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County approves health director

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

The Thomas County Health Department has a new administrator.

Thomas County Commissioners approved Lisa Molstad of Colby at their meeting Monday.

Molstad starts Dec. 18. She, along with Sarah Powell of Colby, were interviewed for the job at the Nov. 30 commissioners meeting.

Molstad replaces Juanita Gatz, who resigned Nov. 6. Gatz started in January and replaced Juanita Dewey, who resigned in December 2005.

Chairman Ron Evans said a lot of time was spent making the decision. "We looked at this pretty closely," he said.

In other county news...

Federal money was also on the commissioners' agenda. Money from the federal government will pay for a communications project in Thomas County.

Undersheriff Jason Moses gave commissioners paperwork from the Department of Homeland Security regarding a grant for communications equipment.

The commissioners approved the agreement, which will provide about \$3,000 to move communication equipment to a better location. The money is slated for a project and materials to move the communications equipment 300-feet higher to the Alltel tower at Orscheln Farm and Home.

"Thomas County pioneered this project," Moses said.

The Mutual Operations Common Channel allows for communication between county dispatchers among the counties in the region.

County Emergency Preparedness Director Jim Engel explained the agreement. Grants from the Office for Domestic Preparedness are handled by regional councils created by the federal government. Thomas County is in a region with 18 other northwest Kansas counties.

"That way, the money benefits everyone in the region," Engel said.

Clair Schrock, county road supervisor, was also at the meeting.

Taking over a road might be in the works for Thomas County. Schrock said the county could take over Kansas Highway 184 from Interstate 70 to the south edge of Brewster. It is about 1.5 miles.

The Kansas Department of Transportation would be willing to give the county some road surface materials at Brewster if it takes over all responsibility for the section of road. No decision was made.

Another matter at the road department is finding new equipment. Schrock told commissioners he is looking for a new scraper to replace the 1976 model.

Sounds of good cheer



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Sacred Heart School students played recorders and sang during their winter concert Monday at the school. This was the first of many holiday concerts this month.

Small colleges need big ideas for their future

By John Van Nostrand

Colby Free Press

Colby Community College is about 250 miles from Denver, Colo., and because of dwindling population, sometimes it feels like it takes miles until you see another person in northwest Kansas.

But the college is not alone in wanting to find how to make things better for Colby while also increasing enrollment.

Barry Kaaz, the college's director of economic development, said plans are in the works for a conference of rural community colleges to be held June 13-15, 2007, at the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo.

"We are going to target rural community colleges," Kaaz said Tuesday during the Colby Rotary meeting.

"We need to get more economic development in rural community colleges, like Colby, not the ones with 18,000 enrollment or 30 miles from a metropolitan area."

Kaaz said he knows of no other conference like this — specifically for small community colleges. The conference will be for community colleges with enrollment no more than 2,000. Kaaz said there are less than 200 of such schools across the country.

The conference is related to one of college president Dr. Lynn Kreider's goals and part of Kreider's initiative to increase the school's exposure and enrollment. Kreider began work July 1.

"Kreider is a driver on change and new direction," he said. "But getting people to change is tough."

Colby Community College's core area involves 14 counties and about 59,000 people in northwest Kansas.

Although the number of counties has not changed, Kaaz said the population usually does — it decreases.

"What can Colby do to get the attention of east Kansas and the Front Range?" The Front Range is the term used for the string of cities adjacent to the Rocky Mountains located north and south of metro-

Denver.

Kaaz, who has been with the college for three years, said he is aware of the battles rural institutions have with metro areas.

"I have worked in a rural area long enough to know the logistics fighting against the Topekas, Wichitas and Kansas Cities," he said.

At the conference, Kaaz expects representatives from those colleges to discuss what works for them and learn what has not worked for others. Kaaz said Colby and the college should be proud of what it has to offer.

Colby Community College has a quality reputation for its success in veterinary technician, nursing and dental-hygiene programs.

Kaaz said the college is researching building a pistol range — related to Kansas' new law of concealed weapons permit. The permit class is available in Colby.

The concealed weapons class in Colby is rare in Kansas since it also includes what is called Utah certification.

With a Utah certificate, a concealed weapons permit owner can legally take the weapon to 28 other states. The only other place in Kansas that offers Utah certification is in Kansas City.

Colby Community College is also negotiating with Thomas County officials about GIS technology.

It is a collection of computer programs and geographic data for capturing, managing, analyzing, and displaying all forms of geographically referenced information.

Kaaz said improving the college and increasing population and economic development is not completely up to the college and its staff. An attractive job market in Colby would also help bring more people to town.

"We need to create a sense of urgency in people," he said.



B. Kaaz

Kansas Masons dedicate Colby Episcopal Church

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

Officers from the Masonic Grand Lodge of Kansas were in Colby Saturday for two dedication ceremonies — one for a flagpole at the Colby Masonic Lodge and another for the Ascension on the Prairie Episcopal Church.

Steve Molstad of Colby, Grand

Master of the Masons of Kansas, said a Masonic gathering of this size had not occurred in Colby in recent memory. A total of 16 officers and their spouses came for the



S. Molstad

dedications, a reception for Molstad and a gathering Saturday.

Molstad said the church is the oldest in Thomas County. It was founded in 1882, three years before Colby.

Don Martin, pastor at the church, said they chose to hold a reception for Molstad at the church to honor him because he is Masonic. Molstad's time as Grand Master started

in March and will end in March 2007.

Molstad is a member of the church, and president of the church board. About 80 people attended the dedication of the church.

"It was quite nice," Martin said.

Harold Lefmann, a member of the church, has been active in the Masons and is the Worthy Patron with the Order of the Eastern Star

in Colby. He said the last Grand Master from Colby was Cline Curtiss in the 1940s, and to reach that position is a "great accomplishment."

"It will probably be some time before another Grand Master is chosen from this part of the state," Lefmann said.

The Masons traveled a collective 9,000 miles to Colby this weekend.

Genesis-Thomas County thankful for those who help others

By Patty Decker

Free Press Editor

More than 8 percent of families in the Colby area are receiving help this holiday season through the local food bank.

Although most years the number fluctuates, said Marilyn Friesen, co-coordinator of the Genesis-Thomas County Christmas basket project, the last two years have been much higher.

"We gave out 191 baskets last year, which was 25 more than in 2004 and this year the number is 186," she said.

Prior to 2005, the average number of baskets hovered between 125 and 135, but Friesen suspects the higher costs of natural gas and other items could be a factor for many families.

Similar to years past, the Christmas Food Basket project give re-

cipients and extra boost during the month of December, she said.

"Each basket will have a ham, potatoes, bread, peanut butter, jelly, four kinds of canned vegetables, soups, spaghetti and sauce, hamburger helper, Jellios, pudding, macaroni and cheese, corn flakes, and oatmeal," she said. "We even have a few new additions this year to include some kind of dessert, stuffing mix, hamburger meat and fresh fruit."

In order to make the Christmas food basket program work it takes a lot of groups and organizations.

For example, the past two weeks, Friesen said two trailers have been used to pick up food items from Dillons, Dollar General, and Wal-Mart for storage at the Thomas County 4-H Building.

"We had help from the Colby College men's basketball team moving food this week and Satur-



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Co-coordinator of the Christmas basket program Steve Friesen, left, watched Dillons manager Tom Chain load pallets of food.

day when the baskets are distributed, the Colby High School Service Club and criminal justice students from the college will be helping," she said.

In addition, United Parcel Services is helping by reinforcing

boxes that will be used as the baskets. Beginning at 7 p.m. Friday, filling baskets will take place and along with individual volunteers, Friesen said the Catholic youth group, Girl Scouts, and other organizations will help.

"We still could use more help filling the baskets," she said. "Anyone else wanting to assist is encouraged to go to the 4-H building Friday night."

The Genesis board begins work on the Christmas basket project in September by informing churches, Social Rehabilitation Services and other organizations that might know of families in need.

"We contact the Colby Fire Department for bicycles, Kiwanis Club for toys and others months before — there's a lot of behind-the-scenes work that involves a lot of people," she said.

Once the baskets are distributed Saturday, the food bank needs replenishing for its regular monthly distributions.

"We rely on food drive collections not only during the holidays, but throughout the year," Friesen said. Donations are still being ac-

cepted at any of the following locations:

Genesis-Thomas County food bank, 350 S. Range Ave. on Wednesdays between 10 a.m. and noon and 1 to 4 p.m.;

Sacred Heart Catholic Church, 1065 W. Fifth;

Leroy's Printing, 560 N. Franklin;

First Presbyterian Church, 515 W. Fourth;

Colby United Methodist Church, 950 S. Franklin;

or Trinity Lutheran Church, 855 E. Fifth.

Money donations may be mailed to the Genesis office, P.O. Box 214, Colby, KS, 67701.

"It's because of the generosity of businesses, groups, organizations and individuals in Thomas County, that we can make the holidays brighter for those families in need," Friesen said.