



# COLBY FREE PRESS

8 pages

## After school sing-a-long



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Students (from left to right) Mariah Skolout, Cheyenne Miller, Jaymee Haberer and Daisy Holzmeister enjoyed a sing-along activity Tuesday at the Colby Community Building as part of the

After School Program sponsored by the Thomas County Inter-agency Coalition. The program is for children in third through fifth grades.

# Bus load of concerns for county

By Jan Katz Ackerman  
Colby Free Press

Thomas County Commissioners Tuesday discussed how residents of Rexford and Brewster can utilize public transportation.

Betty Nichols and Jolene Hansen, both of Rexford, talked to Commissioners Ron Evans, Paul Steele and Ken Christiansen about the van stored in Rexford and another one owned by the county.

"It's for the county, it's not a Colby van," Evans said of the Colby van.

The commissioners in January said they were not sure how to help residents of Rexford and Brewster use the van owned by the county.

Nichols said she thought residents in outlying towns would use the county van if trips to Colby didn't require them to be away from home more than a few hours.

"The offer for a three-hour stay would be better than a six-hour stay," Nichols said.

She said Rexford's van was obtained by a grant and is maintained and operated by Seniors in Action of Thomas County, but the van does not leave the city to travel to Colby.

Nichols suggested the county van arrive in Rexford at 9 a.m. once a week and return to Colby.

She'd like to see the van return to Rexford at noon.

The commissioners asked Nichols to gather public input from Rexford residents and provide it to Thomas County Clerk Shelly Harms so she can begin to establish a schedule for the county-owned van.

The commissioners also plan to visit with Brewster mayor Mike Baughn so plans can be made for the van to transport Brewster residents as well.

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Betty Nichols,  
Rexford



R. Evans

In other news...

• Tracy Winchester-Hillmer, manager of Goodland and Colby's offices of High Plains Mental Health, introduced herself to the commissioners.

Winchester-Hillmer started her job Aug. 1 and works three days per week in Colby and two days in Goodland.

She said she is working with Citizens Medical Center, Thomas County Sheriff's Office and the Thomas County Emergency Medical Service for training and transporting of High Plains clients to other facilities as the need arises.

• Thomas County Treasurer Donita Applebury met with the commissioners regarding concerns about bond issues.

Applebury attended a treasurers' meeting last week and learned some counties, including Thomas County, might have people handling money who aren't bonded.

According to Harms, those currently bonded through the state insurance pool are the commissioners, the county attorney, sheriff, register of deeds, weed supervisor, appraiser, public health officer, engineer, Applebury and herself.

The commissioners directed Harms to check with the insurance pool representative and determine whether the county needed to bond anyone else through a separate insurance company if that person handled county money.

Those considered as possibly needing to be bonded included certain members of the fair board, economic development director or board, emergency preparedness director or staff and Applebury's staff.

# Dry outlook raises growing fears

WICHITA (AP) — Unseasonably warm temperatures in Kansas have caused the state's wheat crop to break dormancy early, increasing its demand on moisture during an especially parched winter.

"I am concerned now. I am still optimistic about the crop if we get moisture soon," said Jim Shroyer, Extension wheat specialist at Kansas State University. "We have good stands across the state. If it is going to green up, I want moisture on it." January was balmy in Kansas, followed by an erratic February when temperatures dipped to freezing before soaring back into 70s by month's end.

"It has kind of been in shock from the last two weeks," Shroyer said.

"It has been sitting there hunkered down — it doesn't know which way to go. It is going to be really unfortunate if there isn't enough surface moisture to sustain it."

The lack of water is adding stress to the winter wheat crop, but whether that will result in yield losses remains to be seen, he said.

"If it can hang on until it gets moisture, there is some good chance we will see very little yield loss," Shroyer said.

There's a chance at least part of the state will get rain this weekend, but the long-term drought outlook is not good, said state climatologist Mary Knapp.

"It is not a favorable pattern," Knapp said. "While there may not

be panic yet, there is concern. Conditions are not favorable now, and there are no encouraging signals for improvement."

Kansas typically gets as much rain in March as it does in December, January and February combined, so how much rain the state gets this month is more critical than how much it got the last three months, Knapp said.

Southeastern Kansas has been unusually dry this winter — its deficit for February alone is 2 inches less rain than it normally receives.

Also extremely dry is northwest and north central Kansas along the Nebraska border, which still are struggling to recover from a five-year drought that left it with a rain

deficit of more than 27 inches that built up since 2000. Even though 2005 was wetter than usual by 1.6 inches last year, that part of the state has much ground to make up after five years of back-to-back drought, she said. Marsha Boswell, spokeswoman for the Kansas Wheat Commission and the Kansas Association of Wheat Growers, said the Kansas crop is not faring as badly as winter wheat in Texas and Oklahoma, where it has been even drier.

"It is supposed to be colder, it is supposed to have snow cover over the wintertime — that would be the ideal situation," Boswell said. "But it is not as bad as other states. If we get some rain, we should have a decent crop."

# Assessments changing with times

By Tisha Cox  
Colby Free Press

Colby School District students are as ready as they can be to start state assessments.

"That has been a positive change for the district," said Colby Grade School Principal Terrel Harrison.

District staff is ready for the tests which begin this week online.

Colby High School Counselor Joni Clark-Leiker said the test is a snapshot of student performance on one particular day.

The tests interrupt instruction and Harrison said scheduling is the biggest issue.

Assessments are scheduled to begin today and last until April 10.

District Curriculum Director Diana Wieland said more people hear about the assessments now because of "No Child Left Behind." That is the federal mandate all children will meet academic standards by 2014.

How students take the test and the

**"It's a partnership with family and school. Parents need to encourage their children to understand the importance of the tests."**

Diana Wieland,  
curriculum director

number of grades taking assessments each year are the biggest changes, she said.

For example, this year fourth, seventh and 10th graders will take the math assessment. That will expand in 2006-07 to include third through sixth grade, eighth and 10th graders.

The reading assessment will encompass the same lower grades and 11th graders. Writing and science assessments will be added and given yearly.

Wieland said high school students only have to take assessments once during their four years.

Average yearly progress is based on the test and that is the report card used to grade the district's performance.

Harrison noted Colby has ranked high.

"Students work hard and take the tests very seriously," she said.

Technology has made the assessments easier to take, and has even improved the turnaround of results. Online testing means the results

are available immediately. Harrison said that's another plus for the staff. In years past, the staff would have to wait until the fall after the test for results.

The entire process encompasses more than just the school.

"It's a partnership with family and school," Wieland said. "Parents need to encourage their children to understand the importance of the tests."

She hasn't seen any stress among the high school students, mainly because they're accustomed to the tests and using computers.

Online test taking has certain advantages, Clark-Leiker said. For example, students have many tools available, like in the reading assessment.

"They determine the format in which the assessment will take," she said.

Students choose how they want to read and answer questions, and there's even a reading tracker to help those who might have trouble keeping track of where they are.

## The band and girls play on



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

The Colby High School pep band brass section played during Monday's girls basketball game. The pep band has been at every home game. For all Eagle action, see page 8.