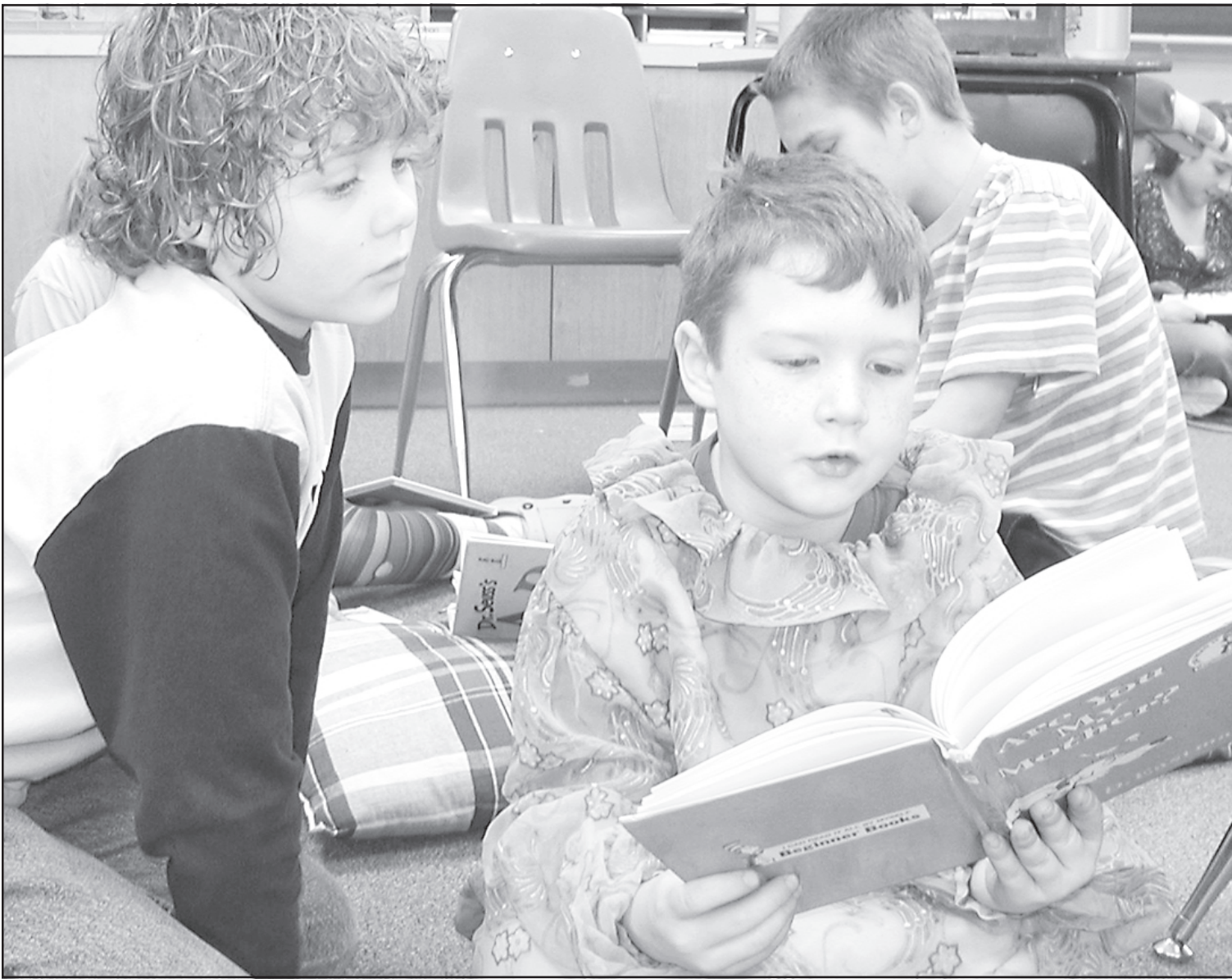




COLBY FREE PRESS

Happy '102' birthday Dr. Seuss



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press



FAR LEFT: Jonah Thompson, right, read to Jaden Morrison at Colby Grade School today. It was part of *Read Across America Day*, and the celebration of Dr. Seuss' 102nd birthday. Some students dressed up for the day, which was "Topsy Turvy Twisted Thursday." **ABOVE :** Camille Rager, left, listened while Austin Boehme, right, read to her. **LEFT:** Nic Phillips, left, enjoyed a story read by Christine Holzmeister, right. Students at the grade school paired up to read together as part of the celebration.

Sales tax for economic development at \$220,000

By Tisha Cox
Colby Free Press

The Thomas County Economic Development Alliance has more than a few extra bucks in its bank account. Last year's sales tax increase approved in the general election has generated more than \$220,482. The quarter-cent sales tax increase is expected to generate more than \$250,000

each year. How the funds will be spent have not been specified. "None of the money has been spent yet," said director Gerry Fulwider. "It's intended to go to businesses that will create good quality jobs, and the creation of those businesses." Other examples of



G. Fulwider

possible uses include expansion of existing business, employee training, or acquisition of property for a business. It could also be used to construct or repair infrastructure for new industry development, matching funds for grants and other means to attract business and industry to the community. Fulwider said the development alliance has been fortunate to receive grants for smaller projects in the past, and may use

some of the funds for such purposes in the future. Also, his office won't decide on the money's use. Fulwider said the economic development alliance can make recommendations to the Colby City Council, but won't have the final say. "The city council has the oversight of it," he said. Even though no money's been spent, it

has provided opportunities to attract different industries. Last fall, Fulwider said there were two requests for proposals but neither was successful. One was a distributing company that later chose not to come to Kansas. The sales tax money allowed Thomas County to be in the running for such a project, and will continue to provide such chances, he said.

Long-time banker retires from Colby

By Tisha Cox
Colby Free Press

Leadership at Farmers & Merchants Bank in Colby is changing. Bank president and chief executive officer C. Lewis Evins retired Tuesday after 32 years with the bank. He started in 1974 with the Security Bank Shares the organization that owns Farmers and Merchants. Evins has been with Farmers & Merchants since 1998, the year the Colby bank was chartered. Taking over as bank president and chief executive officer is Brent Wiedeman. Wiedeman has been with the bank since 1998. He started as a loan officer and was in charge of bank operations and vice president of cashiers before becoming president. Though retiring, Evins said he will continue working for Security Bank Shares. "It seemed like a natural transition," he said, adding he will be exploring other banking alternatives for the holding company.

Wiedeman said only his responsibilities are changing. He will also oversee the bank's investment department, a branch of Raymond James Financial Services. Lisa Wilson, representing Raymond James, will take a more active role. "I'm anxious to continue on with the success we've seen over the years," Wiedeman said. He added there are no other changes. Farmers & Merchants is the only locally chartered bank in Colby. He said they look forward to helping the community with future growth and prosperity. "That's the main reason we're here," Wiedeman said. Evins thanked the community for the support it has given him and the bank. He hopes they extend that to Wiedeman. Wiedeman has a bachelor's degree in agriculture and master's degree in financial planning, both from Kansas State University. He and his wife, Sherrie, have a 7-month-old son, Bryant. Wiedeman is the son of LaVerne and Theo Wiedeman of WaKeeney.



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

New Farmers and Merchants Bank President and Chief Executive Officer Brent Wiedeman, left, visited with retiring president C. Lewis Evins Tuesday.

Oakley may sell utilities

By Jan Katz Ackerman
Colby Free Press

Oakley's city fathers will decide by May whether they will sell the town's electric lines, poles and associated equipment to Midwest Energy. The sale is being considered because of expensive upgrades necessary to keep the electric distribution system operational. "We're weighing options," Mayor Frank Munk said Wednesday. Munk said after last year's hurricane season and increased utility rates, the council decided to consider a proposal presented by Midwest Energy to purchase the system for \$2.5 million dollars. "It would control the customer's costs and Midwest Energy would have to go to the Kansas Corporation Commission for an increase," he said. Munk said if the city sells the system to Midwest Energy the company has said it will do \$750,000 in upgrades the first year. According to Oakley City Clerk Rose Wessel, the city currently has 1,000 active meters which generated \$1.8 million in utility sales in 2005. However, it cost \$1.9 million dollars to furnish electricity to those meters during 2005. "The cost of the utilities fluctuates depending on how much we have to buy it for," Wessel said. Should the city decline Midwest Energy's offer, it will have to maintain all the items outlined in the proposal, plus spend \$2.5 million dollars to replace the lines and repair engines at the power plant.

Commissioners agree to pay old county health bill

By Jan Katz Ackerman
Colby Free Press

A bill from Colby Medical & Surgical Center was back on the table for discussion at Tuesday's Thomas County Commissioners meeting. In February, Public Health Administrator Juanita Gatz told Commissioners she'd received a bill from the clinic in the amount of \$1,460.56. Gatz said 25 of the pa-

tients listed on the bill, which covers a timeframe from July 14, 2003, to May 2, 2005, did not receive care at the public health department. Commissioner Ken Christiansen wanted \$375 deducted from the bill and then pay \$1,085.56. Commissioner Ron Evans and Christiansen approved to table the issue until Gatz can contact the clinic about the bill and report back to the board of commissioners. In other business: • There will be a Kansas Public Employees Retirement System

meeting at 6:30 p.m. April 5 at the Colby Community Building. • Commissioners will see if any county employees will attend the next scheduled Community Preparedness for the Next Pandemic in Kansas seminar in Lawrence. • Bruce Bandy of Commercial Sign submitted to Harms' office a 2006 certificate of liability insurance. The certificate is required if Commercial Sign would do any contract work for the county.

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• County Clerk Deputy Kristy Rubio's resignation was acknowledged by the commissioners. Rubio moved into the treasurer's office. • Evans asked Emergency Management Director Jim Engel to categorize monies taken through his department; grant money, 911 or E911 and present information to the commissioners March 6. The commissioners want to know how the money is received, deposited and spent.