

## RELAXED ATMOSPHERE PLANNED FOR COUNCIL MEMBERS

On the premise that most people like to wind down after a long, busy work week, the Agri-Business Council of Wichita (ABCW) will hold a membership social from 4-7 p.m., May 21 in the private room at Louie's, 21<sup>st</sup> and Webb Rd., Wichita.

The council is known for its networking opportunities and ABCW Vice Chair Roger Kepley says he believes a social will provide the best setting for a low-key, non structured event.

"The mission of the Council is to network and we've held many successful luncheons that served this purpose," Kepley says. "For those whose schedules don't accommodate a lunch meeting, we are extending the networking benefit to a Friday evening, come-and-go social to appeal to people's schedules."

The May 21 event will offer hors d'oeuvres and a cash bar for attendees. Kepley says he expects the location to change but the time frame of 4-7 p.m., every other month, would be consistent.

"When the work week winds down, people benefit from an informal sharing of best practices whether it's issues or challenges they're facing," he says. "Or if I have a customer with a need and you offer a service to meet their need, a social atmosphere allows us to connect and introduce each other to our catalog of resources." —

## BUSINESS PROFILE: ANDALE FARMERS COOP

A coop is more than a place filled with grain and fertilizer. It is also a location for local farmers to discuss commodity prices and swap stories.

Steve Shaver is the general manager of Andale Farmers Co-op, which maintains branches in Andale, Colwich, Furley, Sedgwick and Valley Center. Its mission is to grow and competitively provide the customer with products and services while also returning profits to owners.

The co-op is led by a 12-member board, each person serving a three-year term with no term limits. The board is made up of nine regular members representing various locations and three associate members, who act in an advisory role. The co-op leadership meets the third Tuesday of every month.

"Board members have a say in how their co-op operates," Shaver said. "Serving on the co-op board means a person's values and business philosophy are represented and they help keep the co-op running in the right direction."

Andale Farmer's Co-op also participate in legislative activities. Each year, board members and Shaver attend the Legislative Action Day in Topeka, jointly sponsored by the Kansas Cooperative Council and Kansas Grain and Feed Association. The group meets one-on-one legislators and agency staff to discuss issues such as immigration, tax credits for disaster relief, CREP funding, energy policy and regulatory certainty.

The co-op also works to give back to the communities in which it resides. In celebration of National Co-op Month, the business holds a fundraiser for its high school cheerleading squad and takes pride in supporting local festivals.

Shaver said the concept of a cooperative is based upon members who support it as a local business. He said the Colwich location has worked to expand the co-op's traditional image of being a feed and grain dealer to offering lawn and garden services that benefit community residents.

"The Colwich location has a lawn and garden store for more urban-minded customers," Shaver said.

"We try to be competitive with pricing but our main goal is to provide a service-oriented business and answer's people's questions about their lawn."

Being a member of the Agri-Business Council of Wichita (ABCW) gives Shaver and his board members networking opportunities and provides word-of-mouth advertising. Shaver himself or a board member attends the semi-monthly council luncheons and he believes the ABCW serve an important purpose to educate people on the impact of agriculture in their daily lives. —

## THANK YOU TO LATEST LUNCHEON SPONSORS

A sincere thank you goes out to the Kansas World Trade Center and CoBank for sponsoring the April gathering of the Agri-Business Council (ABCW). Every other month, the ABCW hosts a lunch meeting to give members an informal opportunity to network and hear from a local or regional presenter. The luncheons are often considered the highlight of a Council membership, with between 30 and 40 people in attendance.

Kansas World Trade Center and CoBank sponsored the April luncheon, where Senate President Steve Morris and Senate Majority Leader Derek Schmidt talked to the group on issues the state's budget crisis.

Other businesses and individuals may sponsor a 2010 ABCW luncheon by contacting Jim Mock at [james\\_mock@sbcglobal.net](mailto:james_mock@sbcglobal.net). —

## MEMBER PROFILE: MEL THOMPSON

Mel Thompson takes great pride in his work. Though his role as Sen. Pat Roberts state agriculture representative means he follows the political beat of the boss, Thompson says it's easy to represent Roberts because they have the same political philosophy.

"It's not a prerequisite but he's there to serve Kansas and agriculture and I'm blessed to be associated with someone of that stature," Thompson says. "In fact, I've always felt inspired to be worthy of the Senator and his reputation."



Thompson

Thompson began his association with Roberts in 1969 when Pat served as chief of staff for then-First District Congressman Keith Sebelius. Thompson served as Sebelius' agriculture legislative assistant for seven years then returned to his family farm in the Gypsum Hills of Barber County. His farm earned the designation of a Farm Bureau Century Farm in 2003, 100-years after Thompson's grandfather purchased the first tract of land.

Working on an Angus cow calf and farming operation for 20 years gave Thompson great credibility to be a liaison between a political leader and constituents when he was asked to join Roberts staff in 1997. Thompson says he takes the job of working with farm people very seriously, making an effort to communicate respect and earn the trust of farmers and ranchers, after having been one himself.

"I believe my production ag background really helps me identify with a caller's concerns, comments or suggestions," he says. "Hopefully, they feel comfortable sharing with me and it shows how anxious I am to serve them. By living the same life they are, it's easier to make that connection."

On a typical day, Thompson may deal with constituent issues ranging from Farm Service Agency programs to interpretation of crop insurance regulations. He also reads policy research, attends in-state functions and speaks to groups on behalf of Sen. Roberts. Through a weekly conference call and daily contact with the Washington, D.C. office, Thompson keeps up with fellow staff and shares the opinions and challenges of his fellow Kansans.

Thompson says he joined the Agri-Business Council of Wichita to help make people aware of the essential role agriculture plays in the city and across the state. The council luncheons and the opportunity to network among agribusiness peers are highlights, he says.

At the end of the day, Thompson says he is thankful for the opportunity to serve both a political leader and the farmers and ranchers he respects so much.

"My job is to help producers with issues they may have with government and to be their advocate," he says. "I am the eyes and ears in Kansas for Sen. Roberts with regard to ag and rural issues." —

## COUNCIL BRINGS LEGISLATIVE ISSUES TO LIGHT

Agribusiness leaders had an opportunity to learn more about the state of Kansas' financial affairs at a legislative event last month. Senate President Steve Morris and Senate Majority Leader Derek Schmidt talked to the group on major issues confronting the Senate, specifically the state's budget crisis.

Though the consensus remains the budget problem will continue to occupy the majority of legislators' time, the future of agribusiness in Kansas looks bright, especially for companies and individuals who have an international presence. Both Morris and Schmidt predicted growth in ag export markets, which leads to a positive future for the partnership between the Agri-Business Council of Wichita and the Kansas World Trade Center to develop its Global Agribusiness Center. —

*Continued: Kansas World Trade Center*