



# COLBY FREE PRESS

10 pages

## County considers second van

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

Thomas County residents who need a ride, may get an improvement.

Thomas County Commissioners approved submitting a grant application to the Kansas Department of Transportation at their meeting Monday for a new van.

Deputy county clerk Barb Hopper said the current van, a 2000 Ford, has more than 81,000 miles.

"They realize once they get that far along they start to need repair work," she said.

The van is starting to need more repairs and the county decided it is time to get a new vehicle.

A newer van would allow taking people to appointments in Hays or Garden City, while the older van could be used in Colby.

The county is considering \$51,150 for a 13-passenger raised-roof van, which includes a wheelchair lift and restraint system.

Hopper said the van isn't just for senior citizens, but anyone who needs transportation — for a doctor's appointment, to getting lunch or groceries.

The Senior Progress Center dispatches the van five days a week, mainly around Colby. The cost for riders is a donation of \$1.

"I foresee we can accommodate Hays and Garden City," she said.

Hopper said Colby City Manager Carolyn Armstrong, Mayor Ken Bieber, the commissioners and others have lent their support to the grant application.

The county will find out if the grant was approved in June.

In other county news...

Commissioners approved a new snowblower for the courthouse and Thomas County Office Complex. A tracked snowblower for \$1,500-\$1,700 was recommended.

Jim McGuire, custodian, told the commissioners it is getting harder to find parts for the 1983 snowblower used at the office complex.

"The whole thing is getting pretty worn out," he said.

The old snowblower will be kept as a backup.

A salary issue was also resolved. Commissioners had tabled a request at their Jan. 15 meeting to increase the salary of Jim Engel, county emergency management director.

Engel had requested it because he has taken on additional responsibilities.

The commissioners approved increasing his salary from \$27,310 to \$28,000.

The commissioners went into executive session 15 minutes with Lisa Molstad, Thomas County Health Department administrator, to discuss personnel issues. No action was taken.

The location of where Western Prairie RC&D is moving was also found out.

The group is moving out of its offices at the office complex in April, and for several months, it was unknown where they were moving.

RC&D is moving to the Farm Service Agency building on South Country Club Drive.



J. Engel



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

## Furry friends

**ABOVE:** Kaylee Keck zipped her poodle, Jazz, into a coat during a dog obedience class at the 4-H Building Tuesday. **RIGHT:** Zack May and his retriever Buddy, left, and Seth Bredemeier and his spaniel Hershey practiced "heeling." The obedience classes are for 4-H members and the public, and started last week. Dogs as young as 5 or 6 months old are eligible for the class. Owners learn how to socialize their dogs, and behavior control. 4-H members work on obedience, showmanship and agility, which are all skills used in dog shows and competitions.



## Sheridan County nurse receives \$3,000 raise

By Jan Katz Ackerman

Colby Free Press

Sheridan County taxpayers will spend nearly \$3,000 more in 2007 for a public health nurse than they did in 2006.

Commissioners David Zimmerman, Ron Schamberger and Keith Kennedy on Monday approved Public Health Nurse Melanie Cooper a \$2,275 pay raise. Cooper will make \$32,200 this year, plus receive a cash reimbursement of \$410 each month to apply toward her private health insurance policy.

"Nurses make pretty good money," Zimmerman said Monday. "If you are going to have a nurse you are going to have to pay for it."

Cooper started with the county in November 1999. In 2006, she was paid \$2,100 a month from January to July, and in August when the commissioners expanded clinic hours from 20 to 32 hours per week her salary was bumped another \$525.

As of Monday, Cooper's monthly salary will be \$2,683, which equates to \$20.96 an hour. Cooper said Monday was the first she had seen the dollar figure.

According to Terri Roberts of the Kansas Nursing Association, Cooper's new salary is higher than most public health nurses across the state. Roberts said data compiled for the latest wage survey done in 2005 lists registered nurses, including those serving as county health nurses, making between \$19.73 and \$20.10 per hour in areas other than Kansas City, Lawrence, Topeka and Wichita.

Receiving the second highest pay raise is Bob Schwarz, head of the road and bridge department.

Schwarz started with the county in August 2005. Four months later he received a \$900 raise, and gets another \$900 one this year bringing his salary to \$37,800. Schwarz's salary tops 30-plus year county treasurer Esther Bainter's by \$10,100, despite her \$700 increase

which brings her up to \$27,700. Sheridan County Clerk Paula Bielser is the only county official forced to take a pay cut in 2007.

According to a resolution listing department heads and deputies, the commissioners cut Bielser's salary by \$400 to \$27,000. She will continue to receive 7.5 percent of her gross clerk pay for duties as election officer, that being \$2,025.

"She isn't doing the job she should be doing and isn't putting in the time we think she should be there," Zimmerman said.

Bielser disagrees. "I've been in this office 20 years and I can tell you the times I've taken two weeks off at a time," Bielser said. "I took two weeks off in 1999 after surgery and I took one week off last November."

Bielser said she does not keep track of her hours because she works whatever it takes to get the job done, even nights or weekends. "That's why I'm elected, I'm here to serve the public," she said.

## School board gives students, staff a day off

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

Students and staff in the Colby School District earned an extra day off this semester.

On Monday, the school board approved Friday, Feb. 23, as a day off after students met Adequate Yearly Progress for No Child Left Behind, and high marks on the 2006 state assessments.

No Child Left Behind is a federal program requiring all public schools to meet certain academic standards.

Four board members voted for the day off. Janice Frahm was the only member to vote no.

Board members Dewey Augustine and Kevan Taylor were absent because of illness.

The day-off reward was proposed last year as an incentive to try to improve performance on the state assessments.

It worked. High school principal Rocky Robbins said some of the older students, especially at the high school, need an incentive to perform better.

Reading scores on the assessment improved.

"That's a trend we'd like to continue," he said.

"Not all students try their hardest all the time, and sometimes it is necessary to dangle an incentive."

Board president Tracy Rogers said he would like to see students in school instead of out — but understands the need for the incentive.

"A day off would make the most impact," he said.

Robb Ross, middle school principal, said it is important to encour-



J. Frahm



T. Rogers

**"We would be precedent-setting and expected to repeat this. There will be no going back without hard feelings"**

Janice Frahm, school board member

age students to do well on the tests and to underline how crucial the assessments are.

Frahm said the board would be in new territory if it approved the day off.

"We would be precedent-setting and expected to repeat this," she said.

She said the community needs to be aware of the students' achievement, but would like to see more variety when it comes to incentive choices.

Feb. 23 is the first day of the state wrestling tournament.

Snow days were also a concern. The district closed school four days because of a snowstorm before Christmas break, and after the New Year's Day weekend storm.

Superintendent Kirk Nielsen said the district's calendar has more than enough hours to accommodate the snow days and the day off.

The state requires students to be in school 1,116 hours during the year.

Frahm said if not all the buildings make the standard next year, there will be problems.

"There will be no going back without hard feelings," she said.

Activities Director Larry Gabel weighed in with his opinion.

"It's a long time from Christmas to spring break. The timing is good," he said.

"Many students are gone any way, and it's a win-win situation."

## Logan County commissioners file lawsuit to poison prairie dogs

OAKLEY (AP) — A judge could decide on Groundhog Day whether to force some western Kansas ranchers to move their cattle so Logan County officials can poison prairie dogs.

County commissioners filed a lawsuit Jan. 10 in Logan County District Court against ranchers and landowners who have fought their efforts to eradicate prairie dogs.

The county says it has received complaints from numerous residents about the prairie dogs, which farmers and ranchers say destroy pastures and fields by digging

holes and tunneling. They also say the rodents compete with cattle for grass to forage.

Some people who oppose the county's eradication attempts support a federal effort to reintroduce the endangered black-footed ferret to the area. Prairie dogs are a main food source for the ferrets.

A hearing on the county's request for a temporary injunction forcing the ranchers and landowners to remove the cattle from any lands while the county applies rodenticide is scheduled for Feb. 2, which is

Groundhog Day. Prairie dogs, like groundhogs, are members of the squirrel family.

Defendants in the lawsuit include ranchers Larry and Elizabeth Haverfield and Gordon Barnhardt; Maxine Blank, an 80-year-old Utah woman who rents land to the Haverfields in Russell Springs; Donald and Lillian Becker, who have resisted poisoning efforts; and Dixie Surratt, who owns a large ranch in far southeast Logan County.

Randy Rathbun, an attorney for the Haverfields and Barnhardt, said Tuesday that he hopes the judge will honor his cli-

ents' property rights.

"It's like the world getting turned upside down for these people," Rathbun said, adding that a storm over the long New Year's weekend that dumped up to 3 feet of snow in some areas already has hurt ranchers. "After the snow storm they lost cattle, and now they have to deal with this."

Last month, the county ordered Haverfield to move his cattle so it could apply a poison that's dangerous to livestock. The county said if the cows were not moved, it would spread a more expensive poison

that's safe for cattle — and bill Haverfield for the higher cost.

When Haverfield ignored the demand, the commissioners turned the matter over to the court. The lawsuit claims Haverfield moved the cows intentionally to stop the county. Even if a judge grants the county's request for an injunction, Commissioner Carl Uhrich said the snow means it could be a month before prairie dog towns are accessible. "It hasn't melted any," he said. "It's just ice. Most of them haven't dug out of their holes."