



COLBY FREE PRESS

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Minors drinking a concern

By Jan Katz Ackerman

Colby Free Press

A continued effort to curb underage drinking was Diane Stithem's mission in talking with Thomas County Commissioners Monday.

Stithem works with Regional Prevention Center in Colby and asked the commissioners to sign a proclamation recognizing April as Alcohol Awareness Month in the United States.

"All members of our community need to recognize the serious consequences of underage drinking," Stithem said. "It makes our highways less safe, our schools less effective, and our future less certain."

Stithem said Thomas County students in grades six, eight, 10 and 12 each year are surveyed about their habits which may or may not include drugs and alcohol.

"Thomas County is estimated to have kids 13.25 years old start drinking," she said.

As part of this year's anti-drinking campaign called Reach Out Now Teach-In Stithem said she will speak with students at Sacred Heart Catholic School today.

She said Colby High School's Students Against Drunk Driving campaign this year is called It's OK to say No Way 2 Alcohol.

"At prom we'll be giving out gifts which promote the fact it's OK to say no to alcohol," Stithem said.

Starting July 1, Kansas will participate in its third year of support of a law against hosting of parties where teens can obtain alcohol.

"It's called Paul's Law and anyone hosting a party with alcohol can be fined, jailed or sued for damages," Stithem said.

Saying she's watching closely a case in the courts in Salina regarding Paul's Law, Stithem said parents need to monitor their teen's parties closely.

"Some parents think taking the keys and allowing kids to drink at home is OK," she said. "But they don't know who gets alcohol poisoning or get their keys and leaves driving drunk."

The SADD members, along with the Prevention Center, will host a guest speaker May 1 who will talk to junior and senior high school students about drinking.

"The featured speaker will be Karen Williams who will talk at a breakfast and luncheon, and to the students. She makes things relevant to kids about what alcohol does to the brain," Stithem said.

Stithem said part of her job is to educate younger students about the dangers of early alcohol use.

"The secondary goal is to increase the number of youth who understand the health risks associated with alcohol use and empower them to resist the pressure to drink they often get from peers and media messages," Stithem said.

Waiting for her turn to talk to the commissioners on a separate issue, Thomas County Health Nurse Juanita Gatz chimed in to the discussion. "Once those brain cells die they don't regenerate," Gatz said.



D. Stithem

Kansas wind has the power

By John Van Nostrand

Colby Free Press

The wind that blew in Colby Tuesday blew the litter in the alleys and dirt in the fields. Wind may also blow the lights on later this year.

Midwest Energy and a Lawrence-based company are negotiating installing eight wind-powered electric generators south of town later this year. JW Prairie Windpower, the company behind the generators, gave its presentation Tuesday at the Colby Rotary meeting.

With increases in oil and natural gas prices, wind is becoming a more attractive source of energy.

"The price of wind is less than the price of bulk power," said Jennifer States.

She is the managing director of JW Prairie Windpower LLC. With an office in Lawrence, JWPW provides the technical detail and planning of installing wind generators.

If approved, eight wind generators will be installed about one mile south of Interstate 70. Construction could take three to six months and electric may be produced by the end of the year.

What's proposed?

Colby's Ken Frahm is chairman of an advisory board for JWPW.

Frahm said Midwest Energy has informally asked about utilizing wind generators in their service area.

Frahm has acted as a liaison between Midwest Energy and potential property owners for where

the turbines could be built.

Frahm said Colby is a prime location for wind turbines.

"Colby is the center of Midwest Energy," he said.

Access to adequate transmission lines and an electrical substation in Colby help too.

"Colby is a handy location," he said.

If approved, each turbine tower will stand 241 feet. Including the length of the turbine blades of 105 feet, the entire turbine will stand 346 feet.

Preliminary cost of each turbine is at least \$1 million. Each turbine can produce 1.25 megawatts of electricity, enough to power about 350 houses a year.

"That does not mean each turbine will continually produce that much," Frahm said.

It depends on the wind. The turbines can begin generation when wind speeds are at least 6 miles per hour.

To protect the mechanics of the turbines, the turbines automatically shut off when wind speeds are in excess of 55 mph. According to JWPW's research, Thomas County's average wind speed is 17.9 mph.

"If you look at a wind map, the further west you go in Kansas there is more wind, and we are toward the west," Frahm said.

Where does the power go?

States said JWPW's projects in

eastern Kansas are easy to attach because of the transmission lines. Although those high power transmission lines are not as common in western Kansas, the project for Colby can be connected to the existing transmission lines. The wind generators will not impact the flow of electricity for irrigation systems States said. Property owners lease the land for the turbines.

Colby City Manager Carolyn Armstrong said the city is interested in purchasing some of the electricity produced from the generators.

Financing

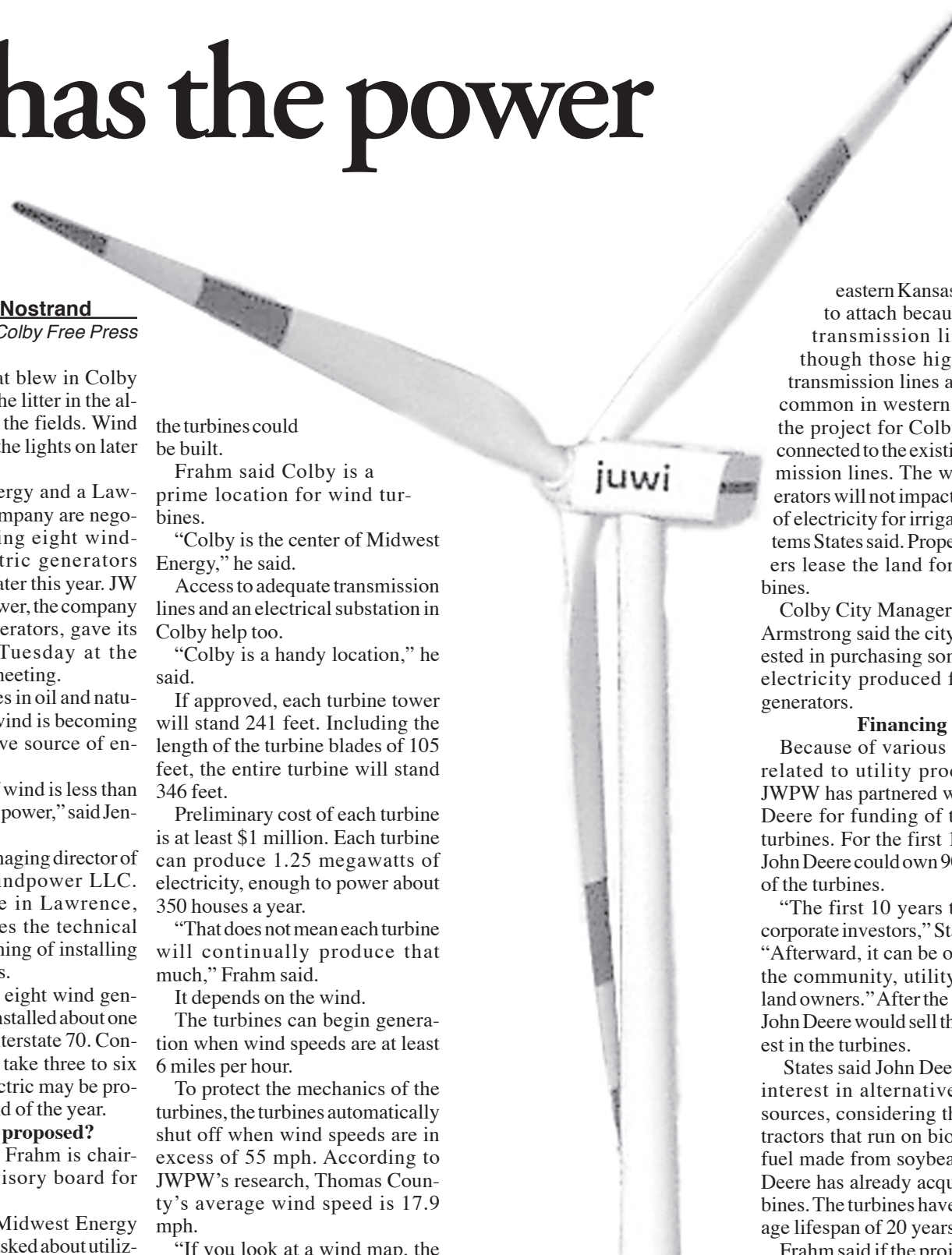
Because of various tax laws related to utility production, JWPW has partnered with John Deere for funding of the wind turbines. For the first 10 years, John Deere could own 90 percent of the turbines.

"The first 10 years there are corporate investors," States said. "Afterward, it can be owned by the community, utility, city or land owners." After the 10 years, John Deere would sell their interest in the turbines.

States said John Deere has an interest in alternative energy sources, considering they have tractors that run on biodiesel, a fuel made from soybeans. John Deere has already acquired turbines. The turbines have an average lifespan of 20 years.

Frahm said if the project is approved, it will show the importance of alternative energy and Colby's acceptance.

"It will be a good message," he said.



Eight wind turbines are proposed to be installed south of Colby later this year.

Same area, different battle

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

Some American soldiers have had two tours of duty during the Iraq War.

For Jim Griffin of Colby, this will be his second conflict involving Iraq.

Griffin served during the first Gulf War in 1991 and is headed back later this year.

"I was called up," Griffin said. Griffin is a member of the Kansas Army National Guard and Detachment 2-107th Maintenance Company.

He is one of several Colby soldiers who were either called up or who volunteered to fill slots in units who need soldiers. Others are Jack Blackheart, Mike Quenzer, Troy Rall and William Diehl.

Griffin is a Staff Sergeant and is a senior mechanic whose duties include technical inspections. However, he will have a different mission when he goes to Iraq.

"Our mission is going to be transport security," Griffin said. "We'll probably still have a maintenance mission."

In 1991, he and the other members of the Detachment 2-107th Maintenance Company in Colby were deployed during Operation Desert Storm. They spent more than five months in Kuwait. This time, he expects to be gone 18 months, with 12 months in Iraq.

They will train three to four months before shipping out later



J. Griffin

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Public television to install new transmitter

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

There was a small party on the prairie near Brewster Wednesday. Smoky Hills Public Television held a ground-breaking ceremony for its new digital transmitter.

Members of the Smoky Hills Public Television board of directors, station manager and the Goodland High School Cowboy band were all present for the event eight miles south of Brewster.

Station General Manager and Chief Executive Officer Larry Holden, said it will be the fourth digital transmitter for the public television station.

Smoky Hills has already converted three other transmitters in Kansas and are installing a new digital tower for northwest Kansas to replace three analog translators currently serving the area.

Holden said the \$3.2 million project will improve the quality of reception and will increase the amount of programming public television can provide.

Construction of the digital transmitter will also comply with the federal mandate that all television

broadcasts be converted to digital by 2009. In February 2009 analog broadcasts will stop.

The money was provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Utilities Division and Kansas' Public Broadcasting Council. They provided \$2 million and \$1.2 million respectively.

"Not only will the quality of the picture people receive improve, but the new tower will allow them to broadcast from midnight to 6 a.m., making public television in Kansas available 24 hours a day."

Ted Bannister of Bison and chair of the board, said the tower is important.

"It is as important as the construction of a university, library or other cultural institution. It is a big deal even though it may seem mundane."

Construction on the transmitter building will begin Monday and the 1,200-foot tower and antenna will go up over the next eight months. By December, they hope to test the tower and its signal and be broadcasting full time by early 2007.

According to a release, the transmitter will be the highest man-made structure in western Kansas.



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

A ground-breaking ceremony was held eight miles south of Brewster Wednesday for a new 1,200-foot digital transmitter for Smoky Hills Public Television. Breaking ground at the new transmitter were (from left to right) station manager and chief executive officer Larry Holden, board chair Ted Bannister of Bison; board members Richard Short of Goodland and Bruce Frahm of Colby and Goodland Mayor Richard Billinger. Work on the tower is expected to be complete within the next eight to 10 months.

Thomas County landowners concerned about weed control

By Jan Katz Ackerman

Colby Free Press

A crack down on noxious weeds was discussed Monday during the Thomas County Commission meeting.

Thomas County landowners Dan Schroeder, Kenneth Johnston and Alvin Depe said they expect the commissioners to control or eradicate of musk thistle.

"We kind of agree with the laws which are in place and we need more enforcement," Depe said. "We are thinking that people who ignore (musk thistle) year after year are hurting the whole community because musk thistle is so mobile."

"I couldn't agree more," Evans said. Kansas law doesn't give Commissioners Ron Evans, Paul Steele and Ken Christiansen the option of allowing landowners to cultivate or

enhance growth of noxious weeds. The law says they "shall" control the spread of and eradicate all weeds declared by legislative action to be noxious. Musk thistle was top of the list of weeds.

Depe said once the "tiny rosettes" of the thistle germinate there can at best be "a 50 percent chance of getting it controlled."

Evans initially sidestepped the topic and then went full circle order-

ing immediate compliance with state law.

"Here's the problem," he said. "A lot of guys don't have the equipment or money to go out and treat them, but we'll probably never completely control or eradicate it."

Depe said he didn't think the commissioners should hide behind such statements.

Evans said he wasn't hiding behind his statement, but was "stating

fact." He asked whether the three landowners expected the cost of the county treating for noxious weeds passed along to landowners.

"Yes," Depe said calling himself living proof infested land could be turned around through treatment.

Evans said it was easy for Depe, Johnston and Schroeder to want the commissioners to enforce state law, but "for every one person who treats, there's eight or nine who

don't."

"The ball's really in your court," Johnston said. "It will help the economy of this county if you take a firm stand on this. Put some teeth into it."

Johnston suggested the county charge over and above the cost of chemicals for treatment on non-compliant landowners and assess

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