



COLBY FREE PRESS

Election 2007 coverage

Colby college proposal worth paying for

By John Van Nostrand
Free Press Publisher

The increase in property taxes, should Colby Community College's wellness center proposal be approved, is an investment for the future according to some landowners.

"I know the taxes will go up but so should the property values," said Lyle Saddler, a Thomas County farmer.

Tuesday, Thomas County voters will determine the fate of the 2,400 seat-gymnasium, auxiliary gymnasium, locker rooms, coaches' offices and other amenities.

The project, announced by the college's

board of trustees in January, is valued at \$15 million.

College officials have said the center will improve the college's appeal to potential students, improve the college's athletic department and be an addition to the area for a variety of events.

If approved, funding will come from the college acquiring general obligation bonds and certificates of participation.

Each item is a separate question on the ballot. College officials said both questions must pass for the project to continue.

If approved, property taxes will increase depending upon the type of property. According to information from the

Thomas County appraisers office, for every \$100,000 valuation of residential property, the increase will be \$144.79 a year;

- commercial property valued at \$100,000 will have an increase of \$314.75 a year

- irrigated quarter of farmland valued at \$14,280 will have an increase of \$53.94 a year

- dryland quarter of farmland valued at \$12,160 will have an increase of \$45.93. Tax increases will last for 20 years.

Saddler said the proposal just adds to the economic development power the college has had since it opened in 1964.

"There is not a finer industry we can

have than the college.

"We need to grow the college," Saddler said.

Return the dollars

Peoples State Bank President and CEO Jon Pope said the proposal gives a glimpse of the future of Colby, Thomas County and the college.

"We need to look 20 years down the road rather than the here and now," he said.

Pope, 53, said what Colby has now is thanks to the benefits of having the college, Interstate 70 and the development of irrigation for agriculture over the past 40 years.

When not banking, Pope manages his farm.

The financial status of business and land-

owners in Thomas County related to the college's proposal intrigues Pope.

"I'm speaking as a farmer myself," he said. "A majority of the farmers have a net income higher than a majority of business owners."

Where some of that income for farmers comes from is another aspect Pope considers.

"Some of that net income comes from government payments and that came from taxpayers," Pope said.

"Farmers can receive subsidy payments for their crops from the federal government."

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City council to throw away garbage jobs

By Patty Decker
Free Press Editor

Colby is one of the few towns in the state that still has three men on each sanitation truck, but that's about to change.

Within the next six months, a one-man sanitation truck will replace the current three-man operation, said Carolyn Armstrong, city manager.

"There is a lot of difficulty in finding and keeping sanitation workers; the escalating costs for sanitation services; the danger to workers riding on the back of a truck in inclement weather; and the back injuries that occur from lifting the garbage cans," Armstrong said.

The change will also mean residents in the city will be required to have a certain garbage can at a cost of about \$66 each. The cans, known as tipper cans by the city, are currently in use.

The decision to move toward the one-man truck, Armstrong said, was made more than five years ago with the city putting money into the municipal equipment reserve fund in 2003.

Tipper cans were first introduced to city residents in December 1997 as a way to get people accustomed to them. The cans with an attached lid make garbage collection easier for crews. The one-man truck operators will be able to empty the can from the truck.



Armstrong

Although not mandatory, the hope at that time, according to Gerry Bieker, then public works director, was a twofold purpose: acquaint people with the efficiency and ease of the cans and readying the city for the day when the one-man trash trucks would be a reality.

"We believe the single-man truck will be able to maintain the same routes that we currently have," Armstrong said, "and the truck we are looking at can tipper can in eight seconds."

Another advantage to the one-man operation, she said, is the cost savings.

The sanitation budget for salaries and benefits is more than \$240,000 for six people.

"If we have two less employees at about \$20,000, it doesn't take long to pay for the additional cost of the single-man truck costing \$140,000," Armstrong said.

No employee will be forced to quit with this arrangement either, she said.

Two of the people have been with the city for nearly four decades and are nearing retirement. Once those employees have retired, those positions will not be filled.

Colby council agreed with the single-man truck in residential areas. Council will proceed with the change in operation when the bid is awarded for a new truck.

"After the bid is awarded," Armstrong said, "which could be about 30 days or so, it will take anywhere from 90 to 120 days for the truck to be delivered."

As soon as the truck is ordered, the city also plans on ordering 1,000 tipper cans.

Opponents look to kill bill allowing casinos

TOPEKA (AP) — After a day of deadlock and filibustering over expanded gambling, the Senate was voting late Wednesday night on a bill authorizing casinos and slot machines at dog and horse tracks.

A preliminary — and unofficial — count showed supporters with 21 votes, just enough to pass the bill in the 40-member chamber. However, the roll remained open because three senators were absent and heading toward the chamber to vote, and it was possible for the count to change.

If senators approved the bill, it would go to Gov. Kathleen Sebelius, who supports it, and end 15 years of failure for gambling promoters.

Coincidentally, that vote — on a plan the House approved Monday — resulted from opponents' attempt to kill the bill. Supporters

then began a collective filibuster that lasted more than 11 hours, hoping to keep the bill alive and buy time to find enough votes to pass it.

Supporters read from various reports, studies and books, pausing occasionally to sip water and continue talking in what at times was a near empty chamber.

As the hours passed, Senate leaders worried about the fate of other pending bills because Wednesday was the last day to act on many of them.

Failing to act could mean some won't have a chance of passing until next year.

"This lengthy and unexpected maneuvering has gummed up the works and a lot of other measures are waiting patiently for Senate consideration," said Senate Majority Leader Derek Schmidt, R-Independence.



TOM BETZ/Goodland Star News

A tornado touched down near Edson in east Sherman County Texas Panhandle to South Dakota. No injuries were reported in Wednesday evening. Storms and tornadoes spread through the northwest Kansas.

Tornadoes miss Goodland, Edson

By Tom Betz
The Goodland Star-News

About a dozen tornadoes whirled north along K-27 Wednesday evening from Syracuse to Goodland and on up to Bird City, causing little damage and no injuries reported in Kansas.

The storm swept the plains from Texas to Wyoming, where snow snarled traffic, and Nebraska.

Across the border in Holly, Colo., a twister tore through the center of town, killing a 28-year-old woman. To the south, in the Oklahoma panhandle, an Elmwood couple died when winds tore apart their home.

Sirens sounded in Goodland about 6:45 p.m. when a tornado was sighted approaching from the south, but the city was spared as the twister veered to the east.

The storm produced high winds, heavy rain and hail as it passed over Goodland, heavier rain and hail on the east side of town. The National Weather Service office here reported a total of 1.69 inches of moisture overnight. The storm with the tornado produced .63 of an inch of rain and hail, and following thunderstorms added more rain through the night.

Southeast of town, Police Of-

Boxes needed for families

Peoples State Bank of Colby is collecting boxes to take to Bird City for families who had their possessions destroyed by Wednesday's storm. People with boxes with lids or boxes that can be closed can take them to Peoples State Bank today and Friday. Peoples State Bank will be taking the boxes to Bird City Friday.

ficer James Gillespie and Deputy Sheriff Jason Showalter were south of I-70 at the east Goodland exit, watching a wall cloud about seven miles east when a funnel dropped out and appeared to touch ground.

Showalter and other deputies rushed to Edson and followed the tornado as it moved north, growing as it went.

The storm, seen through lightning flashes in the dusk, had grown to at least a quarter-mile wide as it approached Bird City.

Sarah Johnson, a meteorologist at the weather station, said Thursday storm assessment teams were out north and south of town surveying the twister's track.

She said some damage had been reported in and near Bird City. A grain bin was hit east of Weskan, and a team was checking damage south of Sharon Springs.

Reports from the Bird City area said the power was out as poles snapped. The tornado spared the town, passing just east, but dropped some large hay bales onto U.S. 36.

In Edson, the power was out be-

cause at least two transformers shorted. Midwest Energy crews responded to repair the damage.

Johnson said a weather service employee, not from the Goodland office, who was following the tornado, reported transformer flashes in Edson.

Another tornado was spotted on the ground two miles east of Edson about 8:30 p.m. moving north. Spotters followed that storm north; it was the second one to go east of Bird City.

Wallace County Sheriff Larry Townsend said he watched a tornado develop north of Sharon Springs and followed it as it headed north and crossed into Sherman County.

A tornado warning was issued for the Kanorado area about 7 p.m. with reports of a tornado moving north from the Weskan area. That twister dissipated before reaching the town.

Sherman County dispatch called for the Kanorado fire department to sound the sirens there, but it took some time before anyone could find

the switch. A sheriff's deputy said the city employee who usually handles that job was out of town at a water school. He later told central dispatch he had located the key if sirens were needed later.

Kelly James, another meteorologist with the Weather Service here, said the office had over 30 reports of large hail. Law officers in Benkelman, Neb., reported hail about softball size.

The long line of storms stretching from the Texas panhandle to Nebraska.

In Holly, four miles west of the Kansas border, a 600-foot-wide tornado ripped through the town, destroying homes and injuring 11.

A 28-year-old woman who was flown out to Colorado Springs later died of her injuries.

There were reports of up to 60 homes damaged and trees in a park two blocks west of Main Street uprooted. The March storm produced heavy snow in the Rocky Mountains west of Denver and up to five inches along the Front Range.

Johnson said there was a slight chance of thunderstorms to the northeast of Goodland through Thursday. She said there is a chance for thunderstorms today, but these are not expected to be severe.