



COLBY FREE PRESS

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PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

Dave Starkey, partner at Starkey and Gatz Law Offices in Colby, learned that he is one of three finalists for a position on the Kansas Court of Appeals.

Kansas Court of Appeals Starkey among finalists

By PATTY DECKER
Free Press Editor

A Colby attorney and two district court judges are vying for a new position on the Kansas Court of Appeals, according to information reported by The Associated Press.

David Starkey, of Colby, whose law partner is John Gatz with the firm of Starkey and Gatz, along with Sedgwick County Judge Thomas Malone and Riley County Judge David Stutzman were the three names forwarded to Gov. Kathleen Sebelius by the Supreme Court Nominating Commission last Wednesday. The governor will now have 60 days to make an appointment.

"This is a tremendous honor to have been recommended," Starkey said on Tuesday.

The Kansas Court of Appeals started the search for the new position following the decision to expand the court from 10 to 11 members. After making that decision, the court then sent letters to every attorney in the state in search for a new member, Starkey said.

Almost 50 lawyers submitted their names for the position and from that list the Supreme Court's nominating commission narrowed the field to 30. Starkey said he was interviewed on Tuesday, Feb. 4 by the commission and on Wednesday, Feb. 5, a letter was sent to the governor recommending his name and the two other district court judges.

Starkey said he has practiced law in Colby since 1975 and has served on many committees and task forces with the Kansas Bar Association. He is a trustee of the Kansas Bar Foundation and sits on the commission of the Kansas Lawyers Assistance Commission, which was created to help attorneys having drug and alcohol abuse, depression or even burn-out issues.

Starkey served Colby in other positions including that of city councilman and president of the Colby Chamber of Commerce.

Competing with Starkey for the newly created position, Malone has been a judge in Sedgwick County since 1991 and Stutzman has been a judge in Riley County since 1997.

In addition to the governor appointing either Starkey, Stutzman or Malone to the new position, she will also be looking at appointing someone to the vacated position left by Judge Robert Gernon, who accepted a seat on the Kansas Supreme Court. In filling that position, the governor will be given three more names and it may or may not include the two left once she fills the new position.

But regardless, Starkey said he is pleased to have been selected.

Starkey and his wife, Lana, have three children. Matt, 27, is a certified financial planner in Kansas City; Alysia, 25, is an assistant professor at Kansas State University in Salina, having majored in library sciences; and Jeff, 23, is student teaching at Fort Hays.

High school and pet shop are fire call sites

By DARREL PATTILLO
Colby Free Press

Electricity was a factor in a fire at Colby High School this morning, Colby's assistant fire chief Rick Dickman said today, and added that a faulty adapter was the probable cause of an electrical fire Tuesday afternoon at the Pet Oasis in downtown Colby.

At 8:55 this morning, the fire department received a call about a fire in the kitchen at the high school.

A steamer unit caught fire in the kitchen, causing the evacuation of the school.

Dickman said that at this point, the fire appeared to be electrical in nature.

"The investigation isn't complete yet," he said.

Dickman said that two military recruiters were at the school at the time, and one of them extinguished the blaze with a fire extinguisher, and the other removed power from the steamer.

"We're glad they were there," Dickman said. "They definitely kept the fire from getting out of hand."

Damage to the steamer was extensive, and Jo DeYoung, business manager for the school district, said that the staff at the kitchen would be ordering a new one.

"They use that steamer everyday," she said. "It's important that they get another one in there as quickly as possible."

Pizza Hut of Colby was called in to provide lunch for the students and staff today. Paul VanEaton, Pizza Hut manager, said that the school had ordered around 50 pizzas.

"We gave them a discount," he said.

"The fire at the pet store was probably caused by an unprotected multi-plugged adapter," Dickman said. "They're aren't very safe to use."

The fire department received the call at 4:25 p.m. about a fire at the pet store. By the time the fire department arrived, the fire was out. Dickman said that damage was minimal, and confined to the wall where the fire occurred, and to the electrical wiring.

The fire department surveyed the area around the fire with a thermal imaging device to make sure that the fire was out.

Bill would allow tax hikes for school districts

TOPEKA (AP)—A bill to allow school districts to raise additional property taxes raises questions about the definition of equal education in the eyes of the courts, legislators said.

Currently, the state caps property taxes — known as the local option budget — at 25 percent of a school district's total budget. The bill considered Tuesday by the House Education Committee would raise that lid by 2 percentage points in each of the next five years, until it reaches 35 percent.

The committee took no action on the bill.

Johnson County legislators led a failed effort in 2002 to increase local option budgets. The county has some of the fastest growing and wealthiest school districts in Kansas, including DeSoto, Blue Valley and Olathe.

Rep. Dan Williams, R-Olathe, and some school officials said Tuesday that without additional state funds, districts need to take matters into their hands.

"If we are unable to significantly improve state funding, which I believe we are, the least we can do is allow districts alternative options," Williams said.

All but four of the 303 school districts have local option budgets, which raise nearly \$375 million. The four districts without local option budgets are Ingalls, Kismet-Plains, Midway and Osage City.

The state matches a portion of those funds for an additional \$148 million. An increase of 2 percentage points in the local option budget cap would raise the state's portion by an estimated \$8 million in fiscal 2004.

Overall, Kansas spends \$2.3 billion a year in state aid to elementary and secondary schools.

Hays Superintendent Fred Kaufman said with declining enrollment and a cut of \$27 per student in state aid, his district will cut \$466,000 from its \$20.7 million budget for the next school year.

"We have been at the top of our local option budget since 1993 and have nowhere to go," said Kaufman, who oversees 3,140 students.

Of its total budget, Hays gets \$4.2 million with local property taxes with the rest coming from the state.

But critics said increasing the 25 percent cap would return the state to the pre-1992 days, when the courts said the state's funding of education was inequitable.

Equals levels of the 1980s

Farm loan delinquencies are on the rise

WICHITA (AP)—More than 22 percent of Kansas farmers who borrowed money from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency are delinquent on their payments — a percentage that reaches levels not seen since the farm crisis of the 1980s.

Last year, 15.7 percent of borrowers were delinquent at this time, said Arlyn Stiebe, the agency's farm

loan chief in Kansas.

"Quite honestly, a lot of people are almost in the same shape they were in the 1980s," he said.

"I don't like to be pessimistic. It is just what I have seen the last two or three weeks sure brings back a lot of unpleasant memories from the 1980s," he said.

The agency is the lender of last resort for many farmers in the state, and with \$260 million dollars in Kansas loans on its books, the agency is the biggest single lender in the state.

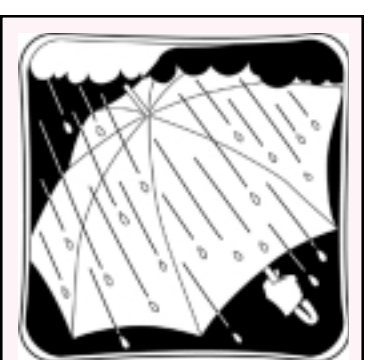
Its newly released February report is significant as a barometer of the farm economy because it is the first to reflect delinquencies for loans due by year's end, when for most part annual farm loans come due.

Now for the cap



DARREL PATTILLO/Colby Free Press

Barbara Bickner, 11, of Colby, prepared to put a cap on the snowman she and her friend, Laura Juenemann, built in the Bickner's yard at 4th and School Street. Barbara said the snowman took about "10 or 20 minutes to build." Today's sun and warmer temperatures will probably reduce his stature considerably.



Moisture mentioned

Tonight., partly cloudy. Lows around 24. South wind 5 to 15 mph becoming light and variable. Thursday., partly cloudy in the morning. Mostly cloudy in the afternoon with a 30 percent chance of rain showers. Highs in the upper 40s. Southeast wind 5 to 10 mph. Thursday night, cloudy. A 30 percent chance of evening rain showers or snow showers. Lows near 30. Friday, cloudy. Highs near 40. Friday night., cloudy. A 20 percent chance of light snow. Lows around 25.

The numbers
Tuesday's high, 49
Low this morning, 16
Soil temperature, 32
Year ago, 44 and 19
Month's precipitation, 0.12
Month's snowfall, 2 inches
Records, 83 in 1911 (warmest February day on record in Colby), -31 in 1899 (coldest reading ever recorded here).

Briefly

Conferences continue Thursday

Parent-teacher conferences for Colby Public Schools continue Thursday. Parents with questions should call either the elementary school at 465-5100, middle school at 465-5200 or high school at 465-5300.

Massage funds help department

The Physical Therapist Department at Colby Community College is holding its annual massage clinic to raise money for program activities. The event's next session is on Feb. 18 from 5 to 9 p.m. in the PTA department. Walk-ins are welcome.

'Rain Rally' on Feb. 22 agenda

The first-ever *Northwest Kansas Pray for Rain Rally* has been scheduled for Saturday, Feb. 22 in the 4-H Building on the Thomas County Fairgrounds, Colby. Organizers are Leonard and Zelma Kinkade of rural Brewster. The event will

run from 3-6 p.m. and residents in the 12 counties of north-west Kansas are cordially invited. The counties include those from Trego west to the Colorado line and north to the Nebraska line. Questions to Kinkade at (785) 694-2671.

Commodity distribution scheduled

The commodity distribution by the United States Department of Agriculture will be held in Colby from 3-4 p.m. on Monday, Feb. 17, at the Retired Senior Volunteer Program housed in the Senior Progress Center in Fike Park Those eligible to receive commodities, based on income guidelines, are expected to get raisins, cranberry sauce, pears, corn cereal, salmon and peanut butter. For questions, call 462-6744.

Rotary Club plans soup supper

The Colby Rotary Club is sponsoring its annual soup supper from 5 to 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 18, during the Colby-Goodland basketball game at the Colby Community Building. The cost is \$4 for adults and \$2 for children 12 and un-

der. Proceeds go toward Rotary projects

Shelter class reminder issued

The Thomas County Chapter of the American Red Cross is offering a shelter operations class, said Molly Oliver, spokesperson for the organization. The class is scheduled for Saturday, Feb. 22, from 8:30 a.m. until 12:30 p.m. at the Thomas County Office Complex on South Range. In addition, the Red Cross is looking for people interested in learning how to drive the emergency response vehicle.

Cemetery board meets Thursdays

The Colby Cemetery District board meetings will be held on Thursdays for the next couple of months, reminded Relda Galli, board member. The meetings will continue to be held at the Thomas County Courthouse beginning at 2 p.m. Board members should note that Thursday meetings include Feb. 20, March 20 and April 24. Call Galli at 462-3670 if you have questions.

