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8 pages

Lining this up



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

City of Colby employee Kevin Helus, left, watched Jerry Reitchek search for lines from S&T Communications as they worked to install new water service to the Thomas County Office Complex Today. Reitchek said they were also putting in a new water meter.

Visitors Bureau antes up

County challenged to help museum

By Patty Decker

Free Press Editor



L. Thomas



S. Taylor

During March and April, meetings aimed at saving Colby's museum were held for the purpose of improving the museum's finances. One organization, though, has put its money where its mouth is.

The Colby Convention and Visitors Bureau committee agreed this week to give one-half percent of Colby's hotel tax, or about \$28,000 per year, to support the Prairie Museum of Art and History.

Leilani Thomas, director of the Colby Convention and Visitors Bureau, said today her committee is challenging the Thomas County Commissioners and the Thomas County Economic Development Committee to match their \$28,000 support.

"The idea to give the museum a portion of the transient tax," Thomas said, "was prompted not only by the 'Save the Prairie Museum meetings in the spring, but also from talks inspired through the strategic planning group formed in March 2005."

The museum's need for income is not a secret.

"We knew the museum needed an infusion of money rather quickly," Thomas said.

"It has a lot of projects needed to be done and our committee thought that maybe if we challenged other agencies, they might buy in too."

The museum's current budget comes from three sources — Tho-

mas County taxes each year totaling \$65,000; donations at \$42,000; and earned income from admission and other programs totaling \$53,000.

However, in recent years the museum's expenses have exceeded its revenue sources with none left-over to improve, upgrade or enhance programs or repairs to the facility.

"If the Thomas County Commissioners and Economic Development Commission accept the challenge," Thomas said, "the Colby Convention and Visitors Bureau is considering an additional yearly pledge of 1 percent or \$56,000 for further additions."

The donation would continue from the Visitors Bureau for as long as needed.

Museum Director Sue Taylor said future plans include improving landscaping, playground equipment, picnic area, a gazebo, benches, miniature farm-animal petting zoo and other features designed to bring more families to the site.

"With increased marketing and

enhancing the museum, we anticipate an increase in visitors to the museum and lots of repeat visitors," Taylor said. "These improvements contribute to making Colby a great place to stop, but also a great place to live."

Colby's Convention and Visitors Bureau was created 18 years ago when then Colby Chamber of Commerce Director Susan Neupoth wanted to start the agency on a trial basis.

The idea of the bureau, then and now, is to promote Colby through marketing on billboards, trade journals, message centers and more recently the Visitors Center at Colby's Interstate 70 exit 53.

The only means of support for the Colby Convention Visitors Bureau is from a 3 percent hotel guest tax, which generates about \$160,000 a year, Thomas said. The tax is also 18 years old.

"Twenty years ago nobody knew Colby," Thomas said.

"Today and through working diligently to promote it, we put ourselves on the map."

The Colby Convention and Visitors Bureau committee includes six hotel managers/owners: Scott Crawford, Howard Culver, Vel Brown, Jennifer Woofter, Julie Sadtler and Martha Brewer and four business persons: Sue Taylor, Patrick Toth, Jim Brown and Lisa Wark. The Prairie Museum/Historical Society will be meeting with the commissioners 9:30 a.m. Monday to present the match proposal.

Strategic planning group changes name, but not objective

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

Progress is being made, plans are developing and a name has changed.

The Thomas County Strategic Planning Committee changed its name to the Thomas County Community Development Plan because the focus of what the group is doing has evolved.

Chairman Scott Focke said the volunteer group has moved more toward overall community development rather than niche strategic planning for certain aspects of the community.

The committee began work on the county's new long-term strategic plan in March 2005. The first meeting was sponsored by the Pro-active Committee, a joint effort between the Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce and the Colby Pro-

“Our group is placing an emphasis on retaining people in the community.”

Committee member Mike Fell

motion Committee. It has since broken down into task forces working on different areas, such as recreation, wellness, health, education, shopping, and more.

Holly Stephens, director of the Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce, is heading up the shopping task force.

"An effort has been made to get people from all parts of town onto the task force. They all agreed shopping in Colby needs to be expanded," Stephens said.

However, the focus needs to be on increasing awareness of what's already avail-

able before trying to fill any shopping gaps that exist.

"We had a lot of wonderful brainstorming sessions," Stephens said.

The education task force, led by Diana Wieland, curriculum director for the Colby School District, and Joni Clark-Leiker, counselor at Colby High School, gave an update.

"We're open to ideas and suggestions," Wieland said. They are focusing on what will be available in education and supporting the workforce.

Clark-Leiker said they have input from Brewster superintendent Dr. Roger Baskerville, who also suggested a lifeskills center for the county.

Mike Fell, part of the marketing task force, said many things are already in place to market the county as a good place to live. Colby's promotion committee and "Oasis on the Plains" motto and more are just two examples.

"Our group is placing an emphasis on retaining people in the community," he said.

"Increasing morale and a connection to the community could help.

"I've seen it done, where communities market to the people already living in them. It think it's been effective," he said.

An example he gave was a song for a sports team or university. He said it excites people, and gives them a sense of connec-

tion.

Other places have used jingles about their community or its aspects. He played four examples from Rochester and Cooperstown, N.Y., Amarillo, Texas, and music being used to advertise the Dodge City Legend, a United States Basketball League team.

Fell said a song is something that could be used in Colby.

"It think it's an investment to be considered," he said.

"The community does a good job promoting itself externally, but not to the people already living her. People take for granted what they see and know all the time," he said.

Focke said a public meeting will be held in September or October to showcase the public what the group has come up with, and to get their input and involvement.

Orscheln's new home on the Range (Avenue)

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

The former Wal-Mart building on Range Avenue won't be vacant for much longer. Orscheln Farm and Home Supply is relocating.

Orscheln Manager Shawn Yost said during the past two years prompted the need for a bigger building.

"We are just flat out of space," he said. "We're going to be four times bigger than we are now."

Orscheln's current building at 1100 S. Country Club Drive is 10,000-square-foot, and the new location is 42,000-square-foot.

"The parking lot also gets congested, like on sale days," he said, "or when people pull in with a pickup and trailer. However, that won't be the case at the Wal-Mart building."

The old Wal-Mart closed in May because of the opening of the new Wal-Mart Supercenter on Willow Avenue.

"We're going to take possession the first week of August," Yost said. "We'll actually have both stores open for about two weeks." Remodeling will begin in Au-

gust and it is expected to continue into September. Yost said the target opening date is Sept. 25.

Orscheln owns the building it is in now, and it will be for sale after the move. Orscheln is leasing the former Wal-Mart building.

Yost said the store's product selection will improve. The store has a full line of men's clothing and is expanding to include to a full women's line.

Most of the other departments will grow as well from hardware, seasonal and pets.

"The pet department had three full lines of dog food right now. After the move, it will expand to five or six. It will be a lot easier to shop," Yost said.

Many of the bigger items, like fence panels, will still be kept outside because it draws attention, and easier to load, Yost said.

He said the move will also help increase the business' visibility.

"This will get us out there," he said.

The relocation will mean more employees. Yost said the store has 10 employees now, but that number will increase to 25, adding 15 new jobs.



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Orscheln Farm and Home Supply, 1100 S. Country Club, is moving into new home at the old Wal-Mart building on South Range Avenue.



Two-car accident injures three

A two-car crash Monday sent three people to Citizens Medical Center.

According to a report from the Kansas Highway Patrol, the wreck occurred at 5:25 p.m. Wednesday at Kansas Highway 25 and Willow Road. Teresa Jo Enger, 20, of Colby, was driving east on Willow Road in her 2000 Plymouth. She failed to yield at a stop sign and turned north onto Kansas Highway 25.

April M. Palmer, 18, of Colby, was driving a 1989 Oldsmobile south on Highway 25. Palmer collided with Enger's car.

Enger was taken to Citizens Medical Center with possible injuries; her passenger, 4-year-old Nathan J. Hurst, was uninjured.

Palmer was also uninjured, but her passengers, Candice Palmer, 19, and Zack Wright, 17, both of Colby, were also taken to the hospital with possible injuries. A hospital spokesperson said Candice Palmer and Wright were treated and released. Enger was admitted for observation and later released.