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X marks the spot



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

Amber McAllister and her daughter, Shaelyn, 4, of Bogue, enjoyed playing some tic tac toe at Fike Park Saturday as temperatures soared into the high 70s. Amber said the family was in Colby visiting Grandma Joyce Gatlin. Lots of families took advantage of the good weather either at the park, grilling, doing lawn work, or cleaning windows. By Sunday, temperatures had plunged into the low 30s and snow fell in the late afternoon.

County won't credit cash on card

Jan Katz Ackerman

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“We may soon have a situation of the tail wagging the dog.”
Paul Steele,
County commissioner

Personal money applied to a county credit card account was the topic of discussion at the Thomas County Commissioner meeting Friday.

Commissioner Ken Christiansen asked Public Health Administrator Lisa Molstad whether she was aware of the county policy that capital expenditures over \$350 require commission approval.

“Yes,” Molstad said. At issue is Molstad used \$500 of her personal money to apply to a county credit card so Viviana Gariby, receptionist and medical records clerk, could attend training in Great Bend in mid-February.

At the time Gariby attended training, the credit card in question had \$199 available credit, according to paperwork Molstad presented the commissioners. The account has a \$2,000 credit limit, but was carrying a balance of \$1,800.08.

When an attempt was made to apply Gariby's meals and lodging to the card, the transaction was declined. Molstad made a \$500 payment out of her personal banking account over the phone to make the transaction go through.

Molstad asked the commissioners to reimburse her for the \$500, which prompted Christiansen to ask Molstad if she knew about the policy pertaining to her actions.

Despite having submitted an expense voucher for her request, the commissioners told Molstad to submit proper documentation for the reimbursement.

She is to provide the commissioners with the credit card statement with attached receipts Gariby received in Great Bend.

Molstad also asked the commissioners for permission to fill a vacancy at the public health department created by the resignation of Kathy Ryan.

Ryan resigned 10 days after commissioners gave Connie Walden, a registered nurse at the public health department, a 48-cent per hour raise. The increase made Walden's pay equal to Ryan's at \$20.36 per hour.

Ryan, in a letter to Molstad dated Feb. 20, stated she was deeply hurt and could “no longer trust

those that I would need to work with on a daily basis.”

She said it was a “slap in the face” and lack of respect for her knowledge and experience that it was reported in the *Colby Free Press* that she holds “only an associate degree,” while Walden holds a bachelor's degree in nursing.

Molstad shared with the commissioners a memo she sent Ryan stating she would offer her a 20-hour work week with flexible hours for a trial period of six months. However, Molstad said Ryan plans to follow through with her resignation effective April 1. Ryan has worked for the Thomas County Public Health Department for more than 27 years.

The commissioners asked Molstad to report to them in March whether Ryan's vacancy creates a burden for the department. Steele asked Molstad to be sure and track how many hours nurses spend with patients.

“This department seems to be one of the few in the county that the budget keeps going up each year,” Steele said.

“We may soon have a situation of the tail wagging the dog.”

Molstad wanted the commissioners to clarify the term “contact hours” so she knows what to report. Steele said the term means time spent with patients which can be billed to either the patient or an insurance provider.

“If we allow billable hours of a professional person to get out of hand we have a problem,” Steele said.

“We have an obligation to taxpayers to keep things under control.”

Molstad said she is considering forming a pool of nurses which can provide services for the health department on an as-needed basis. The commissioners supported that idea and delayed filing Ryan's position.

Director: One county is enough

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Thomas County Emergency Management Director Susan McMahan all but nixed the idea of overseeing disasters in two counties at once Friday.

McMahan told Thomas County Commissioners Ken Christiansen, Paul Steele and Byron Sowers she did not want to assume the duties of emergency management director for Sheridan County.

Cooperative agreements between counties for emergency management services are not a new concept. Logan and Gove Counties work under such an agreement, as do Cheyenne, Rawlins and Sherman Counties.

At an early February meeting, the commissioners asked McMahan to consider taking on more work since Sheridan County has failed to replace Jacquie Boultinghouse who tenured her resignation in December. Despite resigning,

Boultinghouse agreed to continue as management director until she is replaced.

Sheridan County Commissioner Doyle Kauk approached Steele about sharing an emergency management director with Thomas County. Steele presented the idea to Christiansen and Sowers at the Feb. 12 meeting.

McMahan said she considered the option; however, after learning Sheridan County's entire budget is \$19,500, of which the director's salary is \$7,200 per year, she declined the offer to proceed with the venture. Thomas County pays McMahan \$32,500.

“(Boultinghouse) is paid \$600 per month, has no insurance and works from home,” McMahan said.

McMahan reminded the commissioners that National Severe Weather Awareness week which runs March 10-14. She said the annual tornado warning drill will take place at 1:30 p.m., March 11. All courthouse elected officials

and their employees, as well as patrons in the courthouse at the time, are expected to participate in the drill.

In other county news... McMahan said the Kansas Department of Environment gave her the green light to fill the fuel tank which stands adjacent the Law Enforcement Center, 225 N. Court Ave. in Colby.

A leak caused by a broken valve spilled fuel on the ground and saturated the soil late last year. McMahan said the soil in the area under and around the tank has been cleaned and soil samples have been forwarded to the state for review.

“At 32-feet we had 50 percent petroleum in the soil,” McMahan said. “But at 42-feet, it was at 20 percent and they said to go ahead and fill the tank.”

McMahan said part of her duties as Thomas County Emergency Management Director are to serve as chairman of the Local Emergency Planning Committee.

She said while the committee is lacking participants, she is trying to fill all 12 slots.

“I need an elected official on the board,” McMahan said.

After a brief discussion about the minimum requirement of two meetings per year, Sowers volunteered for the board. Steele and Christiansen approved the measure and unanimously appointed Sowers to the board.

McMahan asked commissioners to make a decision as to who within the county should have basic training for emergency protocol.

The commissioners decided each county department head, as well as their deputy or junior partner, and the two custodians must take the basic training.

The commissioners asked Thomas County Clerk Shelly Harms to advise the department heads about the requirement for training and scheduled dates for it.

Baby 'leaps' into Colby

By John Van Nostrand

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Everybody has a birthday. Few people have birthdays.

Andy and Jennifer Burr of Colby had their third child, a son, Cody James, Friday, Feb. 29, a leap day. Every four years, the month of February has a 29th day, one more than its usual 28.

“We were planning a c-section Tuesday, March 4,” Andy said this morning from Colby's Citizens Medical Center. “But Jennifer had some blood pressure issues and the doctor changed the day to Friday. We

are all fine.”

Andy said plans are to celebrate Cody's birthday on Feb. 28. “And we will have a birthday on February 29 those years too,” he said.

Unique birthdays are not new for the Burr family. Andy and Jennifer's daughters, Calley and Caitlin, share the same birthday on Feb. 10. They are three years apart.

Cody weighed 6 pounds, 5 ounces and measured 19 inches in length. Grandparents are Bill and Nancy Talbott of Hays, the late Dr. Jim Costigan; Gary and Martha Burr of Hutchinson and great-grandmother Dorothy McQuilliam of Hutchinson.

Twice as nice!

JOEY FALKOFF/Colby Free Press

Colby Eagle fans cheered wildly this Saturday at the Substate finals in Russell as both the boys' and girls' basketball teams advanced to the 4A State Tournament in Salina. The Lady Eagles eaked out a 36-35 win over Ulysses to reach their second state tournament in a row and fifth in the last six years. The Colby boys beat Nickerson 50-40 to clinch their first state tournament birth since 2003-2004.



Briefly

Teams sought for event

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Thomas County is searching for people wanting to form teams for this year's Bowl For Kids Sake 2008. The event is Sunday, April 13. For questions, call 460-9125.

Tax help continues

Senior citizens and low income individuals or

families are encouraged to have their taxes done free of charge by an AARP representative. Alvin Volk of Colby is trained in helping fill out tax forms and is available from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m., Thursdays, at Pioneer Memorial Library. Volk will help each Thursday through April 10. For questions, call 460-2645.

'Music In Our Schools' set

The Colby School District's music department is

sponsoring “Music In Our Schools,” at 7:30 p.m., Tuesday, March 11, at the Colby Community Building, 285 E. Fifth St. The event will feature musicians from Colby's grade school, middle school and high school. The public is invited to this free event.

World Day of Prayer

World Day of Prayer will be held for Brewster area churches with a fellowship gathering at 9:30

a.m. and worship service at 10 a.m., Friday, March 7 at the Brewster United Methodist Church, 202 Nebraska. For questions, call (785) 694-2463.

Walk Kansas packets due

Walk Kansas, a fitness program sponsored by the Thomas County Extension office, begins, Sunday, March 9. Registration packets are available at the office, 350 S. Range Ave. in Colby. Call, 460-4582.