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To all our readers...

Happy Valentine's Day

Senator coming to town

By TOM (TD) DREILING
Free Press Publisher

U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback will be visiting with residents of Thomas County next week as part of his "Meet and Greet" tour, his office told the *Colby Free Press* today.

Brownback expects to be in Colby at the airport from 9:15 a.m. until 10 a.m., on Friday, Feb. 21, said his contact person Erik Hotmire.

Following his stop in Colby, Brownback will be in Hoxie from 10:30-11:30 in the conference room at the Sheridan County Health Complex.

A "Dutch Treat" lunch will be at Quinter, at the Q-Inn Restaurant, from noon to 1:30 p.m., after which Brownback will travel to WaKeeney to visit with residents at the Western Electric community room from 2-3 p.m.

Brownback's area tour is designed to give constituents an opportunity to question the senator about issues of concern, such as drought relief assistance and the pending action against Iraq.

Brownback is a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee and the House-Senate Conference Committee deciding the outcome of drought relief in the Omnibus Appropriations bill (H.J. Res. 2).

Brownback said the bill provides "targeted assistance" to those producers who need it. "It also provides a waiver of the CRP rate reduction penalty, and will have a significant positive impact across the state," he said.

Brownback said he made a commitment to making drought assistance his first order of business this year.

Firemen's Ball Saturday event

By PATTY DECKER
Free Press Editor

OAKLEY — The city's fire department is holding its annual Firemen's Ball from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m., Saturday, at the 4-H Building in Oakley, said Art Martin, assistant fire chief. Paul Heskett will provide the entertainment, and proceeds will help the department purchase equipment, Martin said.

"Without events like the firemen's ball," he said, "we could not buy the many things needed for training, prevention and firefighting."

During the past three years, the fire department was able to purchase items such as rescue air pillows, battery-operated saws-all, a VCR for watching training films, prevention materials and continuous training for emergency response.

"We spent \$16,715 over those three years for these items and training and none of it was taxpayers' money," Martin said.

He said the money was accumulated over time and through personal donations, grants, and fund raising. Admission is \$8 per person.

Board to look at store

Stage building mentioned as site for school offices

By DARREL PATTILLO

Colby Free Press

Superintendent Kirk Nielsen will ask the Colby school board to take a tour of the Stage building during Monday night's meeting.

The building is located on the Wal-Mart Plaza and Nielsen said it is suitable as a possible location for the district's school administration offices.

"It certainly has a lot going for it size-wise," Nielsen said.

Colby architect Glen Strait will also talk to the board about updated floor plans for a new building, if the school board should decide to go in that direction.

The board will also decide Monday if they will let bids on a new building.

Also on the agenda is a curriculum presentation "Developing Community Character" with Deanna Hanzlick, Judy Kleinsorge and Robin Schwanke.

The board will consider whether to change the April 7 board meeting date.

The board will discuss an out-of-district field trip request for students and two instructors. They will attend the Kansas Hospitality Cup in Topeka on Feb. 21.

Expenses for the trip will be paid by grants.

The school board will meet in the board room of the administration building, 210 S. Range.

The meeting gets underway at 7 p.m. and the public is encouraged to attend.

'Will you be my Valentine?'



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

Children at Smart Start Northwest Kansas distributed Valentine cards and candy on Wednesday afternoon. Malcolm Small, 6, held out a box of cards and goodies and then watched as Allysa Torres, 4, (middle) and Myranda Ortiz, 6, (right) chose a special treat. Terina Schmidt, lead teacher at Smart Start, said the chil-

dren were busy throughout the week making Valentines and decorating windows. For those unfamiliar with Smart Start, the organization's mission is to increase the quality of early learning environments and the availability of childcare for those ages birth to five.

That takes care of this year

Compromise budget goes to governor

TOPEKA (AP) — With the difficult task of balancing this year's budget almost complete, Gov. Kathleen Sebelius and legislative leaders looked ahead to the next budget and saw more of the same.

The House voted 86-36 Thursday to approve a compromise bill that eliminates all but \$2 million of a projected \$312 million deficit in fiscal 2003, which ends June 30. The vote sent the measure to Sebelius.

The bill cuts spending by \$86 million and withholds \$95 million for highway projects and \$48 million in state aid to cities and counties.

"It's a snapshot of what's to come

in the '04 budget," said House Speaker Doug Mays, R-Topeka. "There is a great deal of pain in that budget."

Sebelius said she was not satisfied with the budget she has proposed for fiscal 2004 because it sets almost no money aside as an emergency fund. Her fellow Democrat, Senate Minority Leader Anthony Hensley, of Topeka, said the issue will "loom over this session."

Speaking to a meeting of reporters and editors from around the state, Sebelius also said that keeping next year's aid to public schools at the current level of \$3,863 per pupil actually represents a cut in funding — because school districts'

costs are rising.

The governor said she was open to reviewing tax credits given to businesses in light of a recent state audit, which suggested the state has granted millions of dollars in undeserved tax breaks.

House Minority Leader Dennis McKinney, D-Greensburg, told the visiting journalists that legislators are interested in the topic of tax credits as well.

Another possible money-saving strategy was suggested by Senate President Dave Kerr, R-Hutchinson, who noted that Kansas has more than 4,200 local taxing districts — one of the highest numbers per capita in the country.

Consolidations can reduce costs, and the Legislature should do its part to ease the process of consolidating local governments, Kerr said. If other communities wanted to follow the example of Wyandotte County and Kansas City, Kan., in forming a unified government, they should not have to seek legislative approval, he said.

On the revenue side, Mays said he doesn't sense much support for tax increases. He also said he would oppose the idea of issuing bonds against future revenue from Kansas' share of the 1998 tobacco settlement.

All of the officials agreed that fashioning the 2004 state budget

Briefly

Courthouse to close, no meeting

Monday being President's Day, the Thomas County Courthouse will be closed and there will be no commissioners' meeting. The commissioners will, instead, meet Tuesday at 9 a.m.

Landfill closing Monday

The Thomas County landfill will be closed on Monday in observance of President's Day. Supervisor Larry Jumper said the landfill will be back to normal hours on Tuesday.

Soup supper Saturday

The Episcopal Church Women are planning a soup supper and bake sale featuring homemade chili, vegetable beef soup, plus baked goodies, at the Colby Community Building in the activity room downstairs on Saturday, from 5 to 8 p.m. when Colby faces off with Barton County College in basketball. Soup prices are \$3 for the first bowl with refills \$1 and children under five eat free.

Coffee House Night planned

The Community Awareness Team is sponsoring its third annual Smoke-free *Coffee House Night* from 8 to 11 p.m., Saturday, at the City Limits Convention Center in Colby. An open microphone is available for poetry reading, acoustic and electric guitar playing. Musicians are asked to bring needed equipment, said Janet Worthy, coordinator, and student-produced videotaped public service announcements and art work will be displayed to promote smoke free living. Special coffees, teas, hot cocoa and desserts will be served with a \$3 admission to cover expenses. For questions, call Worthy at 462-8152.

College board meets Monday

The regular meeting of the Colby Community College board of trustees will be held at 5 p.m., Monday, in the board room of Thomas Hall. Trustees are expected to approve contracts, agreements and a mission statement. In addition, the trustees will hear a report from the legislative conference

involving community colleges, and discuss negotiations. For questions, call 462-3984.

Brewster school board to meet

The Brewster Public Schools board of education will hold its regular meeting at 7 p.m., Monday, in the school cafeteria. The agenda includes removing consent calendar items; Western Kansas Liberty League concerns; the state's report card; sharing resources with neighboring schools and discussion on the senior trip survey. In addition, the board will consider new stage curtains, transfer of land, clarification of policies and student council requests. Personnel, students concerns and negotiations are also expected to be discussed.

'Book Lovers Sale' Saturday

Pioneer Memorial Library is sponsoring its "Book Lovers Sale," from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Saturday, in the basement of the library, 375 W. 4th St. Prices range from 10¢ to a maximum of \$5, said Joanne Sunderman, librarian. For questions, call 462-4470.



Some clouds, and some sun

Tonight, mostly cloudy. Lows in the lower 20s. North wind around 15 mph. Saturday, mostly cloudy and cooler. Highs in the mid 30s. North wind 10 to 15 mph. Saturday night, mostly cloudy. Lows in the lower 20s. Sunday, mostly sunny and warmer. Highs in the lower 50s. Sunday night...Partly cloudy and breezy. Lows in the mid 20s. Monday, partly sunny. Highs in the mid 50s. Tuesday, partly cloudy, then becoming mostly cloudy. Lows in the mid 20s and highs in the upper 40s.

The numbers

Thursday's high, 51
Low this morning, 28
Soil temperature, 35
Year ago, 51 and 15
Precipitation up to 8 a.m., trace
Month's precipitation, 0.12
Month's snowfall, 2 inches
Records, 74 in 1945 and -9 in 1936.

