



# COLBY FREE PRESS

## The thinking behind underage drinking

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

Colby was not alone Tuesday. Colby was one of 1,200 towns nationwide holding a meeting at the same time about curbing underage drinking.

Regional Prevention Center Executive Director Sue Evans said the Colby meeting held at the Colby Community Building was a success.

"I was very pleased with the attendance," she said. "We had parents, youth, and concerned community members."

More than 60 people, including the panelists and committee organizers attended. Evans said the meeting in Atwood had 179 people.

The Colby gathering featured presentations by a panel including Luetta Flanagan, nurse practitioner at Family Center for Health Care; Thomas County Sheriff Mike Baughn; Thomas County Attorney Andrea Wyrick; Northwest Kansas Juvenile Service Supervisor Judi Tiller; Thomas County Interagency Coalition Chairperson Vicki Beiser and Brewster High School junior Ryan Edmundson.

Evans gave an overview of underage drinking in Thomas County. She explained statistics from the annual survey given to students in sixth, eighth, 10th and 12th grades, and how the number of students drinking increases between sixth and eighth grades to 10th grade.

"It's never too early to start talking to children about drinking, and educational efforts begin in fourth and fifth grade."

"Start talking before they start drinking," Evans said.

Flanagan talked about how the adolescent brain isn't as mature as originally thought. Alcohol use at a young age can have dire consequences for a maturing brain. The human brain isn't physically mature until about age 24. Among the last part of the brain to develop is the area that controls judgment.

"Alcohol is a central nervous system depressant," she said, "it isn't



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

**ABOVE:** From left Danelle and Darra Stithem of Hoxie, and Tess Brown of Colby, held up underage drinking statistics for Thomas County during a town hall meeting Tuesday on underage drinking. The meeting, held at the Colby Community Building, was one of 1,200 taking place nationwide. **RIGHT:** Ryan Edmundson, a junior at Brewster High School, was one of the panelists.

a stimulant."

Damage can also be done to brain cells. In adolescents, alcohol impairs brain cells for future development and memory.

Baughn discussed the reason for the minimum drinking age and the consequences of alcohol abuse.

"Alcohol wipes out one's ability to control inhibitions, which is one of its biggest dangers."

"That is when people forget about consequences. They fail to accept there are consequences," he said.

Baughn referred to his personal experience and consequences with the use of alcohol.

Wyrick acknowledged there is an underage drinking problem in Thomas County.

She said first-time offenders are referred to a program at the Regional Prevention Center. If they complete it, the offense is taken off their record.

However, Wyrick has encountered one obstacle to the successful completion of the program.

"The most frustrating aspect is parents," she said, "because sometimes they don't understand the purpose of the program."

Wyrick said law enforcement tries to find people who provide alcohol to anyone underage, "But it's tough .... the consequences aren't severe."

The meeting was a joint effort of

the Federal Interagency Coordinating Committee on the Prevention of Underage Drinking, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration along with state and local organizations, like the Regional Prevention Center.

Evans said the Thomas County Interagency Coalition has a Drug Free Communities grant which helped pay for the event.

Thomas County students will get a look at the dangers of underage drinking next week.

The annual "Reach Out Now Teach-In" will be at Thomas County schools. Fifth and sixth graders in Brewster, fifth graders at Colby Grade School and Sacred Heart



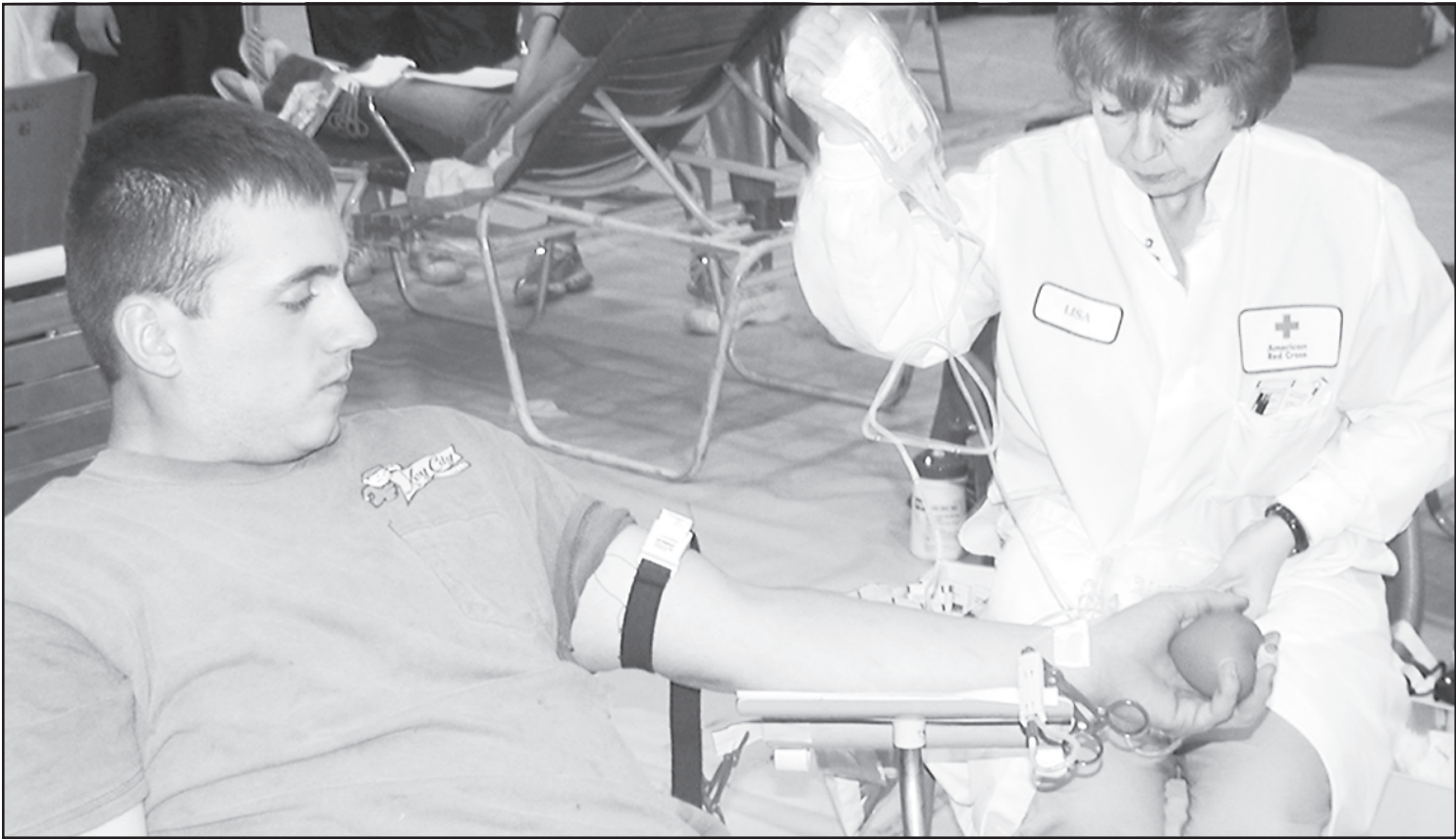
School will participate.

Colby High School Students Against Destructive Decisions members will be part of the discussion on risks of underage alcohol use. Parents of students in those age groups are invited to attend with their child. Sessions will feature age-appropriate information.

Evans encourages people to write legislators about what they can do for the issue.

More events are planned including a speaker in Colby in May. Evans encourages anyone who would like to get involved to call the Regional Prevention Center at 460-8177.

## 'This won't hurt a bit'



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Clint Horinek, left, waited for American Red Cross nurse Lisa Johnson to get him ready to donate blood during a blood drive Wednesday at Colby High School. Jo Cheney, one of the orga-

nizers, said today 120 units of blood came from 134 people who came to donate. Of those, 20 were first-time donors. Other blood drives are scheduled for this year.

## Colby to consider coach

The Colby School Board will hold a special board meeting at 7 p.m. Tuesday at the board room of the Administration Building.

The purpose of the meeting is employment recommendations, including the hiring of a new Colby High School head football coach. The meeting is open to the public.

## School finance proposal debate near

TOPEKA (AP) — Senators were preparing to debate several school finance proposals to see which ideas have legs in their chamber, while critics hoped to undermine support among Johnson County legislators for a \$633 million plan approved by the House.

The debate was scheduled for Thursday, nearly a week after the House passed its plan. Senate leaders hoped the chamber could assemble a school finance package by the weekend to give negotiators a

start at drafting a compromise in the coming weeks.

Senate Majority Leader Derek Schmidt said the goal was to see whether any option has the support of 21 of the 40 senators to move the school finance debate closer to conclusion. Legislators plan to take a break at the end of Friday's debate, until late April.

"It has taken a long time this session to focus minds on the choices and trade-offs we're going to have to make to get a school finance bill

passed," said Schmidt, R-Independence.

Three bills are on the Senate's debate calendar. One is the House plan; another is a \$660 million plan from Senate leaders, and the third is a \$481 million plan from Sen. Jim Barnett.

"If none of these plans has 21 votes, we need to know that. Because so far, people have been unwilling to talk about other options, because they are wedded to one of these three choices," Schmidt said.

## Standing room only for Colby College auction

By Patty Decker

Free Press Editor

Attendance for this year's Colby Community College endowment auction and dinner Saturday at the Comfort Inn Convention Center is maxed out at 375 people.

In fact, due to its popularity Nick Wells, Colby College Endowment Association administrative director, said tickets for the event are sold out.

"This is one of the two biggest scholarship events for us," Wells said. "The other is the annual phonathon."

Guests will have the opportunity to bid on auction items including trips, jewelry and art.

In prior years, the auction has generated from \$40,000 to \$50,000. The event saw its largest attendance and highest proceeds in its 33-year history in 2002.

That year about \$84,500 was raised with two major contributors — The Garvey Texas Foundation of Fort Worth and Roofmasters of Colby — adding \$25,000 and \$10,000 respectively. About 400 people attended.

All proceeds from the auction go toward helping students in north-west Kansas.

Sixty-three percent of Colby College students in the 14-county serve area receive institutional scholarships.

The endowment association is responsible for about \$175,000 annually to assist students with tuition, fees and books.

**"This would not be possible without the support of the community."**

Nick Wells, administrative director

"This would not be possible without the support of the community," Wells said.

The endowment association was chartered Nov. 14, 1964, and has been vital to the growth and development of the college, he said.

The first endowment party and auction was in 1972 at the American Legion in Colby.

Predicting the success of Saturday's party, Wells said he always thinks the auction will be the "best ever," adding merchants and donors have stepped up once again in doing their part to make it the best.

Doors open at 4:45 p.m., followed by a prime rib dinner served at 5:30 p.m. sponsored by Excel Corporation.

Starting at 7 p.m., the live auction will begin and the silent auction will end in three shifts. Wells anticipates the live auction will be completed by 9 p.m.

"Without everyone's help," Wells said, "our evening would not be a success."