



COLBY FREE PRESS

12 pages

Willow street work continues

By Jan Katz Ackerman
Colby Free Press

Taking the curve out of Willow Street is one step closer as of Thursday.

Thomas County Road and Bridge Director Clair Schrock told Commissioners Ron Evans, Paul Steele and Ken Christiansen the state has chosen a contractor for the project which is expected to start later this fall or early next spring.

Two curves just west of Country Club Drive on Willow Street will be removed as part of the \$607,207 project which includes grading and surfacing to Franklin Ave.

Schrock asked the commissioners to approve and sign the resolution which contracts with the lowest bidder, APAC Kansas, Inc., Shears Division out of Hutchinson. The county will pay \$192,600 as matching funds.

The county has until Oct. 5 to get the money to Topeka.

In other business regarding Schrock's department, Christiansen said he had been contacted by constituents wanting something done to slow down traffic in Brewster.

"People are concerned the road at R.D. Steakhouse is 55 miles per hour," Christiansen said.

After looking at a drawing showing a 1-mile stretch of road on Highway 24 which runs past the steakhouse and saloon, the commissioners asked Schrock to evaluate current signage. They also asked Schrock present an acceptable reduced speed in that section of roadway and draft a resolution accordingly and present it at an upcoming meeting.

Schrock gave the commissioners a memo from Kansas Department of Transportation Area Engineer Robert Weiss out of the Oakley office. Schrock said two state highway projects along Interstate 70 and one on U.S. 83 in Sheridan County may result in some road millings Thomas County could purchase to use in county road projects. No action was taken on the memo.

Changing hats from road and bridge director to noxious weed director, Schrock asked the commissioners for direction on sending out letters about bind weed growing rampantly throughout the county. None was given.

"If we want to send out letters on bind weed we've got 5,341 residents you'd have to send a letter," Evans said.

Evans said until everyone decides bind weed is a problem, the commissioners, hands are tied about controlling it.

"If people would take care of their bind weed, musk thistle and prairie dogs life would be grand," he said. "If everyone would do their best to take care of these three items there would be a lot less heartburn in Thomas County."



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

The Colby Theater closed its doors for good Thursday, Aug. 17, with the final movie, *The Devil Wears Prada*. The downtown theater opened March 19, 1941, and provided many moviegoers with fond memories.

Colby Theater rolls final credits

By Patty Decker
Free Press Editor

The end of an era for one of Colby's oldest businesses happened last month when the downtown Colby Theater closed.

Justin and Mary Comer, owners of the Colby Theater and Colby Cinema, purchased the two businesses from the previous owner, Jay Hawk, in May. Prior to Hawk, the Phillips family had owned and operated Colby theaters in various locations for more than 80 years.

Hawk, built the Colby Cinema in the mid 1990s and purchased the Colby Theater about seven years later.

"We were sorry to see the downtown theater close," said Mary, "but when the platter system (which makes showing a movie possible) broke down, we had to make a decision."

Mary said she and Justin, were both sad to close the theater, but the cost of buying a new platter, at \$6,000, new sound system, replacing the seats and renovating the bathrooms were cost prohibitive.

Arliss Phillips, wife of the late Don Phillips, knows how much her husband loved the theater.

"Don would have never closed the theater," she said, "because for many years beginning with J.P. Phillips (Don's dad) and carried on by Don, the Colby Theater has been blessed with many friends and memories."

Almost 90 years ago, Colby's first theater, The Lyric, opened on March 19, 1917, in the south half of the F & M Building. The



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

Mary Comer, right, co-owner of the Colby Theater and Colby Cinema spoke with two employees the last night the Colby Theater was open.

second theater was built in the early 1920s across the street, near what was the Colby Theater.

That theater was remodeled in the late 1920s, had a balcony put in and seating for 500 people.

The first sound movies came in 1929 and restrooms were installed about the same time, according to information the Thomas County Historical Society and articles from the *Thomas County Herald*.

Showing movies have come along way.

In 1917 J.P. Phillips borrowed \$90 from the school board chairman, who was a banker and rented a building from the bank.

"A level floor, movable chairs, a

sheet for a screen, a sheet metal booth and a hand cranked projector and no take-up reel is how the first theater operated," *The Herald* reported.

For many, the Colby Theater, which was converted from an old Chevrolet garage, opened March 19, 1941, and became one of the downtown mainstays and owner, Don, a familiar sight as well.

When the newer theater opened in 1941, the Lyric was closed, but in 1948 it was remodeled and opened again in 1948.

"Three short years later," the *Herald* reported, "the Lyric was closed and the drive-in theater opened."

The movie theater business continued to grow and change in the 1970s when Don and Arliss renovated the downtown theater and opened the drive-in on Colby's west side, but by 1980 the drive-in closed.

It wasn't until 1985 the Phillips "twined" the downtown theater and that's the way it stayed until last month.

Being a family affair for many years, Don and Arliss worked together in building the various theaters. Arliss booked the films while Don was in the U.S. Navy.

"Now it is time to say goodbye to a family-oriented business," Arliss said.

County visits storage issues

By Jan Katz Ackerman
Colby Free Press

Stuff piling up in basements, closets and other nooks and crannies has prompted an inventory of Thomas County materials.

Thomas County Commissioners Ron Evans, Paul Steele and Ken Christiansen want all county department heads to figure out what they must keep and what they can get rid of.

"We want all those having storage in the basement at the office complex to inventory and decide what they want to keep and what to purge in the near future," Evans said Thursday.

The idea of inventorying items stored throughout the county came up when Thomas County Emergency Preparedness Director Jim Engel and County Maintenance Director Jim McGuire talked about the need for more storage.

Storage of an emergency generator, cots, blankets and materials for emergencies, as well as a public transportation concern McGuire and Engel.

McGuire said the county currently has a building which is 12-foot by 50-foot which is used for surplus items.

"It's full and it would be nice to get something bigger," he said.

The two men proposed building a new building approximately 30-foot by 40-foot on the west side of the county's office complex located on Range Avenue.

"How about renting some storage," Evans asked.

Engel said he did not think that was a viable solution since other departments such as county health, clerk and courts all had storage needs.

Engel said the basement is so full of stored items some are encroaching onto stairs leading to and from the basement. He said the situation could be a problem in the event a crowd at the fairgrounds needs to seek shelter during a tornado.

Steele suggested closing in part of the space under the grandstands at the Thomas County Fairgrounds since the grandstands are concrete.

"There could be a lot of storage under the grandstands," Christiansen said.

Evans directed McGuire to get quotes on a new building, closing in part of the grandstands and renting storage units.

Ethanol plant proposed

By Tisha Cox
Colby Free Press

An ethanol plant may become a reality in Thomas County.

RTO Holdings, Inc. of Pratt is considering "prospective facilities" in Colby, Hugoton, and Enid and Shattuck, Okla.

This week, RTO announced working with Orion Ethanol, L.L.C., and Patrick Barker was appointed to the RTO board of directors.

"Orion anticipates that it will apply for air permits for their Hugoton and Colby locations in the fourth quarter of 2006," said Patrick Barker, a RTO board of director. No specific locations to build near Colby have been named yet. Ethanol is a gasoline created from corn. The company is currently building a facility in Pratt to produce 55-million gallon per years. Construction is expected to be completed sometime in 2007.

Pizza business reopens today

By John Van Nostrand
Colby Free Press

Linda and Tuffy Taylor want to give what Colby residents have been asking them for — Gambino's pizza.

The Taylors will reopen the restaurant on 1100 W. Fourth St. today.

Gambino's has been closed since July 4 when the people who purchased the building and business on contract from the Taylors decided to close.

"People would call me and say they miss it," Linda said. "Some people would say, 'I have got to have a calzone."

"I didn't have time to open that day with everything else going on. So we set a goal of Septem-

ber 1. "While those kind of phone calls to the Taylors were increasing, so was their interest in reopening the restaurant. "I missed my customers," Linda said. "It has some fantastic and loyal customers."

Even though Gambino's is back, it will not operate exactly like it previously did. Gambino's will only be open from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. Tuesdays through Thursdays and from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays. Most of the menu will be the same from an assortment of pizza, appetizers and fettuccine. Sandwiches will not return immediately, nor will the lunch buffet. Gambino's will also offer a take-and-bake menu. People can custom order a pizza then pick it up and cook it at home at their convenience or freeze it and have it later on.

Even though Gambino's will not be open during the lunch hour, Gambino's will cater to small groups during that time.

Gambino's will offer discount prices to Colby Community College students who show their identification card. Pizza can also be delivered to customers.

Linda and husband Tuffy, along with two former Gambino's employees, will do all the work. Taylor said reopening Gambino's adds another place to eat near downtown, which is limited.

"It just does not get the interstate traffic," she said, "unless people ask for it and they send them our way." Gambino's, with restaurants in Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Missouri and Texas, opened in 1992 in Colby.



JOHN VAN NOSTRAND/Colby Free Press

Linda Taylor programmed the cash register Thursday at Gambino's pizza. The restaurant closed July 4 and reopens today.