



COLBY FREE PRESS

Wednesday

June 14, 2006

50¢

Volume 117, Number 93
Serving Thomas County since 1888

10 pages

County continues looking for money

By Jan Katz Ackerman
Colby Free Press

The search for \$125,000 for Thomas County's 2007 budget is still on.

"We want you to fill in the numbers as to where you are at and get us a more accurate picture of your budgets," Commissioner Ron Evans said Monday.

An hour long conversation between the commissioners and department heads stemmed from last week's meeting to find a way to cover an estimated \$100,000 in pay raises and \$25,000 for a health insurance hike.

Thomas County Register of Deeds Maybelle Moore wanted to know if the commissioners, plan was to "zero out" at the end of 2006.

Commissioner Paul Steele said Evans, Commissioner Ken Christiansen and he are trying to be accurate with figures they will use to prepare the 2007 budget. Each department head has been asked to submit figures which will be used by the commissioners when they create the budget.

"We'll be doing what's called zero based budgeting. We need to know a little better what we are going to spend in 2007," Steele said.

Each department head was provided a copy of their particular budget. They are to study the material and get back with the commissioners in the near future with more accurate data.

"We can't go back and undo what's been done in Thomas County the past 50 years," Evans said.

"But I've got a goal that when you come on as, say a county clerk or register of deeds, you've got a base salary and then as you've been here we'll have a step in grade salary system." While the commissioners realize a step in grade system may not be feasible, Steele is working on variations of one to be reviewed. Of the \$72 million dollar county budget, \$2.4 million is for county employee salaries and benefits.

The budget must be finalized by July 1, and the hope is to stay away from a tax increase to pay for salaries and benefits. Steele said initial figures for the county show an \$80,000 increase in sales taxes for 2006, but the downside is having to spend more for fuel and insurance.

"It would seem to me we've got the money for a raise, but I don't have the votes," Steele said.

Evans disagreed. "Don't say that," he said. "I've said for weeks I'd like to give a 3 percent raise and cover insurance."

"I don't see anyone getting rich, but we have a reasonable salary plan and a reasonable health plan," Steele said. Moore said she is confident once department heads provide figures to the commissioners they will come up with something that works.

Thomas County Appraiser Mary Cech said she is concerned the county's loss of machinery and equipment valuation because of a new state law will further hurt the budget process. As of July 1, new machinery or equipment purchased by businesses is exempt from Kansas property tax. Steele agreed with Cech saying he saw the state's move as an economic development measure, but one which wouldn't help in western Kansas.

"In my opinion, it's only going to help counties like Johnson, Sedgwick and Saline Counties," he said, "but as far as I see it means you only have to drive to Wichita or Salina to see your grandkids but you don't have to drive to Dallas."

Landfill Director Larry Jumper asked if they are any closer to finding a way to increase wages for county employees. "I think we are," Christiansen said, "but we just don't want to get ourselves in a situation when we have to take money back."

Field fire



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Members of the Colby Fire Department worked to put out a grass fire at the west end of the Golden Plains Ag Tech complex, 650 Pine, Tuesday. Assistant Fire Chief Rick Dickman said the fire was caused by sparks from two arcing electrical wires outside a building. Fourteen firefighters responded to the call. That

wasn't the only grass fire in the area Tuesday. The Oakley Fire Department responded to a grass fire on Interstate 70 that burned about 15 acres, said assistant fire chief Art Martin. The fire call came in at about 2:30 p.m. and was caused by sparks from welders working on a sign.

Wreck claims second person

By Tisha Cox
Colby Free Press

A car wreck that took the life of an Atwood woman Sunday has claimed another.

According to a report from the Kansas Highway Patrol, Josefa Alanis, 46, of Lexington, Neb., died Monday at an undisclosed hospital.

Alanis was driving a 1995 Chevrolet sport utility vehicle south on U.S. Highway 83 when she failed to stop at a stop sign at the intersection of U.S. Highway 24, also known as Nine Mile Corner. Alanis' vehicle then hit a 2000 Buick driven by Constance S. Lillich, 50, of Atwood.

Lillich died in the wreck. Alanis and her passenger, Selena Martinez, 24, also of Lexington, were ejected from their vehicle, and neither were wearing seatbelts.

All three were taken to Citizens Medical Center in Colby. Martinez and Alanis were later transported elsewhere.

Kristin Brands, public affairs manager with the Kansas Department of Transportation in Norton, said Tuesday the last fatal accident at that intersection was May 31, 2002, not in early 2005 as initially reported.

Nancy D. Irion, 49, of Ponca City, Okla., died in a two-vehicle accident. She was driving her 2002 Honda north on U.S. Highway 83 and didn't stop at a stop sign. Irion was hit by another vehicle, a 1995 Jeep, driven by Joshua Ellis, 22, of Lawrence.

Locally, the intersection has a reputation for accidents.

Stan Witley, an information specialist with the department of transportation in Topeka, said according to their current information, 13 accidents happened at or near the intersection between 1995 and 2005.

"We went back 10 years because it gives you a better perspective," he said.

Of the 13 accidents, six involved fatalities. Five of the deaths were in 1996 and the other was in 2002. Those 13 crashes also resulted in 24 injuries.

Witley added the department doesn't have all the data for 2006 because there is a lag between when the accidents happen and when they are reported by law enforcement.

Thomas, Cheyenne counties share cost

By Jan Katz Ackerman
Colby Free Press

Equipment repairs won't cost Thomas County taxpayers as much as county leaders anticipated.

Thomas County Road and Bridge Supervisor Clair Schrock told commissioners Ron Evans, Paul Steele and Ken Christiansen the cost to repair an asphalt recycler was going to be shared with Cheyenne County.

Thomas County and Cheyenne County have an agreement to share certain pieces of equipment.

"Cheyenne County is going to pay \$7,208 and we'll pay \$5,311," Schrock said.

Besides the recycler repair, one of

the county's loaders sustained damage when a portion of it was accidentally submerged in water.

Of the \$17,000 bill, Schrock said insurance will pay all but \$1,200 of the repair.

"I think we dodged a bullet," Steele said about learning Thomas County wouldn't stand the entire cost of either repair bill.

Schrock told commissioners the state wants to give Thomas County road millings in exchange for the county taking over upkeep on about one and a half miles of road east of Menlo. Evans said before the county accepts the offer he wants Schrock to double check with the state about future intent for the road. He wanted to know what strings would be attached to the exchange.

"I'm not saying we would, but could the county decide to keep it asphalt or put it to gravel at a later date," Evans asked.

Schrock also said he wanted to check into grant money for the

county for road work.

In other business, Thomas County Emergency Preparedness Director Jim Engel said he was asked to consider becoming the fiscal agent for the 18-county Northwest Regional Homeland Security Council.

Engel said if he is assigned to the post he would be responsible for oversight of \$408,206 the council receives from the federal government. Of that amount, \$33,816 goes to Thomas County, and another \$12,625 would be earmarked for the fiscal agent job.

Steele and Christiansen were ready to approve Engel's assignment to the job, but Evans wanted Engel to find out more about it and report back to the board.

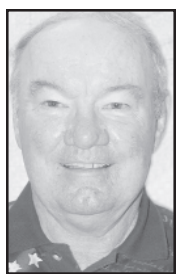
"Will the \$12,625 pay for your time and that of the county clerk and county treasurer to handle the money," Evans asked.

Rosalie Seemann updated the commissioners on activities of the

Silver Haired Legislature. She said two legislative bills which passed this year, Senate Bill No. 324 and No. 62, are known as the grandparents, and workforce bills.

"If you are a 50-year-old grandparent caring for grandchildren in your home and their parent isn't living with you, you can get up to \$600 a month, or \$200 per child, for their care," Seemann said.

Seemann said the workforce bill will assist people who are 55 years or older who have to return to the workforce and need training to do so. Becky Bond, an advocate for the Northwest Kansas Family Shelter, Inc., talked with the commissioners and give them handouts about the work being done to provide 24-hour assistance for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. The business office for the agency is located at 1135 S. Country Club Dr. in Colby. The phone number is (785) 443-0984, or toll-free, 1-800-794-4624.



R. Evans

Attorney general brings re-election campaign to Colby

By John Van Nostrand
Free Press Publisher

With support of 89 of Kansas' 104 county sheriffs, Attorney General Phill Kline is running for re-election. On a western Kansas tour, Kline spoke Tuesday in Colby at the Thomas County Courthouse.

"My re-election campaign is based on protecting the citizens of Kansas," he said.

Kline, a Republican, had Thomas County Sheriff Mike Baughn and Sherman County Sheriff Kevin Butts, in attendance.

"These are folks who answer the call anytime and put themselves in harm's way of people they don't know," Kline said.

According to Kline, two Kansas law enforcement officers have been killed in the line of duty in the past 18 months.

One officer was killed while serving a warrant and the other was involved in a domestic violence situation.

"Consider the great risks they take," Kline said.

During his first term as attorney general, Kline said he has strengthened punishments for certain



JOHN VAN NOSTRAND/Colby Free Press

Kansas Attorney General Phill Kline, center, spoke Tuesday in Colby about his re-election campaign. With Kline are Thomas County Sheriff Mike Baughn, left, and Sherman County Sheriff Kevin Butts, right.

crimes, specifically ones related to children.

According to Kline, crimes such as attempted aggravated solicitation, promoting child prostitution and failure to register as a sex offender typically resulted in probation.

Under Kline's administration,

punishments for those crimes are now prison sentences.

"We want to protect children," he said. "We have made it a promise."

In addition to crime, Kline said he has defended Kansas in regard to water usage from the Republican River valley.

The river winds its way through

Colorado and Nebraska in addition to Kansas.

Kline said he has protected Kansas' use of the river because of additional use by citizens in Nebraska and Colorado.

Kansas, like other states, have also increased regulations related to the production of methamphet-

amine. Kansas law requires certain over the counter medications used in the production of methamphetamine to be placed behind the counter.

"Meth labs are down 70 percent since I've been attorney general," he said.

Kline is a fifth-generation Kansan who was sworn in as the state's 41st attorney general on Jan. 13, 2003. He was born in Kansas City.

A graduate of Shawnee Mission Northwest High School in Shawnee, Kline attended Central Missouri State University on a wrestling scholarship.

After receiving degrees in political science and public relations, he attended the University of Kansas School of Law where he was associate editor of the Kansas Law Review and editor of the Kansas Criminal Justice Review.

After earning his law degree in 1987, Kline joined the Kansas City firm Blackwell Sanders where he counseled large corporate and government clients including the state of California and the city of Los Angeles. In 1992, Kline was elected to the Kansas House of Representatives.