



COLBY FREE PRESS

8 pages

Up, up and away



MICHELLE MYERS/Colby Free Press

Colby Fire Chief Bob McLemore works on positioning the antenna for Amateur Radio operators, often called hams, at the Field Day Saturday. This learning event was for new hams and a refresher for seasoned hams, said Michael Albers, one of the participants. A total of 12 hams operated during the 24 hours. Even though this was a North America event, they managed to contact France, Cuba, Mexico and Canada along with other states such as Idaho and Oregon.

Tourism in Colby creates boost in jobs

Michelle Myers

Free Press Intern

Summer is the season for traveling and because of Colby's location on Interstate 70, motorists see the city as a convenient place to stop.

This boost in business also calls for a boost in employees for fast food, restaurant and hotel services.

Generally speaking, there are some characteristics that employers look for in potential employees, according to state officials.

"They are looking for employees that have soft (employment) skills. Those skills include good attendance, communications skills, team work, initiative/motivation, responsibility, flexibility, appropriate dress, hygiene," said Phyllis LaShell, office manager for the Hays Workforce Center.

"Many employers are willing to train employees if they have those skills." Of course, some jobs do require certain specific technical abilities or skills, as well.

"Employers are in need of qualified workers, not just in Thomas County, but across the country. It makes it really tough on employers," LaShell said.

There are 65 positions available in Colby.

Most of them are management positions, laborers, office, technology, manufacturing and farm related. Plus, there is always a need for medical positions, she said.

"Job growth is one important aspect of a healthy economy and businesses all across the state in every industry continue to add new jobs," said Secretary of Labor Jim Garner. "Combined with our low unemployment rate, these key economic indicators continue to reflect a healthy Kansas economy."

Jobs with the highest percentage growth (top 10) of northwest Kansas are telemarketer/sales, social/human service assistants, correctional officers, teachers aides/para-

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Jim Garner,
Secretary of Labor

professional, police patrol officers, service supervisors/managers, personal/home care aides, laborers, registered nurses and nursing aides/orderlies. While jobs typically pay minimum wage, which is currently \$5.15 in Colby, workers have a reason to look forward to the future because that figure will soon be more demanding.

The increase in minimum wage is partly due to an emergency Iraq funding bill signed by President Bush and was approved by both houses of Congress.

The bill includes a three-level increase that will bring that figure of \$5.15 to \$5.85 on July 24, then \$6.55 July 24, 2008, and should be at \$7.25 by July 24, 2009, LaShell said. This will be the first increase in minimum wage since September 1997.

Statewide, the lowest paying occupations in Kansas include counter attendants, cafeteria, food concession and coffee shop employees, according to a 2006 survey by the Department of Labor. The average wage for these workers is \$6.67 an hour, \$1.11 lower than the national average.

"After 9/11, we saw that it hurt the job market. It cut back on manufacturing. Unemployment rates were higher, but now it's turning the other way," she said. "It had an effect on several industries."

Since 1930, censuses have been

conducted every 10 years to collect information on the employment status of people ages 16 and over. The last 10-year census was in April 2000.

A census brief from the U.S. Census Bureau of that year documented 63.9 percent of the 217.2 million people age 16 and over in the U.S. were in the labor force. Of the 138.8 million people in the labor force, 129.7 million were employed, 7.9 million were unemployed, and 1.2 million were in the military. The civilian unemployment rate was 5.8 percent as of 2000. On a smaller and more recent scale, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported the national unemployment rate for May 2007 is at 4.5 percent, which is about 79,130,000 men and women at least 16 years old are not in the labor force.

The Kansas Labor Force reported Thomas County's May unemployment is up slightly from last month at 3 percent, but still remains below the state's rate of 4.3 percent. Thirty-one thousand jobs have been added in the last year.

Besides getting access in person at the workforce center, the Chamber of Commerce offers many ways to get information on job listings.

People can create an account and register at www.kansasjoblink.com, e-mail colbyjobs@kansascommerce.com or call (785) 462-6862.

Brewster School District's future looking bleak, letter says

By Jan Katz Ackerman

Colby Free Press

A wake up call has been delivered to families in the Brewster school district about possible closure of the school.

"I don't think it's something that will happen this year or next, but it's in the future," administrator Sherri Edmundson said.

Edmundson and board members Carrie Starns, Leisha Carpenter, Donard Allen, Willard Crumrine,

Lonnie Selby, Bonnie Holm and Rod Gilley sent a letter to patrons on June 20 stating the situation with the school is grave.

"I truly don't think people in the community understand how much one child can impact the whole community," Edmundson said.

Edmundson said the board does not have a determined number of enrollment or budget amount to know when to close the school.

"There is no magic number yet. Not yet, but there might be after that

July meeting."

Based on the number of full-time students, Brewster's schools are facing a loss of eight students for the 2007-08 school year. Edmundson said enrollment is expected to hover around the 97 student mark, down from the 105 students from last year. Since the 2000-2001 school year, Brewster's kindergarten through 12th grade have lost 55 students.

Edmundson said, in 2006-07 the district operated on a budget of \$1.2

million. She said losing eight students would have a significant impact on the district.

"Based off this year's state aid and 97 kids the 2007-08 budget looks to be down about \$75,000 dollars," she said. "And I went ahead and projected the 2008-09 budget projecting 85 kids and we are down another \$135,000."

Edmundson said over the next two years, the district faces trying to work on a budget of \$210,000 fewer dollars than the current year

and risks closing if things don't turn around.

For each student who attends school in Brewster during the 2007-08 school year, the district will receive an estimated \$6,998 in state aid. If a student lives in the district and resides more than 2.5 miles from the school, located at 127 Kansas Ave., the district will receive an estimated \$1,312 in transportation aid.

If a student qualifies for free lunches, the district expects to re-

ceive an additional \$1,750 per student. As enrollment decreases, the district loses a minimum of \$6,998 to a maximum of \$10,060 per student.

"That adds up quickly," Edmundson said.

Edmundson sees several reasons the district is facing loss of students. She said families are smaller than when the school supported 160 students.

See "BREWSTER," Page 3

New stadium nears completion

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

The new stadium at Dennen Field is almost complete. Construction started over the weekend.

Joel Powell, a member of the Colby High School All-Sports Booster Club, said volunteers finished the bulk of the work.

"We're about two-thirds done with it," Powell said. "We figure we have about one big day left."

The volunteers worked 13 to 14 hours Saturday and Sunday. The rest of the stadium construction is expected to take that long.

The last work day is Saturday, July 7, to accommodate harvest.

At its peak, 30 to 35 volunteers helped with construction over the weekend.

"We got a lot done," Powell said.

The new stadium is 121 feet long with 1,033 seats. It has 15 rows of seating and stairs on each end. A 30x8-foot press box will cap off the stadium.

Powell said the work was not

complicated, but involved a lot of cutting, measuring, and drilling. Powell was told by the technician from CBS Constructors of McCook, Neb., who was overseeing the work, a crew from the company would take 700 hours to complete something similar.

Volunteers were covered by the district's insurance policy. Powell said that was why volunteers had to be at least 18 years old.

The club raised money over the past few years to help pay for a new stadium at the football field. The club turned over a \$65,000 trust fund to the school district in October to pay for the stadium.

A \$99,500 bid from CBS Constructors was approved last fall.

Powell said the volunteer help was appreciated, and part of the reason he enjoys living in Colby.

"I'm proud to be a part of it," he said.

Most of the remaining work should be done by Aug. 10. Some small tasks will remain, such as installing a sound system. He hopes



ABOVE LEFT: The old press box at Dennen Field was removed in April along with the old stands, to make way for a new stadium.

the group can raise \$3,000-\$4,000 more for the sound system.

Glenn Straight of Straight Associates Architecture in Colby is designing the press box.

When the blueprints are complete, Kevin Kriss and Brad Wildeman will build it. Plans originally called for the press box to be built on the stands, but it was decided

building on the ground would be safer.

Stephens Construction and Martin Tractor donated equipment.

Reserved seating is still available for \$75 each, and that money will help pay for the sound system. The one-time cost will guarantee spectators a seat at football games for five years.



ABOVE RIGHT: Volunteers worked to put the seating on the new stadium at Dennen Field during construction Saturday.

Those seats are in a 30-foot section in front of the press box. The 12-inch wide benches will feature 20-inch seats with snap-on orange seat covers. The section will have approximately 280 reserved seats. The rest of the benches in the stadium are 10-inches wide.

The project had a rough start last fall when John Gatz, the school

board's attorney, informed them it must go to bid because of money being donated to the district. It was discovered once the booster club money was turned over to the district, it would have to be handled as public money.

The bid process was started after a special board meeting in November.

TISHA COX/Colby Free Press