



COLBY FREE PRESS

Priorities provoke exchange

School board getting 'hammered,' Miller says

By JAY KELLEY
Colby Free Press

District priorities, and how to pay for them, became a bone of contention for members of the Colby School board Monday night. Board member Wilburn Holloway wanted to know why an update on the proposed middle school technology lab wasn't on the agenda. Superintendent Kirk Nielsen told Holloway the middle school and high school labs were part of the reason for a discussion of priorities, to which Holloway retorted, "Didn't we give you the go ahead on this?" Nielsen and Board president Stan Molstad reminded Holloway their had been no vote on the project, only a decision to look into costs. Carol Robison, elementary school librarian, told the board their computers were out-of-date. The elementary computer lab has 24 computers, mostly older Mac LC475 models, which Robison said are too limited in hard-drive capacity. "We need basic, reliable equipment with lots

of memory," she said. Robison also told the board the older computers were becoming unreliable. "I have Phil (DeYoung, technology director for the district) on speed dial," she said. The computers are getting to the point where programs must be removed to add others and some new programs will not fit. The computers are not Internet capable, either. Audio visual equipment in the elementary school inventory still includes film-strip projectors and record players, according to Robison. Becky Holtwick, elementary school principal, agreed, saying, "We need a lab." Curriculum director Dianna Wieland said the elementary school was targeted for upgrades, but wasn't sure when that would be. Board member Bill Miller said, "I feel like the board is caught in the middle of this." He told administrators that elementary, middle and high school technology teachers need to develop a plan together and bring it to the board.

"We getting hammered from all sides," he said. Holloway asked Wieland which board member was on the technology committee. "You are," said Wieland. Holloway said he had been on the committee "a couple of years ago," but he thought he was off. Board member Gerry Fulwider said the board had been successful with the technology lab and other projects, largely because of a five-year plan developed by school administrators. "We need to do that again," he said. Most of the discussion on priorities was on how to pay for improvements. "We can't do everything," said Molstad, adding his priority was the middle school tech lab. Nielsen told the board he was in favor of building a new building at the high school to move the shop classes closer. Classes are getting smaller, according to DeYoung, but not as fast as some think. Most

grades are staying around 90, according to DeYoung's figures, with the smaller classes coming in about 10 years. "Some of those classes aren't as small as they look," said DeYoung. She showed the first grade class in Colby at 60, but Sacred Heart School adds another 20. Nielsen also told board members a capital outlay was necessary to continue funding improvements. DeYoung added, "A district this size should have a capital outlay." Leasing was discussed, with Miller and Holloway in sharp disagreement. Holloway wanted to "give the people a vote" on new construction, while Miller said leasing was no different than "salaries and buses that we vote on all the time." Fulwider said he thought a capital outlay was vital to the future of the district and was concerned that a lease agreement would do more harm politically than help materially. "If we can get the teachers and others af-

ected by this out to vote, it almost has to pass." Nielsen told the board they were still 4 mills under the local option limit set by the state and could raise the levy by that much without a vote. Miller added, "It's not just the mill levy. The levies and the assessments are ganging up on us." Holloway suggested going to an intramural program for middle school. "Several patrons have mentioned it to me." Nielsen suggested a public vote on sports, to which Holloway agreed, saying we needed to get back to basics. Walker said he would add all extracurricular activities, including the tech lab. "I support all those programs, but they are extras," he said. "We provide them because we think they are important." "Maybe we need to find out what the patrons think is important." In the end, the board decided to table the matter.

College puts free tuition in motion

By MAXINE NELSON
Colby Free Press

The free tuition program for Thomas County graduates is ready to go after the Colby Community College Board of Trustees approved a tuition waiver affidavit of residency form at their Monday night meeting. The student must state he or she is a legal resident of Thomas County and that residence has been established for the last three years.

He or she must also provide three documented verifications of residency, choosing from receipts for payment of Thomas County property tax, motor vehicle registration form, employment verification in Thomas County commencing three years prior, copy of voter registration in Thomas County, copy of Kansas driver's license, or other proof approved by the dean of students. Students will still have to pay fees and buy their books.

The free tuition will not apply to hours taken on the Internet, such as Edu-Kan. Free tuition will be offered this year and the coming year and then the plan will be reevaluated. In addition, the board heard a lengthy presentation by Larry Noffsinger of Intermountain Benefits of Denver.

The college health insurance is with Intermountain Benefits, and is a self-funded plan. The college pays into a fund from which claims are paid up to a certain amount after which coverage is provided by a reinsurance carrier. This year the college fund was set up to pay expenses up to \$15,000, then the reinsurance carrier would pay up to \$2 million, according to information presented.

Noffsinger said the college averaged \$28,000 a month in claims. Because of the rising cost of health insurance, the college is looking for coverage which will be beneficial to employees, and still affordable. Noffsinger presented several options which the board will consider before making a decision.



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

Colby Police Officer Mark Blatt and Colby High School sophomore Magnum Shea listened during the first-ever dialogue night on Monday sponsored by a juvenile justice mini-grant. Janet Worthy, co-facilitator, is in the background.

Grant allows kids, cops to talk frankly

By PATTY DECKER
Free Press Editor

A juvenile justice mini-grant made it possible for six local law enforcement officials and 13 Colby High School students to meet Monday night and talk about a variety of topics with the goal of better understanding the pressures and/or problems each face on a daily basis. "The dialogue night," said Janet Worthy, co-facilitator, "was for both groups to exchange thoughts and feelings on perceptions and experiences."

There were three areas that both groups were asked to write and talk about. Included in the discussion

was the question: During your teenage years, did you have an experience with a police officer that was positive or meaningful? If so, what was it that made this a positive experience.

Participants, Worthy explained, were then asked to share some of those positive and negative perceptions of teens and police officers and why each individual viewed them that way.

"As each person listened to others in their group," Worthy said, "others in that group were asked to consider whether or not they believed the perceptions were accurate in their opinion."

Participants also held a common goal of improving the substance abuse

and underage drinking problem in Thomas County and were asked, "How could a teenager and police officer most help to achieve this goal?"

According to Anne Ogle, the other co-facilitator, the grant was funded by Thomas County Interagency Juvenile Justice and was the first of its kind. As a follow-up to the discussion, Worthy said, written responses from the evening's first dialogue session will be made available. In addition, both facilitators explained that they hope to continue this type of discussion in the future or even broaden the scope to include more people.

Resident peppers commissioners with many concerns

By MAXINE NELSON
Colby Free Press

Lonnie Wilson peppered the Thomas County Commissioners with a variety of questions at their Monday meeting, and foremost was his concern regarding the county's maintaining the roads in North Randall Township. The township had voted a year or so ago to turn the maintenance of the township roads over to the county.

Wilson wanted to know why the county had "overspent the budget" by \$11,000 last year.

The commissioners, caught cold because Wilson had not been on the agenda, summoned Diana Gatz, the secretary for the county roads department, to help explain how the money was used.

She said some of the money had been used to repair equipment owned by the township, and if the bills exceeded the money in the township budget, the county had paid it.

Wilson asked why the money which the township had as a \$558 credit with Mingo Co-op was used to buy chemicals which could be purchased cheaper elsewhere.

Ken Ptacek, weed supervisor, was called and he said because he had understood the money was earmarked for chemicals, and the credit needed to be used up.

Wilson wanted to know if the township could have their grader which is being stored at the county yard. He said he would start up the motor and keep the grader in running order.

Wilson also asked what the county policy was about mowing ditches. He wanted to know why the county was mowing crops in the ditches.

The commissioners replied the policy is to mow 15 feet of the ditches, because that is the width of the mower. Commission Chair Ron Evans said the right of way for ditches varies in different sections of the county and townships, and in order to be consistent, they have set 15 feet as normal mowing width, but want the county employ-

ees to use common sense. He said there is also the possibility of liability. If someone has an accident and claims it is because of vegetation growing in the ditch, the county may be liable, he said.

The vote to turn maintenance of the township roads over to the county is for a five-year period, according to Kansas statute.

After that, the township can petition to take care of its own roads again. Wilson told the commissioners there would be such a petition, "but I don't know if it will pass."

Roads Supervisor Chris Bieker, arriving at the meeting after Wilson left, said he would look into Wilson's concerns and report back to the commissioners.

In other business: Architect Glen Strait brought an estimate for an enclosure with a roof to keep water from running into the basement through the back door on the east of the courthouse. He said it would cost \$15,000-20,000, for a concrete and glass structure with a roof.

He said it would be more cost-effective to put in a cement protection wall around the entrance, with a drain in the bottom, or possibly a sump pump. The commissioners told him to go ahead and get a cost estimate on that.

Larry Struckmeyer and Lois Dellere brought a video about the High Plains Mental Health Center. They represent Thomas County on the board.

The commissioners voted to put more "Trucks Entering Road" signs on County Road 415 west of Colby, which goes over I-70.

The county already has signs on one side of I-70 but will put some on the other side, because of the heavy trucks present a danger to traffic from side roads.

They approved the bid of \$20 each for 10 concrete parking control slabs to use at the courthouse from Stephens Construction.

A bid of \$30 each from C&K Lumber was rejected.

House members approve final budget bill of session, deny penny-a-gallon

TOPEKA (AP) — House members stood firm against a penny-a-gallon gasoline tax increase, forcing legislators to approve a state budget that leaves problems to fix next year.

The Legislature finished its work for the year and adjourned just before 1

a.m. Tuesday, drawing out the 13th day of work since members returned from their annual spring break and the 98th calendar day of the session.

Legislative leaders had agreed that a compromise spending plan would close a \$206 million gap in the state

budget for the fiscal year that starts July 1, even without an increase in the motor fuels tax.

But most leaders believed doing so would leave the state short of revenue in fiscal 2003, which starts in July 2002.

The Senate had approved the year's final spending bill Friday night. The House's 68-53 vote about 12:30 a.m. Tuesday sent the measure to Gov. Bill Graves.

"We can get by this year, but it's going to be worse next year," said Senate

Ways and Means Chairman Steve Morris, R-Hugoton. "The governor's going to be put in a box when he presents his budget next year."

Leaders had trouble focusing on the budget Monday afternoon because of an impasse on school finance issues.

But negotiators agreed on those issues Monday evening and both chambers approved their compromise, clearing the way for adjournment. A 1-cent increase on gasoline and diesel fuel was already scheduled for July 2003, to help finance a transportation plan.

Briefly

Weather: Thunderstorms

Partly cloudy to cloudy conditions, with lows in the 50s and highs in the mid-80s, then cooling down to around 70, are forecast for the Colby region this week. Tonight, clear, low 50-55 and southwest winds 10-20 mph. Wednesday, partly sunny, a 20 percent chance for thunderstorms, high around 85 and southwest winds 10-20 mph and gusty, becoming light late. Wednesday night, mostly cloudy, a 40 percent chance for thunderstorms and the low around 50. Thursday, cloudy, rain likely and the high around 70. Monday's high in Colby was 67 and the overnight low this

morning was 45. There was an additional 0.01 inches of precipitation during the past 24 hours, giving Colby 2.27 inches for the month to date. The soil temperature at the four-inch depth is averaging 58 degrees. The records for May 8: 95 in 1934 and 27 in 1975. (The daily temperatures, precipitation and records are provided by the Northwest Kansas Research-Extension Center, Colby.)

College concert tonight

Colby Community College's Department of Music will hold its spring concert at 7:30 p.m. today in the Frahm The-

ater in the Northwest Kansas Cultural Arts Center. Highlighting the concert, said Dr. Phil Shuman, director, will be the Sunflower Singers, Jazzmen, and concert choir, band.

Reception for principal next week

The Colby Parent-Teacher Organization is sponsoring a reception for Colby Elementary School Principal Becky Holtwick, who is leaving the district at the end of this school year. Everyone is invited to attend the event from 7 to 8 p.m., Tuesday, May 22, in the cafeteria at the grade school. If unable to attend, cards can be sent to Holtwick at Colby

Elementary School, said one of the organizers.

Fair board to meet

The Thomas County Fair Board will meet at 8 p.m. Thursday in the 4-H Building to make plans for the fair.

Food drive planned Saturday

Letter carriers at Colby Post Office will be collecting non-perishable food items for the Thomas County Genesis program on Saturday, May 12. Post officials ask that people leave items by their mailbox or on their porch.

