



COLBY FREE PRESS

Colby School board acts

Nielsen's contract extended; new courses approved

By JAY KELLEY

Colby Free Press

The Colby School Board extended Superintendent Kirk Nielsen's contract and approved new courses for the next school year during its regular meeting Monday night at the administration building.

The board voted 6-0-1 to extend Nielsen's contract until June 30, 2004, which would carry him through the next school year. Board member Wilburn Holloway was absent.

Nielsen has been superintendent since July 1996, replacing Carl Combs. He was elementary school principal from 1985 until 1996, with a short stint as interim superintendent in 1993 between Jean Snell and Carl Combs' tenures.

Board member Bill Miller said he saw an opportunity for Nielsen to set an example during the current financial shortages.

"I think you should take a leadership role and freeze your salary for one year," he told Nielsen. Nielsen's salary is \$78,595 per year.

"I didn't vote for the last budget because we didn't talk about it," Miller said. "Here we are, seven months into the year and we haven't talked about the budget, yet."

"I didn't offer him a raise," said board member Cathy Gordon, who had made the motion to extend Nielsen's contract.

Both Miller and board member Gerry Fulwider said they didn't like Nielsen's comments about "taking the school board down that road" concerning the governor's state of the state speech in Monday's *Free Press*.

Nielsen said his intention was to wait to see what kind of consensus the governor had instead of taking drastic measures prematurely.

He added that measures were being taken to prepare for a budget shortfall by the state.

"We're not improving things nearly as quickly as we might have in the past," said Nielsen.

Gordon asked when administrative salaries were normally approved and Nielsen answered sometime in April or May, after teacher con-

tracts. "I think we can wait 6-8 weeks to see what happens," she said.

"I'm disappointed that our superintendent isn't taking the initiative," said Miller.

The board also looked at new courses for the next school year.

Board president Stan Molstad asked how the number of courses increased without increasing the number of teachers.

"It has to do with scheduling," said high school Principal Bryan Bullington. Courses include *The American West* and *Honors World History and U.S. History* which would be offered, but only taught if there was enough interest.

Curriculum director Diana Wieland also explained that some courses could be facilitated easier than others and teachers could effectively "double up" if that was the case.

New course offerings also include *Walton Wisdom*, *Applied English III*, *Lifetime Sports and Activities*, *Recreation and Leadership*, *Lodging Management I, II* and on-the-job training.

Culinary Arts II and *Culinary Arts* on-the-job-training. The board approved the new courses with a 6-0-1 vote.

In other action, the board:

- Heard a report on wireless technology being employed and being considered by the district from technology director Phil DeYoung. The biggest issue is cost, according to DeYoung.

- Heard an Orange & Black Classic report from Bullington. Thursday and Friday's gate receipts were "very good," and Bullington said he expected Saturday's to be good also, based on the crowd.

- Bullington also reported on new driver's education curriculum that would allow students to do the lessons from home or on computers.

He said the system would cut back on the hours of instruction needed and save the district money, although he wasn't sure how much. Nielsen told board members that driver's education costs the district about \$8,000 over the

fees charged.

- Bullington also said the school greenhouse had been broken into sometime during the weekend and some items had been stolen. The Colby Police Department had been notified and were investigating.

- Heard about two new morning study halls for elementary students, one for math and one general, from elementary Principal Terrell Harrison. Although the study halls aren't mandatory, Harrison said they give students who are behind a place to study with someone to help them.

- Heard from Nielsen on Blue Cross/Blue Shield insurance costs. He told the board the administration was working up figures on the cost of switching to the state insurance plan with different scenarios and hoped to have data ready in the near future.

- Also heard from Nielsen on property insurance. He told the board that property insurance was expected to go up and the district hadn't taken bids for some time.



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

Ron Huffles, owner of Huffles Construction in Colby, along with two other employees, took advantage of the warmer temperatures by laying concrete in the parking lot area for the Colby Travel Information Center.

The facility will include a small building around a grain bin. The projected date for completion of the parking lot and center was not available.

Tourist information center work begins

By PATTY DECKER

Free Press Editor

The Colby Travel Information Center is starting to take shape just off the northeast corner of the Kansas Highway 25-Interstate 70 junction, said Leilani Thomas, director of the Colby Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Huffles Construction has been contracted to lay the cement foundation, along with the curb and guttering.

"We are so excited to see the work beginning," Thomas said today. "We (the tourism board) first started talking about the center two and one-half years ago and what made it possible was the one percent transient guest tax that was passed in April of 2000."

Funding for the city's tourism bureau and the new center comes from transient guest taxes on lodging facilities within the city.

In a brief overview, Thomas said, the first transient guest tax was passed in 1986 at one percent. Three years later, an additional one percent increase was approved generating more than \$80,000 a year.

Those funds pay the director's salary, along with making it possible for Thomas, and the tourism board, to promote the city through advertising and special events that bring others to the area.

The additional one percent lodging tax, which was passed nearly two years ago, is specifically earmarked for the new center, she said.

The funds will be used to build the center, hire a full-time staff member, and pay for upkeep and other maintenance needs.

"The new facility will offer convenience to travelers," she said, "complete with restrooms, coffee, and information about Colby and other tourism sites around the state." The entrance to the center will be on Frontage Road near Taco John's and Arby's with the front door of the building facing north. The parking lot will accommodate 16 vehicles and the site will include a grain bin on the south end of the center.

"This will be a classy-looking building that we think will give a great first impression to visitors passing through the area," she said.

The current tourism board members, who have been involved in the project from its beginning, include Sue Taylor, chairperson with Prairie Museum of Art and History; Martha Brewer, Ramada Inn; Jim Brown, Central Detroit Diesel; Scott Crawford, Country Club Motel; Howard Culver, Comfort Inn; Chandra Farmer, Holiday Inn Express; Patrick Toth, Kansas Quick Lube; and Mike and Jennifer Woofter, Woofter Construction and Irrigation.

First responder plan proposed for county

By MAXINE NELSON

Colby Free Press

The idea of a "first responder" plan that would improve the county's ambulance response time was proposed to the Thomas County Commissioners at their Monday meeting.

Josh Buffington, Emergency Medical Services director, said the proposal could cut the time in half when responding to an accident or other situation. The average response time has been about 10 minutes from receiving the call to arriving at the emergency scene, he said.

The law requires three responders to an ambulance call and under the present plan "the volunteers come to the office, get into the ambulance and go on the call," Buffington said.

He said he would like to equip the department's Suburban for calls, and have a first responder who will go immediately on the call in that vehicle from wherever he was, to be followed by the other two volunteers in the ambulance. He said he wants to pay the volunteers \$1 per hour to be on call. Commission Chair Ron Evans estimated it would cost a little over \$6,000 per year, and said it would be worth it to maybe save a life. He told Buffington to pursue the first responder plan. If necessary, Evans said, the plan can be funded by raising the fee for an ambulance call. Buffington said uncollected bills of \$2,104 were written off in 2001, mostly for small amounts for people who do not live in the state. Around \$41,000 has been sent to the Kansas state collection agency for action. He said the amount collected was comparable to last year, even with Medicare cuts.

In other business:

- The commissioners met with Judge Glenn Schiffner to discuss repairs around the courthouse. Schiffner had submitted a memorandum in September 2000, at their request, listing items in need of repair. The group went over the list.

- First on the list was the roof. The commissioners have had some repairs done to the roof, but Schiffner said it still leaks above the court, and said you can see daylight through the roof from the attic. He said he was thinking of putting a large umbrella over the computers if it rains.

- Schiffner had suggested an air lock door at the north entrance of the building. Evans said there was not room for double doors. Schiffner suggested the commissioners look at the Atwood courthouse, as it had auto-

mated sliding doors on the north. Evans agreed a double door would save on heat and make it easier to open on a windy day. He will check with the architect on the doors. Schiffner also suggested the north entry door be painted.

- Commissioner Glen Kersenbrock said some lawn work has been done, and arrangements had been made for some repairs to the sidewalk and curb in front of the courthouse, but so far it hasn't happened. Evans called and invited Mark Blatt to meet with the commissioners at the next meeting to discuss the repairs.

- The carpeting in the basement is wrinkled and still needs repair, as does the carpet on the third floor.

- Remedial action has been taken for the handicap parking, and break room.

- Some ceiling tile has been replaced in the courthouse, but the roof leaked and stained some tiles again.

- Repairs have been made in the men's restroom in the basement, and the women's restroom on the second floor.

- Handrails have been put up on the uneven outside steps, but Kersenbrock said the State Historical Society has denied a request to repair or replace the steps, because the building is on the National Register of Historic Places.

- Schiffner said a light was still needed to illuminate the north parking lot.

- He said some Community Corrections people have been cleaning the courthouse attic, and might be available to do some painting if the commissioners wished.

- The commissioners met with Pat Mallory of S&T Communications and decided to use S&T as their exclusive long distance carrier for 9.9 cents per minute all the time. The program is set up so the long distance bill goes to the city, and the city bills the county. Mallory said the city was already using S&T, but the county has several long distance carriers, at varying costs.

- County Clerk Tracey Perkins said the commissioners had already decided to use S&T but had been waiting for service to be available. She said the different carriers were the results of decisions by department heads.

- The decision will put all the county's telephones under the same company, except for the "prisoner call-out" at the jail. The prisoners can call out collect from the jail, and the jail gets some of the money if the person called accepts the call.

Leader not sure Democrats can slow budget plan

By JOHN HANNA

Associated Press Writer

TOPEKA — Senate Democrats have found plenty to dislike in a Republican budget plan, but they are not sure they can prevent it from getting out of committee.

The plan is designed to balance the budget for the state's 2003 fiscal year without increasing taxes. The state faces a projected \$426 million gap be-

tween expected revenues and spending commitments for fiscal 2003.

The Senate Ways and Means Committee was to begin hearings today. The proposal was drafted by Chairman Steve Morris, R-Hugoton, and Senate President Dave Kerr, R-Hutchinson, who also serves on the committee.

Morris and Kerr want the committee to act quickly, to allow debate by the full Senate next week.

Because Republicans hold eight of 11 seats on the committee, Senate Minority Leader Anthony Hensley said Monday he believes an endorsement is all but guaranteed.

"I would think at this point, it would probably be meaningless to try to do anything with it in committee," said Hensley, D-Topeka, whose party is outnumbered in the Senate 30-10.

The Kerr-Morris plan is an alterna-

tive to Gov. Bill Graves' proposal to raise \$228 million by increasing cigarette, sales and motor fuels taxes and vehicle registration fees. Graves has argued that tax increases are necessary to avoid cuts in education and social service programs.

Kerr and Morris propose to cut the current \$4.5 billion budget by about \$85 million, or 1.9 percent, then freeze spending for fiscal 2003.

Those needing assistance should bring all their necessary papers with them.

Extra sports copies available

Those seeking extra copies of the "Thomas County Winter Sports Special," inserted in last Thursday's *Free Press*, can purchase copies at the *Free Press* office for 50 cents each.

College board meets today

The Colby Community College Board of Trustees will

meet at 5 p.m. today in the board room of the Administration Building. Agenda items include payment of claims, discussion of negotiations, and any other item any member wants to discuss. The meeting is open to the public.

Recycling center takes phone books

The Thomas County Recycling Center is taking old telephone books at its collection site, 720 E. College Dr. in Colby. Those wanting to drop off the books should use the magazine bins, coordinators said.

Briefly

Weather: Cooler

A turn to cooler weather can be expected in the Colby region through Thursday, said the National Weather Service this morning. Tonight, cloudy, lows 15-20 and north winds 10-20 mph, turning to the northwest and decreasing to 5-10 mph. Wednesday, mostly clear, highs near 40 and northwest winds 5-10 mph. Wednesday night, clear, low around 10. Thursday, mostly sunny, highs in the middle 40s. Friday, cloudy, lows around 15 and highs in the upper 50s. Colby's high Monday was 59 and the overnight low this

morning was 11. Precipitation remains at 0.10 inches for the month. The records for Jan. 22: 77 in 1943 and —17 in 1966. Colby's high today is expected to reach 65. (*The daily temperatures, precipitation and records are provided by the Northwest Kansas Research-Extension Center, Colby.*)

Program assistance available

Rosalie Seemann will be at the Meadowlark Manor in Colby from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Friday to assist with Food Sales, Homestead Refunds, LEIAP applications and the

Low Energy Income Assistance program. Those needing assistance should bring all their necessary papers with them.

