New Baker Arts Center Director Denae Weber shows some of the artwork she has personally painted Friday morning in her office at the center. Weber is scheduled to take over the reigns of the center starting June 1. L&T photo/Robert Pierce

By ROBERT PIERCE • Leader & Times Denae Weber's journey began in 1988 in the north central Kansas community of Hays. Her travels would later take her to Wellington, just south of Wichita, where she graduated from high school. S he would later graduate from Southwestern College in nearby Winfield, and in January 2012, her life's trip brought her to Liberal, where she has worked in USD No. 480 schools as well as being an assistant manager at Adventure Bay Water Park.

In the school district, Weber now serves as a para at West Middle School and is an assistant softball coach at Liberal High School.

In her short time in Liberal, Weber has also become community minded, and in May 2012, she joined the board of the Baker Arts Center. On June 1, after fulfilling her contract with USD 480, Weber will officially step into the shoes of the director of the arts center. She said Baker is

something many communities don't have, and Liberal is very fortunate to have an arts center.

Weber said when she becomes director, she wants to make the community more aware of what Baker has to offer.

"Offer more events, art classes, more exhibits," she said.

Weber said Diane Marsh and Toni Smith with Baker Arts have helped out greatly with the center's newest display.

"Diane and Toni have done such a wonderful job with the dinosaur exhibit," Weber said. "I hope everybody's taking advantage of coming out here and also to the air museum."

Weber said having been a board member has given her an idea of how Baker Arts is run.

"I just want to take everybody's knowledge and wisdom here and see where we can go," she said.

Weber said her primary goal is simply "to keep Baker alive."

"Mrs. Baker wanted to have an arts center," she said. "We need to keep moving in that direction and not let it die out. There's all sorts of things I can see. I have an idea of what I want to do. They have a wonderful park. Bring in other types of art."

Weber believes art is more than just two dimensions, and she would like to see more than that at Baker.

"It's performance art, music and dancing and all sorts of drama," she said. "Offer other classes or workshops or an event that has more to do with some type of performance art."

Weber said Baker Arts already provides pottery, clay and sculpting classes, as well as many programs for younger kids, but she would like to see more workshops for all members of the art center. Weber said these include floral and ribbon art classes as well as woodworking programs.

"With elementary school kids, get them involved and possibly have more programs that would attract them here," she said. "I'm an athlete, but art's been a big part of my life."

Weber's degree is in public relations, with a minor in leadership studies, and this is an important part of what she feels her job is with Baker Arts. She also knows what is at the core of the center's growth.

"It's the people that will make the center," she said.