



# COLBY FREE PRESS

## Street work not slowing business sales

By Kevin Johnson

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Construction on a portion of Fourth Street began July 9 and was scheduled to last until early November. It was more than likely going to be a long, drawn-out, grueling process, like all road construction jobs, and who could say when it would be actually finished. Only one thing could safely be assumed, it would not be done on time.

"Last I heard they were going to be opening the street within a week," said Colby City Manager Carolyn Armstrong. "Just some touch up work for the state inspection. They're really doing a fine job."

Things are going better than planned.

Set to reopen almost a full two weeks a head of schedule, one would think that business owners on Fourth Street would be out in the streets with jackhammers and pavers trying to expedite the process that much sooner. But the truth is you won't hear nary a word of complaint from them.

"The businesses on Fourth Street knew it was coming in advance and have been very patient and understanding through out the whole process," said Armstrong.

"Four or five years ago there was a similar project done that went right in front of the middle of my front door to the east and it was a complete disaster. This one has been pretty much painless," said Mark Beringer, owner of Beringer Hardware, a business located on Fourth Street right in the middle of the construction. "In 2003 my business went down by 40 percent, this time it has actually increased every month. Business may have been up more if the construction hadn't been



COLBY FREE PRESS FILE PHOTO

Construction crews begin work on the portion of Fourth Street in early July. At the time, the work was scheduled to end by early November. But city officials say the work may be finished sooner than that. For businesses along the work route, fears of lost customers has been minimal.

there, but I can't say that I have seen an effect from the construction," said Beringer.

The Fourth Street project was organized by the Kansas Department of Transportation, with the city footing only 25 percent of the bill since Fourth Street also serves as U.S. Highway 24. Spore Land Development got the bid and has been doing an outstanding job, according to Beringer.

"Any thing they could do to make it better they did it. They talked us through every step of the process. They worked from sun up to sun

down to make sure what they said would get done got done. I have nothing but praise for these guys," Beringer reiterated what he had said before, "we've gone through several of these projects and this has been, by far, the easiest."

Jackie Wiens, owner of Someplace Special, Beringer Hardware's neighbor, also echoed Beringer's praise of the way Spore Land Development has handled the project. "I think it has gone great. They have done an awesome job and I can't believe they have gotten done this fast," said Wiens. "This crew just

works hard. They care about what they are doing, which is something I have never seen from a construction crew like this. I came in one morning and they were washing my windows and wanted to hose down the whole building because something splattered up on it. Today they are out sweeping the streets and sidewalks with a broom." "They are getting the job done and doing it right" said Wiens. "They want to make sure everything is better than when they started."

Though the project has gone better than expected, Fourth Street

business were aware in advance and had time to make necessary adjustments. "I changed my marketing plan," said Wiens, "we promote through a newsletter telling customers to use the side door this week or the front door another week. It has actually worked out pretty well. The foreman (Spore Land Development) was really helpful and always made sure the crew got done what he said would get done so we could stick with some sort of a plan."

When asked if she was nervous for the crew to get going on the project, in lieu of previous projects

that had gone less than stellar, Wiens said she was not. "I was just anxious for them to get it going."

"We knew it was coming and everyone was prepared," said Beringer. "It had to be done."

Beringer, who also owns stores in Garden City and Hays that are surrounded by similar construction, wishes things were going as well over there as they are here. "In Garden City we are down 80 percent," said Beringer. "In Hays the construction has basically shut us down. In view of both situations, Colby is a cakewalk."

## What's on the auction block?



HANNAH PYLE/Colby Free Press

Brette Pfeifer, one of the organizers for the annual Sacred Heart Auction prepares some of the donated items for the church/school event. The auction is Saturday at City Limits Convention Center. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. and dinner is at 6 p.m. The auction will follow. Those wanting to view auction items are encouraged to do so from 7 to 8:30 p.m., today; however, no sales can be made. For tickets or questions, call 462-2179.

## Colby enrollment declining

By Joey Falkoff

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It's not time to panic, yet, but the 2007-2008 enrollment numbers for the Colby school district certainly have board members and district employees concerned for the future health of Colby's public schools.

For the fourth consecutive year, the total number of students in the district declined from the year before. According to enrollment numbers released at Monday's school board meeting, the district head count was down from 1,011 students in 2006-2007 to 1,001 students this year. District Business Manager Jo DeYoung says this is a trend that started back when she arrived in the district in 1994.

During the 1993-94 school year, the district was home to 1,373 students. Now, 13 years later, the enrollment has declined by 372 students or 27.2 percent. No answers appear to be on the horizon either.

"There's not much we can do," said DeYoung. "People are having fewer kids than before. I'm not saying it doesn't concern us, but it's an issue for all rural communities."

While Colby High School was able to maintain its enrollment of 366 students from the year before, Colby Grade School went from 378 students in '06-'07 to 370 this year. Colby Middle School dropped

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Board Member Gerry Fulwider

from 238 students to 234 in that same time.

"For whatever reason the high school has been able to most of its enrollment," said DeYoung. "I think some of it is the Sacred Heart students that come over after fifth grade."

The declining numbers at the lower levels were of most concern to board member Joel Powell who questioned whether Colby High School would be able to maintain its 4A status in athletics 10 or 15 years from now. Board member Gerry Fulwider echoed those statements.

"If Heartland Christian School continues to grow, we'll be 3A soon," he said.

Fulwider was assured by other board members that most of the 99 Heartland Christian students came from surrounding communities, but nevertheless, board members are aware of what's going on and aren't happy with the enrollment numbers. The historical trend of mostly declining enrollment has been documented by the district since 1988. In the 1988-1989 school

the district was home to 1,234 students. Five years later the enrollment was up 139 students to 1,373. Since that point there's only been one enrollment increase, which occurred in 2004. The numbers are just as startling when broken down individually. The current Kindergarten enrollment of 65 students is down 30 from '94, the grade school enrollment of 350 is down 245 students and the high school is down 100 students.

DeYoung said the prosperity the district experienced in the mid-90's could be attributed to the interstate business boom that occurred around the same time.

"I would hope Colby has things going on to hold the enrollment steady, as far as economic development" said DeYoung. "Right now we're treading water, but we're slowly sinking. I'm actually pleased our enrollment has held up as much as it has, but there's no way the enrollment is going to stay up unless people start having more babies or we find away to draw people to town."

## Briefly

### Council plans open house

The Thomas County Alcohol and Drug Abuse Council is sponsoring an open house from 5 to 7 p.m., Wednesday, at its office, 1523 W. Fourth St., Colby. The council offers confidential services to individuals and families who have problems in their lives resulting from alcohol or other drugs, said Wendi Wacker, executive director. "We invite everyone to attend the open house," she said. For questions, call 462-6111.

### Genesis seeks applicants

Genesis-Thomas County, Inc., the area food bank, is again planning to help Thomas County families during the holiday season. Families in need and who are interested in receiving a holiday food basket during are asked to pick up forms from 10 to noon and 1 to 4 p.m., Wednesdays, at the Genesis-Thomas County Office,

350 S. Range, Suite 6, Colby. Those interested, can also call Genesis at (785) 460-7930 and leave a message. All applications must be returned by Saturday Nov. 10.

### Coaches' coffee Saturday

"Coffee with the Coaches," is a new event this year for anyone interested in Colby High School football, said Head Coach Chris Gardner. The coffee begins at 9:30 a.m., Saturdays during the season, at the Sports Shoppe, 400 N. Franklin Ave., Colby.

### Body winterizing clinic set

The Family Center for Health Care is offering a free "winterize your body" event from 5 to 7 p.m., Monday and Tuesday. In addition to free cancer screenings, the clinic will offer blood pressure checks. Dr. Bruce Kellogg and Dr. Darren Matchell will perform the

screenings with Nurse Practitioners Luetta Flanagin and Jenny Niblock assisting in blood pressure checks. Snacks and beverages will be provided. For questions, call 462-6184.

### Women's class Monday

A women's self defense class is being offered at 6 p.m., Monday, in the Colby Community College Student Union multi-purpose room. Kansas Highway Patrol Trooper William Goodness will talk about how women of any age should be aware on how to defend themselves in a variety of situations, said Susan Draper, with the Thomas County Farm Bureau Association, co-hosting the event. "Attendants can also participate in hands-on training for some scenarios if they want to," she said. "Please dress comfortably." There is no charge, refreshments will be served and door prizes will be given. For any questions, Draper, 460-6332

or 460-4842.

### Food collection Sunday

Colby Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts and Colby Sacred Heart's youth organization will be collecting food for the Thomas County Genesis food bank from 2 to 4 p.m., Sunday. In the event of bad weather, the alternate date will be the same times but on Sunday, Oct. 28. Canned goods or other non-perishable items should be left on the front porch for pickup.

### Hospice auction nears

The annual Hospice Services Banquet and Auction will be Saturday, Nov. 10 at the City Limits Convention Center. For questions or tickets, call any member of the advisory board to include: Amber Barton, Melinda Cheney, Sherrie Matchell, Kim Brier, Darris DeGood,