



COLBY FREE PRESS

8 pages

Telephone costs up and down

TOPEKA (AP) — Major telephone companies and the Kansas Corporation Commission staff have agreed on a plan which would increase the cost of local phone service while cutting long-distance rates.

The commission will consider the plan later this month. Eva Powers, assistant general counsel for the regulatory agency, described it as "a fair deal," but consumer advocates disagree, questioning why local rates need to go up at all and saying that savings from reduced long-distance rates are speculative.

"We don't think this is in the public's best interest," said David Springle, chief economist for the Citizens Utility Ratepayer Board. "There may be other things the commission may want to consider." After the commission opened its investigation, Southwestern Bell Telephone Co., AT&T Communications of the Southwest and Sprint/United and Sprint LP reached an agreement that the companies said would reduce intrastate access charges and long-distance rates. The companies said they decided to do this to avoid costly protracted litigation. They invited the commission staff to sign onto the agreement and the staff did.

But the agreement also would raise local rates. Under the agreement, residential customers of Southwestern Bell would see monthly increases for local telephone service ranging from \$1.65 to \$2. Southwestern Bell has about 85 percent of the state's customers, according to the commission.

Southwestern Bell also would automatically include its \$1.15 per month charge for touch-tone dial service in every customer's bill. The few people who still use rotary dials don't have to pay this charge.

Easy does it



Colby Police Officer Tom Nickols and Bob McLemore, fire chief, inspected a trailer loaded with about 4,000 pounds of fireworks in Dillons

parking lot on Saturday. The trailer's dolly broke a pad and fell through the asphalt. After leveling, the trailer was moved to a safer location.

JAY KELLEY/Colby Free Press

Mural project to begin

By PATTY DECKER

Free Press Editor

A former art instructor at Colby Community College will begin work Tuesday on a wall mural at the Bedker Memorial Complex, according to Deb Schwanke, public information officer.

Ken Mitchell, who taught art at the school from 1969 to 1989, said he is looking forward to returning to Colby for the project.

"Many northwest Kansas residents are familiar with his work which is on display in homes and buildings throughout the area," Schwanke said.

The well-known artist and teacher arrived today and plans to begin some work in the kiva area of the complex on Tuesday.

In addition, Mitchell is inviting residents to participate in painting the mural through a class offering.

"This mural will cover an entire wall," Schwanke said, "and it's a great opportunity to learn how to do something like this. A lot of students and some senior citizens have expressed a desire to work with Mitchell."

The mural itself will depict education scenes through the past century, she said, featuring school buildings like Colby's old high school, the Brownville School, Rexford School and other schools in Thomas County.

Enrollments will be taken through Monday, June 25 and the class meeting time will be determined by each student and Mitchell, Schwanke said.

For those wanting to enroll in this three credit hour course, *Problems in Painting*, can call the Admissions Office at 462-4590.

Airport upgrades, rate hike are high on council agenda Tuesday

By JAY KELLEY

Colby Free Press

The Colby City Council will have a full plate when they meet on Tuesday night, with upgrades to the airport and new electric rates high on the list.

The council will award the bid for the airport lighting project, to replace airport lighting that has been a source

of trouble for several months.

Jim's Electric, Colby and B&W Electrical Contracts, Salina each bid, with the local bid coming in at about half. The state is paying for 75 percent of the work through a grant.

Penco Engineering has also submitted agreements for design and inspection of the work.

If the council approves the bids, the city's cost will be about \$61,000, according to City Manager Carolyn Armstrong.

The budget allowed \$100,000.

Also concerning the airport will be a self-fueling system. The airport board would like to use \$20,000 in remaining funds for the lighting project

to install the system, which would allow pilots to dispense their own fuel with a credit card or house card.

The council will also have an ordinance to increase electric rates before them. Armstrong said the rate increases are as low as possible, and will range from 8-13 percent, depending on classification and usage.

"The last rate adjustment was in 1994," she said.

Armstrong said at the last council meeting that the cost of fuel had made the hikes necessary.

Other business the council will undertake includes:

- Rezoning of an area south of Comfort Inn on Range from single family

dwelling to neighborhood commercial.

- Review of a proposed franchise agreement with S&T Telephone for telecommunications system in Colby.

- Purchase of land for a new fire station.

- Award of bids for a new parks department mower.

What's that?



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

Mother Nature's artwork could be seen in many places last week when winds gusted to nearly 100 mph in the area. Along Interstate 70, just shy of the Levant exit westbound, was this strange piece of artwork that once supported a large highway sign.

Price of educating state's children could be passed on to all taxpayers

By JOHN MILBURN

Associated Press Writer

TOPEKA — Get out the checkbook. The price of educating the state's 450,000 public school children is likely to increase.

Despite legislators' best efforts to avoid a tax increase to enhance spending on elementary and secondary education, taxes are indeed likely to go up.

As suggested by Wichita's school board, many local officials are probably going to ask their residents to pick up a bigger tab for providing an adequate education.

The state's largest school district, with 45,500 students, is preparing to raise its local property taxes to cover mandatory increases in wages, benefits and operational costs to avoid cuts that its officials believe would lessen the quality of education.

It is a scenario that should be repeated in July and August as school districts prepare their budgets for the 2001-02 school year. Absent an increase in local taxes, 131 of the 304 school districts will have less money to spend this year than last.

Before they adjourned, legislators

approved a \$2.3 billion school finance package, which added \$67 million to public education. However, many acknowledged that the \$50 increase _ to \$3,870 per pupil _ in the base state aid to schools did not go far enough to address rising costs of natural gas, textbooks and salaries to retain and recruit qualified teachers.

Dale Dennis, deputy commissioner of education, said there is no question that districts are facing challenges.

"There is a significant problem to retain and recruit teachers," he said.

For example, of 13 math teachers who graduated from one state university, nine went into the private sector because of signing bonuses, better salaries and better benefits, he said.

"Schools cannot compete," Dennis said, adding that the starting teacher salary in Kansas is about \$27,500.

Many superintendents made the same point as early as March. Their boards began identifying areas to save money, including firing teachers, closing schools and eliminating programs such as elective courses and activities.

Senate Majority Leader Lana Oleen acknowledged that local school boards

are likely to increase property taxes to take care of educational needs.

"That doesn't negate the fact that the state has a responsibility to fund 100 percent of an adequate education," said Oleen, R-Manhattan. "That whole issue of funding adequately needs to be looked at."

Some districts, such as West Graham-Morland, Lenora, Nes Tre La Go, West Mineral and Havensville are planning to close schools. In effect, it is a form of consolidation, which legislators are reluctant to do themselves because of the lingering wounds caused by forced consolidation during the 1960s.

Dennis said all but about 10 of the 304 school districts use a local option budget, which increases property taxes, to augment state funds. Still, many find they are limited in using this authority because of the public's disdain for property taxes.

Oleen is a member of the Senate Education Committee and one of four architects of a plan early in the legislative session that would have pumped more than \$200 million into the school finance formula over three years.

Briefly

Weather: Cooling trend

A cooling trend is in the forecast for the Colby region, according to the National Weather Service. Tonight, cloudy, a 30 percent chance for thunderstorms, low 50-55 and northeast winds 15-25 and gusty. Tuesday, mostly cloudy, a 20 percent chance for thunderstorms, much cooler with a high near 70 and northeast winds 10-20 mph. Tuesday night, partly cloudy, a 20 percent chance for thunderstorms, low around 50. Wednesday, partly cloudy, chance for thunderstorms and a high in the 70s. Sunday's high in Colby was 102, just one-degree shy of the record high for the date of

103 set in 1939. The weekend temperatures: highs, Friday 90, Saturday 88 and Sunday 102; lows, Saturday 52, Sunday 59 and this morning 63. There was 0.28 inches of precipitation in Sunday afternoon's thunderstorm, bringing the month's total to date to 0.37 inches. The records for June 18: 107 in 1936 and 42 in 1895. (Records are provided by the Northwest Kansas Research-Extension Center, Colby.)

Gluten plant slated for closure

RUSSELL (AP) — A gluten plant scheduled to be closed next month is the subject of inquiries from a potential buyer — one that's building a \$30 million ethanol plant next door.

The prospective purchaser, however, cautions that its interest is "off and on" and that the Heartland Wheat Growers plant will likely be closed for several months even if it's bought. Kansas City, Mo.-based Farmland Industries, the nation's largest farmer-owned cooperative, announced on May 1 it plans to close the 6-year-old gluten plant in July 2.

Skydiving president dies skydiving

WICHITA (AP) — Geoffrey Peggs had done this more than 250 times before. He owned his own parachute, kept his equipment in meticulous shape and had just been elected

president of the skydiving club at Kansas State University.

None of that mattered on Friday, when the 21-year-old Peggs became entangled in the lines of his parachute and fell to his death in a Sedgewick County cornfield. He had jumped just before dusk from a plane at 11,000 feet and deployed his parachute at about 4,000 feet, which is normal. The cords that became wrapped around Peggs' right arm and leg probably prevented him from deploying his reserve parachute, said Phil Haase, owner of the Air Capital Skydiving Center, where Peggs had made several other jumps. Peggs had about half a minute, falling at speeds of about 60 to 70 mph, to figure out what to do.

