



COLBY FREE PRESS

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Quitting is not part of the plan for Colby man

By John Van Nostrand

Colby Free Press

A wheelchair ramp leads to the front door of Doug Finley's house. Those ramps have also helped lead Finley back to his life.

Sunday will be the one-year anniversary Finley returned home after nearly four months of rehabilitation after becoming paralyzed.

"I love what I do," Finley said. "I never thought about quitting, I did think about coming back."

History

Finley, 51, has assisted special need students at Colby Public School since August 1998. He conducts tests on students with various concerns from social behavior to environment issues. He then creates programs for those students to improve their learning skills.

But on March 12, 2005, Finley's life took a drastic turn.

He woke up with extreme back pain and didn't know why he had it. The pain intensified and he went to the emergency room at Citizens Medical Center in Colby. Doctors speculated Finley had neurological problems and immediately had him flown to Presbyterian St. Luke's Medical Center in Denver, Colo.

"I walked in the E.R.," Finley said, "but I didn't walk out."

While in Denver, doctors determined Finley had internal bleeding near his spinal column. Swelling and pressure damaged the spinal cord. During surgery, doctors relieved the pressure off the spinal cord and hoped Finley would recover.

"We waited weeks," Finley said, "and there was not much change." Finley was paralyzed from the chest down.

After Presbyterian, Finley was transferred to Craig Hospital, also in Denver. Craig specializes in recovering from spinal cord injuries. During his rehabilitation, Finley was aware Colby schools offered a disability-leave package for employees.

While in rehabilitation, he met another public-school employee who took his district's disability leave.

"That wasn't my plan," Finley said. "I still had my education. I can

“There are lots of options to things. You just have to go discover them.”

Doug Finley

still counsel students and do tests, as long as I get around. I can access about everything I need. Some people can't go back to their positions and the school was supportive."

Finley returned to Colby July 2, 2005. He returned to work the next month for the 2005-2006 school year.

Home

Knowing Finley would be confined to a wheelchair, his house needed changed. Finley's brothers, who took over their father's construction company business, and other volunteers remodeled doors, bathrooms and the outside deck so Finley could easily maneuver his motorized wheelchair throughout his home.

A ramp within his home was painted in Kansas University colors, his alma mater. A Kansas Jayhawk mascot complements the ramp.

While the hammers were pounding, so was Finley's work ethic. He has limited use of his hands. He said his typing skills were limited before his paralysis, but still learned how to manipulate a keyboard.

"There are lots of options to things. You just have to go discover them," he said.

Finley's doctors were thrilled with his response.

"During one evaluation, he was impressed I went back to work so soon," Finley said.

Doctors had suggested he only work part time.

"Working full time, it was the best thing for him," said Doug's wife Donna. The two celebrated 30 years of marriage this month. Donna and Doug have known each other since seventh grade. She was with him in Denver throughout his hospital stay.

Donna recommends patience for any couple under these circum-

stances.

"You do the best you can do each day," she said. "You do the best with what you have."

Donna admits she is still adjusting her life and some adjustments are done each day. Despite those changes, Doug has still been an motivation to her.

"He's been a great inspiration to me. Going back to work is what he wanted to do."

School was not the only work Finley was doing. In December, he started his own private practice meeting clients one day a week. This spring, he increased his meeting schedule to two days a week.

Donna said Doug's situation has changed family dynamics, but not enough to keep the family at a distance from each other. Son Chris graduated high school in 2005. Son Cole is still in high school.

"Our boys are getting older and they are starting to have their own lives, but we still sit down and eat together," she said.

Work

Doug's impact on people is also noted at the Colby School District.

"It's inspiring to see that he's able to handle his duties even after the health issues he's had to endure," said Colby School Board President Tracy Rogers

Joni Clark-Leiker, career counselor for Colby schools, was waiting for Finley to return to work. She has worked with him for several years.

"I was expecting him to come back and I know we would have a place for him," she said.

Clark-Leiker said the offices were altered for Finley, but she said he did not alter how he approached his work.

During the school year, Clark-Leiker said Finley was virtually the same person before his incident. Prior, she said Finley wanted himself and the rest of the office to have



JOHN VAN NOSTRAND/Colby Free Press

Colby's Doug Finley showed off one of his wheelchair ramps, decorated with the University of Kansas mascot, in his home. Sunday will be the one-year anniversary Finley returned home after nearly four months of rehabilitation after being paralyzed.

a good time — even if he had to investigate it. Even in a wheelchair, she said Finley is still the same person.

"He has become even more empathetic, it's part of his job. He took on all the things he could possibly do and even stretched a little bit," she said. "He's been very good about work and his personal hurdles."

Finley did not use a sick day during the 2005-2006 school year.

Doug said he was familiar with Colby while growing up in Atwood. He attended Colby Community College before moving on to the University of Kansas. He remembers during his younger years in Atwood that Colby was the team to beat, as it was a rival school.

But all of that was forgotten when he realized how Colby people were supporting him after his paralysis. During Colby High's 2005 graduation ceremony, the audience gave Finley a standing ovation.

"People of the community have been overwhelming," Doug said. "I didn't expect that kind of support. I was still accepted."

Lions roar on July 4th

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

Independence Day in Colby will be celebrated with more than fireworks.

The Colby High Plains Lions Club is celebrating its 30th anniversary with a party and the public is invited. Club vice president John Mead said he came up with the idea because the community has such a large fireworks display, but nothing before it.

"With the club's anniversary, and a lack of events leading up to the fireworks, it would be a good idea to give back to the community," he said.

A free hot dog feed and games for kids will give people plenty to do before the evening finishes with a bang with the Kiwanis Club fireworks.

The Lions Club event starts at 6 p.m. at the Thomas County Fairgrounds. Games, like a bean bag toss, the Thomas County Amusement Association's dunk tank and moon walk will also be available.

Lion Roger Hale said the evening will also include the game plinko, and prizes for games like watermelon-seed spitting.

Mead said food will be served at 7 p.m. at the 4-H Building. The



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Summar Stephens, right, answered questions about fireworks Thursday for Jonathan Crenshaw, left, and Devon Schlageck at a fireworks tent by Dillon's. The boys were shopping for fireworks in preparation for the Fourth of July.

menu includes hot dogs, baked beans, potato chips, lemonade and watermelon.

Serving will stop about 8:30 p.m., but the games will go on until the fireworks start between 10 and 10:15 p.m.

"We put this together on the spur of the moment," Mead said. "It took

about six weeks to pull everything together."

Also helping with the event are the Thomas County Fair Board, Amusement Association, Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce, Sacred Heart Church, Thomas County Community Foundation, Dillon's, First Baptist Church,

First Christian Church, Assembly of God Church, State Farm, KXXX/The Ride, Wofster Construction and Coca-Cola.

For information, call Mead at (785) 462-2422 or the chamber office at 462-3401.

Mead said the Lions Club may have the events every year.

Colby School Board ends fiscal year

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

Fiscal year end budget issues were on the agenda for Colby School Board's meeting today.

The board approved the transfer of \$144,281 from the supplemental general fund and contingency fund. District financial officer Jo DeYoung said a transfer of funds is done each year.

The fiscal year runs from July 1-June 30.

Another budget issue brought up was putting more money in the capital outlay fund. Those are funds used for building repairs and improvements. Colby has \$242,530 in that budget. DeYoung said a district the size of Colby should have \$750,000-\$1 million in its capital outlay budget.

She suggested the board consider raising taxes next year to build up the outlay fund.

DeYoung also brought up the

2006-2007 budget process which the board is expected to review next month.

The board approved a salary change for assistant coaches and sponsors. The rate was changed to be at least 75 percent of what the head coach or sponsor makes. Over the course of the school year, DeYoung said it will be an increase of \$2,421 among all positions.

In other business, the board approved:

- The board approved resignations from: Darlene Anderson, Colby Middle School food service; Mary Bates and Allison Ruda, Colby Grade School paraprofessionals; Mitch Beims, Colby High School social studies teacher/head wrestling coach; Andy Boell, Colby High School math instructor and district PowerSchool administrator; Andrea Schuette, middle school Technology Student Association advisor and Matt Simms, assistant softball coach.

Marriage law starts Saturday

From the Associated Press

Saturday, the state ends its policy of having no minimum age for marriage with parental or judicial approval.

The new law now says a person must be at least 15 to marry, and even then a district judge must decide it's in that person's best interest. Those 18 and older don't need permission.

Those 16 or 17 can marry if they have permission from a parent or legal guardian and judicial consent; permission of both parents and the legal guardian if the parents are divorced and one parent is married to someone who is the legal guardian; or permission from a judge if the parents are dead and there's no legal guardian.