



COLBY FREE PRESS

Forensics team readies for state event

By Tisha Cox
Colby Free Press

Members of the Colby High School forensics team showcased their talents in a variety of public performances Monday. The pieces performed by students were all either qualified for the state championship tournament or festival.

"We've had our best year ever," said coach Nancy Rundel.

There are 11 entries qualified for the state championship and four are students who qualified in two events.



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press
Sophomore Curtis Fulwider read his poetry piece "Petite Rouge Riding Hood."

"That's a first," Rundel said.

Both events are Saturday, May 6. The state championship will be held at Washburn Rural High School in Topeka and the state festival is at Kansas City Community College in Kansas City.

Rundel said it's difficult to qualify for the state tournament and it requires a first or second place finish. The state festival requires anywhere from a first to fourth place finish to qualify.

She said 33 students started out the season, and 26 stayed in the program.

"That's a good-sized team," Rundel said.

The year the team has had its best showing is also the last year with Rundel as head coach. She resigned that position recently, but will be help out next year as needed.

She is pleased with the work the students have put out.

"I think we did pretty good," she said. "They've done a great job this year."

Qualifying for state championship are:

Robyn Schmid, senior, serious solo acting and informative speak-

ing; Hank Lamm, junior, original oration and extemporaneous speaking; Curtis Fulwider, sophomore, poetry; Paige Pfeifer, sophomore, poetry; Courtney Ress, sophomore, prose and poetry; Porscha Selley, sophomore, serious solo acting; April McAdams, junior, humorous solo acting; Jennifer Horinek, junior, and April McAdams, junior, improvised duet acting.

State festival qualifiers are:

Teresa Rocha, senior, prose; Katie Strange, sophomore, prose; Kelly Gerstner, sophomore, and Strange, duet acting; Paul Schrick, senior, and Fulwider, improvised duet acting; Katelyn Houtz and Sami Tole, freshmen, duet acting; Kortney Khan, freshman, poetry.

Other team members are: Kayla Sloan, Danni Baker, Kylie Kennedy and William Mruzek, freshmen.

Sophomores: Darci Brown, Jessica Cox and Jaewoo Jeong.

Juniors: Jasmine Brown, Liz Erickson, Cyndi Rothfuss and John Tole.

Assistant coaches are Linda Jones and Regina Heier.



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

A city crew worked to tear out four concrete slabs at the southwest corner of the Colby Swimming Pool.

Pool repairs should not delay opening

By Patty Decker
Free Press Editor

Dirt settling beneath concrete slabs around the Colby Municipal Pool prompted city crews to begin repair work Wednesday, said Marc Gilman director of the city's public utilities.

"So far it looks like only the four concrete slabs in the southwest corner were affected," he said, "but we aren't sure how far

we will need to go."

Gilman speculates the problem was created when dirt under the concrete was not compacted properly years ago when new concrete was added around the pool. "A couple other areas look suspicious," he said.

City workers are currently recompacting the dirt and replacing the concrete.

Director of City Recreation and supervisor of the pool Ryan Sturdy

said he is optimistic that the pool will open Memorial Day weekend.

"We are trying to eliminate the trip hazards that have happened due to the ground under the concrete deck settling," he said.

Sturdy said an engineer from Penco Engineering Company will visit today to look at the pool and assess the situation.

"The engineer will do some testing and take some core samples around the outside of the pool be-

fore formulating a game plan," he said.

The city pool was built in the 1930s as a WPA project during the depression-era times, but is maintained on a regular basis.

"We keep everything up-to-date and new pumps are installed every year," said Gilman about the maintenance.

Gilman said every effort will be made in getting the pool ready for opening day.

Increased rates: Two years and \$2 million later

By John Van Nostrand
Colby Free Press

City of Colby officials are making sure this is not money down the drain.

In fact, it's money for a new drain.

Colby's increased rates for sewer and water will be two years old next week.

The new rates have already served its primary purpose. Rates have generated \$2.2 million for the city's new sewer system currently under construction.

"We've reached that goal," said city of Colby Finance Director Debbie Zerr.

May 1, 2004, city officials implemented new rates, something that had not been done in years. According to city documents, the previous rates had a tenuous relationship with the city's sewer system.

"It did not build any cash reserves to pay for a new treatment plant. In addition to building the new sewer plant, the city needs an additional major sewer main to serve the business expansion occurring on both sides of I-70."

The city's sewer plant dates back to 1932. The last improvement to the plant was in 1996. In 2003, the city was informed of new requirements from the state about sewer operations.



D. Zerr

The city knew then the current system would not meet those new requirements when they go into effect next year.

"It shows how much the sewer plant is decaying," said Sherry Ummel, who processes city utility payments.

Not only did the city need to maintain what sewer services it already had, but Zerr said the city was expecting more growth near the interstate.

"There were several business along I-70, and the new Wal-Mart was coming, everything between Willow and Horton avenues," she said.

Estimated cost for the new sewer system is \$8.6 million. Zerr said that amount was calculated two years ago, but some numbers have since changed.

"With Katrina, construction materials are going up," Zerr said.

Last summer's hurricanes in the Gulf Coast have increased the cost of construction materials because of the high demand and rebuilding in the region.

Even though Colby's new plant is expected to be finished and working in 2007, Zerr said the city is already making payments on construction. She said it is too early to tell just exactly how much the new plant will cost.

"Prices have gone up, but we are getting construction materials here," she said.

The city is paying for 20 percent of the new sewer system through the

PREVIOUS READ DATE		CURRENT READ DATE		
01/19/2006		02/20/2006		
SERVICE	PREVIOUS READING	CURRENT READING	USAGE	AMOUNT
Previous Balance				125.84
Payments Received				-125.84
Electric	23454	24009	555	46.77
Water	1065	1070	5000	11.40
Sewer Charge				42.58
Garbage				11.75
KS Water Prot. Fee				0.16
Tax				0.59
Total Due				113.25
BEFORE DUE DATE		PENALTY AMOUNT		AFTER DUE DATE
113.25		11.34		124.59
STATEMENT DATE		DUE DATE		
03/01/06		03/15/06		

increased rates. For the remaining 80 percent, the city is using state-backed financing over 20 years.

Zerr and Ummel said it is difficult to determine how much the sewer plant costs to operate on a monthly basis.

"It changes," Ummel said, "because people move in and out."

According to city records, in March sewer expenses totaled \$470,000, but \$440,000 of that is related to new plant construction costs. Reviewing the past 12 months, the city's expenses for the sewer was \$1.1 million.

That averages to about \$92,000 a month. Rates were increased to meet financial needs at the sewer.

The minimum monthly sewer rate nearly doubled from \$4.56 to \$9.

Rates for water use also increased because of the relation between water and sewer use.

As soon as the new rates were made to the public, the utility office heard complaints from the residents.

"It was non-stop for five days,"

Zerr said.

People were so accustom to those rates, the change was a shock and the city heard about it.

Telephone calls from residents were continuous.

"The rates hadn't been raised in so many years," Ummel said.

Colby Mayor Ken Bieber, who served on the city's utility board at the time of the increase, said the city was forced to change the rates and improve the sewer system because of the state's requirements.

Bieber said the city could have inquired about a bond issue to pay for the plant, bond issues relate to taxes. Bieber said the research then switched to the monthly fees and usage.

"We had no choice," he said, "but it was something that should have been done years before."



K. Bieber

Agreement seen for compromise on funeral picketing bill

TOPEKA (AP) — One question for House and Senate negotiators reworking legislation prompted by the Rev. Fred Phelps and his followers is how far they can legally be kept back when protesting funerals of U.S. troops killed in combat.

Negotiators met Wednesday and said they're optimistic they can agree as lawmakers began their wrap-up session.

"We're trying to move in the same direction. It's just a matter of getting the language right," said Rep. John Edmonds, lead House negotiator.

The House version bans anybody closer than 300 yards one hour before, during and two hours after a funeral service. The Senate banned protests within 100 yards.

"We still think less is smarter, and we'll just have to see where we come out on it," said Sen. Pete Brungardt, his chamber's chief negotiator. "We want to go to a limit that's constitutional."

The measure doesn't single out Phelps or his followers, who contend the combat deaths are God's vengeance for the U.S. harboring homosexuals, and that their protests are a form of religious expression. For years, Phelps and his followers protested funerals of AIDS victims but have shifted to soldiers.

Stephen McAllister, University of Kansas Law School professor and constitutional scholar, told negotiators the U.S. Supreme Court hasn't set any specific distance. "The question is: How much separation is legally acceptable?" he said.

Kansas is among 27 states this

year to consider legislation restricting protest activities around funerals, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. Distances imposed by other states range from 100 feet to 1,000 feet, McAllister said, and most have chosen 300 feet.

"I'm wary about 300 feet, because the court has never upheld that distance," McAllister said. "What I'm suggesting is less is more, maybe not politically, but legally."

Another issue is where protesters can assemble.

The Senate exempted from the buffer zone streets, sidewalks and other public spaces, because the court has ruled those areas are public venues. But the House made it unlawful to obstruct or prevent the intended uses of public streets and sidewalks or other public space.

Brungardt, R-Salina, said the committee wants language to prevent places such as streets and sidewalks from being obstructed from their intended use.

"It's just a matter of coming up with the language," he said.

McAllister said lawmakers "absolutely" can impose limits on noisy demonstrations that disrupt a funeral service.

The idea of regulating noise around a funeral found support with negotiators, although it wasn't addressed in either the Senate or House version.

"It allows the family of the deceased to have an appropriate service without interference from outsiders," said Edmonds, R-Great Bend.