

**SHOAL CREEK:** Festival scheduled for July 25. **3A** | **FOOTBALL:** Area kids attend camp at Joplin High School. **1B**

# Liberty rate increase to go forward

Change had been put on hold to address billing, customer service issues

FROM STAFF REPORTS  
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Electric rate increases for Missouri customers of Joplin-based Liberty that were approved in January but then put on hold will take effect Aug. 3, the Missouri Public Service Commission announced Wednesday.

Joplin residential electric customers will see three years of rate increases after an earlier agreement was reached with regulators in Jefferson City.

Liberty, in a statement released to The Joplin Globe in January, said under this agreement customers using 1,000 kilowatt-hours a month will see electric rates climb:

- **\$7.83 PER MONTH** in the first year, about 4.9% over current rates.
- **\$8.91 PER MONTH** in the second year, a 5.31% increase over the first year.
- **\$9.94 PER MONTH** in the third year, a 5.06% increase over the second year.

“The current total bill for residential customers using 1,000 kilowatt-hours of energy per month is about \$159.91,” Liberty said in its written statement. “Based on today’s rates, the proposed total bill after three years would be \$185.60. This is about a 16.1% increase in the total bill, which includes base rates, fuel costs and other charges.”

However, the PSC also announced that the utility would have to meet specific billing and customer service metrics prior to receiving approval to implement changes to customer rates.

The PSC said in a statement the the delay “reflects the Commission’s concern with the persistent issues the company has experienced with billing and customer service and the Commission’s ongoing expectations for measurable improvement in these areas. Addressing the customer service and billing issues is a priority for the Commission. Staff’s opinion was that the implementation of Customer First compromised (Liberty’s) ability to provide safe and reliable service at just and reasonable rates. The Commission agrees

SEE **LIBERTY**, 2A

# 11 WITNESSES



Neosho pharmacist Tim Mitchell and Lacy Epperson, an Access Family Care pharmacist representing the Missouri Pharmacists Association, spoke Wednesday to the Missouri Senate’s Select Committee on Rural Healthcare.

GLOBE | JOHN HACKER

## State senators from across Missouri gather at MSSU to discuss rural healthcare

BY JOHN HACKER  
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Rural healthcare was the focus of a public hearing Wednesday at Missouri Southern State University, with experts talking about more and better access to healthcare for rural residents.

It was the first public hearing of the Missouri Senate’s Select Committee on Rural Healthcare, formed in the 2026 session of the Missouri General Assembly.

Eleven witnesses appeared, including representatives of the Missouri



Josh Moore (left), director of MO Health-net, Missouri’s Medicaid provider, and Joe Miller, director of the state’s Rural Health Transformation office, testify before the Missouri Senate’s Select Committee on Rural Healthcare on Wednesday at Missouri Southern State University.

GLOBE | JOHN HACKER

Hospital Association, Missouri Nurses Association, the Missouri Pharmacy Association, the Missouri Pharmacy Business Council and the director of Missouri’s Medicaid office. Others who testified came from Freeman Health System and Mercy Hospital Joplin, the Missouri State Medical Association and the Association of Missouri Nurse Practitioners, laying out their perspective of the challenges and ways the Legislature might help to solve it. Also on hand were

several state senators, including Jill Carter, R-Granby, who represents Jasper and Newton counties. Carter is chair of the committee.

“The unfortunate reality is half of the rural hospitals in this state lose money from operations,” Jon Doolittle, president and CEO of the Missouri Hospital Association, told the lawmakers. “This has been true for several years. Sometimes I think

SEE **MEETING**, 2A

# Carthage homebuyer ‘just thrilled’ with Habitat home

Organization celebrates  
200th home in area

BY DEBBY WOODIN  
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CARTHAGE, Mo. — Six years ago, Jennifer Ascon left California for Missouri, where her mother’s family lives. She wanted to put down roots here and buy

her own home.

“I ventured off to try to get my own home, but every door was closed,” Ascon said of her early effort.

Finally, a Carthage cousin gave her an application for a homebuilding option Ascon did not know about — Joplin Area Habitat for Humanity. That organization, a nonprofit, provides assistance to build homes for those who qualify. Buy-

ers also must provide sweat equity by helping with the construction work.

Waiting through that application process, Ascon, a cosmetology student who also is a wife and mother of two, was uncertain whether her dream would be fulfilled.

“So I said, ‘Lord, I know you have the perfect home for me,’” she said, without knowing yet that her appli-

cation was on the way to being approved.

Habitat’s executive director, Scott Clayton, told Ascon about a piece of land in Carthage that could provide a building site and asked if she was interested. She said Clayton also told her the land where her house is being built had been available for some time. He told her, “I feel like the Lord gifted you this and this was for you

because any other applicant could have got in this spot.”

Ascon said, “I was just thrilled. I don’t even need to see the land. I’m just happy for this opportunity to have a home.”

This is Habitat’s 37th year of helping area families help themselves to achieve the dream of homeownership.

Habitat staff and volunteers on Thursday were working to help fulfill As-

con’s dream as well as marking a Habitat milestone. Ascon’s house became the organization’s 200th home build.

To help Habitat and Ascon celebrate, a Habitat sponsor, the U.S. Bank Foundation provided a \$25,000 donation toward the cost of Ascon’s home. The bank also sent several employees to

SEE **HOME**, 2A



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