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Get peek at plant's progress



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

City officials met with Aaron Clark (left) of Ferguson-Harbour Incorporated, Hendersonville, Tenn., which is the general contractor in charge of building the water treatment plant at the Ace Services Superfund site located east of Golden Hardware. Clark, along with Gerry Bieker, public works director, and Mike Albers,

the city's technology director made a "walk through" of the plant today. Bieker said plant operations should be up and running by March of this year. The city will be operating the treatment water facility as part of an agreement with the Environmental Protection Agency.

Board tours two buildings, then focuses on new

No action taken in search for administrative offices

By MICHELLE L. HAWKINS
Colby Free Press

The Colby School District board toured a couple of buildings Monday night that could be used for administrative offices, then sat down to talk about building new.

These were the options presented at the board's meeting, which resulted in no action being taken.

The board did on-site tours of two sites. The first was the former Stage store, 1923 S. Range, in Wal-Mart Plaza. B.J. Melvin of Homeland Reality showed board members around the 10,000 square-foot building.

Should the district consider buying the entire property, Melvin said it includes an additional 4,000 square feet that currently is rented by Maurices and Claire's Boutique.

The second was a building owned by Larry McDonald of Colby, just south of Sears at 1937 S. Range. That building has no front entrance and was accessed during the meeting through the back door.

The 6,000 square foot area is not finished and would need to be remodeled and an entrance would need to be added.

Additional parking could be placed on the south side of the building since the property includes the land 72 feet to the south.

After returning to the board room in the administration building at 210 S. Range, a presentation was given by Glen Strait, with Strait Associates, on the possibility of constructing a new building on land near the high school.

Strait presented two scenarios, one with a basement and the other without. Both were similar with the exception of changes on the plan with the basement to allow for a stairwell.

Although Strait didn't have the final drawings from the mechanical engineer, a suggestion was made to take bids for the building.

School board president, Stan Molstad, recommended the board wait to take bids until all the plans are in place.

Strait estimated the upper portion of the building could be constructed

for around \$60 per square foot and said the basement could be in the area of \$25 per square foot.

"This is a good time to bid out work," Strait said, "the level of competition is pretty intense."

Concern was raised about bidding the project without knowing where the money to build it was going to come from.

Board member Gerry Fulwider asked if anyone had suggestions on how to pay for the project rather than taking the money out of capital outlay.

"The money saved from leaving this building (the current administration building) is not that great," Fulwider said.

He continued to question the economy and what appears to be the future funding from the state. "It seems to be a very poor time to be making an investment," he said.

Strait suggested the building could be bid out as a shell and then add on elements to the building. One possibility to cut costs was that the outside of the building could be built and then the maintenance staff could do the work and contract out different jobs.

"We could put up a shell and work on it (ourselves)," Superintendent Kirk Nielsen said.

"Just don't expect us to be in it in six months."

Board member Bill Miller didn't agree with having the maintenance staff work on the building.

"Gary Barton (maintenance director for Colby Public Schools) doesn't have time to be doing this stuff," Miller said, "and if he does, we need to find him something to do."

No action was taken on any of the options for an administration building.

It was decided to wait until the next board meeting on March 3 to see the completed architectural plans.

Molstad asked the building committee to meet with Nielsen and review the plans in detail.

After all the plans are completed and reviewed, the board will decide whether or not to bid out the project.

Alleged rape here sparks note of caution

By PATTY DECKER

Free Press Editor

Colby police are investigating an alleged rape that reportedly occurred Sunday afternoon involving a young woman who told them she doesn't remember what happened to her.

Lab results are showing benzodiazepine and morphine in her system, said Randy Jones, Colby chief of police.

"Benzodiazepine is a very potent tranquilizer similar to valium," he

said, but many times stronger."

Jones said the woman told police she was having a drink at Twisters Bar and Grill in Colby and believes that someone put something in her drink.

"This case is similar to others being investigated in other parts of Kansas," he said, "where women have been date raped."

The most common drug currently used in date rape, Jones said, is call Rohypnol or its street name, Roofies.

Further details of the investigation were not released, but authorities are reminding everyone to take precautionary steps to protect themselves when possible.

Some of those tips include not going out alone and to keep an eye on friends when out for the evening.

"Never leave drinks unattended and don't accept a drink that you did not see made," he said. "Remember that these drugs dissolve in non-alcoholic beverages as well as alcoholic ones."

Jones also recommended that people not share drinks and beware of someone who asks a person to go outside for fresh air — particularly if it is someone they don't know.

Another important safety tip when at drinking establishments is that if someone believes they are "severely intoxicated" after only one or two drinks, they should call for help immediately, Jones said.

For questions, Jones urges people to call the police department at 462-4460.

House panel endorses higher education budget

TOPEKA (AP) — A \$1.7 billion higher education budget proposed by Gov. Kathleen Sebelius for the next fiscal year has been endorsed by the House Appropriations Committee.

Spending for public universities, community colleges and vocational schools would remain at current levels under Sebelius' plan.

The budget makes no fresh cuts in higher education but neither re-

stores money cut last year nor provides additional funds for rising costs in health insurance and operations.

The committee's endorsement, on a voice vote Monday, continued a trend this year in which lawmakers are leaving Sebelius' spending recommendations largely untouched.

The committee plans to put most of the fiscal 2004 budget in a bill

expected to come to a final vote in mid-March.

Committee members said tight revenues and the state's lack of cash reserves have discouraged significant changes in Sebelius' budget proposals.

"At this point, we don't see a lot of options for making changes within the resources we have," said House Appropriations Committee Chairman Melvin Neufeld, R-

Ingalls.

In a report, the committee noted that the higher education system lost \$27 million in general revenues last year when then-Gov. Bill Graves imposed budget cuts. The report also noted that Board of Regents institutions face \$8 million in higher health insurance and personnel costs.

But the House committee didn't add money to compensate.

Death toll climbs to 21 in Chicago night club tragedy

CHICAGO (AP) — Hundreds of screaming guests rushed the exits of a crowded night club Monday after someone used pepper spray or Mace, and at least 21 people were crushed to death or smothered in the panic, officials said.

Firefighters were forced to use sledgehammers and pry bars to open locked or blocked doors that prevented some club-goers from fleeing, Fire Commissioner James Joyce said at a late morning brief-

ing. "There are people trying to get out that could not get out," Joyce said. "Locked and blocked doors are a contributing factor. We can't explain how management or ownership would allow that."

The locked doors are a fire code violation, Joyce said.

Twenty-one people were confirmed dead in the tragedy at the Epitome Night Club, Chicago Police spokesman Pat Camden said. Hospitals reported treating at least

50 for everything from critical injuries to asthma-like symptoms.

"Everybody smashed; people crying, couldn't breathe," said club-goer Reggie Clark. "Two ladies next to me died. A guy under me passed out."

Some witnesses reported that panic broke out after the guards used pepper spray or Mace to break up a fight, but authorities did not immediately confirm that. Police Commissioner Terry Hillard said

investigators are trying to sort out conflicting stories about the source of the spray, and were retrieving a video from inside the club.

"We will get to the bottom of this," Hillard said. "Right now our investigation is at full tilt."

There were more than 1,500 people in the two-story nightclub when the spray was released sometime after 2 a.m., officials initially estimated.

They could not immediately say

what the legal capacity of the building was.

"It appears a disturbance from within led to a mass chaos where people headed for the door. Most of the fatalities appear to have been crushed or had injuries due to suffocation," said police Officer Ozzie Rodriguez.

The club is located in the Near South Side, a commercial district near the McCormick Place convention center.

Briefly

Kindergarten enrollment scheduled

Kindergarten enrollment for the 2003-04 school year at Colby Grade School is from 7:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Friday in the conference room at the school. For questions or what paperwork is necessary, call 465-5100.

'Thumbs Up' makes a return

A featurette that has proved popular in the past has been revived and returns today. "Thumbs Up," which salutes various local and area individuals and groups, can be found on page 2 today, and will appear on that page each Tuesday from here on in. You can submit names or groups for inclusion. The phone number for doing so appears at the bottom of the column.

'Hospital Notes' needs your help

If you have a family member hospitalized here or elsewhere

in our reading area — or is being dismissed — and you want his/her name to appear in the *Free Press*, please call us at 462-3963 no later than 10 a.m. each day for inclusion in that day's paper. Most hospitals no longer provide that service.

Childbirth education series to begin

The next Colby Childbirth Education series will start on Thursday, March 6 will subsequent classes scheduled on March 20 and 27, and April 3. They will be held in the Health Science Building on the Colby Community College Campus. More information is available at 462-6845, ask for Tina Schrick.

Commodities are still available

Commodities are still available for eligible persons who missed the Feb. 17 distribution. Call the RSVP office at 462-6744 to obtain guidelines and make arrangements for pickup. The next scheduled distribution will be in May.

Sacred Heart carnival nears

Sacred Heart School's annual carnival begins at 11 a.m. and concludes at 3 p.m., this coming Sunday. The event will feature lunch with bierocks and sloppy Joes, along with games and other prizes. For questions, call 462-2813.

Red Cross classes planned

The Thomas County Chapter of the American Red Cross announces the following classes: shelter operations class from 8:30 a.m. until noon, Saturday; a first aid course from 6 to 10 p.m., Thursday, Feb. 27; and a two-day instructor training course on Tuesday and Wednesday, March 11 and 12, with times to be announced. Classes will also be offered by arrangement for a "Ready, Set, Roll" class to train drivers in the emergency response vehicle drivers and an introductory class to disaster services.

To enroll, call the Red Cross office at (785) 462-7161. Courses are held at the Thomas County Office Complex.



Moisture stays in the forecast

Tonight...mostly cloudy. Lows in the lower 20s. Light northeast wind. Wednesday...cloudy. Highs in the mid 50s. Northeast wind 5 mph becoming southeast early in the afternoon and increasing to 5 to 10 mph. Wednesday night...cloudy and brisk. Lows in the lower 20s. Thursday...cloudy. A chance of rain in the afternoon. Highs in the mid 40s. Chance of rain 40 percent.

The numbers

Monday's high, 58
Low this morning, 24
Soil temperature, 35
Year ago, 61 and 30
Month's precipitation, 0.26
Month's snowfall, 2 inches
Records, 81 in 1970 and -10 in 1978

