

GUEST SPEAKERS



Cyndi Peters, left, and Helen Robertson from the C.W. Parker Carousel Museum were guest speakers for Kiwanis Club of Leavenworth luncheon meeting. They talked about the 20th Annual Children's Small Mall Dec. 6-7.
Cindy Henry

Defendant

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school reported past sexual abuse to deputies of the Leavenworth County Sheriff's Office.

The student identified Bell as the abuser, according to the news release.

In January 2024, Leavenworth County investigators were notified by a Lenexa police detective about a Kansas Department of Children and Families hotline report involving Bell. The report was submitted by two pastors from a church in Johnson County and involved sexual acts involving at least one child, according to the news release.

Bell reportedly talked to the pastors following a December 2023 church service. The pastors informed him they would report what he told them, according to the news release.

Ahead of the trial, a question arose as to whether testimony from the pastors was admissible because of a state law that establishes a penitential communication

privilege. But the judge ruled that the statutory privilege did not apply in the case.

The trial began Monday in Leavenworth County District Court.

Bell had been free on bond, but his bond was revoked and he was taken into custody Tuesday after the jury returned a guilty verdict, according to court records.

Sentencing is scheduled for Nov. 14.

"Penitential communication privilege is not something I've seen used in court often," County Attorney Todd Thompson said in the news release. "In fact, this is the first case I've seen litigated. While the defendant may have wanted to repent, we're grateful to the pastors for not giving him a pass for his actions."

Another criminal case is pending against Bell in Johnson County. In that case, he faces charges of aggravated indecent liberties with a child, rape and aggravated criminal sodomy, according to court records.

A status conference is scheduled for Oct. 15 in that case.

Proposed rail merger would make U.S. history

The Union Pacific (UP), Leavenworth's railroad, and the Norwalk Southern Railway (NS), one of two Class 1 freight railroads serving the eastern U.S., seek to merge. If allowed by the Surface Transportation Board (STB), this marriage would result in the first Atlantic to Pacific, ocean to ocean rail line in U.S. history.

Jim Vena, CEO of UP, has made the rounds of industrial and government officials to "educate" them on the advantages of the planned merger. Smart and experienced - he has worked on the railroad since his youth - he met with President Donald Trump, who expressed favor of the merger going forward during his presidency.

Mark George, CEO of NS, and Vena announced in mid-September that they hope to present the proposed wedding of the firms to stockholders before the end of 2025. That seems ambitious to everyone. And it cannot be presented to stockholders before the federal Securities and Exchange Commission has ruled on the legality of the terms as proposed by the two firms.

If all takes place as Vena and George expect, including positive votes by stockholders, the merger could go before the STB for rulings by December of this year. That it will happen that



Walt Mack

quickly seems doubtful. Stranger things have happened, however.

The STB is where most of the opposition to merger would be made. President Trump has fired the only Black member of the board. Last week, he re-appointed one whose first term was up (only two terms are allowed) and selected a replacement for a recent resignation. One vacancy remains.

Trade associations have already announced their plans to oppose the merger. Among the opposition are groups like the Rail Customer Coalition (RCC). They have engaged high-powered attorneys to intercede for their interests. Traffic losses, pricing and trackage rights will make for lively bargaining between the proposed new firm and those who oppose its formation.

In recent days, the largest rail unions have declared support of the merger. Combined with President Trump's backing, it looks more promising as the effort gathers steam from important firms and groups.

Bill Stephens, analyst

of the rail scene I most trust, has written that the merger will seem ideal if allowed to proceed. For a while. He writes that investors will enjoy dividends. When the spurt in growth the merger creates for investors levels off, Stephens believes, the demand for it to continue will prove problematic.

The rail industry's greatest profits occurred in 2006. Investors love dividends. Moves which would continue real growth demand investment in equipment and personnel. This affects profit. And investors who care only for the fat dividend checks will resist the expense. They don't care about taking competing trucks off interstate highways.

Every major rail line in the U.S. has an interstate running parallel to it supported by taxpayers. If railroads commit to long-term growth, it will mean a new philosophy of investment. And that will anger Wall Street.

Investors have demanded more say on railroad boards. If short-term profits dominate board thinking and actions, then actions like the proposed UP/NS merger will only be a temporary fix. Once the bloom is off the merger, what then? The industry will continue to struggle without a new investment strategy. Stay tuned.

Walt Mack is a life-long historian and lives in Leavenworth.

County

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Leavenworth during the next week, according to the National Weather Service.

In July, Gov. Laura

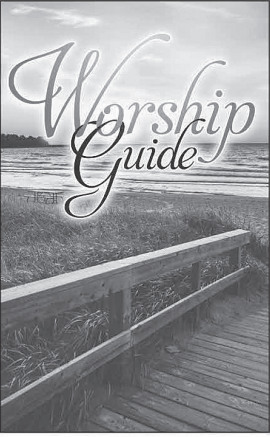
Kelly issued a declaration that placed Leavenworth County in a drought warning status.

While Leavenworth County is in a drought, most of Kansas is not experiencing any drought conditions, according

to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

The Drought Monitor releases an updated map of drought conditions in the United States each Thursday.

The Drought Monitor is a partnership of the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, U.S. Department of Agriculture and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.



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