

By Jan Schultz

The Imperial Republican

Water and crops.

With the importance of water and agriculture in this area, those two components of life in Chase County are entwined.

And, they just so happen to be the year's top two stories in 2008 covered by The Imperial Republican.

It's the seventh consecutive year that water and Chase County's involvement in the Republican River Compact disagreements with Kansas have been at the No. 1 spot in the year's ranking of top stories.

One must go back to 2001 to find a different year's No. 1 story than this area's continuing involvement in the water issues.

In 2008, Compact compliance issues went to a higher level than just local discussions, as the Nebraska Supreme Court and an arbitrator to help the two sides come to agreement got involved.

The year's No. 2 story is closely entwined with No. 1.



Thanks to the availability of irrigation, along with generous summer rains and local producers' continued efficiencies on the farm, the wheat and corn harvests had better than average yields last year. Then, prices for those two crops hit record highs in June.

Placing third in the rankings, by just a few votes, was the 2008 U.S. Presidential race, which overshadowed some local contests that elected a new county commissioner and two new Chase County school board members.

While it was the third-ranked story of the year overall, the election received the highest number of first place votes, five, from the staff.

The other top 10 stories, in order of their rankings, included reaching the half-million dollar mark in city sales tax proceeds, fuel prices, completion of pool complex, delay of football field light installation, demolition of Broadway school building, arrival of fulltime family practice physician Dr. Doug Nicholson and June's stormy month of hail damage.

The 10 staff members of The Imperial Republican choose the top stories of the previous year, ranking a group of 15 presented them by the editorial department.

No. 1—Supreme Court, arbitrator get involved in water issues

The constitutionality of the property tax portion of Nebraska's water bill, LB 701 (passed in 2007), went before the Nebraska Supreme Court in late 2008, while disagreements between Kansas and Nebraska on Compact compliance issues went to non-binding arbitration. Nebraska and Kansas officials agreed with the selection of Karl Dreher of Littleton, Colo., as the arbitrator, who ruled in December in favor of Nebraska on two key issues—limiting damages claimed by Kansas and examining the accuracy of the water models used to determine compliance.

The Supreme Court has yet to render a decision on the constitutionality of LB 701's property tax portion challenged by a McCook-based group, Friends of the River.

No. 2 Crop prices bring smiles

Chase County producers were in good moods this summer, as the price for wheat peaked at \$8.75 in late June and corn also hit a high day price of \$7 that month. Both corn and wheat harvests were later than usual—wheat due to the plentiful summer rains, and corn, mostly due to a very late hard freeze. Yields from the two crops grown here were average or above.

No. 3 U.S. Presidential Election

Local races and issues in Chase County took a back seat to the U.S. Presidential Election, which saw the Democrats nominate the first African American, Barack Obama, as their candidate while Republicans nominated their first female vice presidential candidate in Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin, who ran with Sen. John McCain. While the Obama/Biden ticket won the national vote, Chase County and Nebraska overwhelmingly went for McCain/Palin.

No. 4 City sales tax milestone

After September's city sales tax proceeds were added, the total since the one percent city tax began in April, 2007, surpassed the half million dollar mark. July, 2008, city tax receipts remain the highest one-month total at \$38,195.20.

No. 5 Fuel prices

It's the second consecutive year fuel prices ranked in the top 10. However, prices in 2008 hit the pocketbook much harder than 2007, as unleaded gasoline eclipsed the \$4 mark in July. The prices eased considerably by year's end to around the \$1.67 mark.

No. 6 Pool complex finished

After numerous delays, the new pool/lockerroom/bathhouse complex was not put into use in 2008 as expected but the structure is substantially complete. The general contractor will be back in the spring to complete some "punch list" items and will be assessed some penalties for missing the completion deadline. Chase County's football team was able to use the lockerrooms on a limited basis for practices.

No. 7 Football field lights

Height of the four football field lights at the East 9th St. field and their effect on the airport's zoning regulations and approaches remained an issue all year. Football games at the new site were not played there as planned. In November, school board members indicated the poles will be submitted to meet all requirements; the southwest pole has been approved by the airport zoning board.

No. 8 Old school demolition

A mainstay on Imperial's Broadway street came down in September, as the old Imperial Grade School building was razed. The original section was built in 1915. Plans being discussed for the now-empty lot between 7th and 8th Sts., are for a new fire hall/EMS building that will also house the county emergency manager's office and possibly a tornado shelter.

No. 9 New family practice doctor

Dr. Doug Nicholson, a family practice physician, joined the staff at Chase County Community Hospital/Clinic. Dr. Doug Boyer started seeing patients in late December, 2007, on a permanent part-time basis. Three family practice doctors are now on staff, and were joined by several new specialists, as well, in 2008.

No. 10 Stormy June

June was a stormy month, with several storms hitting in the first half of the month. Large hail, some measuring near baseball and softball size, hit Champion and Enders in June 4-5 storms. A tornado also damaged property. Damage to homes, vehicles, pivots and crops were estimated in the millions. Lamar also was hit with a damaging storm in mid-June.

The other five top stories rounding out the top 15 were:

No. 11—Phoned-in bomb threat at Chase County Schools in April; building was evacuated. Remains under investigation.

No. 12—Newer Imperial Theatre seats, after major fund-raising campaign.

No. 13—Death of former Imperial resident Corrie Wood, who died of a homicide in Grant. Investigation continues.

No. 14—Chase County Schools' implementation of the Career Academy, offering students both a high school diploma and associate's degree after a fifth year of high school.

No. 15—Imperial's vote in November not to add fluoride to its drinking water.