



COLBY FREE PRESS

Colby goes batty with new cages

By Patty Decker
Free Press Editor

A new batting cage located beyond left field of the American Legion baseball diamond at Colby's ball fields will impact hundreds of young players for years to come.

Prompted by frustration, John Gatz of Colby, said his son Mitchell spoke to him in November 2005 after he tried unsuccessfully to practice batting in the old cage.

Following that conversation, John said Mitchell asked for suggestions on how to improve the batting cage.

After talking with Lyle Saddler, whose son Brian plays baseball, and Ryan Sturdy, director of city recreation, Gatz said the first step was to raise money to either upgrade the existing cage or build a new one.

The old cage needed new netting and a foundation. The old batting cage, located behind the storage shed and near the concession stand, was beyond cosmetic repairs. Consensus was to opt for a new structure.

For the next several months, Gatz said he and others asked for money or materials to build the new cage.

"It's been a long process, but worth it," he said. "So many people either contributed time, materials or money. The potential benefits; however, made the project worthwhile."

The cages are open to everyone and will be used by the high school's softball, baseball and summer baseball programs Gatz said.

"This is a big improvement over what we had," Lyle Saddler said. "The new cage is all-weather. In the near future we hope the city will get lights up so players can use the cage at night too."

The new structure can accommodate up to eight players — one person pitching and one batting in each of the four sections. It's dimensions are 70' x 14' x 10', with concrete base and carpeting.

Gatz and others coordinating the project thank the following people and businesses for their support: the City of Colby public works department; Colby Baseball Association; Colby Booster Club; Colby Canvas; City Recreation; Tim Hutfles (Hutfles Sand and Gravel); Office Works; Orscheln Farm and Home Supply; Tarbet Redi-Mix; Thomas Coun-



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

ty Attorney Andrea Wyrick; Thomas County Community Foundation; Thomas County Sheriff Mike Baughn; and Colby Public Schools.

In addition to organizations and businesses involved, recognition also goes to the following people: Jeremy Dietz, John Gatz, Mitchell Gatz, Jay Hawk, Larry Heier, Daryl Meyer, Chad Niermeier, Stan Orth, Martin Ruda, Brian Saddler, Lyle Saddler, Wayne Sulzman, Jon Tole, Brett Wilson, Ryan Sturdy and Kevin Cox.

For those unfamiliar with the Colby Baseball Association, Lyle wanted to remind everyone that the advertising signs located on the fencing around the ballfields is what makes many programs possible.

"We hope everyone will take notice of the advertisers who help the K-18, 12-year-old traveling team and other baseball programs," he said.

There are four batting stations and anyone is welcome to use the facility. BELOW: The new cages are a big improvement, said Lyle Saddler, one of the organizers.



County approves increase to dispatcher contract for 2007

By Jan Katz Ackerman
Colby Free Press

What might be the smallest budget request increase was proposed to Thomas County Commissioners Monday by Colby City Manager Carolyn Armstrong.

Armstrong, along with Deb Zerr,

Colby's finance director, and Chief of Police Randy Jones asked commissioners Ron Evans, Paul Steele and Ken Christiansen for \$451 dollars more for the communications contract for 2007.

The city and county share the cost for dispatching services for city and county law enforcement, emer-

gency medical services.

"My thought was it needs to go up to 39 percent," Armstrong said about the county's contribution toward dispatcher services. In 2006, Colby contributed \$117,485, or 65 percent of the \$180,720 contract, and the county contributed, \$63,235, or 35 percent.

Jones said his department currently has five dispatchers. As in the past, the communications contract covers salaries, Social Security, medical insurance, retirement, workman's compensation insurance and state unemployment insurance. Armstrong said the city and county need to continue their

effort to provide good wages and benefits or risk losing employees to the private sector.

Steele said he liked the fact the budget request was less than \$1,000.

"But if we get a few more businesses in town my people are going to quit and go to where they can

make more money," Armstrong said. "This is a joint effort and we are all working toward the same goal."

Commissioners approved the new contract increasing the county's share to \$70,657, or 39 percent. The city's share is at \$110, 514, which is 61 percent of the \$181,181

70 turns 50

A crowd standing on the Interstate 70 Exit 54 overpass in Colby waved flags at a military convoy that passed by Wednesday. The convoy and gathering were in celebration of the 50th anniversary Federal Aid Highway Act, signed by President Dwight Eisenhower, enacting the U.S. Interstate Highway System. The convoy reenacted the 1919 Transcontinental Motor Convoy. Eisenhower traveled on that convoy and his great-grandson, Merrill Atwater, was a passenger Wednesday.



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Celebration has some thinking of new projects

TOPEKA (AP) — With the interstate system's 50th birthday approaching, some Kansans are preparing to push for a new state transportation plan, partly to ease urban congestion.

A national group released a report Tuesday saying Kansas' interstates save money, travel time and even lives.

But, the report said, if improvements aren't made over the next decade, more than half the state's urban interstate miles could become dangerously congested.

The report noted that the state Department of Transportation has identified four stretches of urban interstates as needing to be widened by 2016, at an estimated cost of \$515 million. None is covered by the state's 10-year comprehensive transportation program, which ends in 2008.

President Eisenhower signed legislation creating the system on June 29, 1956, and the first eight-mile stretch, for I-70, was completed west of Topeka five months later.

Eisenhower's presidential library in Abilene, where he was raised, is hosting a celebration, with events scheduled Wednesday and Thursday evening. A vehicle convoy from San Francisco plans to arrive in Abilene at 7:45 p.m. Wednesday, going backward along the approximate route Eisenhower took as a young Army officer in 1919, until the convoy reaches Washington on June 29.

That trip helped convince Eisenhower that the nation needed an interstate system, and the report released Tuesday suggested it has lived up to its promise to make travel and commerce easier and safer.