



COLBY FREE PRESS

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Well not so well



JAY KELLEY/Colby Free Press

Joe Lobato, public works department employee, inspected city well no. 8 at Fourth and Country Club this morning. The city has been unable to use the well since contamination was found at the Ace Services site on Convesse Ave. A public meeting tonight, beginning at 7

p.m., at the Community Bldg will present modifications to the clean-up plan due to a larger contamination plume than first suspected. The changes include the possibility of city water hook-ups for some area residents.

Local physicians continue staffing emergency room

By PATTY DECKER

Free Press Editor

The Citizens Medical Center's board of directors decided at its meeting late last week to continue using local physicians in its emergency room, according to Michael Boyles, chief executive officer of the hospital.

In addition, he said, the board withdrew its June 1 letter of notification to terminate services with the local doctors as they continue an ongoing process of review and recollecting statistics.

Documentation was cited as one of the issues with the board and as a result a new system of forms will be introduced to address that concern. According to Boyles, there are five key things that need to be documented when a patient sees someone in the emergency room and under the new system, different forms would be used to simplify billing services.

Prior to this recent decision, the board had considered hiring outside physicians to staff the emergency room.

Heat played role in power outage

By JAY KELLEY

Colby Free Press

According to Leonard Delzeit, Colby's public power director, heat had a lot to do with some Colby residents near Franklin Street being without power for parts of Friday night and Saturday morning.

"The heat certainly had a lot to do with it," Delzeit said. Problems began about 7 p.m. Friday when a breaker tripped a circuit in the area of College and Franklin Streets.

City personnel reset the breaker, which held, and inspected the area for causes, such as small animals or limbs

shorting on lines of transformers, but found nothing.

"The fun began about 9 p.m.," said Delzeit. A transformer near Pine and Franklin blew, followed by an underground section near Orscheln's, on Country Club Drive at Hill St. burned up.

"Usually the undergrounds go on the hottest or the coldest day of the year," Delzeit said. City crews worked to restore power most of the night and into the next day.

The final work was finished at 11:53 a.m. Saturday, but most customers had their power back before then.

Small Kansas town experiencing oil boom; some not happy

COLDWATER (AP) — Next to the lake on the outskirts of this southwest Kansas town, an oil well pumps about 350 barrels of high-quality crude a day.

Swimmers can see it. Nearby residents can hear its continual hum. And Coldwater Mayor Roy Hoffman hears the complaints.

But Hoffman insists the energy industry is giving much more than it takes.

"That's the price you pay to get a 350-barrel-a-day well," he said.

The lakeside well is one of five planned on city property this year, and

Hoffman projects direct royalty payments to the city of \$1 million by the end of the year. The city's annual budget is \$2 million.

A classic oil boom is building up Coldwater — population 800 — located in Comanche County, which boasts 2,000 people and 40,000 cattle within its boundaries. Several strikes in 1998 have made Comanche County and Coldwater the epicenter of Kansas drilling.

So far this year, Comanche County leads the state in drilling permits for new locations.

The city has not spent any of the royalty money, even though its general fund has increased from \$50,000 to almost a quarter of a million dollars during the past six months.

It's working on a plan to prioritize what civic improvements it wants to make with the money.

"We need to repair the community swimming pool," Hoffman said. "We're looking at a five-year project to upgrade the water system. But so far, we haven't spent it. We haven't spent nothing."

The city wants to spend the money

wisely, Hoffman said, because the boom won't last forever. Technology and intense drilling are expected to bring good times to an end.

Rob Patton, head of Lippizzan Petroleum Group, has found several successful wells in the county using 3-D seismic exploration. The newer, computer-aided imaging technique is used in deciding if an area looks promising for drilling.

Since the first finds in 1998, Comanche County has been besieged by lease-seekers, Patton said. Once a lease is secured, many potential drill-

ers will use 3-D seismic exploration to decide where to drill. The technique has given Lippizzan better than a 60-percent drilling success rate in the past three years — historically a very high percentage.

"We've gone into townships that were pretty much graveyards" in past searches, he said.

"We went back using 3-D and found some good wells."

The better technology makes drilling more profitable, but it has one drawback: If someone using 3-D seismic decides an area isn't productive,

the odds of someone else coming in to look for more oil and gas are low. So when Comanche exploration is over, it's over.

Hoffman is keeping that reality in mind.

So in addition to the city's plan to drop its property tax levy by about 20 mills so all citizens can receive a direct benefit from the prosperity, most of the city's windfall will go to capital improvements. That move is aimed at strengthening some of the city's more sustainable industries, such as tourism and hunting.

Communication giants look at \$44.5 billion merger in hostile bid

NEW YORK (AP) — With its \$44.5 billion offer for top cable television provider AT&T Broadband, Comcast Corp. wants to create a cable TV and high-speed Internet access behemoth that would dwarf all others.

The merger would give Comcast — the nation's third largest cable operator — 22 million cable TV subscribers and leading positions in eight of the top 10 U.S. markets.

The hostile bid was announced Sunday by Philadelphia-based Comcast after the company said merger negotiations with AT&T management fell apart amid concerns about Comcast's stock voting structure.

Comcast hopes AT&T investors will now pressure the company to strike a merger deal before a shareholder vote scheduled for later this month on plans to spin off AT&T Broadband as an in-

dependent company.

"AT&T's board of directors has the opportunity not only to deliver a considerable premium to its shareholders, but also to create both tremendous growth and significant value for the long term," said Ralph J. Roberts, Comcast's chairman.

The offer came the day before New York-based AT&T's spinoff of its wireless operation into an independent

company, the first stage in a plan to break the communications conglomerate into five separate companies.

The biggest of those AT&T units is the sprawling cable operation that AT&T patched together with \$100 billion in acquisitions that began just three years ago.

The price tag on Comcast's offer suggests AT&T overpaid for those acquisitions, an embarrassing admission

AT&T management might like to avoid.

The AT&T Broadband business Comcast is trying to buy includes MediaOne cable systems, which it was set to acquire two years ago before being foiled by a hostile bid from AT&T.

AT&T Broadband has more than 16 million subscribers, though planned divestitures would reduce that amount

by 2 million. Comcast has more than 8 million subscribers.

Comcast also said it was prepared to buy AT&T's sizable interests in two rival cable operators: a 25.5 percent stake in Time Warner Entertainment, the nation's second biggest cable company after AT&T Broadband, and a 30 percent interest in Cablevision.

AT&T said in a statement Sunday it has no plans to sell the broadband unit.

In this issue of the Free Press

American Profile

Celebrating Hometown Life
full-color weekly magazine

Students in Buhler learn to drive on Internet

BUHLER (AP) — Some driver education students in Buhler are learning to drive by using the information superhighway.

Instead of beginning classes behind the wheel of a car, they're getting started behind a computer keyboard.

Buhler in April started the state's first online drivers education program, according to Stefani Curchy, assistant

Buhler High School principal and a driving instructor who helped create the program.

The program allows students to study the textbook at home and take quizzes at any computer with Internet access. Students are still required to show up for a final exam and to take road driving lessons, but the rest of the work can be done anytime within a

four-week period. "We felt virtual learning would work well even though it's not face-to-face contact," Curchy said. "Parents and students have said they liked the online system and would rather do it than sit in a lecture."

Instructors want to offer the program year-round and eventually expand the program to other school districts. Currently, most school districts only offer

summer programs. Students receive a textbook at the start of class and can read chapters and take quizzes at their own pace.

When they get 80 percent or above on the quiz, they move forward in the program. If a student is having trouble on a quiz, an instructor will e-mail or call the student. The student then has another opportunity to pass the quiz.

Briefly

Weather: Continued warm

Warm weather will continue to assault the Colby region through much of the week, according to the National Weather Service forecast center at Goodland. Tonight, partly cloudy, a 20 percent chance for thunderstorms, lows 65-70 and southeast winds 5-15 mph. Tuesday, partly sunny, a 20 percent chance for thunderstorms, highs in the middle 90s and southeast winds 10-20 mph. Tuesday night, partly cloudy, a 20 percent chance for thunderstorms and lows 65-70. Wednesday and Thursday, thunderstorms a possibility with lows in the 60s and highs in the 90s. Colby's weekend temperatures: highs, 105 on Friday (not a record as the old record high of 108 was set in 1964), 106 on Saturday (that ties the old record of 106 set in 1973) and 98 on Sunday; lows, 65 on Saturday, 67 on Sunday and 65 this morning.

The soil temperature at the 4-inch depth is averaging 89 degrees at the Northwest Kansas Research-Extension Center at Colby. There was precipitation over the weekend, leaving the month's total at 0.23 inches. The records for July 9: 107 in 1978 and 38 in 1905. (The daily temperatures, precipitation and records are provided by the Northwest Kansas Research-Extension Center, Colby.)

Hale, Webbs, Mitchell to be honored

Colby Community College will host a retirement/old-timers/farewell picnic honoring Roger Hale who is taking early retirement, Gary and Sue Webb who are leaving, and Ken Mitchell of Washington state, former art instructor at Colby College, who is painting the mural in the Bedker Memorial Complex. It will be at 6 p.m. Wednesday, July 11, in the Student Union. The public is invited.

College pool closed for repairs

The Colby Community College swimming pool will be closed for repairs and renovation beginning at noon, Tuesday, July 10. According to Kipp Nelson, pool manager, the pool will remain closed until mid-August. The renovation will include roof and pool area repairs and painting, he said today.

Nine-Run-Run planned in August

Now in its sixth year, the Thomas County Emergency Medical Services is again sponsoring its Nine-Run-Run beginning at 8 a.m. on Saturday, Aug. 4 in Colby. Early registration is underway, said Kathy Wright, one of the organizers with openings in all age groups for the 10K and 5K run, 2K fun run and 2K walk. The cost of the event for early registration is \$10 for walkers and \$13 for runners and

after Monday, July 23, the cost will increase to \$12 and \$15 respectively, she said. To register, stop by the facility at 1245 S. Franklin or call any EMS member.

Brewster school meeting changed

The regular meeting of the Brewster Board of Education has been postponed, according to school officials. The meeting planned for Monday, July 9, has been moved to Monday, July 16. For information, call (785) 694-2236.

Blood drive planned in Colby

Colby will be hosting a blood drive, Thursday, July 26, from 7:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at the American Legion, 1850 W. 4th St. In order to give blood, said Donna Finley, director of the Thomas County Red Cross. For information or questions, call Finley at 462-7161.

