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No, it's not leaking



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Water sprays from the city of Colby water tower today. Jenny Call with the department of public works said the amount of water in the tower was reduced for the tower's yearly maintenance and inspection.

Doctors propose new medical facility

By **Patty Decker**
Free Press Editor

Two optometrists and a medical doctor approached the city council Tuesday asking they consider issuing industrial revenue bonds for a proposed new office complex.

Drs. Jeff Morrison and Mark Wahlmeier, optometrists, and Dr. Gary Slavens, a medical doctor, talked with council members about the importance of this clinic.

"We believe that a good health-care system is vital to the residents of northwest Kansas and we also believe that we can add to the infrastructure already in place," Wahlmeier said. "We have plans for our own surfacing lab where we can manufacture almost any pair of glasses the same day."

According to the three doctors, the complex would be located on South Range Avenue with Slavens and Morrison and Wahlmeier sharing the building.

The cost quoted to them by Colby architect Glen Strait was \$1.7 million, which is why they are asking the council to consider issuing industrial revenue bonds.

Other features in the optometry half of the building would include low vision services, vision therapy services and a retinal camera and scanning laser ophthalmoscopy to diagnose and better manage ocular diseases, Wahlmeier said.

"We plan to create four or five new job opportunities by the time the project is complete," Wahlmeier said.

Slavens said it is important to Colby to know he is committed and has no plans to leave the area.

"I am not taking anything away from the hospital (Citizens Medical Center)," he said. "This proposal would build up the hospital."

Currently, Slavens and his physician assistant, Andy Rose, have about 1,900 active patients and are gaining an additional 150 new patients each month.



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

City Councilman Phil DeYoung (left) looked over the proposed building site with Dr. Gary Slavens at the city meeting Tuesday.

"We are also the only provider in northwest Kansas offering a 7 a.m. walk-in clinic and with the addition of new providers, that could be extended to the p.m. hours," Slavens said.

Should the council approve industrial revenue bonds for the proposal, Slavens said the future expansion would offer more employment opportunities from entry level to professional positions.

"The implementation of electronic medical records offers the latest in advanced technology," he said.

"This move forward into the electronic age will offer our young people who pursue technology the opportunity to return for employment in fields not formerly possible in rural areas."

In addition, digital radiology would allow for real-time tele-radiology and allow for remote consultation and diagnosis, he said.

"Workflow would also be improved by the elimination of film and videotape, thus improving time management for all staff and, therefore, benefiting the patients," Slavens said.

Slavens said he could be equipped to house six providers with support staff and basement expansion would enable the medical staff to fulfill needs of the public unavailable to northwest Kansas. Other potential additions include adenosine stress tests, pulmonary function tests and additional consultants. After discussing concerns related to tax abatements and competition, the council agreed that the doctors should move forward with a cost benefit analysis and bring it back to council in two weeks. City Manager Carolyn Armstrong said Theron Froggatt, a fiscal agent, has worked with the city on other projects and will be working with the doctors on this proposal as well.

Chamber of Commerce reservation deadline Monday

By **Tisha Cox**
Colby Free Press

Feeling "Lucky to live in Kansas?"

That's the theme for the annual Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce banquet Friday, March 17.

New chamber director Holly Stephens said the theme and entertainment will reflect that sentiment.

Author Marci Penner is the featured entertainment. Stephens said Penner will talk about her book, "The Kansas Guidebook for Explorers."

Penner grew up on her family's

farm in Inman.

The author traveled around the state for her book racking up 40,120 miles while visiting all 627 incorporated towns and cities in Kansas. The author also went to many incorporated and ghost towns.

Stephens said the book is a celebration of Kansas' rural culture.

The banquet is at City Limits Convention Center.

Social hour starts at 6 p.m. and will be followed by dinner and entertainment at 7 p.m.

Stephens the evening will include the presentation of the business person and community service awards for 2005. New chamber president

Todd Stramel and newly elected board members will be sworn in.

Stephens is looking forward to her first big event as chamber director. "I'm very excited," she said. "This is a chance for me to meet a lot of chamber members. I think it will be a fun evening."

Tickets are still available until

Monday. Stephens said the chamber has reservation sheets. Anyone wanting to attend the banquet should stop by or call the chamber at 460-3401 to make reservations.

A centerpiece drawing will also be held. She said various businesses donated centerpieces and people can buy tickets to win one.

Trees proposed by boards

By **Tisha Cox**
Colby Free Press

The Thomas County Fairgrounds may be getting a few new trees in the near future.

The fair board will be working with the Pickin' on the Plains board to figure out how many and where the trees should go. The board approved the matter at its meeting Thursday.

Jane McDougal with the Pickin' on the Plains board said bluegrass has some memorial money available and wanted to see about getting trees for the fairgrounds. She asked the board what kind they should consider and where they will go.

Board member Mark Brede-meier said the extension office can help tree varieties that will do well here. McDougal said they would also like to purchase a bench for the fairgrounds.

The board also approved its annual contract with Colby Community College to allow its rodeo



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Fair board members Mark Anderson (left) and Clair Schrock listened to a discussion at Thursday's board meeting. Schrock is the newest member, and he replaces Gary Garrett.

team to use the fairgrounds for practice. Board member Nancy Rundel said the only change they needed to make was fixing some dates.

In other business, the board welcomed new member Clair Schrock, who replaces Gary Garrett.

The board approved adding a

welded class to the fair demolition derby with the same rules as a welded event being put on by Kerry Wark April 29 at the fairgrounds.

Groundskeeper Ron Kogler said they should have new hydrants for the campground in by this weekend. When finished, there will be 33 full-

service campground stalls at the fairgrounds.

The board approved:

- Paying fees in the amount of \$575 to the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association.
- Added an antique combine class to the fair book.

Legislators get report to use finance debates

TOPEKA (AP) — Legislators trying to craft a school spending plan to meet a court mandate got yet another piece of information that could help them decide where the money should go.

Thursday, analysts from Standard & Poor's delivered a 40-page report giving a list of best practices used by districts they say are getting the best return on their dollars.

Legislators said it wasn't too late for the report to play a role in the session's school finance debate.

"Yes, this year and from here on out," House Education chairwoman Kathe Decker said.

Senate Education chairwoman Jean Schodorf said the bigger impact would come when House and Senate negotiators meet to hammer out the session's final school finance bill.

Analysts compared spending practices of districts with more than 200 students to how those students fared on statewide assessment tests. They concluded that given their resources and the number of poor students, 17 districts exceeded expectations in student achievement because of how they used their resources.

Of those, Scott County, Geary

County, Arkansas City and Olathe were selected for further review.

Decker, R-Clay Center, said the report validates some legislators' opinions that districts could spend their money better and that many districts are getting good academic results. Some argue that increasing spending doesn't solve the problem of low academic achievement.

Meanwhile, Schodorf, R-Wichita, has scheduled extra time Monday to work a \$660 million, three-year plan that Senate leaders drafted after negotiations with House leaders and Gov. Kathleen Sebelius. The House also has a three-year plan amounting to \$500 million.

Both plans are in response to a 2005 Kansas Supreme Court ruling that ordered increases in school funding to meet constitutional mandates to provide all students a suitable education.

Kansas spends more than \$3 billion on K-12 education, including \$290 million in increases legislators approved last year in response to Supreme Court orders in a lawsuit filed in 1999.

Standard & Poor's was hired in 2005 by Sebelius to analyze school spending.