



COLBY FREE PRESS

Nice mice



JOHN VAN NOSTRAND/Colby Free Press

Marquez Manuel, 9, watched the mouse pick a hole in the Mouse Game, one of the contests at Sacred Heart's annual carnival held

Sunday at the school. If the mouse picked the same colored hole as the color Manuel selected, Manuel won a prize.

Lights, camera, action: Charter school turns on movie studio equipment

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

Access to technology is giving Colby school students an edge say school officials.

The district's charter school, Thomas County Academy, provides students an alternative to the normal classroom situation. Students must learn the same things as their mainstream counterparts, but do so at their own pace.

Their studies meet the state standards also, but they learn through doing presentations and other projects.

This is the second year for the school, which has 18 students in grades fifth through eighth, said facilitator Kristin Eberle.

The students use laptops for research and homework, and the school has one laptop per two students.

This year, the students have

added another aspect to their learning.

The district received a grant to purchase a portable studio, which has lights, camera, sound equipment, and a green screen.

"Anything the kids need for a video, they have it," she said.

The screen is used for productions and computer projects. Students stand in front of the screen while other students run the camera and computer. On the screen, different backgrounds can be projected behind the student to make it seem as if they are elsewhere.

They have had the equipment since November.

"They thoroughly enjoy it," Eberle said. "It takes learning to a new level for them."

All of the students at the charter school have access to the equipment. Students at Colby Middle School can also use it, but the academy students have priority. She said

the middle school has to make arrangements with her so her students can run the equipment.

Technology also allows the students to expand their learning beyond the school.

For example, they can teleconference with students elsewhere.

"The walls are taken down," she said. "They aren't restricted to the Colby area."

Learning about new technology isn't restricted to the students.

Eberle said she is learning all the time, too. When she needs help, the students can provide it.

"We rely on that," she said.

At the middle school, technology allowed two students to apply what they have learned. Seventh graders Christina Ostmeier and Madison Gawith produced a 24-minute video showcasing the staff, students, activities and atmosphere of the school district.

The video will be used by the dis-

trict to show off its features at teacher fairs. They started in September, shooting video at various events, then edited the footage and added music. The video was shown to the school board at its meeting Monday, Feb. 19.

"They did a great job," middle school principal Robb Ross said. "I'm very proud of them. Those kids really went above and beyond. It's a positive reflection on the community also."

Besides the video, the school provides many opportunities to take advantage of technology.

Students produce their own newspaper and yearbook.

Ross said students learn about technology throughout their school years.

"It starts early, and by third grade, they learn keyboarding, then go on from there. Seventh and eighth grade are when the learning really takes off," he said.

Defendants deny accusations of prairie dogs

By Jan Katz Ackerman

Colby Free Press

Six of seven defendants in a battle over prairie dogs deny allegations filed against them in Logan County District Court in Oakley.

Logan County landowners Larry and Elizabeth Haverfield of Russell Springs; Robert G. Barnhardt, Jr. of Bucklin; Donald and Lillian Becker of Winona claim state law protects them from lawsuits such as the one filed by Logan County Commissioners Doug Mackley, Carl Uhrich and Nick Scott.

Dixie Surratt of Panhandle, Texas and Maxine Blank of Willard, Utah are the other two defendants in the case.

In August, the commissioners told all Logan County landowners starting Oct. 1, any landowner having a formal complaint filed against them about out of control prairie dogs would have 15 days to comply with state law mandating the animals be controlled.

As of December, 47 residents complained about one or more of the defendants, and Logan County Attorney Andrea Wyrick filed a lawsuit on behalf of the commissioners to enforce compliance.

In January, the commissioners asked Judge Jack Lively, senior judge appointed to the case by Kansas Supreme Court Chief Justice Kay McFarland, to force the landowners to control prairie dogs on their land. According to Uhrich, about 18,000 acres of Logan County land is infested with prairie dogs.

According to Mike Mitchner of the Kansas Wildlife and Parks Department at Pratt, Kansas has about 130,000 acres of land infested with prairie dogs.

According to court documents filed by Wichita attorney Randall Rathbun, the Haverfields, Barnhardt and the Beckers claim state law protects them from what they are calling a "nuisance" lawsuit.

Rathbun said state law protects and encourages development and improvement of farmland for protection of food and other agricultural products.

The Haverfields, Barnhart and the Beckers also claim prairie dogs are an "at risk species" and have been listed as a candidate for the federal endangered and threatened wildlife and plants list three times since 2000.

In November, meetings took place in Logan County to talk about reintroduction of the black-footed ferret.

The Haverfields and Barnhart have, according to court documents, entered into an agreement with the United States Department of Interior to allow reintroduction of the black-footed ferret onto their property as a way to control prairie dogs.

They claim the county trying to force them to eradicate prairie dogs is a "deprivation of a valuable property right. Surratt, like the Haverfields, Barnhart and the Beckers, claims townships, not the county have the right to enforce prairie dog control. Surratt's attorney, Allan Hurlbutt of Sharon Springs, said in paperwork filed Feb. 21 in Logan County District Court, that state law authorizes township boards of trustees to eradicate prairie dogs.

According to Donald Hoffman of Hays, special council assisting Wyrick, a previous board of commissioners on July 31, 1981, entered into an agreement with all township boards for the county to assume responsibility of controlling prairie dogs.

In their motion for an injunction, Wyrick and Hoffman are asking the judge to force the landowners to move cattle from land infested by prairie dogs.

The county alleged the landowners intentionally put the cattle to pasture to delay the county's use of the chemical Rozal starting March 1. Surratt claims she did not intentionally pasture cattle on her land to delay chemical use and claims to have spent "almost \$1,000 on materials to exterminate (prairie dogs) as recently as the spring of 2006."

Blank has not filed required paperwork with the court.

A hearing in the case has been scheduled for 9 a.m. April 4 in Oakley.

No go



JAN KATZ ACKERMAN/Colby Free Press

Forty to 50 mile per hour winds and a light covering of snow on Saturday forced state officials to close U.S. 24 at Hoxie to west-bound traffic. The highway was also closed at Levant to east-bound traffic, but both lanes reopened late Sunday morning.

Storm closes western Kansas roads; fatality in Greeley County

Associated Press

Kansas highways reopened Sunday after a winter storm generated strong winds that whipped up snow drifts up to 7 feet deep and caused one fatal crash in the western part of the state.

All roads were open by shortly after noon, Kansas Department of Transportation spokeswoman Barb Blue said. U.S. 24 from Colby to Hoxie and U.S. 83 from I-

70 to Selden were the last to reopen.

The department began closing west-bound lanes of highways in far western Kansas on Saturday morning, to accommodate requests by Colorado officials who had already shut down roads in that state.

The storm later moved into northwest Kansas, causing whiteout conditions and forcing a steadily expanding list of road closings that began around noon.

One person died Saturday in Greeley County when a tractor-trailer jackknifed and crashed into two of three vehicles that were stopped in blizzard-like conditions after a non-injury accident on Kansas 96.

The crash killed Robert J. Hughes, 55, of Batesville, Ark. The rig hit him as he was outside his sports utility vehicle preparing to exchange information with the other drivers involved in the initial accident.

But the department reported Sunday that the storm had left the state and strong winds were no longer causing visibility problems.

Interstate 70, which had been closed from Salina west to the Colorado line, reopened around 6:30 a.m. Sunday. Part of the reason for the closure was a lodging crunch caused by state high school wrestling tournaments in Hays and Salina. Also reopening around the same time was U.S.

40, which had been closed from Oakley to Colorado.

Around 8:30 a.m., several other roads reopened, including U.S. 36, U.S. 160, Kansas 25, Kansas 27 and Kansas 161.

Transportation officials cautioned that some sections of highway in western Kansas remain snow-packed and icy. They urged motorists to drive with caution and use speeds appropriate for conditions.