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District attorney candidates square off at forum

BY RICK PLUMLEE
The Wichita Eagle

Dealing with spending cuts sparked a lively discussion Thursday during a forum for the candidates for Sedgwick County district attorney.

"There is waste in that office," Kevin O'Connor, a former deputy district attorney for the county, told the Wichita Crime Commission

during the nonprofit's forum. "There are people in that office who are at the administrative level who are making \$20,000 to \$30,000 more than lawyers who are prosecuting cases.

"And that's just wrong. There are too many administrators in that office."

Marc Bennett, his opponent in the Aug. 7 Republican primary and a current deputy district attorney,

said, "This isn't the Harvey County attorney office with three attorneys and a secretary. This is a major enterprise. So to run it without administrators at all is folly."

Bennett and O'Connor are the only two candidates, so the race will be decided in the primary. Nola Foulston is retiring after 24 years as the district attorney.

The District Attorney's Office has a \$9.1 million budget for 2012.

Most of its funding comes from Sedgwick County, which is seeking to cut spending overall to eliminate a \$9.3 million deficit by the end of next year.

Bennett said that of the office's 120 employees, 70 are administrators and 50 are attorneys.

O'Connor said he had a "fundamental difference" with the way money was spent in the office.

"I understand you need adminis-

trators," he said, "but we're not electing a district administrator. We're electing a district attorney ... someone to fight crime."

Bennett said, "I agree we can save money. I'm open to anything, but I also have my eyes open to reality."

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Lessons in riding, living

Wichita's Lose the Training Wheels bicycle camp serves 40 adults and children who have disabilities

BY KATIE GILBAUGH
The Wichita Eagle

R.J. Beste decided he was tired of riding his bike. R.J. is 12 and has Down syndrome. Marty Johnson, one of R.J.'s two spotters at the Lose the Training Wheels bike camp, tried to motivate R.J. to get back on his bike.

"This isn't walking camp," Johnson told him. "This is biking camp."

R.J. got back on the bike and continued circling the Wichita Ice Center.

"I enjoy cycling as an activity, so I see the health benefits and just enjoy it," Johnson said. "If I can do something on my part to help someone else enjoy cycling, then I'm glad to do it."

Lose the Training Wheels is a nonprofit that offers camps for people with disabilities nationwide.

The Independent Living Resource Center has sponsored the camp for the seven years it has come to Wichita.

Eight campers on specialized bikes ride inside the Wichita Ice Center during each session. The ice is covered with flooring provided by Intrust Bank Arena.

There are five sessions daily, each lasting 75 minutes. The camp, which began Monday and ends today, served 40 campers ages 8 to 53.

"The biggest part is inclusion," said Deb Umberger, communications and public relations coordinator for the Independent Living Resource Center. "For many kids, a big rite of passage is learning how to ride a bike. If their neighbors and siblings can and they can't, then they feel left out."

Johnson said he had heard about the program in years past but made the decision to volun-



Volunteers Marty Johnson and Jenny LaSalle work with R.J. Beste, 12, during the 2012 Lose the Training Wheels-Wichita bike camp for children and adults with disabilities.

teer this year. "I thought I'd be too busy," Johnson said, "but this year I figured they could get along without me at work for one hour. I just made the commitment to help, and I'm glad I did it."

In addition to being a volunteer, Johnson recruited others. After sending an e-mail about Lose the Training Wheels to a few friends, he said he had 10 people sign up immediately.

"Most have full time jobs or are taking time away from work to do this," Johnson said. "I ... encourage anybody just to volunteer with people with special needs. It's very rewarding."

Campers begin the program by riding bikes with a roller instead of a rear wheel. The rollers allow the campers to learn stability. The goal is to have everyone riding two-wheel bicycles by the



The Independent Living Resource Center has sponsored the camp for the seven years it has come to Wichita.

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Mike Hutmacher/The Wichita Eagle
Jim Park, right, lost his wallet on I-135 and John W. Thompson found it and turned it in to police. Park is now helping Thompson find a job.

Wallet recovery may open door to job

BY STAN FINGER
The Wichita Eagle

John W. Thompson was on his way home to Haysville after visiting his mother at the Catholic Care Center in Bel Aire when he first saw the wallet.

It was lying in the southbound lanes of I-135 near the exit for 29th Street North shortly after noon on Tuesday, and vehicles kept running it over.

"That bothered me," Thompson said. "Somebody might be missing that wallet, he thought, so he decided to rescue it."

He exited at 21st Street, looped back around and parked on the shoulder of the outside southbound lane, braving numerous roofing nails nearby.

"I thought, 'I'm going to get a flat tire saving this guy's wallet,'" Thompson said.

He waited until there was a lull in traffic and grabbed the wallet from the outside lane. It had begun to split apart already from being run over so many times.

Not knowing where else to go with it, Thompson drove to the Patrol South bureau at Pawnee and Broadway and turned it in to Mandy Hebert. He hadn't taken anything out of it, he told Hebert, but officers may need to go back to I-135 and look for money or credit cards that had been knocked out of the wallet by traffic.

Hebert, the customer service clerk for Patrol South, found identification in the wallet and called the owner.

Jim Park thought it was a prank. Yes, he had misplaced his wallet, but he was convinced it was somewhere in his house in Willowbend in northeast Wichita.

But when he started asking specific questions about the found wallet, details started falling into place. Yes,

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County population surpasses half-million

BY SARAH TUCKER
The Wichita Eagle

The milestone passed quietly some time last year.

There was no celebration, and hardly anyone noticed.

Last year was the first time Sedgwick County's population reached the half-million mark, according to U.S. Census Bureau estimates released on Thursday.

Every year after each census, the bureau calculates the nation's population from many sources, including IRS data for migration and vital statistics.

Sedgwick County reached

501,076 people, up 2,711 from 2010, according to the 2011 estimates.

Wichita also increased in size, growing from 382,368 people to an estimated 384,445 in 2011. The Wichita Metropolitan Statistical Area, which encompasses Sedgwick, Butler, Harvey and Sumner counties, grew as well, to an estimated 625,526 people.

While increased population and population milestones are important, the growth rate of the city is what matters, said Jeremy Hill, director of Wichita State University's Center for Economic Development and Business Research.

"Growth is a reflection of the regional economy," Hill said. "If the population growth slows, housing slows because there's less demand, less population accumulating from year to year."

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the city grew 1.1 percent each year during the past decade, and the Wichita metro area grew 0.9 percent each year during the past decade.

Both Sedgwick County and Wichita's growth rates so far are estimated at 0.54 percent for the past year.

Hill isn't worried, however, because the growth rate isn't that slow compared to the historical average.

Although it reached the half-million mark, Sedgwick County isn't among the fastest-growing counties in Kansas. The top two spots go to Geary and Riley counties, ranked 71st and 79th in the nation, respectively.

The five Kansas cities with the fastest growth rates are Ogden, Junction City, Grandview Plaza, Manhattan and Dodge City.

Kansas' overall population also increased, from 2,853,118 in the 2010 census to 2,871,238 according to the 2011 estimates.

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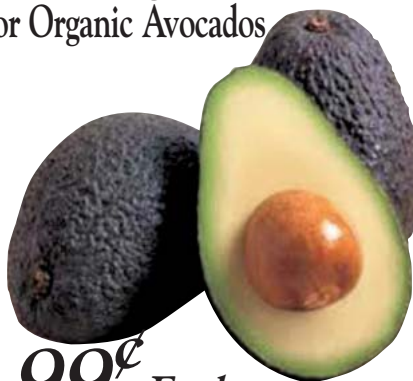
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