



12 pages

COLBY FREE PRESS

Friday

January 6, 2006

50¢

Volume 117, Number 4
Serving Thomas County since 1888

Here's what is in the mix for 2006

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

The New Year promises to be a full one. Many projects and programs will be carrying over from 2005, or new ones will be starting for the county, city of Colby, Colby School District and Colby Community College.

For the county, commissioner Ron Evans said the biggest endeavor will probably be the Willow project. The county is responsible for redoing and straightening out the turn in the road between Franklin Avenue and Country Club.

A change that will affect all of the county's residents is the use of new voting machines in this year's election.

"That's going to be a new thing for all the citizens of Thomas County," Evans said, adding they're asking for patience and co-operation from everyone when it comes time to vote. The new voting machines will be used for the first time in August.

The county also has a new administrator and nurse at the health department. Juanita Gatz joined the county in Dec., 2005, and started full time with the county this month.

Evans said they're excited to have her aboard.

They're also looking at a county Web site.

Overall, he said he and fellow commissioners Ken Christiansen and Paul Steele are pleased with they way the county is running, and they have a "good, dedicated group of people" to see that things run smoothly.

"We're looking forward to a good year in 2006," Evans said.

The city has many projects going on this new year.

City Manager Carolyn Armstrong, said the city will start construction on its new waste water treatment plant, a \$5 million project, and complete its \$2.1 million sewer main project.

Armstrong said the plant will take a year to a year and a half to complete, and should be done by May, 2007.

"It's a major, major project," she said.

Another current undertaking is an application for a Federal Aviation Administration grant. Armstrong said they're working on the grant application now, and it's for runway improvements at the Colby Airport.

Three electrical projects are also on tap. Two have been bid out, and the third will be bid out in the next 60 days.

The electrical work includes the southeast and southwest substations as well as the power plant.

The city will also work on improvements to West Fourth Street between School and Chickamauga, which will be under the Kansas Department of Transportation because it's a state highway.

Armstrong said 2006 will be a busy year for the city, with all of the ongoing and new projects.

"It's very possible this may be a busier year than last year," she said. "It's nice to be in a community that has the potential for growth." The Colby School District is also expecting a busy year.

Superintendent Kirk Nielsen said they're working on many grant applications, including reapplying for their Enhancing Education Through Technology grant, and a couple of new grants.

They're applying for a Kids Live grant, which would allow students at Colby high

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TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Colby High School teacher and PowerSchool administrator Andy Boell checked his e-mail today in the school's commons area, where wireless Internet

access is available to teachers. Superintendent Kirk Nielsen said going wireless at the high school is one of the district's future projects.

Man to plead on sex crimes in county

By Jan Katz Ackerman

Colby Free Press

A Goodland man has accepted a plea agreement for sex crimes committed in Thomas and Sherman Counties.

Terry L. Sapp, Jr., 38, was to appear in Thomas County District Court today to plead guilty to one count of lewd and lascivious behavior in the presence of a 14-year-old child between Jan. 31 and Feb. 7, 2004. Details from the hearing were not available at press time.

As part of the dual-jurisdiction agreement, Thomas County Attorney Andrea Wyrick dismissed one count of sexual exploitation of a child for Sapp's alleged asking the same child to engage in sexually explicit conduct during the same timeframe.

According to the plea agreement filed in Sherman County District Court Dec. 12, Sapp entered a guilty plea in Sherman County to one count of exploitation of a 16-year-old child in mid-February 2004. The incident took place while Sapp and the child were in a vehicle driving between Brewster and Goodland on U.S. Highway 24. According to court records, Sapp offered the teen "\$20 or more if he would engage in illegal, sexual conduct."

Sapp also pleaded guilty to one count of lewd and lascivious behavior in the presence of a 14-year-old child on several occasions from Jan. 31 through Dec. 31, 2001.

According to court records the incidents took place "while watching and looking at pornographic material." Dismissed were one

count of rape and one count of aggravated indecent liberties of a third child in 2005.

Sapp's attorney, Scott Beims of Atwood, has advised him that depending on a presentence investigation in Thomas County Sapp faces between five and 17 months in prison and a fine of \$100,000. In Sherman County he faces the identical sentence for the charge of lewd and lascivious behavior and 31 to 136 months in prison for the exploitation charge, and fines of \$100,000 and \$300,000 respectively. That same agreement was to have been filed today in Thomas County.

Sapp will be sentenced in Thomas County by District Judge Glenn Schiffner and in Sherman County by District Judge Jack Burr. Both Wyrick and Sherman County Attorney Bonnie Selby will ask that

Sapp's sentence be in the mid-range as outlined on the state's sentencing guideline.

They have also agreed to ask that no fines be imposed. Sentencing dates in both counties have yet to be set and Sapp has agreed not to appeal the convictions.

Selby on Thursday said Sapp was released on a supervised bond after entering his plea in Sherman County District Court last month.

Sapp, having pleaded guilty to sex crimes, will be required to file his name with the state's sex offender registry. There are currently 16 sex offenders living in Sherman County and five in Thomas County.

To see photos and last known addresses of these offenders, log on to the state's Web site of <https://www.accesskansas.org/ssrv-registered-offender/searchCounty>.

Colby instructors involved in project

An educational service center serving over 50 school districts across Kansas is developing new educational programs designed to meet the ever-changing needs of students in the 21st century, said Kevin Honeycutt, technology education specialist.

The service center, known as ESSDACK, is kicking off one such project with a two-day student training session beginning Sunday and continuing through Monday, he said.

Only five Kansas schools will be involved in this first round of the grant and "Teacher-Coaches" with Colby one of them. Those involved are Andrea Schuette,

Kristin Eberle and Lamoreaux Fulwider are involved. Using a research-based education approach, the Kan-ed Kids Live project will promote student learning. Not only do they learn important facts while making their broadcasts, they also learn many skills that are increasingly important in the 21st century workplace.

"As schools struggle to improve test scores and prepare students for a competitive global workplace, new methods are necessary," he said. "Kan-ed Kids Live shows great promise as a program that will use research to create experiences for students."

Matmen



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Colby Community College' wrestlers warmed up before the start of the Tournament of Champions at the Colby Community Building today. The tournament runs through Saturday, with action beginning at 11 a.m. and the finals at 7 p.m. For more sports, see page 12.

School vouchers put on hold

TOPEKA (AP) — Education Commissioner Bob Corkins on Thursday urged the State Board of Education to delay action on a proposal to create a voucher program for some Kansas students.

Corkins said in an interview that he called board members this week and asked them to shelve a proposal to create scholarships for at-risk and special needs students after he decided the timing for such a plan "isn't ripe."

"Now is not the time for the State Board to make a pronouncement on this issue," Corkins said. "The idea has not received the full public debate it needs before expecting the board to act on it."

The board was expected to debate the voucher program during its regular meeting next week in Topeka. Corkins is asking the board to pull that item from the agenda for a later date. Board Chairman Steve Abrams said he had spoken with Corkins.

"I think it is appropriate. It's something that needs to be discussed more fully," Abrams said.

Last month, board member Ken Willard, of Hutchinson, expressed reservations about the voucher proposal and said it probably wouldn't win the board's endorsement. Willard is part of the board's 6-4 conservative Republican majority; his stance likely meant that at best, voucher supporters would fail on a 5-5 vote.

Corkins' announcement also

“Now is not the time for the State Board to make a pronouncement on this issue. The idea has not received the full public debate it needs before expecting the board to act on it.”

Bob Corkins,
Education Commissioner

came the same day the Florida Supreme Court struck down a voucher program in that state, saying it undermined public schools and violated the state's constitutional duty to provide a uniform free education.

The board's endorsement of a voucher proposal would have sent it to the Legislature, which convenes its annual session Monday.

In the past, voucher proposals have failed to win legislators' support, and Senate Majority Leader Derek Schmidt was pleased Corkins backed away.

"That's wise," said Schmidt, R-Independence.

"It's one less headache to deal with this session."

The voucher plan was developed by a transition team formed by Corkins shortly after he was hired by the board to be commissioner in October.

The board discussed the proposal, along with a recommendation to change the state's charter school laws in December. Several

superintendents and education advocates attended that meeting and expressed their opposition to both ideas, saying they would undermine the state's public school system.

Corkins has supported both ideas, stemming from his days lobbying the Legislature. He maintains both ideas would stimulate innovation and competition in Kansas and improve the overall quality of education.

The voucher plan would allow children with special needs or identified as being at risk of failing academically to receive state funds to enroll in private schools.

"We've made a lot of progress in promoting the public charter school issue and not much progress in promoting the voucher/scholarship issue, and there's a lot of work that needs to be done," Corkins said. "It's our priorities."

But Corkins said a voucher proposal still could surface in the Statehouse during the 2006 legislative session.