

# New KAN STEP projects at Uniontown and Westmoreland

**T**he Kansas Department of Commerce KAN STEP program that is helping cities and rural water districts gain facilities that would otherwise likely not happen, has introduced six new projects in 2006. I am pleased that KRWA continues to provide valuable assistance and inspection service to the KAN STEP program. KAN STEP is unique nationally in constructing both water system projects and community facilities.

I applaud communities willing to take on the responsibility of donating labor to construct their projects. That concept is not foreign to most rural people as our forefathers used the same approach to construct remarkable churches, schools, homes and barns.

Neighbors helping neighbors, whether in good times or following a disaster, is a real asset to building community spirit and providing an ownership stake for everyone involved. People care when they contribute – and especially so when their own physical efforts help make a difference.

I would like to feature two KAN STEP projects in this article that have communities with unique and contrasting histories. These projects are the Uniontown Fire Station and the Westmoreland Fire Station. Uniontown is located in Bourbon County in southeast Kansas, and Westmoreland is located in Pottawatomie County in northeastern Kansas. Both

communities have projects of similar size.

## Westy's story

Westmoreland, often called "Westy" by locals, was an isolated area back in the mid-1800's. The first land claim in the area was at the foot of Mt. Ephraim, located just east of the present town site.

stopped in Barrett and worked at a mill where he met Elizabeth Hazen. They soon married and moved back to improve her land claim on the hill above the Oregon Trail.

By 1858 John had developed a post office in one room of their home which he named Westmoreland for his native county

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That claim was held by a Mrs. Adamson who then sold her claim to Isaac Hazen who unfortunately died shortly after from tuberculosis. At that time, an ox-pulled wagon

in Pennsylvania. Their cabin is gone but an outbuilding and part of a stable still exists from the farmstead. It is visible from the new fire station site.



Shane Holthaus  
KAN STEP Tech



A south facing view of Westmoreland's limestone courthouse built by volunteer labor when the community won a special county election after the Civil War. Several present-day Pottawatomie County communities are now much larger than Westmoreland in population size.

trip to Leavenworth for groceries took two weeks. After Mr. Hazen's death, the family moved to Barrett, Kansas, which was in Marshall County but no longer exists today. Shortly thereafter, John McKimmons, who hailed from Westmoreland County, Penn., moved west seeking work. He

The Oregon Trail was first traveled in 1827 by fur traders heading west. The trail was heavily traveled through and during the Civil War but with the opening of the Union Pacific Railroad, use dropped quickly. By 1870 it was only used locally along its length and was but a shadow of what it

was during the Trail's heyday in the 1840s and 50s.

Several quality freshwater springs in the area and especially one at the Rock Creek crossing, just south of present day Westmoreland,

established, St. George, Kansas was the largest village – but not for long. Louisville, just north of present day Wamego, grew to be the largest village so it held the county seat for several years. Soon

their labor, their knowledge of stone masonry, horses, mules, oxen and wagons to haul stone from the nearby hillside to where Mr. & Mrs. David B. Kitts had donated the city a block for the new stone court



**Above:** A covered wagon and sculptures of a yoke of oxen evoke memories of 150 years ago at the Scott Spring Park just south of Westmoreland on Highway 99. **Above right:** The Westmoreland crew of volunteers pours the floor of the new community KAN STEP fire station.

named Scott's Spring, had abundant and especially good water. It was a place for emigrant oxen trains heading west to camp, rest and replenish water barrels and water the stock. Good water was a main reason for people to stop, camp and later homestead in the area. During this time a trading post was also established there to serve the travelers.

Westmoreland began to develop the basics of a village when a decision was needed about the location of a permanent county seat. When the county was first

there was a push for the county seat to be centrally located. At a vote by the registered voters and with much difference of opinion, as in similar contests across Kansas, Westmoreland won the decision.

Of course every county seat needs a court house so several men in the community pledged to pay for the building. There had been some discussion about a bond issue to build the building but the rest of the county had vowed there would be no bond issue for a court house and was little hope of its passing. With this, local people pledged

house. The building committee worked carefully, continuously and cooperatively to complete the project. In October 1884 the new two-story building was ready to hand over to the county commission, debt free. As county seat, Westmoreland experienced a building boom for approximately 20 years.

Marian Bradley, a local historian reports, "Westmoreland survived because a lot of volunteer labor went into quietly getting things accomplished. There was a good neighborliness which was compassionate of the citizenry in an effort to survive. Such efforts took place not only in Westmoreland but

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in many of the villages and towns of the county and the state.” The spirit of the KAN STEP program obviously has historical roots in Westmoreland!

### Westmoreland Grant

The city of Westmoreland has been awarded a \$399,850 KAN STEP grant from the Kansas Department of Commerce to construct a new fire station. The KAN STEP grant will pay for a new 6,600 square-foot facility. The project has an estimated retail cost of \$675,937. This includes volunteer labor valued at \$276,087 and the KAN STEP grant which will pay for technical services and materials. The overall dimensions of the Westmoreland Fire Station project are 60 feet x 110 feet. The building includes six bay doors with one being a pull-through bay. The truck bay area also has a trough drain, lockers and storage above the additional rooms. The fire station also has additional rooms including a training center with an open kitchen, restrooms, storage room and office with a library nook.

Excavations for the footings of the Westmoreland project were made early in September. September 2 was a Saturday and it was a cold one. Later in the afternoon it started raining. It seems inevitable that one sure way to make it rain is to start digging footings. Regardless, good progress was made on the Labor Day weekend. The footings were poured on Tuesday, September 6.

“Cutting and tying rebar is just the tip of the iceberg for this project and it is sure good to finally get started,” Westmoreland Fire Chief and KAN STEP Sparkplug Jim Smith said. “I would recommend more communities take advantage of the KAN STEP Program. I also feel as if we need to keep some of our tax money at home. A project like this takes many different trade

skills and lets you know more about the people in your community.”

The community goal is to finish all concrete and have the building up and weathered in before winter arrives. The floor was poured on October 7 and framing began the following weekend.

Leah Smith, another KAN STEP Sparkplug noted, “From what I can tell, KAN STEP is the best grant program out there.”

### Uniontown students bring history to life

Uniontown in southeast Kansas was not successful in keeping a county seat and they lost their railroad as well as several businesses. But Uniontown is alive and thriving with history!

In the fall of 1999, Mr. Norm Conard, a teacher at Uniontown High School, encouraged four students to work on a year-long National History Day project which would among other things, extend the boundaries of the classroom to families in the community, contribute to history learning, teach tolerance and respect and fulfill the class motto, “He who changes one person, changes the entire world.” Mr. Conard showed them a short news clipping from a March 1994 issue of *US News and World Report*, which said, 'Irena Sendler saved 2,500 children from the Warsaw Ghetto in 1942-43.' He told the students that the article might be a typographical error, since he had not heard of this woman's story. The students began their research and looked for information sources throughout the year.

What came about was 'history in the making' for the students as well as Uniontown. They won awards in that year's Kansas History Day and went on to win an award in the National History Day competition.

The Irene Sendler in the students' presentation was still alive in Poland. She had indeed saved Jewish children from the Warsaw Ghetto and had put the Jewish children's names and addresses in a jar buried in a neighbor's garden – the student's History Day presentation play was from then after named, “Life in a Jar.”



Uniontown High School students Maria Aikins, Melissa Query, Kaitly Smith, Gage McKinnis and their Senior Performance of "The People's Poet," were recognized this past June at the 2006 National History Day Awards held at the University of Maryland.

The project evolved into an international effort that sees sponsorships from diverse groups from Kansas to Europe. The students have made hundreds of presentations of their “Life in a Jar” play nationally and internationally. Stories about the effort have been portrayed in national print and electronic media.

### History Day: Uniontown

Norm Conard's Uniontown High students have continued successful projects for National History Day. In 2001, students produced a documentary film which dealt with diversity and American music and made it to the finals at the National History Day Awards.

This year three Uniontown student teams won awards at the State History Day Competition held in Abilene, Kan. The state competition is sponsored by the Kansas State Historical Society.

One of those teams made it to the National History Day Finals this year and was awarded the *Outstanding State Senior Entry Award*. (see photo on page 96)

### Uniontown Grant

Uniontown has been awarded a KAN STEP grant through the



room, kitchen, an upper deck and storage rooms.

The Uniontown Fire Station is not as far along as Westmoreland because a local contractor backed out of an earlier commitment to assist with pouring the fire station floor. This setback has only affected the volunteers by one week. Work began in Uniontown on August 16. Footings were poured August 18 and materials for plumbing and the trench drains

can be held at this facility. This facility could be a training center for six departments within the county.”

Uniontown Fire Department Chief and Sparkplug for the project, Alvin Beerbower, said, “A good thing about the KAN STEP grant is that it is more obtainable with volunteer labor versus matching funds. One-third of all Bourbon County kids attend Uniontown High School and the old station had no capacity for growth. Now a tanker (water supply truck) can be housed here for rural support, where before there was no room.”

It is interesting to see how communities differ from one another. Go to the KRWA Web site at [www.krwa.net](http://www.krwa.net) to track the progress and read a brief



**Above left:** The Uniontown High School Trades Class sets the floor drain trough before the concrete slab floor is poured.

**Above:** A crew of volunteers assembles a rebar fence.

**Left:** The architect's rendering of the fire station front elevation.



Kansas Department of Commerce to construct a new fire station. Uniontown's project has an estimated retail value of \$653,219. The city will receive a KAN STEP grant not to exceed \$384,719. Local volunteers will contribute a total of \$268,500 in labor services. Project representatives at Uniontown are Merle Rose and Linda Gier.

Uniontown's new fire station will measure 60' x 100'. It will include three fire truck bays, one ambulance bay, a large meeting

arrived the next week. Interior footings were poured and the plumbing and trench drains are in. Grade and form work was completed October 10; the concrete floors were poured October 16.

### Volunteers make the difference

Bourbon County Rural Fire District 3 Coordinator Delwin Mumbower explained, “With the ambulance bay, response time will be cut in half and Multi-Agency Regional Training that has been mandated by federal and state law

history of all 45 KAN STEP projects KRWA has assisted with.

Enthusiasm is in abundance in all KAN STEP communities as well as in those communities and water systems where projects are in the planning stages.

Communities across Kansas are rightfully proud of their projects and they are grateful to the Kansas Department of Commerce for providing this unique program for the benefits to many rural citizens in the state.

I encourage communities interested in KAN STEP to attend the 2007 KRWA Annual Conference. There will be breakout sessions showcasing several projects and also the opportunity to visit directly with Department of Commerce representatives about KAN STEP.