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Reaching for the stars

ABOVE: Brock Wagoner, foreground, and the rest of the Colby High School band percussion section play their portion of "Woodwind Polka" during the band's spring concert Tuesday at the high school. **LEFT:** The band was under the direction of Joey Nickols, far right.

Group seeks ideas, input

By **Patty Decker**

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Representatives from the Kansas Bioscience Authority, an agency created by the Legislature in 2004 to promote and strengthen the agricultural heritage across the state, visited leaders in Colby earlier this month.

The purpose of the trip for members of the authority was to acquaint themselves with resources in northwest Kansas and explain what part the agency could play in economic growth.

"We enjoyed talking with people in Colby about Kansas Bioscience Authority programs," said Tom Thornton, president of the authority. "One of our stops was at Colby Community College's vet tech program."

Thornton said one of the goals of the authority is in working with communities to attract companies.

The vet tech program, he said, is a state asset and bioscience opportunities go beyond the private practice, which is where many graduates make their careers.

For example, Thornton talked about the research and animal health companies wanting to employ vet technicians for bioscience growth.

"It's no surprise that most vet technicians go into private practice, but there are many more jobs looking for cancer treatments for pets; medicines; flea and tick collar advancements - the animal health industry in general," he said.

Thornton also spoke with a local farmer, Ken Frahm, about the agricultural-side of bioscience.

"I believe Tom Thornton and the Kansas Bioscience Authority are doing really great things in Kansas," Frahm said. "The intersection of biosciences and business and industry is the scene of the hottest new ventures in the country these days."

Frahm spoke about how bio-energy, bio-medical and traditional bio fields such as plant and animal food production are affecting the way everyone lives.

One example of a new business in Kansas dealing in the bio-field, Frahm cited, involves a company known as Edenspace Systems Corporation.

"Through work of a combination of the Kansas Bioscience Authority, Kansas Technology Enterprise Corporation and Junction City," he said, "Edenspace expects to be an early stage innovator in the cellulosic ethanol field."

This developing field, he said, will involve a process of genetically modifying a hybrid seed corn variety with the introduction of enzymes into the corn stover, making the rest of the plant (beyond just the grain) much easier to process into cellulosic ethanol.

The outcome of this process would be more of the product reaching market and increasing the amount of ethanol produced per acre from cornfields.

Another idea Frahm said he spoke with Thornton about was how many people in the Colby area want to produce anhydrous ammonia fertilizer as a byproduct of wind energy.

Steve Ziegelmeier, another local producer, was among many who organized the wind energy conference recently, which brought officials from the University of Minnesota to Colby.

"There was interest expressed on both sides at that meeting to consider a project in the Colby area to supplement working being done in Minnesota," Frahm said.

In addition to visiting Frahm and Colby College, Thornton and members of the authority, spoke with City Manager Carolyn Armstrong and Thomas County Economic Development Director Gerry Fulwider.

For questions, call (913) 397-8300.

County employees will see drop in health care premiums

By **Jan Katz Ackerman**

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Taxpayers will pay less for health insurance for county employees next year.

"The county's plan is based on two things," Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas Representative Charles Krull of Hays said. "It's based 35 percent on you and 65 percent on the state-wide average of trends over the last 12 months."

Krull on Monday told Thomas County Commissioners Ken Christiansen, Paul Steele and Byron Sowers county employees will not see any changes in the services covered by the county's healthcare plan, but will see a drop in premiums.

"You have got 54 employees on single policies and three on an employee and spouse policy," Krull said. "Thomas County has had no claims over \$25,000."

The county pays the premium

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It's all about costs and cost sharing.”

Charles Krull,
Blue Cross and Blue Shield

for any employee enrolled in the county's health and dental insurance plan and those who opt to insure their spouse or children pay the difference between what the county pays and the cost of the premium. The premium for a single plan will drop \$9.75 to \$316.38.

The three employees who insure their spouses will pay the difference between the single rate and an employee spouse rate, which will be \$362.93, down \$20.96 from this year's charge.

Should other county employees decide to join the county's health and dental plan they can do so between July 1 and July 31, Krull said. He also said if an employee

wants to add his or her spouse for the dental coverage only that is an option.

"It's all about costs and cost sharing," Krull said. "Wellness and taking better care of yourself are things we all must do. These are things we pay for or they are paid for on your premium."

Krull said in Kansas, Blue Cross and Blue Shield contracting healthcare providers wrote off \$1 billion dollars in 2007.

"That's because of networking," he said. "That's the only control we have over costs."

Steele referred Krull's proposal to the employees to review and asked Thomas County Clerk Shelly Harms to get back with

them whether the employees approved the plan.

The commissioners on Monday dealt with a second topic relating to healthcare when Public Health Administrator Lisa Molstad submitted her resignation effective Aug. 1.

Molstad told the commissioners she weighed heavily her professional obligations against those of her parental responsibilities of raising a teenage son. She said she would be moving to Florida to be closer to her son during his last two years of high school.

"We are sad to hear you are leaving," Sowers said.

"But we understand things come along."

Steele told Molstad and Connie Walden, registered nurse at the public health department which is located at 350 S. Range Ave. who was also at the meeting, the commissioners wanted their input as to what direction to go as far as replacing Molstad.

"Lisa has done a fabulous job

with paperwork, the finances and everything in between while Kathy (Ryan) and I were doing the medical work," Walden said. Walden told the commissioner she recommended hiring someone with healthcare and administration experience. She also told them she would like them to hire another nurse as well.

Molstad told the commissioners besides her resignation, Viviana Garibay, receptionist and medical records clerk was leaving effective June 13 to return to Hays for family obligations.

The commissioners told Molstad to begin trying to find a replacement for Garibay immediately and asked Molstad to attend the May 30 meeting to offer them more input about finding someone to replace her.

In other business, the commissioners approved purchase of four tires for the county public transportation van in the amount of \$725.52 from Great Western. The commissioners also approved

a resolution requiring Thomas County Jail inmates who work on a work release program to pay the county \$20 per day to help defray costs of housing the inmate. The payment may be waived if it creates a hardship on the inmate. The commissioners reviewed a report of the annual fire marshal inspection conducted on the jail that was submitted by Thomas County Sheriff Mike Baughn.

Sowers said prior to start of the meeting he visited the landfill to inspect a metal cabinet used to store corrosives which was damaged when wind blew it over. The commissioners decided to have Larry Jumper, landfill director, take the cabinet to one of the local body shops and see whether it could be repaired versus spending money to replace it.

The commissioners signed a working agreement with Overland Park based Custom Energy to begin the formal process of trying to reduce the county's energy expenses.

Briefly

No trash pickup Monday

Monday is an official holiday and the City of Colby is reminding everyone no trash service will be provided that day.

Trash pickup for Monday and Tuesday sanitation routes in both residential and commercial areas will, however, be provided Tuesday. For questions, call 460-4420.

Piano recital today

The piano students of Sharon Kriss will hold their Spring Recital at 7 p.m., tonight, at the Colby United Methodist Church. Students performing are: Joshua Baden, Brooklyn Bange, Andrea Barton, Dryden

and Lucas Baumfalk, Morgan and Lauren Bell, Andrea and Rachel Browne, Lauren Dempewolf, Bailey Foss, Abby and Allie Friesen, Miranda Kern, Kevin Lang, Amy, Carrie and Rachel Myers, Katelin Neuenschwander, Renea Reasoner, Ariel and Kale Regier, Ashley Standage, Sydney Stephens, Lucas, Andrew and Anna Taylor, Rachel Urban and Alex Young. The public is welcome to attend this event, Kriss said.

Hydrant testing underway

Colby Fire Department is flow testing fire hydrants across town to see how well the hydrants are working, said Sean Hankin, assistant fire chief. For questions, call 460-4454.

Bird feeders available

The Colby FFA and ag program is donating hanging bird feeders to the community in appreciation of all their support they have given our program, said Shawna Howell, Colby High School ag teacher. The bird feeders have a wire already attached and have three different compartments for different bird seed. These feeders hold seven pounds of seed. For questions, call 460-5320.

Grass, garbage don't mix

Colby residents are being reminded that solid waste garbage and grass clippings cannot be placed in the same green trash bin.

"Grass needs to be separated or it will be left," said Chris Bieker, public utilities director. If residents do not have a grass sticker and need one, they can call 460-4420.

Golf tourney June 13

Citizens Foundation Golf and Bridge Tournament is scheduled for Friday, June 13, at Meadow Lake Golf Course in Colby.

"All proceeds from the tournaments are used exclusively for the purchase of needed medical equipment and education," said Tama Unger, coordinating the event. For questions or to register, call Unger at (785) 460-1214 or Citizens Medical Center (785) 462-7511.