

# Snow Things Contest is Officially a Wrap



By Danny Hunt

Well, we tried waiting on more and better snow this year, but it doesn't look like it's going to happen. The snow we got was tough to work with. Dry and powdery. But we had a small group that got out there and gave it the old college try. And as you can see, they succeeded! Congratulations to oall of the contestants. You're all winners! The wrap-up party and prizes will be determined at a later date. Thank you again for entering!

Pictured above, Jacob Foster family made the Sphynx and pyramids. Below left, Tiffany Hershaw's snow thing. Below center, Tina Friend had a creative entry. Below right two photos, Ruby and Calvin Lott created an igloo and a snowthing!



## Caldwell, Argonia Among Communities Chosen for State Water Grants

March 17, 2026 - A fresh wave of state funding aimed at safeguarding Kansas' water future is flowing out of Topeka, with Governor Laura Kelly announcing more than \$19 million in grants to communities and water districts across the state.

The funding, administered through the Kansas Water Office, represents the third round of awards under grant programs established by Senate Substitute for House Bill 2302. The initiative focuses on strengthening water infra-

structure, offering technical expertise, and helping smaller communities manage costly improvements.

"We're addressing pressing water issues now to ensure a safe and resilient water supply for generations of Kansans to come," Kelly said, pointing to the growing strain on water systems statewide.

Since its expansion in 2023, the program has steadily built momentum. Lawmakers boosted the State Water Plan Fund and created two new funding streams — one for

technical assistance and another for water projects — bringing total investment to \$44 million over the past two years. This latest round pushes that commitment even further.

Demand, however, continues to outpace available dollars.

More than 280 applications were submitted for the 2026 funding cycle, collectively requesting \$272 million — a stark reminder of the scale of water challenges facing Kansas. Ultimately, 44 communities and special districts were selected, including 10 water

project grants, 22 technical assistance awards, and 12 loan assistance packages.

Among the recipients, the city of Caldwell secured \$425,650 in technical assistance funding for Phase I of its water system improvements. Meanwhile, Argonia received \$141,840 in loan assistance to support its public water supply.

"This program helps build more resilient communities," said Connie Owen, director of the Kansas Water Office. "Water is a vital resource, and

this funding ensures adequate water quality and quantity across the state."

Several communities submitted applications but were not selected in this round, including Belle Plaine, Conway Springs, Douglass, and rural water districts in Cowley County. Botanica Water Education in Sedgwick County was also among those not selected.

While not every project made the cut this time, state officials say the breadth of applications underscores both

the urgency and the opportunity ahead. With aging infrastructure and population shifts putting pressure on water systems, the competition for future funding rounds will likely stay steady.

For now, the funding will move forward to selected communities, helping them make needed updates to their local water systems.

### Trivia Answer:

Mountains provide the source for all of the world's major rivers.

Do you have trivia that we should include in a future edition? Send it to NewsBellePlaine@gmail.com!

## Community Mural Project Launches In Belle Plaine

FROM THE CITY OF BELLE PLAINE, KS — A new public art initiative is set to transform the landscape of Belle Plaine, turning local walls into a canvas for community history and creativity. Led by professional visual storyteller and resident Ashley Whitmore, the #PaintBellePlaine Mural Project aims to foster a deep sense of 'place-making' through collaborative design.

Residents of all ages are invited to transition from spectators to collaborators. "Small towns have big stories," Whitmore said. "Murals give people a way to see their community differently. They spark pride, conversation, and a sense of ownership in the place we call home."

Belle Plaine is more than just a dot on the map; it's a story of "Beautiful Plains," historic

railroads, and vibrant spring blooms. Now, we're putting that story on the walls.

Ashley is passionate about place-making: the idea that art should belong to everyone. That is why she is currently leading the charge on a series of Community Murals right here in Belle Plaine! Her goal? To give our students a hands-on creative outlet, see their community as a canvas for creative expression, and let them leave their mark.

While the project serves as a cornerstone for student empowerment, led by Whitmore in her role as the Art, Graphic Design, and Photography teacher at Belle Plaine High School, the invitation to participate extends to every neighbor, business owner, and family in town.

"Public art is most powerful when it's a shared experience," says Whitmore. "While our high school students will be gaining professional design experience, we want our neighbors, our families, and our local leaders to literally help us put paint on the wall. This is about building community through every brushstroke."

The community is invited to meet Mrs. Whitmore and encouraged to participate in the mural design process at the upcoming Downtown Festival on April 11th.

From 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM at the Community Center, residents can:

Meet the Artist: Chat with Ashley about the vision for the town and how the youth are getting involved.

Sign Up for Volunteer Opportunities: Find out how you might be the missing puzzle piece needed; painting, site prep, hype, logistics, and more!

Explore Interactive Displays: See the shortlisted color palettes and "Postcard" styles in person.

VOTE & WIN: This is the FINAL DAY to cast your official vote on the design. Everyone who completes a ballot is entered to win a \$20 Gift Card to The NoWhere Grill!

The project will host designated Community Paint Days this summer, where volunteers can assist in bringing the final design to life. Community members who are ready to roll up their sleeves and help transform Belle Plaine through art are invited to attend the informational Volunteer Meeting at the Community Center on Monday, June 1, from 6:00-7:30 PM to learn how they can be part of the project.

For more information on how to volunteer or to vote online, visit <https://forms.gle/zjzbWn7r78W2hV88>

The mural initiative aims to transform walls throughout Belle Plaine into vibrant landmarks that reflect the town's culture, history, and future. By combining art, storytelling, and community participation, Whitmore hopes the project will inspire residents to see their town through a new lens.

"Art has the power to make people feel seen," Whitmore said. "If a mural can make someone stop, smile, take a photo, or feel proud of where they live, then it's doing exactly what it's meant to do."

### Artist Bio:

Ashley Whitmore is a multidisciplinary creative, educator, and visual storyteller based in Belle Plaine, Kansas. By day, she's the Art, Graphic Design, and Photography teacher at Belle Plaine High School,

where she hands students the tools, the confidence, and occasionally the glitter to turn their ideas into something real. Ashley believes art should also live outside the classroom walls, giving young creatives the chance to shape the culture of the town they grew up in.

With more than 15 years behind the camera, Ashley is best known for bold, emotionally charged work that blends fine art aesthetics with raw, human connection. Through her brand Urban Lumi | Photo + Film, she helps individuals and small businesses across the Midwest ditch the boring, and capture their stories with unapologetic authenticity.

Ashley's artistic roots run deep: spanning dynamic photography, cinematic videography, immersive set design, and bold graphic content. Her work thrives on personality, playfulness, and purpose, often highlighting the weird, the wild, and the wonderfully unexpected.

Beyond her creative work, Ashley is also an advocate for Alpha-gal syndrome, a tick-borne allergy that makes mammal products life-threatening, that turned her life upside down 7 years ago. After surviving severe reactions and navigating the chaos that comes with the condition, she now uses storytelling, humor, and a little mutant energy to raise community awareness about tick-borne illness, prevention, and the realities of living with Alpha-gal.

A passionate community organizer, Ashley has a proven track record of using public art to bring people together, including coordinating local events like First Fridays. Currently, she is focused on a series of mural projects in Belle Plaine designed to reflect the unique heartbeat of the place she calls home.

Whether she's teaching teenagers how to think like artists, snapping photos, creating bold visual work, advocating for health awareness, or standing on a ladder with a paintbrush and a wild idea, Ashley's goal is simple: make people feel seen, celebrated, and part of something bigger.

Legal Notice  
(Published in The Belle Plaine News / Oxford Register on Thursday, March 26, 2026 and Thursday, April 2, 2026 2t2a0tN)

### RESOLUTION NO. 030926-1

WHEREAS, the Belle Plaine Parks and Recreation Commission has adopted a resolution declaring it necessary to increase the annual property tax levy for the use of such Commission to operate a public recreation system and has requested the **Unified School District No. 357** to authorize a maximum mill levy in the general fund not to exceed **2.5 mills**; and

WHEREAS, the provisions of K.S.A. 12-1927, and amendments thereto, provide for such an increase, subject to a petition of the voters for a referendum thereon;

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Board of Education of **Unified School District No. 357** that the **Belle Plaine Parks and Recreation Commission** be authorized to levy ad valorem property tax not to exceed **2.5 mills** in the general fund in the tax year 2026-27 and thereafter, subject to the aforementioned petition and referendum.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this resolution shall be published once each week for two consecutive weeks in the official school district newspaper and that an amount not exceeding said maximum mill levy may be made for the Recreation Commission in the ensuing budget year and each successive year unless a petition requesting an election upon the proposition, signed by at least five percent of qualified voters for the school district, shall be filed with the county election officer within 30 days following the date of the last publication of this resolution.

PASSED, by the Board of Education of **Unified School District No. 357** on this **9th** day of **March, 2026**.

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