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A portion of this complex in north Liberal just south of Daylight Donuts is the new home of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Haskell, Stevens and Seward Counties. L&T photos/Robert Pierce

By ROBERT PIERCE

- Leader & Times

The building just south of Memorial Library on Kansas Avenue is now vacant, but it won't be empty for long, according to Kerry Seibel.

“The library’s wanting to expand,” she said. “They own the building. They’re wanting to expand.”

## BBBS gets new office

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Seibel is the director of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Haskell, Stevens and Seward County, the now former tenant of the building, and her agency will be relocated to 1023 N. Kansas Ave. in north Liberal.

She said the move was good for both the library and BBBS, and she said much in the way of research went into finding a new location for an office.

“We did a lot of searching for what works for us in this price range and visibility, accessibility to some of our clients that are handicapped,” she said. “We had to look into that. This is a nice central location for us.”

Seibel said both the price range and visibility of the new office are what attracted BBBS officials to that locale.



“This is working out for us,” she said. “I think we’re going to be extremely happy with this. We’d like to have our new address out there so people know where to find us.”

Seibel said BBBS would like to thank everyone involved with the organization for a good year.

“The state of Kansas was able to serve 6,000 kids,” she said. “Throughout the state, we still have 4,000 on the waiting list. We’re looking forward to serving more kids and families in 2014.”

The move to north Liberal was made just before the Thanksgiving holiday, according to Seibel.

“We wanted to do it before the holiday so we could start fresh Dec. 1,” she said.

Seibel said the new office has about the same amount of space as the building next to Memorial Library, but BBBS is always looking to grow in terms of matches for its littles.

“We still have a huge need for male mentors,” she said. “We have a long waiting list for our boys and actually looking for more referrals for female children. We have some female mentors ready to go. We need some more kids on the waiting list.”

Seibel said during this time of year, BBBS does a lot of work with Seward County Community College and Liberal High School in finding activities for kids on the agency’s waiting list.

“We had one with our business development group out at the college,” she said. “Amanda Stout heads that up. It gave us an opportunity to see some of our kids we’ve had on the waiting list kind of come out of their shell. We had some potential volunteers in that group. We’re looking forward to 2014 and starting new.”

Seibel said BBBS is always looking for grant money, as well as donations, and with the organization’s annual end of the year gift give coming up, money is especially in need.

“If there’s anybody looking for end of the year write-offs, throughout the year, we’re looking for donations,” she said. “Kansas is working on a state and federal grant for opportunities through Juvenile Justice Authority. We’re always looking for opportunities to better our services, match more kids. It costs about \$1,000 to match a child from beginning to supervised. That’s liability insurance and supervision, background checks.”

Seibel said the local BBBS office also gets funding from the City of Liberal, Seward County, United Way and anonymous donors.

“Our Bowl For Kids Sake is a huge portion of our fundraisers,” she said. “We have other fundraisers throughout the year. We do have a small Juvenile Justice Authority Title II grant. Wichita is looking at another Juvenile Justice grant federally for our kids that have been in the system to try to prevent them from reoffending.”

With a recent downturn in the nation’s economy, some non-profits are reporting a decrease in giving, but Seibel said the drop in the nation’s finances has not affected giving at her agency, at least from a donation standpoint.

“Individuals are just as giving,” she said. “Unfortunately, federal grants have dried up, and they’ve done away with a lot of the federal grants, going in a different direction.”

Seibel said no matter the financial condition of BBBS, the need for mentoring is huge and continuous.

“We are an evidence-based program, and it’s proven to work,” she said. “It’s preventive, and we want to continue with what’s working for us. I think if these kids have somebody to look up to, they won’t be offenders and won’t cost the state and our community when they do enter into the system. That becomes very costly compared to the \$1,000 that it cost per kid.”

While the local BBBS office serves Stevens and Haskell counties, in addition to Seward, Seibel said most of the matches the agency handles are in the county that is home to the office.

“Stevens County is seeing a lot of success,” she said, however.

That county should be seeing even more success in the near future, as BBBS is looking forward to working with Hugoton High School, in particular with getting more bigs in school.

“They have some new faculty that in college, they were bigs and really believe in the program and are really looking forward to working with us,” she said.

Seibel said the transition from the downtown location to the new office has been an easy one.

“I think it’s going to work for the library and for us, and so far so good,” she said.

While the new location has about the same amount of space as the old one, Seibel said the north Liberal office should allow for future growth of the local BBBS program.

“We don’t have access to add on, but we have enough space that as we grow or need more case managers, we do have the space to do so,” she said.

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