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The Brewster Consolidated School was built in 1925 as the community outgrew several older buildings, one of which was struck by lightning. It was given an addition in 1954 and is still in use by the Brewster School District today.

Different ideas help district survive

By Vera Sloan

Colby Free Press
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The Brewster school opened with 11 students on January 14, 1889, and before the end of the week, the number had increased to 23.

The school was struck by lightning in the summer of 1906 and partly burned. By December, the men of the community had already started work on another building.

As the community grew, the school followed, and soon needed an even bigger building.

The present brick structure was built in 1925, remodeled with a new addition in 1954.

When farms began to grow in size, and the Interstate highway system came to northwest Kansas, school enrollment began to dwindle. Enrollment has fallen dramatically since 2003, when the district serviced 158 students; however, according to Superintendent George Staaten, enrollment has increased slightly this year. Preliminary head count for the district is 101, including preschoolers, an increase of seven from 2008.

Staaten stepped in as the principal and superintendent this year. He said he is encouraged by the increase in enrollment.

The Brewster community has struggled to keep its school going, using some innovative measures involving the school board and the community.

Last year, the district opted to go to a four-day school week to help with the budget crunch experienced by so many smaller rural schools.

They also teamed up with Triplains School in Winona to the south to form an eight-man football team. Sharing a coach allowed the two schools to remain in a sports league, so important to the western Kansas style of life.

"It has worked well," said Daryl Ann Jorgensen, Brewster school district clerk the last 33 years. "The students made new friends, and it has been good for school spirit.

"I believe parents and students all like the four-day week. Parents with smaller kids need



School District Brewster

Enrollment fall 2009 — 101
Plus/Minus from 2008 — plus 7
Trend — down 57 since fall 2003.

to make a little different arrangements, but over all, it does work, because Fridays were pretty much sports days anyway."

She said the math teachers felt they had covered everything they needed to, and the students performed well at math competition.

"When students go on to be doctors and professionals, that speaks well for the school," she said.

Jorgensen said even after the population began to decline several years ago, the Brewster district still held its own, but over past three or four years, the financial crunch hit with a boom.

"Young men are slowly beginning to come back to farm now," she said. "Ag Sun is expanding its grain storage, and Cenex-Harvest States grain and seed has built a huge facility, and that all will help, plus we have a couple of new businesses downtown.

"We also could see there would be some drastic cuts in funding coming down the pike, and made plans to allow for it in a budget contingency reserve fund, and that cushion is there when we need it."

She said she expects the district to hold steady, and could possibly increase a little in

Towns keep schools by working together with an agreement

By Vera Sloan

Colby Free Press
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An answer to a declining enrollment for the Grainfield and Grinnell school districts was for the two to work together under a cooperative agreement so each town could retain its school and district.

Both towns were able to retain their elementary schools. Middle schoolers in grades five through eight attend school in Grinnell, and the high school students attend in Grainfield.

In consolidation, there would be one board and one budget, and both facilities would be under one district. This way, there are two separate school boards, one in each town, and still two separate districts.

The agreement was drafted by Kansas Association of School Boards attorneys, then voted on and endorsed by the school boards of both districts. The vote was 7-0 in Grainfield and 4-3 in Grinnell.

The agreement became effective July 1, 2007, and was set up to expire in three years, in 2010, when the contract can be extended for additional two-year periods.

There were several factors at hand, but the primary intent was to combat declining enrollment, said Principal and Superintendent Rose Kane.

A preliminary head count for this year puts enrollment at 76. This is a decrease of four students from last year, and a decrease of 42 from 2006, when enrollment was 118.

Most often, the loss of enrollment limits the class offer and limits a school district's ability



School District

Wheatland

Enrollment fall 2009 — 76
Plus/Minus from 2008 — minus 4
Trend — down 42 since fall 2006.

to attract quality instructors, Kane said. The cooperative agreement changed that.

At the middle school level, Kane said, the combined schools are able to offer electives such as a technology lab, construction trades and a formal art class for seventh and eighth graders. Band is required for grades five through eight.

All students have the opportunity to be in classrooms with more students. It was not uncommon to have only three in a class before, Kane said.

The high school is able to offer eight new classes, including concurrent college credits through Colby Community College.

Another advantage was that 17 courses are now offered due to increased space in the building, giving students the options and variety of a larger school.

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