



COLBY FREE PRESS

Schools observe student illnesses

By John Van Nostrand
Colby Free Press Publisher

The three Rs of education these days are rest, recuperation and reading the directions on prescriptions.

Schools across northwest Kansas have noticed an increase in student absence because of illness. The sniffles and sneezes in the Rawlins County District in Atwood is so great, administration closed schools today and Friday to give students a chance to recover and slow the spread of contagious illnesses.

In Colby, Heartland Christian School canceled its preschool class today because of illness. Of the 14 students in the class, about half of the class showed up for school Wednesday and feared more would miss school today because of the interaction between students and classroom materials.

"We are lucky it's just one class," said Heartland Administrator Jesse Vincent. "It's all around the area."

Vincent said the preschool class is the hardest hit class. Other grades just have one or two students out.

"We are preparing notes to send home with students to inform parents," Vincent said. "And we have met with teachers reminding them what they can do in their classes."

Colby public school nurse Emily Strange said the number of absences because of illnesses this year has not reached an abnormally high number. She has been with the district for seven years.

"We are seeing more, but don't feel like it's different than previous years," she said. "It is about the same as every year. That may change though, it is getting in the area."

Strange said the timing when students miss school because of win-

ter illnesses varies.

"Sometimes it starts in December and can go longer into March," she said. "It just depends on the virus."

Strange said the most common symptoms have been sore throat and fever.

Thomas County Health Department will attempt to prevent the spread of more whooping cough cases. Last week, the department announced four cases of whooping cough in Thomas County have been confirmed since Jan. 10. The four cases are in people from as young as 3 months to 15 years.

Thomas County Health Administrator Lisa Molstad said her department will be in Brewster school Tuesday. According to the department's research of the cases, the four cases have ties to Brewster.

"We will offer immunizations to students and staff at the school who

may not be up to date," she said. "We still need to get the word out that the state has advised us to accelerate the immunization schedule for infants and children relative to pertussis."

Colby's Dr. Slavens said the more work to prevent the spread of whooping cough, the better.

"It's a big risk to infants, especially ones younger than 1 year," he said. "Anybody can get it and very contagious."

Those diagnosed with whooping cough can be treated.

"Because of immunizations, whooping cough is almost eradicated, but it does creep back in."



Molstad

Rx Officials keep track of absences because of flu to whooping cough

Sheridan County to install E-911

By Jan Katz Ackerman
Colby Free Press

A \$200,000 grant will help Sheridan County officials install Enhanced 911 equipment in the near future.

Marie Jones, office manager for the Sheridan County Sheriff's office, along with Gordon R. Slater of ATC of Shawnee Mission announced Monday the county has been awarded a grant to install new dispatcher equipment in the sheriff's office.

"The Enhanced 911 project that is being implemented in Sheridan County is very important to our residents," Jones said. "This will ensure that all emergency agencies get to you as quickly as possible in the event of an emergency."

Jones said the grant is part of the state's Grant Program and new physical address assignments for all rural addresses will take place. She said while the county already has road signs marked, the actual physical address of a farm or residence is not specified. The E911 system will narrow down the address of a resident to the exact location, not one associated with a traveler's vehicle odometer.

Slater said every address in Sheridan County will be evaluated. He said addresses already in place in towns will most likely stay the same, but that may not be the case for every residence.

"That's our plan," Slater said. "The big decision is made by the people, but the post office and sheriff's office have some say in addresses. Typically the city addresses do not change."

Of the \$200,000 dollars Sheridan County will receive from the governor's office, \$89,808 will go for new dispatcher equipment. The remaining \$110,192 will go toward wireless 911 project management, aerial mapping, physical addressing, postal coordination and telephone database clean up procedures.

Jones said telephone companies now require complete addresses before establishing services to customers. Included in a complete address is an Enhanced 911 address.

Slater said the driving force behind the need to improve dispatching equipment stems from federal law which requires all 911 calls made from cellular phones be able to be pinpointed so emergency crews can find the caller.

"The E911 grant covers 911 cell phone calls, but the prerequisite is to have the rural area addresses in place," Slater said.



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Land for a new fire station for the City of Colby sits just north of the state building on South Country Club Drive. The city of Colby is researching building a new fire station after heavy snow Dec. 31 damaged a portion of the exiting fire station on Franklin Avenue.

Proposed new fire station will benefit fire department

By Tisha Cox
Colby Free Press

A new fire department building and a new location for it will have advantages according to city of Colby officials.

The city council discussed the issue at its meeting Tuesday.

The roof over the two north bays at the fire station, adjacent to Colby City Hall at 585 N. Franklin Ave., collapsed under the weight of heavy snow Dec. 31. The bays were torn down last month for safety reasons.

Colby City Manager Carolyn Armstrong said a committee was formed to advertise for architectural consultants for building a new station. Councilmen Tim Hutfles and Mark Beringer, fire chief Bob McLemore and members of the fire department are on the committee.

The group will interview the firms then narrow the choices down to two or three to present to the council. After that, one firm will be chosen to design the new fire station. Once a design is approved, the project will go out to bid.

"That's the next big step," Armstrong said.

McLemore said the firm must have experience in designing such buildings.

"We'll have a good facility that way," he said.

"The central portion of town was unavailable. At that time that was the best place, and still is."

Bob McLemore,
Colby Fire Chief

The city already has a seven-acre parcel of land on South Country Club Drive between the new state building and Hi-Plains' Co-op fueling station. The city purchased the land in 2000 after looking at its options.

"The central portion of town was unavailable," McLemore said. "At that time that was the best place and it still is."

The new location won't affect response time, and will actually provide many advantages McLemore said. He said the department has driven to the furthest point in town from the location. It was about five minutes, about what it takes now.

The land is closer to the hospital,

college and nursing homes and is also on a wider street with less traffic.

"We won't have some of the issues we have now," McLemore said.

In the summer, children going to and from the swimming pool, people parking in front of the building and downtown traffic all can slow the fire department.

Country Club Drive is an emergency snow route, and is one of the first streets cleared after a heavy snowstorm.

McLemore expects the new building will be bigger and better than the old fire station.

"This station has been inadequate for a number of years," he said.

A new facility will enable the department to store everything inside, from trucks to its hazardous materials trailer.

McLemore said servicing the ladder truck was also a problem. No matter the weather, the truck was pulled outside for servicing because the building was too small.

Bigger living quarters and a training area are also issues. Because the



McLemore

department trains its own firefighters, "that is another must, and an advantage," McLemore said.

McLemore has no idea of what a new station might cost. The city has \$100,000 put aside for that purpose.

Until a new fire station is built, the fire department will continue to house its vehicles at the National Guard Armory on Range Avenue. Armstrong said the Guard has put no time limit on how long the city can use the facility.

However, the city is paying a lease of \$2,800 per month.

"That helps cover utilities and the cost of having someone from the Guard present at the building 24 hours a day. The insurance is picking up the first six months of the lease and we're asking FEMA to pick up another year," she said.

The fire department is attached to City Hall, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. The entire building, including the fire station, have been on the register since 2003. City Hall was built in 1936. One fire bay was added in 1950, and another followed in 1976.

A plan detailing how the building will be protected while the rest of the fire bays come down will be sent to the register.

"They're really concerned about that," she said.

Co-op voters approve merger

By Jan Katz Ackerman
Colby Free Press

The vote to merge grain companies in Oakley and Goodland passed overwhelmingly Wednesday.

Frontier Equity of Goodland and CO-AG, Inc. of Oakley will no longer exist March 1, the day when Frontier Ag Incorporated starts.

"The vote was 88 percent in favor in Oakley and 77 percent in favor in Goodland," Brian Linin, chief financial officer of Frontier Equity, said.

Linin said of the members which voted, a two-third majority was required to make the merge go through. Voting took place in both towns.

Frontier Equity has 1,480 voting members and 170 of them showed up to vote. Of those voting, 131 cast ballots in favor, and 39 voted against the merger.

CO-AG has 2,166 voting members and 268 showed up to vote, with 231 voting for the merger and 37 voting against it. According to Linin, between the two companies, the stockholder count is about 2,000 more than the voting membership.

Linin said steps are already being taken to assure a smooth transition for stockholders and employees.

"We are really excited about putting this together and I think it's going to be great for both companies," Linin said. "In fact, we are doing that this very minute."

Linin, along with Brad Cowen who becomes the general manager of Frontier Ag Inc. met with staff members in Oakley today to begin the merger.

"Brad's office will be in Goodland, but he'll also have an office here in Oakley so he can work here too," Linin said.

Expecting no major changes in employment, Linin said Frontier's 90 employees and CO-AG's 65 people will continue.

"And in terms of services, everything stays the same," he said.

Both companies offer grain storage and sales, fertilizers, chemicals, custom application, seed, feed, petroleum and shop facilities to their customers. Frontier Equity owns a convenience store and a Carquest part store and fuel sales.

Lori Stanley, chief financial officer at CO-AG, is excited about the merger.

"I think the stockholders are pretty positive about it," she said. "They want to keep the control here and the companies are a lot alike and it is a good fit."