

ICT play celebrates 'Motherhood'

By RICHARD LUKEN
The Iola Register

Two incontrovertible truths are evident at the Iola Community Theatre Warehouse this month.

1. Motherhood is a tough business.

2. The pool of talented actors in Iola is far deeper than we ever could have imagined.

Three newcomers to the ICT scene — Ashley Widener, Teagan Kern and Tracy Keagle — take turns connecting with the audience through a series of monologue-based skits on the ins and outs of maternal life with "Motherhood Out Loud."

The production, which opened last week, runs at 7 p.m. Friday and Saturday at the ICT Warehouse. Tickets sell for \$15 for adults and \$8 for students. (It should be noted the play features several instances of strong language and subject matter is geared for mature audiences.)

That caveat aside, "Motherhood Out Loud" is a must-see. See **MOTHERS** | Page A5

'Motherhood Out Loud'
Friday and Saturday
ICT Warehouse



Above, Teagan Kern, center, demonstrates how she'll react during a graduation ceremony during a scene from the Iola Community Theatre production of "Motherhood Out Loud," which runs Friday and Saturday at the ICT Warehouse. Also in the scene with Kern are Jaime Westervelt, left, and Tracy Keagle. At right, Ashley Widener depicts a mother struggling to find sleep while caring for a newborn. REGISTER/RICHARD LUKEN



Budget includes fees for attorneys

By JOHN HANNA
The Associated Press

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — Republican lawmakers in Kansas have earmarked \$50,000 for the Legislature to hire its own attorneys on school finance issues, leading Democrats to speculate Wednesday that GOP leaders plan to defy a recent state Supreme Court order on education funding.

The money was included in the final version of a plan to keep the state budget balanced through June 2017. Both chambers approved the package Wednesday, sending it to Republican Gov. Sam Brownback; the votes were 68-53 in the House and 22-16 in the Senate.

The Supreme Court last See **STATE** | Page A5

Religious leaders object to tougher welfare rules

By ANDY MARSO
KHI News Service

A brief theological debate broke out Tuesday in the Kansas Legislature as religious leaders voiced opposition to a bill placing further restrictions on welfare recipients.

The legislation, House Bill 2600, is a sequel to last year's Hope, Opportunity and Prosperity for Everyone (HOPE) Act. Both bills place stricter limits on who can receive cash assistance and food stamps and for how long. They also place restrictions on things like using benefits to take cruises or continuing to receive benefits after hitting the lottery — scenarios critics say are far-fetched and intended to paint recipients in a negative light.

Moti Rieber, a rabbi who leads the group Kansas Interfaith Action, opened his testimony to the House Health and Human Services Committee with a biblical quote from the book of Deuteronomy that urged legislators to be "open-handed" to the poor.

Rieber said he and the other religious leaders in his group believe welfare legislation should not be punitive or impugn the human

See **RULES** | Page A5

Conservation efforts recognized

By BOB JOHNSON
The Iola Register

Allen County's Conservation District celebrated its 75th anniversary with a look at Kansas history during its annual meeting Wednesday evening at the Bass Community Hall.

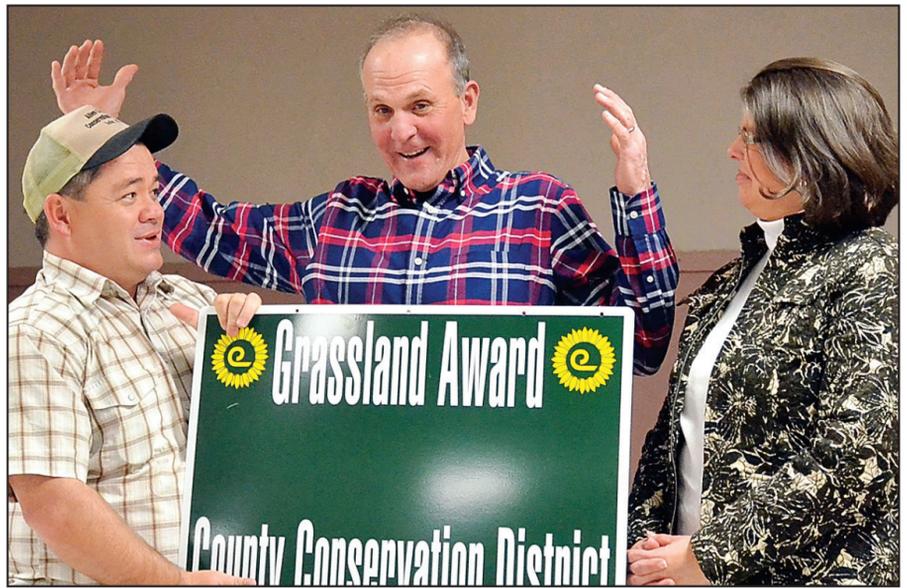
Awards and a meal were sponsored by Landmark, Community National and Great Southern banks. Sam and Helen Rife, rural Mildred, were recognized for soil and water conservation, Craig and Sussie Sharp, rural Humboldt, for grassland management.

Jeff Davidson, a water resource contractor from Eureka, entertained with commentary and songs, some from his pen, about early days of the state. He was named Kansas cowboy poet champion in 2013.

Davidson pointed out the Santa Fe and Oregon trails both crossed Kansas to connect people and trade goods with Santa Fe, N.M., and the Pacific Northwest in the decades immediately preceding the Civil War.

The Pony Express also had a strong presence in Kansas, from the start of its 1,960-mile journey in Missouri to Sacramento, Calif., carrying mail for \$5 a piece. Record delivery, of Lincoln's inaugural address in 1861, covered the distance in seven days and 17 hours.

Advent of the telegraph See **EFFORTS** | Page A6



Above, Dane Varney, left, presents a grassland management award to Craig and Sussie Sharp Wednesday at the Allen County Conservation District annual meeting. Below are soil and conservation winners Helen and Sam Rife. At right, Fred Davidson provided the musical entertainment. REGISTER/BOB JOHNSON



Quote of the day

"God is in the details."
— Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, American architect



Hi: 72 Lo: 53

Motherhood: Iola Community Theatre play draws laughs

Continued from A1

erhood" takes the audience along a wondrously touching — and frequently hilarious — journey through life as a mom.

"MOTHERHOOD Out

Loud" is based on a book with 14 authors. The play is segmented into chapters, the first on new mothers giving birth; the second on the first day of school; the third on "sex talk," the fourth on seeing their children

as adults, and the fifth and final on motherhood now that their children have grown.

From the opening fugue on giving birth to Widener's touching final exposition on what it's like as a young mother,

the two-hour production runs at a brisk pace.

Each of the three main stars — none of their characters have names — is consistently captivating, warranting an occasional chuckle, or a heart-warming "aw-

www" from the crowd.

For example, Widener perfectly depicts a mother yearning for sleep in one scene while lying on the floor next to her infant's crib; in another, she speaks about her daughter's first period.

Kern, meanwhile, reflects on the angst of having a young son more interested in wearing girls' dresses for an upcoming school event; in another she laments on her inability to connect as a would-be stepmother to her new beau's children.

And Keagle hilariously notes how problematic it is to be at a playground with other mothers she cannot stand, yet feels forlornly left out when her child isn't invited to a play date with their children. In another cringe-inducing oratory, she recounts trying to connect with her son's first date as she drives the young couple home.

THE PRODUCTION isn't limited to those three.

Bryan Johnson, one of only two ICT veterans in the show, portrays a father in many of the scenes, and a son in one

of the more touching segments of an older mother who decides to go back to school.

Another ICT returnee, Jaime Westervelt, is on stage for only two scenes, but she shines in both, the first in a rapid-fire-discussion about graduation day, the second a powerful soliloquy on the torment facing the mother of a son shipped off to war.

Last but not least, little Indira Trester portrays a young child in several of the scenes, including an uproarious "interview" with Keagle as her brutally frank great-grandmother highlights the final chapter.

PUTTING THE pieces together for "Motherhood" is director Angie Whitmore, who previously helmed "Steel Magnolias."

Sam Terhune serves as stage manager.

They ensure the play proceeds seamlessly from one chapter to the next.

The end result is a deeply moving production. It may even prompt a few in the audience to seek out their mothers for a reaffirming hug.

Rules: Religious leaders speak out

Continued from A1

dignity of people in poverty.

"I would put it to you that HB 2600, and actually its predecessor legislation as well, does not comport with these principles," he said. "It does not address the causes of poverty, it does not help people get out of poverty and it presumes the bad intentions of people in need."

Rep. Randy Powell, a Republican from Olathe, said he's also a "man of faith" and urged Rieber to take a broader look at the Bible as a whole.

"I know the Apostle Paul in the New Testament, which is something you might not be referring to but it's biblical also, he talks about if a man doesn't work, let him not eat," Powell said. "So from what I can read, what we're looking at doing is just ensuring that we have proper stewardship."

Powell pointed to written testimony from Chuck McGinnis, a 52-year-old father of three who praised the Kansas Department for Children and Families for helping him find work with the Ellis County Road and Bridge Division after his oilfield job dried up.

Rieber quoted extensively from the United Methodist Church's principles of welfare reform document and said he could provide the committee mem-



Rep. Randy Powell, left, a Republican from Olathe, and Rep. Kent Thompson, R-LaHarpe, and other members of the House Health and Human Services Committee are considering a bill that would place stricter limits on cash assistance and food stamps. KHI/ANDY MARSO

"What I do find troubling is what I judge as a lack of respect for the struggles of persons living in poverty."

— Sister Therese Bangert, Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth

bers with similar statements from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

He said the Legislature's anti-poverty work should focus on investing in education and job training and maintaining a minimum wage that ensures employment is more rewarding than welfare.

He argued against "arbitrary" time limits on how long Kansans can receive benefits, saying they don't account for individual employment circumstances.

Sister Therese Bangert, a nun with the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, also spoke against the new bill, saying legislators didn't seem to understand how difficult it already is for Kansans to access benefits for which they're eligible.

For example, she said that in 2011, 31 percent of Kansans who were eligible for food stamps under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, were not receiving them.

"What I do find trou-

bling is what I judge as a lack of respect for the struggles of persons living in poverty," she said.

Bangert asked the committee to amend HB 2600 to undo a provision in last year's legislation that prohibited Kansans convicted of a drug-related felony from receiving welfare assistance in their lifetimes.

She said that prohibition was particularly unfair to people with mental illness who self-medicate with illegal drugs out of desperation — including military veterans who "come back from the wars we send them to" suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

The House committee took no action on HB 2600 Tuesday. A companion bill, Senate Bill 372, has advanced out of committee and awaits Senate action.

State: Attorney fees

Continued from A1

week struck down a 2015 law that determines how the state distributes more than \$4 billion a year in aid to its 286 school districts. The justices said the law violates the state constitution by shorting poor districts, and it ordered lawmakers to boost such aid by June 30 or face having schools shut down.

"A decision's been reached," Rep. Jim Ward, a Wichita Democrat and attorney said during the House's debate on the budget plan. "Hiring legal representation is usually done when you have another appeal avenue or you're planning on disregarding the court's decision and you need lawyers to keep you out of jail."

Senate Minority Leader Anthony Hensley, a Topeka Democrat, also suggested that Republicans are preparing to defy the court, creating a "constitutional crisis."

"They need legal counsel to steer them through it," he said after his chamber's vote.

But top Republicans dismissed such talk.

"We need to gather information on the best way to move forward," said House Appropriations Committee Chairman Ron Ryckman Jr., an Olathe Republican. "Having proper representation is beneficial."

The Supreme Court ruled in a lawsuit against the state pursued by the Dodge City, Hutchinson, Wichita and Kansas City, Kansas, school districts since 2010.

Attorney General Derek Schmidt's office is representing the state. It reported Wednesday that as of Jan. 26, it had paid the Wichita law firm of Hite, Fanning & Honeyman nearly \$1.36 million and paid another \$78,000 to state Solicitor General Stephen McAllister.

The Republican-dominated Legislature is not named as a defendant in the lawsuit.

"The Legislature has no direct representation," said Senate Ways and Means Committee Chairman Ty Masteron, an Andover Republican, adding that the appropriation is "prudent."

The Republican-backed school funding law enacted last year junked the state's old, per-pupil funding formula in favor of stable "block grants" that largely froze aid, outside of contributions to teachers' pensions. The new law also allowed the state to avoid an unexpected \$54 million increase in aid to poor districts called for by the old formula.

Schools composed their budgets for the 2014-15 academic year based on the old formula and, in response to the new law, districts cut programs and jobs and ended the school year early.

Mark Tallman, a lobbyist for the Kansas Association of School Boards, said it's not clear how much extra money the court expects lawmakers to spend.

The Kansas Department of Education estimates that restoring the aid for the 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years would cost a total of \$110 million, but that doesn't include the \$54 million districts were shorted for 2014-15.

Asked whether making plans to hire attorneys showed that GOP lawmakers plan to defy the Supreme Court, Tallman said, "Our expectation is that the Legislature will comply."

"I mean, I think the Legislature would expect school districts to comply with the decision," Tallman told reporters during a briefing.

Schmidt said in a statement that he advised the Legislature to appoint its own legal counsel.

"The Legislature needs its own counselor as it works through the many complex policy options," Schmidt said.

Kansas Press Association It Can Wait® Editorial Contest

The National Safety Council estimates that texting while driving is involved in 200,000+ vehicle crashes each year, often causing injuries and deaths and new research shows that as many as 7-in-10 people may engage in smartphone activities while driving.

However, there is an opportunity to change this behavior. Ninety percent of teen drivers say they would stop if a friend in the car asked them and 78 percent say that they are likely not to text and drive if friends tell them it is wrong.

The Kansas Press Association (KPA) and local newspapers will sponsor a contest underwritten by AT&T that challenge Kansas middle school and high school students across the state to write an editorial or opinion column highlighting the dangers of engaging in smart-phone activities while driving and encouraging their peers to take the It Can Wait pledge.

Write an editorial or opinion column about the dangers of smartphone driving distractions

- The piece will answer the question, "Why is it important to take the It Can Wait pledge to keep your eyes on the road, not on your phone?"
- The piece will highlight the dangers of engaging in smartphone activities like texting, using social media and taking pictures while driving.
- The piece must include the following call to action, "Take the pledge to keep your eyes on the road, not on your phone at ItCanWait.com."

Who can participate in this contest?

The contest is open to all students enrolled in any Kansas public or private middle school and high school.

How are entries to be submitted?

Entries may be emailed, mailed or hand delivered.

Entries should be sent to danstaett@kspress.com or at the KPA office, 5423 SW 7th, St. Topeka, KS 66606.

Who will judge this contest?

The KPA will then determine the statewide winners.

What is the prize for the statewide winners of both the middle and high school categories?

The statewide prize will include \$500, a tour of the School of Journalism and the KPA Office, and a dinner for the students and their parents with the leadership of AT&T, the KPA annual conference & banquet.

Contest Schedule:

Jan. 11, 2016	Doug Anstaett, Kansas Press Association Executive Director, announces start of Campaign.
Jan. 13, 2016	Contest entry period begins. - Announced by local newspapers in paper and/or directly with schools.
Feb. 25, 2016	Contest entry period ends.
Feb. 29, 2016	Winners announced.

