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New boiler system is fully electronic and baby-sitter free

By Tim Linscott
Republican Editor

Maintenance Superintendent for the Saline County Courthouse, Dan Johnson, is a man of many hats. One day he may re-wire a light fixture, the next replace a motor in a machine or fix a broken window. Baby-sitting, however, was never in Johnson's job description and for many years he's had to do just that...until recently.

Johnson was happy to note that a project to fix the boilers for the courthouse is nearly completed. It is a part of an overall energy efficiency grant project that the county has been working with Southeast Nebraska Development District (SENDD) and the Nebraska Energy Department.

A total of \$645,000 will be needed for the project. A total of \$249,972 in grant money was secured by the county to have 72 windows replaced, along with the aging boiler system.

The Saline County Commissioners were able to secure an EECBG (Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant) to help defer the cost of the project. The project will be reimbursed at 38.7 percent back to the county. Total cost of the project will be \$645,922, which includes replacing the original boiler system.

Reimbursements to the county will be \$249,972, leaving \$395,950 as the county's share. The window portion of the project is \$445,922 with approximately \$200,000 for the boiler side of the project.

The boilers were installed 56 years ago and have a 30-year life expectancy. Project manager Mark Zettler explained that the boilers have long outlived their usefulness and it was time to bring them into modern times.

"Dan won't have to babysit those things anymore in the middle of the night. The new boilers are going to save a lot of time and money for everyone," Zettler said.

The boilers were having significant problems in recent years and were being barely held together 'by any means necessary,' according to county officials.

"They were basically held together with what we had around here to hold them together," Saline County Commissioner Willis Luedke

said. "We were going one day at a time with those things."

Johnson would check the boilers each night before going to bed to make sure they were properly running.

"Absolutely I am happy to not be babysitting those old boilers anymore," Johnson said.

There were leaks in the tubes and the control system was not dependable, according to Luedke. Johnson would have to go and 'check on the system' at all hours of the night on certain occasions in order to stop the pipes from freezing in the winter.

The boiler system is actually not in the Saline County Courthouse, but next door at the former county jail, where the heat is piped underground to the courthouse. The new boiler system is far more efficient and reliable than the old system and takes up a lot less space. Over half of the floor space is not needed anymore for the new boiler system.

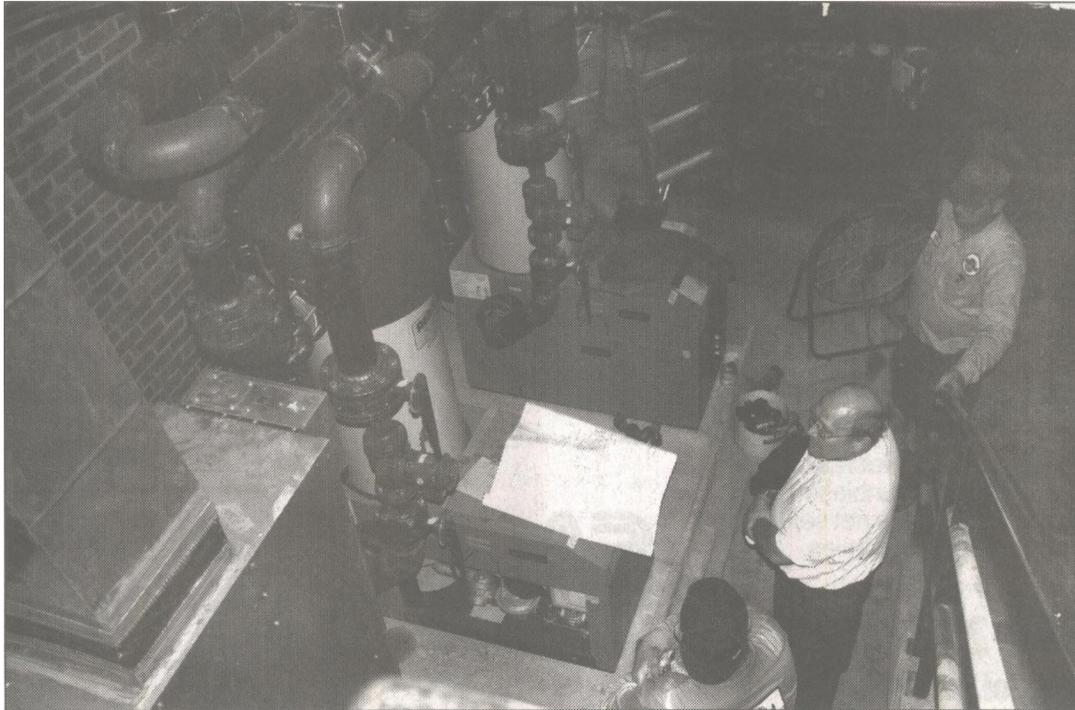
The new boilers are run by a electronic system that adjusts temperature to the outside temperature and will automatically shut on and off.

Some months, county officials said the gas energy bill would top off at \$4,000 a month. Johnson said that, along with him staying up at night worrying about the boilers breaking down, are a thing of the past.

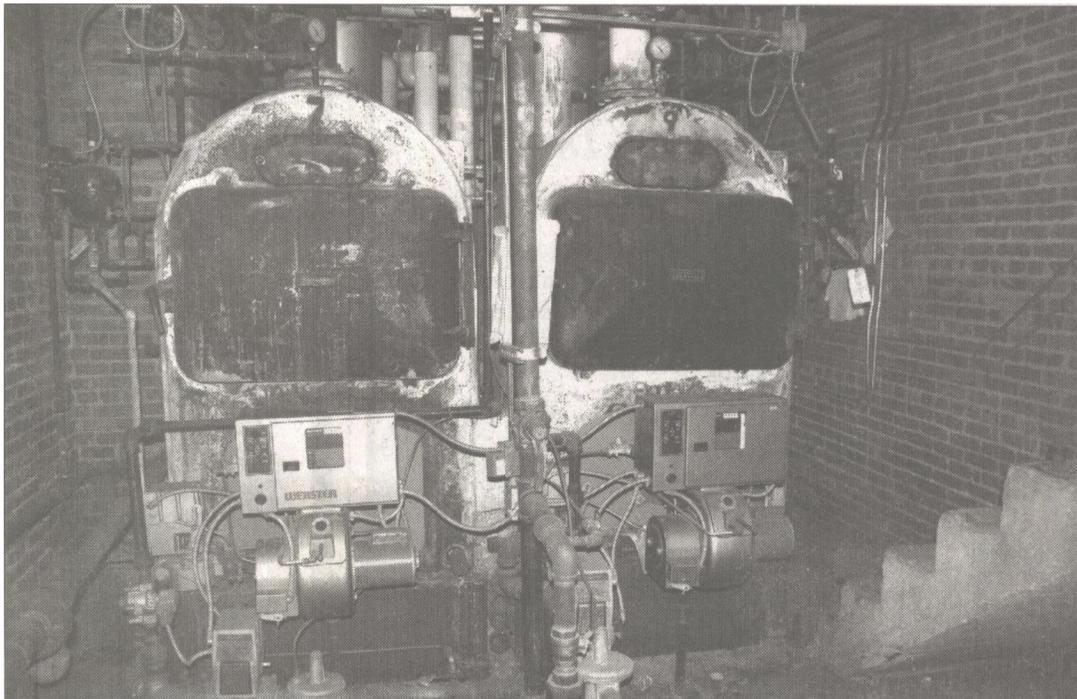
Asbestos was found in removing the old boilers, which has added to the cost of the project. A projected cost of \$171,000-\$172,000 was established when the project started last year. Those costs are now in the \$180,000-\$190,000 range, due to the removal of the small amount of asbestos. Luedke, however, explains that the window project has come under budget considerably, balancing out the equation.

With a more efficient way to control the heat at the courthouse, the county leaders expect to save \$6,180 annually in energy costs from the new boilers. Zettler estimates that will give the boilers a roughly 16-year payback.

Right now the boiler project is around 80-85 percent complete, according Zettler. Johnson felt the boiler project will reach 100 percent completion by the end of this month.



Technicians try to figure out how to finish the new boiler system at the Saline County Courthouse.



This photo was taken of the original boilers three months before they were removed. The old system was installed over 50 years ago and took up much of the basement of the old county jail.