



# COLBY FREE PRESS

## Increase in insurance benefit turns into hot topic at board meeting

By JAY KELLEY

Colby Free Press

After 2 1/2 hours of sometimes heated discussion, the Colby School Board decided to increase their contribution to the employee insurance benefit by \$85,000, even though they won't know where the money is coming from until Dec. 17.

The plan would cover a 22 percent increase in Blue Cross/Blue Shield and calls for the school district to pay an additional \$50 per staff member and staff contributions of \$20 for single and \$100 for family plans.

Right now, the district contributes \$250 per insured, with staff members on family plans paying an additional \$330 out of their pockets.

Superintendent Kirk Nielsen told board members that this wasn't the only increase the board would see.

"We'll see the impact of hits in June, and we are going to ask you to raise the mill levy to pay for insurance again in August," he said.

Board member Bill Miller said he would feel "a lot more comfortable about voting for the spending if he new where the money would come from."

"We'll have to cut back in places and move some things into capital outlay," said Nielsen. "Some day this district isn't going to make it without a capital outlay."

Nielsen told Miller he could have a list of where cuts could be made by the regular board meeting on Dec. 17.

Miller said he thought the administration should have had some idea when they asked for the board meeting.

"You guys are supposed to run the day-to-day of the school district," he said.

Board member Gerry Fulwider said he found the health insurance plan offered by the state to be "much better," saying it would save \$132,000 if funded at 115 percent.

The percentage is part of the district's self-funding process. Funding at 115 percent means the district

keeps enough money on hand to pay for that percentage of expected claims.

District Business manager Jo DeYoung said she thought the state plan would cost more, but said it was a better plan in areas like prescription drugs.

One problem the state plan would eliminate, according to Fulwider, is drastic increases in premiums after a year where the insurance is used a lot.

"They have a much bigger pool," he said, "and can project costs more accurately."

Although only 18 of more than 300 school districts statewide are in the plan, school officials agreed that eventually most districts would use state insurance. Fulwider contended that some districts didn't want to give up control.

Miller asked about a survey of staff members who would take the state plan if offered. The state requires 70 percent participation or districts must pick up the difference.

Board president Stan Molstad reminded board members they only had four days to make a decision. Molstad said he was also for changing over to the state plan, "but not today."

Staff representative Cathy Vaughn, who has been with the district since 1979, said she and other teachers didn't want to go back to trying a new insurance company every 2-3 years and most were satisfied with the way Blue Cross was handling claims.

"Everyone wants lower rates, but not at the expense of some of the problems," she said.

Board member Tracy Rogers said, "I'd like to pay the whole thing and go on, but we don't have the money."

Miller also wondered about raising deductibles to lower premiums, but was told that was researched.

"It's amazing how little deductibles changed (the cost of plans,)" Vaughn said.

Fulwider again brought up the state plan, claiming it was only going up 11

percent and that "several big claims on the plan we have now could bring it up to \$600 for a single next year."

Board member John Cranston said he doubted that, but insurance was sure to rise each year.

"A lot of what we're seeing is from Sept. 11," he said. "It has nothing to do with Colby."

Miller said he still wasn't happy about not knowing where the money was coming from.

"You can't go into a bank and borrow money to pay increased bills and when the banker asks what are you going to cut, say I don't know," he said.

Nielsen responded, "I'll tell (maintenance director) Gary Barton to shut down and only fix what needs to be fixed and (technology director) Phil DeYoung to stop buying new computers, just fix the old ones." DeYoung told the board, "There is no more money in the budget and cutting budgets isn't any easier than raising taxes."

Curriculum director Diana Wieland also told the board the new technology and grants were necessary "if we are going to have performance-based education."

The first vote went 3-2 with board members Cathy Gordon and Wilburn Holloway absent. Holloway had an appointment and left before the vote. Four yes votes are necessary for a motion to pass. Miller and Fulwider voted against the motion to pay \$85,000 toward the increase for different reasons.

Miller said he still objected to not knowing where the money was coming from and Fulwider said he would not vote for the Blue Cross plan until he had a firm commitment from the board to look into something else, which prompted sharp replies from board members who said they had already committed to looking at the state plan for next year.

After Miller left the meeting to go to work, another vote was taken and Fulwider voted for the proposal, passing it 4-0

## Commissioners discuss public rides

By MAXINE NELSON

Colby Free Press

The Thomas County Commissioners have been exploring the availability of public transportation throughout the county, and with that in mind they invited Ed Dean, driver of the Thomas County public transportation van to visit with them at Monday's meeting.

Dean told the commissioners that he normally only drives the van in the immediate Colby area. Commission Chair Ron Evans said he would like to see a van make regular trips to Brewster, Levant, Rexford, Gem, Mingo and Menlo.

Dean said he has regular riders in Colby which take up his time, and said that he has driven 25,000 miles in three years, and averages 50-90 miles per day in Colby alone.

Dean said the grant for the van is set up so Thomas County residents can ride free. However, donations are appreciated to help pay for gas and maintenance on the van, he said. The van has been running in the red since March, he told the commissioners.

The commissioners learned that Rexford and Brewster both have transportation vans which are used regu-

larly, and may be used to pick up passengers in outlying areas.

If anyone in the county feels they need, and do not have, access to a public transportation van, they should contact Thomas County Clerk Tracey Perkins at 462-4500, the commissioners said.

In other business:

- The commissioners approved the request of Curt Stephens to rezone the Stephens Industrial Park from S-1 (suburban) to I-1 (industrial) following the recommendation of the Thomas County Planning Commission. The park is located south of Interstate-70. Stephens said he had been working with the Local Environmental Protection Group and the Groundwater Management District and had their approval.

- Larry Jumper, landfill supervisor, said the amount of municipal solid waste was down one-half ton per day at the end of November. It has averaged around 16 tons per day for the past three years, well below the 20 tons per day allowed to keep the landfill open. Averages were 17.33 tons per day in 1999 when 1.35 tons were from Sherman County; 16.13 tons average in 2000;

and 15.94 tons per day for 2001 at this time.

Jumper said the landfill had taken in \$175,876.29 so far this year.

Jumper said the answering machine has been installed at the landfill. The landfill number is 462-8139. He said the new road in the landfill was complete and he had used the concrete which was crushed at the landfill.

Thaniel Monaco of Miller and Associates, McCook, Neb., reported on plans for the new pit at the landfill. He said work will be done in two phases. Phase one will cost approximately \$600,000, and the second phase will cost approximately \$400,000. The phase one pit can be used for several years before the second pit will need to be made.

The county will issue no-fund warrants to pay for the first phase, which will be nearly paid off in time to issue no-fund warrants for the second phase.

Commissioner Evans said the expenses for the landfill are required by federal and state laws, and the commissioners have no choice in the matter. If trash had to be hauled to a landfill somewhere else, it would be even more expensive.



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

Adam Mead (left) and Brett Bandy, both freshmen at Colby High School, worked on a chain mail vest. Bandy has been interested in artifacts of the medieval era for the past couple of years and recently started making some of his own items from that period.

## Reaching centuries back Student's hobby could very well be one-of-a-kind for Colby community

By PATTY DECKER

Free Press Editor

Hobbies are nothing new. But one Colby teenager has one that probably puts him in a class all his own.

Enter: Brett Bandy. Brett, the son of Bruce and Leatte Bandy has taken a keen interest in the medieval and renaissance period, making and collecting various objects typical of that era.

Bandy, a freshman at Colby High School, said he has always been interested in history, but his fascination with making armor and jewelry worn by those roughly in the fourteenth through seventeenth centuries was prompted by a demonstration held here a couple of years ago.

The Society for Creative Anarchisms, also known as SCA, visited students at Colby High School in the spring of 1999, and Bandy said it was from then on that he has kept active in medieval reenacting.

"At the SCA demonstration," he said, "I met many fun people, who still are working very hard with me in my medieval works and support me even though I am quite a long way

from their home locations."

Bandy is currently training to become a swordplay fighter in the society and said that when he turns 16 next year, he would like to be able to compete in tournaments against other swordplay fighters from around the United States.

"It's really fun, although sometimes it can be a painful hobby," Bandy said.

In addition to learning swordplay skills, he makes armor and jewelry from chain mail in a variety of metals and styles, along with collecting weaponry and knightly equipment.

"I also do woodworking with the help of my grandfather (Tom Bandy) and make many of the shirts, jackets, tunics and vests with much help from my grandmother (Jane Bandy)," he said.

Writing, drawing and reading are other ways that he has studied and taught himself about this period.

One of the more time consuming and challenging parts of his hobby has been in building chain mail items.

"A half shirt, which basically is a chest piece with shoulder cover, weighs about 20 pounds," he said. "A

full shirt, which is half sleeve, full front and back to almost the knee, can weigh upwards of 30 pounds or more."

All that's needed, he said, is a hand turn drill, a metal rod or dowel the right size for the rings, strong wire clippers, needle-nose pliers to put the rings together, and galvanized wire," he said. These shirts can sell for \$200 or more and the smaller the rings, the more detailed the work, which would bring an even higher price, Bandy said.

With help from a friend, Adam Mead, also a freshman at Colby High School, Bandy said he was able to complete a chain mail chest piece in about five months with both of them working on two different pieces.

There's not many armorers in Colby, or for that matter Kansas, that Bandy knows of. "All I know is there are few, just as there are few medieval reenactors in the area.

"I do correspond with people in central and eastern Kansas, along with others in the Denver area, with the hope of starting another demonstration in Colby soon," he said.

## Trustees look at fitness center plans

By MAXINE NELSON

Colby Free Press

Larry Keirns of Goodland gave a presentation to the Colby Community College Board of Trustees at their Monday meeting, displaying a floor plan and photographs of the fitness center at the Northwest Kansas Technical College in Goodland. The center was completed last year, about the time Keirns retired as president of the college. The new center was named the Larry Keirns Fitness Center, recognizing his more than 30 years at the Goodland college.

Colby Community College is considering building a fitness center. Dr. Mikel Ary, college president, said one of the things that constantly comes up when asking students what would im-

prove the campus, is a fitness center.

Keirns said a survey of the Goodland students showed 86 percent favored a fitness center and were willing to pay a fee to use it. Those saying "no" were the ones who commute, he pointed out.

The Goodland center has a lounge, weight training/exercise room, two racquetball/handball courts, a gymnasium, showers and lockers. Keirns said they limited seating at the gymnasium to ensure it would not be used for tournaments, but would be used for students and intramural activities only. It is open from 3-9 or 10 p.m. weekdays and Sundays, and closed Saturdays.

He said the cost was approximately \$1.2 million, but some of the work had been done by the electrical and carpentry departments, cutting costs. The

building is operated under the students services department, and employs students. He said that six video cameras record what is going on.

In other business at Monday's meeting:

- The board toured the college nursing department.

- Curt Stephens, representative from the board to the Endowment Association, reported on the Nov. 12 meeting. The college endowment funds have increased in value five times since 1990 and a new accounting system is needed, he said.

Stephens reported that Troy Faulkender of Oakley is a new member of the endowment board, and that a new brochure is being printed with the college donating the printing.

## Briefly

### Weather: Slim snow chances

Chances are slim — but at least they are chances — for moisture to move into the Colby area tonight, advises the National Weather Service. Tonight, clear, then becoming cloudy late, with a 20 percent chance for snow showers, with lows in the upper 20s and southeast winds up to 15 mph, shifting to the northwest late. Wednesday, mostly sunny, highs in the upper 40s and northwest winds up to 15 mph, turning to the southeast. Wednesday night, mostly clear with lows in the middle 20s. Thursday, sunny, highs in the lower 50s, and Friday, partly cloudy, lows in the upper teens and highs in the middle 40s. Colby's high Monday was 56 and the overnight low this morning was 22. No

precipitation to report for this early part of December. The soil temperature at the four-inch depth is averaging 33 degrees. The records for Dec. 4: 74 in 1946 and -4 in 1902. (The daily temperatures, precipitation and records are provided by the Northwest Kansas Research-Extension Center, Colby.)

### Council meets tonight

The Colby City Council will hold its regular meeting today at 7:30 p.m. in council chambers. Items to be discussed include approval of corrected final plat for Dell Addition and request to from Triplett, Inc. to pave and place three street lights on easement.

### Flags fly half mast Friday

In remembrance of Pearl Harbor on Friday, Dec. 7, flags should be flown at half mast from daylight until dusk, said Dean Ludlow, VFW member.

### Soup supper Wednesday

The Trinity Lutheran Church youth group and Aid Association for Lutherans is having a soup supper at the church on Fifth St. and Country Club Dr. from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m., Wednesday, Dec. 5. The supper is being held to benefit the Thomas County Big Brothers Big Sister organization. Admission is free-will donation.

### Parade entries wanted

The Colby Christmas parade will be held Sunday, Dec. 9 at 6 p.m. The Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce, the sponsoring organization, said cash prizes will be given in five divisions including religious groups, clubs and organizational floats, best lighted vehicle, child displaying best Christmas Spirit, and best lighted float.

Line-up will be at 2nd and Franklin at 5:30 and then proceed at 6 to Santa City where Santa will be in attendance.

The Chamber is still looking for entries and encourages anyone with even a hint of participating to call the office to register your entry.

(See advertisement page 6.)

