



# COLBY FREE PRESS

10 pages

## Budget billing

# City offers choices in paying utility bill

By **Patty Decker**  
Free Press Editor

Colby residents now have a choice when it comes to paying their city utility bills.

“Starting this month, residents can sign up for budget billing, similar to what Midwest Energy already offers,” said Debbie Zerr, finance director.



D. Zerr

During October and November only, customers with at least 12 months of utility bill history are eligible to take this option. One other stipulation to the plan is if a cus-

tomers’ account should become delinquent, the budget billing option is revoked.

The city will calculate and average from the previous 12 months, adding 5 percent as a precaution until the averages are working out, Zerr said. Customers will be able to see each month if they are over or under their budget using this new system.

For those who sign up in October, Zerr said, the first budget bill will be in November and for those signing up in November, their first budget bill be in December.

“For the first two years of the program,” she said, “we will only have a sign up in October and November.”

After that, Zerr said the city will be able to sign anyone up for bud-

get billing at any time.

In addition, those on budget billing, as well as regular billing, are re-evaluated each year following the December-January-February calculation of water bills for the sewer rates.

The council approved budget billing by a unanimous vote last month.

Zerr was asked how the decision to accept credit cards for utility bills was working out.

“So far, no one has used a credit card to pay their bill,” she said.

Zerr said she wasn’t sure if the added \$5.95 transaction fee was a reason people were not using a credit card.

For questions about budget billing eligibility, call 460-4410 or stop by the office, 585 N. Franklin Ave.

# Landfill has new service

By **Tisha Cox**  
Colby Free Press

Thomas County residents needing to dispose household hazardous waste no longer have to wait for a collection date.

The Thomas County landfill has a permit to accept household waste said Larry Jumper, landfill supervisor.

The most recent collection date was Saturday. Jumper said seven people dropped off waste at the downtown Colby site and more came out to the landfill. Saturday was the last collection for the town site. Waste can now be taken to the landfill.

Right now, the landfill accepts acids, corrosives, flammables, latex paints, household cleaners and poisonous materials, such as pesticides.

“People can step right up there

and put stuff inside the container,” he said.

Jumper suggests people to call ahead to make sure there is enough help available if assistance is needed.

Jumper has taken a hazardous material course and the landfill crew will also be getting the training.

He said former director Sandy Swob is also helping out from time to time, as well as Jim Maguire, who does maintenance for the county.

The landfill only takes household waste from Thomas County residents. Business or industrial waste will not be accepted.

“Most of the time it will be small quantities,” Jumper said.

The trailer is temporary and the landfill will get a permanent collection site. The county received a grant to construct a household hazardous waste building at the land-

fill. Jumper said the \$66,000 grant was approved two weeks ago.

The reason behind the new building is accessibility and hours of operation. Before, residents would have to wait for one of three yearly collection dates.

“They can bring stuff out anytime they want to during regular landfill hours,” Jumper said.

Also, the building currently used by the county as a collection site at 190 W. Fourth St. isn’t very suitable for the purpose of storing waste.

Jumper said he was told during Friday’s commissioners meeting to get bids for the building and also the cost of having a contractor construct the facility. A decision will likely be made at the commissioners meeting Monday.

The building will be approximately 40 by 50 feet. It will be fire-proof, leak-proof and have an explosive-proof room.

## A novel opportunity



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Kristie Hubbell, right, and son Talen Hubbell browsed through books during a book fair Tuesday in the Sacred Heart School gym. Both Sacred Heart and Colby Grade School are holding book fairs this week, in conjunction with parent-teacher conferences.

# Unrelenting drought taking toll on Kansas farm families

WICHITA (AP) — Charlie Griffin gets two or three calls daily from farmers struggling with bills they cannot pay.

“Often the first thing out of someone’s mouth is, ‘I don’t know where to turn,’” said Griffin, director of the Kansas Rural Family Help Line.

Widespread drought is taking a psychological, as well as financial, toll on American farmers and ranchers.

The summer of 2006 was the second warmest in the continental U.S. since records began in 1895, according to the NOAA National Climatic Data Center. Despite some rainfall last month in parts of the country, moderate to extreme drought conditions continue in about 40 percent of the country.

It’s difficult to quantify how deeply the

“We have stretched all we can. There is really not much else that we can stretch.”

Dan Engler,  
grain grower in north Kansas

drought is affecting Kansas farmers. While the number of calls to the help line is running about the same as in past years, Griffin said, the drought has risen to the top of the average farmer’s list of worries.

Calls to the help line typically increase as winter approaches and farmers start going over their account books.

“That is the time when a lot of farmers

go through some seasonal depression, and some of them could benefit from assistance from a mental health professional,” Griffin said.

Cattle rancher Barrett Broadie said he’s fortunate to have an off-farm job working for a cattle auction company to help pay bills and make his land payment.

“For a lot of these families, there is nothing they can do,” he said. “Psychologically, that is as tough on them as anything.”

Broadie, 36, keeps about 220 cows year-round and usually runs another 400 or more head on wheat pasture every winter. Last year, the drought-stressed pastures were so poor he could only run 200 head on pasture, cutting his profits in half.

In north Kansas, grain grower Dan Engler struggles with crops decimated by drought over the past seven years.

His off-farm job as an insurance crop adjuster helps, but his pickup truck has 217,000 miles on it and much of his farm equipment is aging. He laid off his hired hand, and depends more on his children and grandparents as unpaid farm labor. To cut insurance costs, he raised the deductible on their automobile, farm and health care poli-

cies. “We have stretched all we can. There is really not much else that we can stretch,” he said.

Engler, 42, farms several thousand acres of corn, soybeans, wheat and sorghum. Higher prices for fuel and fertilizer have driven his operational costs up an additional \$35,000 this year, he said.

“How can you in a drought situation — when you don’t have a crop — produce that \$35,000?” Engler asked.

He said seven young farmers he knows quit farming since he came to Kansas and took over his wife’s farm in 1998.

Some relief may be in the offing in some areas. The National Weather Service’s Climate Prediction Center has forecast some improvement across the Great Plains through December.

## The first of many meetings

Laura Ramirez, left, and Wendy Chavez, center, were welcomed to their parent-teacher conference Tuesday by Colby Grade School kindergarten teacher Judy Shull. Parent-teacher conferences for the Colby School District began Tuesday, and run all week.



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

## Moving moves to court

By **Jan Katz Ackerman**  
Colby Free Press

A Thomas County woman is suing the owners of a Pratt moving company alleging they want too much money to deliver her furniture.

For more than a year, Barbara Young-Duell and the owners of Wegele & Wegele Vanlines, Inc. have battled over how much money Young-Duell owes for having furniture moved from Oberlin to Colby.

The dispute started after a Wilson Moving Company of Hays subcontracted the move of Young-Duell’s household furnishings to Blaze L. Wegele and Dena D. Wegele.

Wilson Moving closed just days before Young-Duell’s June 2005 move. Young-Duell, at the onset of the dispute, said when Wegele arrived at her home and started to unload his truck in Colby, a cost difference of several thousand dollars

surfaced. Young-Duell said an verbal quote of less than \$2,000 she claims Wilson Moving Company gave her should have been honored by Wegele.

Young-Duell claim Wegele wants \$8,000 more than Wilson Moving quoted in April 2005 to move her property. Now back in court, Young-Duell, through her attorney, Jeff Mason of Goodland, continues to claim the Wegeles are holding her furniture against her will. She is asking for return of her property and damages in excess of \$75,000 for “wrongful detention of property,” and “mental and emotional anguish” caused by the Wegeles.

The Wegeles, through their attorney, Stephen M. Kerwick of Foulston-Kiefkin LLP of Wichita, is countering Young-Duell.

The Wegeles claim Young-Duell owe them the \$8,019 in tariff charges, plus \$11,008 in services, packing materials, labor and storage fees