



COLBY FREE PRESS

10 pages

Academy could face shutdown

By Joey Falkoff

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Everyone on the Colby School board agrees Thomas County Academy and its unique, technology-driven learning environment is a positive thing for the district.

That's where the consensus ends.

When it came time at Monday's board meeting to decide whether it was worth it to keep the academy running next year, the board was split nearly every way imaginable.

Some, including superintendent Kirk Nielsen, wanted to scrap the program, while others, like member Gerry Fulwider, expressed sentiments to see it remain open. A few others felt the academy concept was worth keeping, they just wanted to see more students involved.

Many ideas and arguments were presented, but no one on the board could come up with any sort of plan that appeased everyone. That included the numerous academy students, teachers and parents who showed up to pledge their support to the charter school.

Instead, the issue was tabled until the next board meeting April 7; a meeting the board was originally going to vote on later that night to

cancel.

So much for that.

"I don't have a solution, but that's why there's seven of us on the board," said board president Tracy Rogers. "There's a lot involved with this and it's important to a lot of people. The people who may want to get rid of the program just want to get the most value out of every dollar and reach as many kids as possible."

This is the second year in a row the board has discussed whether to close TCA.

The Academy was brought into existence in 2003 with a \$7,500 start-up grant, but only since 2005 have students attended classes there. The charter school is designed to give those students who choose to partake in the program an opportunity to learn in a more creative, individualized manner.

Rather than sitting at a desk, taking notes all day, students are given the freedom to work at their own pace. In this new project-based learning environment, standard workbook assignments and quizzes are replaced by individual and group projects. This often allows students to work with new technological innovations to do things like create movies, do a news broadcast or video slide shows.

"What's my typical day like in



Thomas County Academy seventh-grade students Alyssa Goodheart, left, and Kaitlin Jarman worked together this morning using their laptop computers. The Academy is in danger of being shut down after a recommendation made by superintendent Kirk Nielsen.

JOEY FALKOFF/Colby Free Press

TCA?" read seventh-grade student Alyssa Goodheart from a letter to the board.

"Well, that's kind of a hard question to answer, because everyday is totally different. I get to school and grab my computer and decide which subject I feel like working on. We have the opportunity to use technology all day long, not simply in a computer lab like a traditional school."

Colby High freshman Sunne Creighton also talked to the board for close to 10 minutes about her experiences at the academy, which is open to grades five through eight.

"It's the most incredible learn-

ing experience I've ever had," said Creighton.

That was followed by a letter from Christine Guy, mother of Kristen and Kalli Guy. Kristen, 14, is a current eighth-grade academy student, while Kalli is in third grade.

"Kristen started out shy and reserved, but TCA has given her confidence," said Guy.

"It would truly be a step backward to not have this program available for students."

While the charter school has produced many success stories in the classroom, that success hasn't translated to the bottom line.

Since it opened its doors to stu-

dents in 2005, the academy enrollment has remained in the low 20s.

This year 22 students are signed up.

"My recommendation this year is to discontinue the program," said Nielsen. "It's not going to get us to where we need to be. This was intended to draw kids from home schools and other area schools, and it hasn't done that. There's too many money issues to continue, and no grant money on the horizon. The two teachers (Gerri Balthazor and Theresa Morgan) will still have jobs, because we have some elementary school teachers retiring. I don't

want to discontinue the concept. These things need to be going on at the middle school."

The extra expense Nielsen referred to lies not in keeping the school open, but paying two full-time teachers to teach 22 students.

In kindergarten, the district has one teacher for 18 students and in first grade, one teacher for 20 students.

"We're spending quite a bit of money to deliver instruction to 22 kids," said business manager Jo DeYoung.

The estimated cost to run Thomas County Academy this school year is \$184,629.

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Rexford City Hall expansion underway

By Jan Katz Ackerman

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Space to house equipment prompted Rexford city officials to add two fire truck bays to the already operable city building.

"This will open up two bays for mowers, parking equipment and a place to work on equipment," City Superintendent Bill Scott said.

Scott, also fire chief for the Thomas County Rural Fire District No. 4, said work on the two new bays has gone slow because it has been mostly a volunteer venture.

"We started in September," he said. "It's almost done and we hope to finish by May."

Prior to the addition, the fire district's two trucks, a trash truck, city hall and two restrooms were housed in the limited space, but now the building has an expanded city hall and fire truck bays on the north side of it.

What once was a one-room city hall about 12-foot by 15-foot, now has a meeting area adjacent to Clerk Jolene Hansen's desk area.

The new 12-foot by 15-foot

Rexford City Superintendent Bill Scott cut paper to hang on metal walls in preparation of two new fire truck bays. Rexford city officials in September approved expansion of the city's building to allow for room for Thomas County Rural Fire District No. 4 trucks and opening up current bays for Scott to have work and storage space for other city equipment.

area is perpendicular to the original office space.

"We used to meet here," Hansen said pointing to an area wide enough only for a table used in most church hall or meeting rooms. "The public had to sit here in front of my desk, the few times we have anyone at the meeting that is."



JAN KATZ ACKERMAN/Colby Free Press

City hall is inside the city-owned metal building located in the 200 block of Maple Street. Hansen said the west wall of city hall was cut through to create the meeting area. Once the wall was cut open, the room was bumped out about 15-feet into one of the existing fire truck bays.

The only work space Scott has

right now is adjacent to the back end of the fire trucks in the second door from the south of the building. That will change when the new fire truck bays are done.

"I'll have space to work," he said. "And, if he needs to put the tractor in during the winter he can put it in here," Hansen said.

Scott said he could not quote

a dollar figure for how much the expansion cost Rexford, but said the city paid for all the materials.

Rexford resident Lee Luna was hired for a portion of the construction at a cost of \$1,500 for labor, the city, again, paying for materials or using items already on hand.

Teen rolls pickup

By Jan Katz Ackerman

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Two Levant teens were involved in an accident in rural Thomas County on Tuesday afternoon.

At 5:50 p.m., Case Rundel, 17, was northbound on County Road R driving a 1998 Ford Ranger pickup when he swerved to miss a pheasant and lost control of the vehicle.

After rolling two times, the pickup came to rest in the north ditch of the roadway, Thomas County Undersheriff Allen Marcum said this morning.

Rundel was transporting his younger brother, Colton Rundel, 12, also of Levant. Neither teen was injured and both were wearing a seat belt when the accident occurred.

Briefly

Free concert Monday

KGCR Christian Radio Station is having a free concert by Scott Krippayne at 6:30 p.m., Monday, at Colby High School. Tickets are limited and will be sent out on a first come/first serve basis. Tickets are free of charge but are required for each individual attending to ensure adequate space. For questions or information, call 888-882-5427. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. No reserved seating.

Children to perform

Colby Grade School kindergartners will present "A Day in the Country" at 7 p.m., Thursday, April 3, in the Colby Grade School auditorium. The event is free and open to the public. For questions about the event, call 460-5100.

Endowment auction April 5

"Gold Rush" is the theme for this year's Colby

Community College Endowment Foundation Scholarship Benefit Auction Saturday, April 5, at the Comfort Inn Convention Center. Doors open at 4:45 p.m. with dinner served at about 5:30 p.m. and live auction starting at 7 p.m. Donated items include a gold nugget, jewelry, toys and home decorations. Many trips will also be auctioned. Items will be on display beginning March 28 at Colby Photo and Plum Creek. For reservations call 460-4684.

College meets Friday

The Colby Community College Board of Trustees will hold a special meeting at noon, Friday, March 28, in the Thomas Hall board room. The meeting will be a closed door session on personnel issues. In addition, the board is expected to return to open session with a motion on the personnel matter. Executive sessions are held to protect the privacy of the individual(s) being discussed; however, any action taken must be open to the public.

Pre-enrollment scheduled

Kindergarten pre-enrollment for the 2008-09 school year will be held at Colby Grade School in the conference room from 7:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., Wednesday, April 2. Parents/guardians are requested to bring their child's birth certificate, immunization records and social security card. For questions or information, call 460-5100.

Water meeting set in Colby

The general ground water declines in northwest Kansas have scientists and economists looking at the potential long-run effects of the rate of water use on the resource and the economy, said Tracy Streeter, director, Kansas Water office.

In response, a meeting is planned in Colby, Thursday and Friday, April 3-4, at the Comfort Inn, 2225 S. Range Ave., Colby. The presentation starts at 1 p.m. Thursday.

A complete agenda will be posted to the Kansas Water Office web site www.kwo.org or a request can be made by calling (888) 526-9283.

Swim Club to meet

Parents with children interested in swimming this summer might want to plan on attending the Colby Swim Club meeting from 4-5 p.m., Sunday, April 6, in Room 803 of the Health Science Building on the Colby Community College campus. A "fun swim" for young people will follow from 5-6 p.m. at the college pool. For questions, call Ronda Faber, 460-6548.

Dutton family to perform

Western Plains Arts Association will present the Dutton Family at 7:30 p.m., Thursday, in the Oakley High School auditorium. Admission will be by WPAA season ticket, or at the door.