

# St. Francis KAN STEP – working in the extreme!

**O**n March 14, 2006 St. Francis, Kansas population 1,400, was awarded a KAN STEP grant from the Kansas Department of Commerce to construct a new fire and EMS station. St. Francis is located in Cheyenne County in the extreme northwest corner of the state.

There's a lot of the typical small town Kansas activities in Cheyenne County. It is also one of the most beautiful and unique areas in Kansas. St. Francis is the Cheyenne County seat. The County Historical Museum located on the south side of U.S. Hwy. 36 is packed full of local history. It has a display of frontier Kansas history and an archaeological display showing how the area progressed

over the last several thousand years. A peaceful, half-mile-long, tree-shaded river walk meanders along the Republican River in St. Francis and is a great place to walk the dog or ride a bike, even during the hottest part of the summer. The Arikaree

Breaks located in northern Cheyenne County are well worth the short trip from St. Francis to take a look. This natural wonder is an area of extremely rough terrain, with its deep ravines and gullies, is a marked contrast to the plains generally associated with the surrounding country. The breaks are 36 miles long and approximately two to three miles wide. The Arikaree Breaks are

included on the preliminary list of "8 Wonders of Kansas" by the Kansas Sampler Foundation.

When a community's TV news and weather forecasts come from a Denver station, it really is western Kansas! St. Francis residents regularly hear comments by neighbors that eastern Kansans

consider Hays to be extreme western Kansas. Well, when a St. Francis resident lives another four hours west from Hays on the road to Colorado – that's what "extreme" means around here. On our visits to St. Francis, we've definitely noticed this and will not get mixed up on directions and descriptions again!

## The project gets off the ground

The first work was completed on the St. Francis project in the spring of 2006. The first work was clearing a few trees in order for

*Left: This section of the 36-mi. long by 3-mi. wide Arikaree Breaks can be seen from a viewing area due north of St. Francis.*



*Shane Holthaus  
KAN STEP Tech*



*On November 4, 2006, volunteer Wade Krien was lying down on the job. Really he was screeding off a drain area in the EMT side of St. Francis's new KAN STEP building. Quite a contraption but it worked great and only took a few minutes to put together. The building steel was scheduled to be delivered the following December 6.*

the dirt work to begin. By the time the bids were received and the contracts were signed and returned by the suppliers it was time to begin. The first concrete was poured on September 29, 2006 after trenching the footings and doing the backhoe work for the column supports. The overall dimensions of the St. Francis building project are 80 feet x 140 feet for a total of 11,200 sq. feet of usable floor space.

With the footings complete the rough-in plumbing came next.



Volunteer and local electrician Sam Miller and volunteer Kelly Frewen finalize the placement of four inch conduit before pouring concrete. Sam and Kelly are project core volunteers. The project's concrete was supplied by St. Francis Sand and Redi-Mix.



An area Girl Scout Brownie troop tours the existing firestation

The building includes three fire bay doors and a two-door bay for EMT service. The fire truck and EMT bay areas also have a trough drain and there is storage above the many additional rooms. The building's additional rooms include meeting, kitchen, restrooms, file storage rooms, separate EMT and fire station offices and an emergency preparedness office. Cheyenne County Emergency Preparedness Coordinator Gary Rogers and project volunteer commented about the construction, "It is going to be really nice to have an efficient, more spacious office and workspace."

The first floor concrete was poured on October 30, 2006. Other pours were finished within the next

week. The concrete work was completed just in time because of the unexpected blizzard that hit western Kansas in December.

#### Blizzard causes delay

The snow storm was a drought buster for an area that had been dry for eight years but the unwelcome effects of that snow and ice storm lasted well into 2007. The rough winter weather brought other delays as well but the volunteers kept their spirits up

and realized there would be a lot of catch-up work to do.

"After all, the building is not small by any means," Mayor Scott Schultz exclaimed. "Look at the size of your building and then realize the hours it will take to build it. A little time in between isn't always a bad thing on a building this big," he added.

In the following months, the red iron and tin were completed in two phases. While waiting to

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**Above:** Volunteer Gary Rogers has just completed pulling the communications wire into the EMT office. Gary is also the Cheyenne County Emergency Management Director, wiring in his office is next.



**Above right:** Wyoming Air National Guard loadmasters aboard a C-130 Hercules aircraft watch as a 1-ton hay bale lands near a herd of cows during one of the emergency feeding missions over southeast Colorado and western Kansas during the first week of January 2007.

from needing a time extension from the Department of Commerce. Although St. Francis will be pushing the finish date of March 14, 2008 a little, all of the material will be purchased and only a few minor details will need to be finished. One example of a weather delay is the stone masonry work on the front of the building that cannot be completed while the weather is so cold.

07 brought 15 feet snowdrifts from the over 30 inches of snow. Over 8,000 power poles were downed and 44 western Kansas counties were immediately declared a disaster area by Governor Sebelius. With roads impassable, western states' National Guard aircraft were brought in to assist Kansas Air Guard units in dropping hay for starving livestock. Auxiliary power units from the Guard and every supplier in the region were called on to keep water and wastewater systems in operation. Businesses were closed because employees were not able to get out of their driveways as many were stranded in their homes. The snow blanketed the western Kansas counties for nearly three months.

This disaster was a huge delay because the St. Francis project had only the building foundation and floor concrete poured. While waiting on building material to be delivered the weather moved in and didn't let up, sending the project well into 2007.

"When it snows that much there are plenty of other issues to take care of," Mayor Schultz explained. "Some of the volunteers were stranded away from town because of the weather, older folks were not able to make it out to help, farmers stayed away



**Left:** Sparkplug J.R. Landenberger operates the St. Francis bucket truck helping to lift purlins to the roof beams for final installation.

install the roof on the building, a crew of ambitious St. Francis volunteers built walls for the interior rooms off-site and hauled them to the building for erection after the roof was finished. This creative thinking saved the project

Finishing it will have to wait until it warms a little.

Many projects start off like gangbusters but few can sustain the increased frenzy of activity during an entire project. St. Francis is no exception. The winter of 06-

because chores took most of the morning and they had their own problems to deal with the rest of the day.”

### Volunteer updates

Mayor Schultz summed up feelings on the project that are shared by St. Francis volunteers. “We are holding our own. This project is just like a business; you will have peaks and valleys. We

three-month-long tough snowy winter and then finish a community project on time.

### Project details

The Kansas Department of Commerce \$390,300 grant covered building material costs, architectural fees, grant administration costs and inspection and technical assistance to volunteers. The facility has an estimated retail cost of \$737,970. Volunteer labor on the project is valued at \$347,670. To date, a total of 11,213 volunteer hours have been spent by St. Francis volunteers on the project.

Dan Hall, BG Consultants of Manhattan is the architect. Grant administration is provided by Michelle Kieffer of Northwest Kansas Planning and Development. The volunteer "sparkplugs"

for the project are St. Francis City Council Member Dale Weeks and St. Francis City Superintendent J. R. Landenberger. Kansas Rural Water Association is providing inspection services and technical assistance to the volunteers.

KAN STEP is a self-help program that enables small communities to make major infrastructure improvements. Local people volunteer labor and services or "sweat equity," while the Kansas Department of Commerce provides funding for materials and technical services. An acronym for Kansas Small Towns Environment Program, KAN STEP gives small Kansas communities an opportunity to do projects they couldn't otherwise afford. The funding is provided through the federal Community Development Block Grant program.



Volunteer Fire Chief George Harper looks on as volunteer Kelly Frewen reviews the electrical blueprint. Chief Harper encouraged the community to look into KAN STEP after seeing positive results in a neighboring town.

could not do this project without the KAN STEP program. It is a really good tool for communities like ours,” he said.

In my five years at KRWA, working with KAN STEP, my belief in rural community volunteerism could not be stronger. As Mayor Schultz said, “Volunteerism is a great tool and has a great history in Kansas.” In St. Francis I’ve also found another “extreme,” and it is a word that describes the people of the community and the way they work. When they can, they work sun-up to sundown; it’s the way they get things done. It’s the way a community can get through a

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