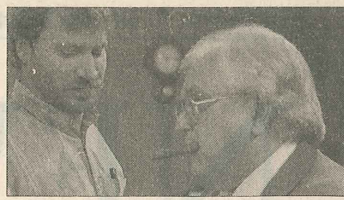


SPRINGING INTO ACTION

Area high schools are gearing up for the spring sports season / B1



FINANCIAL FITNESS

Barry Finchbaugh, KState ag economist, speaks at an investment seminar / A6

ELLSWORTH COUNTY Independent

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THURSDAY • MARCH 15, 2001

75 CENTS

Water plant project cost is \$2 million

BY LINDA MOWERY-DENNING
ELLSWORTH COUNTY INDEPENDENT

The bad news Monday for Ellsworth City Council members was the latest price tag on a project to improve the town's aging water treatment plant.

Since August, the construction estimate has gone from \$1.8 million to a little more than \$2 million in March of this year.

The good news for council members came from City Administrator Scott Moore, who said he has based his figures for months on a \$2.2 million project.

That means water rates were raised enough this past year to meet the city's debt obligation on the higher estimate.

"I think the rates are in place for these kinds of numbers," said Martha Tasker of Wilson and Co., project engineers.

Council members met for their regular meeting Monday and the water treatment plant was back on the front burner. Two weeks ago, city officials approved an

Please see **WATER PLANT**, Page A5

WHAT'S AHEAD THE CALENDAR

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 14

ALUMNI TICKETS: Tickets for the EHS Alumni Banquet go on sale today at Seitz Drug Store. Tickets also are available from committee members. For information, call Kim Seitz, (785) 472-5266 or Fonda Rush, (785) 824-6531.

THURSDAY, MARCH 15

FINE ARTS NIGHT: The Quivira Heights High School fine arts night begins at 7 p.m. at the high school in Bushton.

TEACHER CONFERENCES: Parent-teacher conferences in the Ellsworth-Kanopolis-Geneseo School District begin today and continue Friday.

SATURDAY, MARCH 17

LORDS AND LADIES: Girl Scout troops from Holyrood and Bushton will sponsor Renaissance demonstrations starting at 1 p.m. in Holyrood City Hall.

GOING GREEN: Second Chance Recycling Center, Kanopolis, plans a work day beginning at 10 a.m. at the former Ellsworth County Hospital.

SUNDAY, MARCH 18

LENTEN FISH FRY: The annual Wilson Knights of Columbus Lenten Fish Fry is 4 to 7 p.m. at the St. Wenceslaus Parish Hall, Wilson.

MONDAY, MARCH 19

SPRING BREAK: Students in USD 327 schools begin Spring Break. Spring Break begins for students in USD 328 schools in Bushton, Holyrood and Wilson.

NIGHT OF HONORS: The annual FCE Hospitality Night will begin at 7:30 p.m. at the Kanopolis Library. Vera Maydew of Lebanon will give the program on "Remember When."

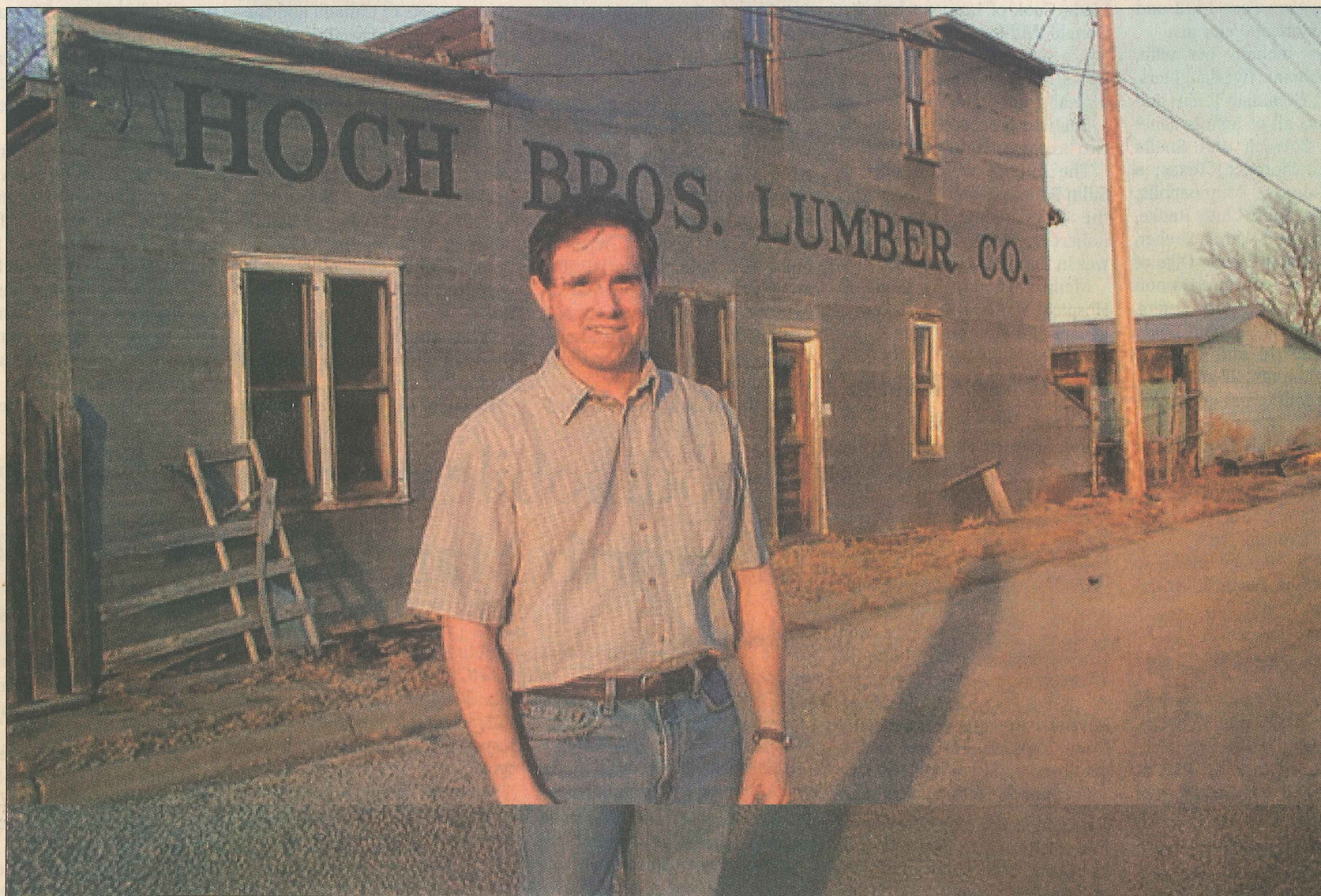
TUESDAY, MARCH 20

ANNUAL MEETING: Jon Wefald, president of Kansas State University, is the speaker for the annual meeting of Ellsworth County Economic Development, 6:30 p.m. at the Catholic Parish Hall in Wilson.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 21

BLOODMOBILE: The Red Cross Bloodmobile will be at the Presbyterian Church from 1:30 to 6:15 p.m.

CZECH COTTAGES



LINDA MOWERY-DENNING/Ellsworth County Independent

There is hardly any place in Wilson that David Criswell can't trace to his family. The old Hoch Bros. Lumber was owned by his grandmother's uncles. Criswell was in Wilson this past weekend to participate in a construction workshop. About two dozen attended the all-day session at the Wilson Senior Center.

Building green

One-time Wilson resident plans apartments made of straw bales

BY LINDA MOWERY-DENNING
ELLSWORTH COUNTY INDEPENDENT

WILSON — David Criswell is a man with a past in this Ellsworth County community of fewer than 800.

This late Friday afternoon finds him at Wilson Recreation, shaking hands with owner Jerry Klema.

"Jerry gave me my first job working for 50 cents an hour at Klema IGA," Criswell said, the memories of his early years washing over him.

Two streets over, the old Hoch Bros. Lumber building beckons. His grandmother's uncles owned the business. On other streets are buildings that housed a produce business and an implement dealership, both of which were in Criswell's family at one time.

"I've always kind of considered Wilson my home even though I only lived here a year," he said.

This past weekend, Criswell came home, to the place where his grandmother, 91-year-old Anna

Anschutz, and his Uncle Don Anschutz and family still live.

The purpose of this visit is something Criswell has thought about for a long time — the construction of a building made from straw bales. Saturday, he participated in a workshop sponsored by the Wilson Chamber of Commerce. It's title: "Building the Natural Way: A Green Building Workshop."

At the front of the room, presenter Joyce Coppinger of Lincoln, Neb., guided her audience of about two dozen through environmentally friendly construction techniques. At one point, slides of historic straw bale buildings filled a projector screen at the Wilson Senior Center — a home built in the early 1900s near North Platte in Western Nebraska, a more elaborate straw bale and concrete structure — Criswell's favorite — built in the 1930s in Alabama.

"If they can do it in Alabama and not worry about moisture, I think we can do it in Nebraska," Coppinger said. "It's just a matter of maintenance and upkeep and appreciating what you have."

Across the street, on three shaded lots, Criswell

plans to build four duplexes with eight apartments for the elderly. His Czech Cottages project will use straw bale construction and other innovative construction techniques.

With architect drawings, legal fees and other expenses, Criswell already has spent almost \$30,000 on the project, which is expected to have a finished cost of \$900,000.

He should hear in mid-May whether an application with the Kansas Department of Commerce and Housing for its tax credit program was successful. Included in the application were letters of support from Congressman Jerry Moran, state Sen. Janis Lee and Reps. Jerry Aday and Laura McClure, who attended Saturday's workshop.

If his project qualifies for the program, Criswell would receive tax credits over a 10-year period. He could either use himself or sell — say for 84 cents on the dollar — to others looking to lower their tax liability.

Please see **APARTMENTS**, Page A2

New events planned for Cowtown Festival

As Mugs Kepka and Louise Gerbitz left Topeka this past September, their minds were filled with ideas for Ellsworth's annual Cowtown Festival.

Aug. 3-5, the dates for this year's celebration, those thoughts will be translated into new activities and new attractions for the decades-old event.

"We learned a lot. We saw a lot of acts," Kepka said this past week as she talked about the convention of the Kansas Fairs Association.

Participants from across Kansas could view six acts a night, everything from magicians to clowns to singers.

The attraction scheduled to take center stage the Saturday afternoon of the Ellsworth festival will be the Kid's Ranch Rodeo from Republican City, Neb.



LINDA MOWERY-DENNING

Plains Talk

Kepka said the rodeo should fill a real need.

"We lack things for the kids — that's our biggest downfall," she said. "Every-

thing at this rodeo is with props, not real things." For the past 11 years, Kepka has organized the festival's Saturday parade. In 2000, she added the title of general chairman to her resume.

Other members of the 12-person Cowtown committee are Gerbitz, Raymond Thomas, Doug Stefek, Nancy Karst, Larry Schmidt, Charles Fulford, Roger and Lenore Samuelson, Tami McGreevy, Lynn Ramsey and Janice Fuller.

The group met Friday, and members are hoping for ideas from the public — on themes for the celebration, including button designs and parade ideas.

Another meeting is planned at 7 p.m. March 23 at the Ellsworth Golf Course.

Changes for the festival have either

been approved or are being discussed by the group.

Years ago, the celebration included a street dance on Friday night. It was stopped after rain canceled the event and the group scheduled to perform refused to give organizers another date.

This year's attraction will be the Benders, a group which specializes in music from the 1950s and 60s.

The traditional ice cream social also will be that night. No location has been chosen for the two activities.

There also is talk of moving the Saturday parade to the afternoon, leaving as the morning's main activity the fly-in at Ellsworth Municipal Airport. Again, no

Changes for the festival have either

Please see **COWTOWN**, Page A2

NEWS

Apartments

Continued from Page A1

His is the program's first application for straw bale construction. Without the credits, which should provide 60 percent of the funding needed for the duplexes, Criswell said the duplexes would not be economically feasible.

My wife and I won't be using any of the tax credits — unless we win the lottery," he said. "We'll be selling them on the open market."

Criswell and his wife, Kim, started researching straw bale construction several years ago.

At a December meeting of the Wilson City Council, Criswell offered a history of the construction methods he hopes to employ in his apartment project.

"The apartments I wish to build will contain materials and amenities that will provide an exceptionally high level of comfort and value to their residents. Wheat straw bales will provide the insulation," he said.

"If successful, these afford-

able apartments will demonstrate the safety and energy efficiency of straw bale construction as well as the potential for straw bale construction to generate income for rural farming communities."

He said straw bale construction dates back to the 1890s and the settlement of the Sand Hills of Nebraska.

It continues to be an accepted method in much of Europe and in some parts of Canada and the United States. Criswell predicted the method will grow in popularity as more citizens learn of its benefits relating to energy efficiency and safety.

"It's an education process," he said.

The Criswells considered building a house, but hesitated doing so in their home of Saline County, where Criswell recently was fired as county administrator.

"Wilson gave me a way to do this without having any effect on my job," he said.

He spent Saturdays and other

free days looking at lots here. It was the property across the street from the Senior Center that took his thoughts beyond a house to the senior apartments. The library, post office and main street are all less than a block away.

"Thinking about what would be the best use for those lots — that's when I started thinking about affordable apartments for the elderly, using straw bale construction, of course," he said.

Criswell said he never would have attempted the project had it not been for the progressive leadership shown by officials of Wilson and a foundation established to preserve the community's historic buildings. A grant from the Kansas Department of Transportation will pay for the biggest share of a project to renovate the town's Midland Hotel.

"That hotel project has been an impressive one," Criswell said. "It shows what a community can do when you have a vision to preserve what's there.

"This community has so much

going for it. There is so much potential here that isn't being realized."

In recent weeks, Criswell has had his own problems, as anyone who reads a newspaper or listens to the radio probably knows. Before he was fired by Saline County commissioners, the former Wilson resident read an almost 11-page statement critical of county government in Kansas.

Criswell is vague about his future, saying he plans "to pursue some business ideas," as opposed to another job in public administration. And then there's the project in Wilson, which Criswell hopes might someday lead him back to the place he considers home.

He attended sixth grade here, in the old school now owned by the Wilson Foundation. His father, an insurance adjuster, moved his family often.

"In the long-term, my wife and I want to move here. This is just such a neat community. We don't want to see it die," Criswell said.