chapter levels.

The Santa Fe Trail extends for nearly 1,200 miles across five states. Its route is divided into segments, each represented by a Chapter.

In many ways, these Chapters are the heart and soul of the Association. Chapters also offer programs and educational opportunities, as well as projects to mark and interpret Trail sites.

The Quivira Chapter, which was organized in 1992, covers approximately 90 miles of the Trail through McPherson, Rice and Barton counties in Kansas. The Santa Fe Trail enters the Quivira Chapter at the McPherson/Marion County line. Cities within the Quivira Chapter include McPherson, Lyons and Great Bend. U.S. 56 closely follows the Trail east to west through the Chapter area.

“SFTA assists the National Park Service in mapping and marking the Trail,” said Linda Colle, Quivira Chapter president. “Chapters work with the Association to mark the Trail, and site identification signs are provided to the Chapters by the National Park Service.

Site identification signs have been installed at significant Trail sites in the Chapter and interpretive signs have been installed at the four sites near the Little Arkansas Crossing in Rice County, as well as at Ralph’s Ruts near Chase.

The Quivira Chapter also worked with the National Park Service to install a kiosk at the McPherson Museum. The kiosk identifies Trail sites east and west of McPherson, as well as an interpretive sign about the road ranches established along the Trail.

“Additional areas for interpretation have been identified and the Quivira Chapter will continue to add signs as funding becomes available,” Colle noted.



1955 NHRA Drag National.

SUNFLOWER ROD & CUSTOM ASSOCIATION

Hank Denning could talk all day about fast cars, safety features and the challenges drivers face when they fire up the engines at the Sunflower Rod & Custom Association's (SRCA) Great Bend drag strip.

But he especially enjoys sharing information about his real passion behind the racing club – the participation of two classes of junior racers, ages 8-9 and 10-18.



“They drive miniature-scale dragsters, with the same safety considerations and rules,” said Denning, former SRCA president. “Parents are super-involved but, if homework slips, that car is parked.”

The young drivers also discover how academics relate to this racing thing. For example, they learn that temperature, barometric pressure and humidity are considered before a race. Math and geometry play a big role too.

SRCA is available to visit schools.

Denning started this re-direction of the club in 2009; he joined the board of directors in 2007, and was president from 2008-22. Club founders initially called themselves the Gasket Blasters in 1954 but changed the name a short time later. In 1955, the drag strip hosted the first-ever National Hot Rod Association National Championship; in 1956, it was the first-ever American Hot Rod Association Championship.

These huge events were the start of SRCA's attraction to racers, and family and friends who come to town as spectators.

“The drag strip is a vital part of Great Bend's past and future,” Denning said.

The National Hot Rod Association /Sunflower Rod and Custom Association (NHRA/SRCA) Drag Strip was constructed circa 1942-43 as an Army Airfield during World War II. Located at the Great Bend Expo Area, the City of Great Bend purchased the base in 1946. In 1954, the SRCA was founded in Great Bend and, with city approval, was allowed to use the airfield as a drag strip. The SRCA joined the NHRA in 1955 and petitioned the NHRA to have the national drag strip championships located here. The NHRA held its first drag racing championship at this location.



"Thousands of people travel to our town every year. They shop at our stores, fuel stations, auto parts stores, and eat at our restaurants. They also stay in local motels, and visit city attractions such as the Water Park and zoo."

SRCA is a strictly volunteer, non-profit organization. Its resources are invested in the drag strip and Expo Complex, which the club built before giving it to the city. The race track is on the Kansas Historical Site list and is eligible to become a national site too.

Racing season is from May through October for old muscle cars and factory hotrods. Racing categories include E.T. Bracket, all NHRA Lucas Oil Drag Racing Series Classes, Pro Mod, Top Alcohol, JR Dragster and Street.

An abbreviated timeline

- The city acquired the B-29 Army Air Force Base, the site of the drag strip, in 1946 as military surplus.
- The track was black topped in 1958, revitalized in 1999 and resurfaced in 2000.
- A Compu-Link timing system and new scoreboards were installed in 2003.
- The new control tower was completed and 1320 Go Live Timing installed in 2010.
- Concrete barriers and additional lighting came in 2011.
- A complete track rotator enhanced the quality of the surface in 2018.
- NHRA Division 5 awarded SRCA with the Zimmer Award for its impact on drag racing in 2018.
- NHRA events over the years have included the Lucas Oil Drag Racing Series, Summit Drag Racing Series, National Dragster Challenge, King of the Track and Sunflower National Open.
- The facility also has hosted AHRA 1st Nationals, Hot Rod Magazine Drag Week, Rocky Mountain Drag Week, Colorado Flat Headers, Horsepower on the Plains, Big Bend Bike Rally and

USD 428

The first school district in Barton County was established in 1872 and the first superintendent was William Reece, who served from 1885-1890. Reece reorganized the district in 1886 and the first high school was built a couple of years later at 1112 Williams.

Today, Khris Thexton is the USD 428 superintendent. In this role, he appreciates the legacy inspired by Reece and those who came after him during the past decades.

"Yesterday, today and tomorrow, we are proud to provide students in Great Bend with a high-quality education," Thexton commented. "Our students benefit from the longstanding investment and forethought of previous generations."

"In the work of education," he added, "we strive daily to fulfill our mission to educate and prepare all students to be responsible citizens and lifelong learners."

The following list tracks the growth of USD 428. The oldest building to the newest are listed, with mention of their renovations, additions and current enrollments.



- Washington: Built in 1919, with renovations/additions in 1949 and 1982. Current enrollment is 81 preschoolers ages 3 and 4. It also is home to Barton County Special Services Administrative Offices, Parent Teacher Resource Center, Elementary Art Offices and Independent Learning Center.
 - Park Elementary: Built in 1951, with an addition in 1985. Current enrollment is 252.
 - Eisenhower Elementary: Built in 1954, with an addition in 1998. Current enrollment is 325.
 - Jefferson Elementary: Built in 1958, with additions in 1960 and 1966. Current enrollment is 301.
 - Lincoln Elementary: Built in 1958, with additions in 1963 and 1985. Current enrollment is 222.
 - Riley Elementary: Built in 1956, with an addition in 1982. Current enrollment is 297.
 - Great Bend Middle School: Built in 1958, with additions in 1998 and 2013. Current enrollment is 469.
 - Great Bend High School: Built in 1958, with additions in 1965, 1970, 1982 and 2010. Current enrollment is 927.
- Total USD 428 enrollment for 2022-23 as of Sept. 20 is 2,874.

A FEW GREAT EXTRAS



The Dolly Trolley - Sheryl Cheely purchased and donated Great Bend's 1st trolley and it arrived on November 28, 2021. Cheely is excited to provide a trolley excursion for a jaunt around town especially during Christmas time for trial of lights. The trolley is operated, maintained and rides organized by the Rosewood Roots & Wings Foundation to help with tourism and economic development opportunities in town.



Great Bend Economic Development (GBED) - Recreated in 2019 is creating big successes for Great Bend. A few projects include the downtown loft apartment projects, the new childcare facility that has been approved and Director Sara Hayden is looking to cultivate our existing manufacturers as well as grow retail business in town. Hayden said, "Great Bend is a small community on the verge of great things."

Barton Community College's Shafer Art Gallery - A staple of beautiful art in the community is the 8,000 square foot of exhibition space. This gallery was created in 1981 and boasts over 900 works of fine art. "The Shafer Gallery offers space for regional and national artists along with interactive family activities," Director David Barnes said. "Also featured is an extensive collection of bronze sculptures by L.E. Gus Shafer."



Chamber of Commerce - This member-driven group is focusing on transformative projects to help Great Bend Businesses and partners. The Chamber is working collectively with other state chambers to provide Chamber Blue to offer health insurance to business member of all sizes. "The Chamber's priority is to focus on widening the scope to ensure the community is more inclusive and diverse," said Megan Barfield Chamber Director. "We want to be a connector, catalyst and champion for all of Great Bend."

If interested in more on these topics please go to www.greatbendks.net 150th tab for the full stories!



EXPLORE GREAT BEND!

Great Bend is a wonderful place where you can see the people you know every day and meet new ones too! We have unique experiences from wildlife to arts, restaurants to fun – the only requirement – that you get out and EXPLORE! We want you to go enjoy our wonderful community and know that we are proud to call it home! This year we have celebrated our 150th with an evening outdoor dinner & car show during June Jaunt (featured on the cover), we gave away koozies to celebrate at Party in the Park, Cups during the Home for the Holidays Festival and during each city event we hid special lapel pins in participating stores for people to find and potentially win \$150 to that local store!

Special Thanks on this 150th Anniversary Project...our writer Maggie Lee Reinhardt, Administration Staff of Kendal Francis & Larami Klein, CVB Staff Members Angie Hicks and Amanda Gaddis who worked countless hours on research and finding photos. Each of the interviewees and The Barton County Historical Society for being willing to dig in and find information for us if and when we needed it. Our photographers who have contributed over the years. Our amazing graphic designer Hugo Gonzalas who was able to take a lot of text and make it beautiful! And most of all, thank you to the citizens and fans of Great Bend, KS... your love of Great Bend shines bright and will carry on for the next 150 years!

Thank you! Christina Hayes, City of Great Bend CVB Director/Community Coordinator

THE CITY OF
GREAT BEND