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Voters have choices

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Anyone thinking about running for public office in Thomas County needs to throw a hat in the ring by noon, June 10 to meet the filing deadline.

The office being most actively sought is that of the sheriff. Incumbent Thomas County Sheriff Mike Baughn is seeking a second term and is facing off against Colby residents C.D. Hopper and Rod Taylor. "Since it's a three-way contest it's important for the electorate to exercise their privilege to vote in the August primary," Baughn said.

Another contested race is for county attorney. Colby resident Bruce Flipse who is competing against Oberlin resident Preston Pratt for the position. State law does not require a county attorney to reside within the boundaries of the county served. While not contested races, both commissioners from Commission District #2, Paul M. Steele, and District #3, Ken Christiansen, have filed for re-election.

Steele said he wants to complete infrastructure improvements started in his first term, such as energy improvements at the courthouse, located at 300 N. Court Ave., and the county office complex, located at 350 S. Range Ave.

"My goal is to maintain essential services for the citizens of Thomas County, while requiring strict accountability for revenue and expenditures," Steele said.

A 1953 graduate of Colby High School, Steele is a retired certified public accountant.

Christiansen said he would like to follow through with current projects.

"I have enjoyed working for the residents of Thomas County and would like to continue," he said. "There are numerous projects we commissioners and county employees are currently working on and I would like to see them completed."

Also a Colby High School graduate, Christiansen is engaged in farming and for nine years served on the Thomas County Farm Service board.

Others who have filed for office are:

Thomas County Clerk: Incumbent Shelly Harms (R).

Register of Deeds: Incumbent Maybelle F. Moore (R).

Magistrate Judge 15th Judicial District: Incumbent Richard (Rick) J. Ress (R).

District Judge 15th Judicial District: Glenn D. Schiffner (R).

East Morgan Precinct Committeeman/ Committeewoman: Tamara Ziegelmeier (R) and Steve Ziegelmeier (R).

Menlo Township Treasurer: Susan D. Guill (R).

Lacey Township Treasurer: Vernon Roemer (R).

Thomas County Attorney Andrea Wyrick also plans to run for the District Judge position held currently by Jack Burr, who is retiring.



JOEY FALKOFF/Colby Free Press

Colby school district transportation director Alan Wade checked out the engine on one of his buses Wednesday morning at the bus garage. The district has 11 buses, two activity buses and two spares in its fleet, but in five years eight of those can no longer be used because of Kansas state laws. Wade is hoping the district will agree to lease a fleet of buses in the near future.

School has busload of concerns

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The wheels on the bus are going round and round in Colby for now.

Whether that's still the case in five years is something the Colby school board will have to decide.

Currently, the Colby school district has 11 school buses, two activity buses and two spare route buses in its fleet, but only two have been purchased since 2000; the last in 2004. In 2013, some of Colby's bus fleet can no longer be used. Kansas state laws permit a school bus to run for a maximum of 20 years, and according to transportation director Alan Wade, eight buses date back to 1992.

With the situation getting more desperate by the day, Wade is seeking out an alternative solution he plans to present the board at their next meeting June 2.

"Since we've gotten so far behind, we're going to need to buy more than one new bus a year," said Wade, whose been employed by the district since 1991. "I don't know that we can. We could lease a fleet of busses. I know several schools like Oakley, Golden Plains and lots in eastern Kansas are doing that."

Wade's proposal calls for the district to spend a \$100,000-110,000 a year for the next five years plus paying 3 to 4 percent interest to lease a fleet of 11 buses. Seven of the buses would be smaller, holding up to 25 passengers. The other four could hold up to 71. At the end of the five years, the district could negotiate another

“ If I had an unsafe bus, we wouldn't drive it.”
Alan Wade, Colby School transportation director

lease. Wade said they could also pay \$140,000 a year for five years and then own the entire fleet at the end of the lease.

Wade estimated the cost of one 65-71 passenger bus to cost anywhere from \$73,000-75,000 and a smaller bus to run anywhere from \$50,000-75,000.

Rather than spending that amount every year for the foreseeable future, Wade said lease purchasing would better suit the district.

"We've asked for a new bus or suburban every year, but most years they don't have the money because it needs to be spent other places," said Wade. "The only way around it is to do leases, bonds or that type of thing."

Wade met with business manager Jo DeYoung about the situation before Monday's board meeting. According to DeYoung, Wade said he would be satisfied if the board agreed to purchase one or two buses a year for the next five years. DeYoung made it known she is not usually in favor of lease purchasing.

"It doesn't make sense for us to spend three to four percent of our money on interest if we can avoid it," said DeYoung. The district has \$415,000 in its capital outlay fund. But, due to the lack of a capital outlay mill levy (since 1998) the district has virtually no way to

replenish that money, if it's spent on buses. Therefore, vehicles usually are purchased at the end of the year with "saved" general or supplemental general fund dollars. Lately, technology purchases and expenses have absorbed many dollars.

"The capital outlay is the reason we have a problem," said superintendent Kirk Nielsen.

Board members Gerry Fulwider and Stan Molstad seemed to suggest purchasing any new buses would be a problem.

While De Young was summing up Wade's demands, Fulwider became agitated at DeYoung, raising his voice to say "And what else did he say?"

Superintendent Kirk Nielsen responded by saying, "he feels his fleet is getting old."

Fulwider then remarked, "Maybe a lot of things are getting old."

"I think Mr. Fulwider seemed upset because he felt I or Mr. Wade was trying to tell the board what to do," said DeYoung.

Moments later, Molstad asked if the district had any buses that were going to run off the road. Nielsen told him they didn't have any to which Molstad responded, "Then there you go."

"Why would you wait until it's unsafe," said Wade. "Do you suppose most people wait until his their car is unsafe to replace it? We

have to take care of things prior to them being unsafe."

Wade did agree all of his buses were safe for the time being.

"If I had an unsafe bus, we wouldn't drive it," said Wade. "The state checks literally everything on our buses before the start of every school year. The last thing we want is an unsafe bus."

Although Suburbans aren't included in his lease proposal, Wade says the district also needs to look at replacing those in the near future. "We've got five Suburbans with over 200,000 miles on them," said Wade. "All the new one's have well over 100,000 miles. I know they'll last up to 230,000 miles, but there's more than that on some of them."

A new Suburban is estimated to cost anywhere from \$32,000-40,000 depending on the model.

Ideally, Wade said he'd like to replace every suburban that reaches 100,000 miles and have the maintenance staff use the old one's to drive around town. He also mentioned selling them after a period of time.

"Somehow we've gotten out of that practice," said Wade.

Wade said he understands the financial constraints the district is under, but also feels this is an issue that's going to have to be dealt with.

"How can you have hard feelings? We're all one big family," said Wade. "I want new buses and Suburbans, but in the same respect they need new chairs, air conditioning. I'm not upset or angry, but this is something we have to face or get out of. We can't just buy one and get caught up."

Center shows growth

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Among all the information Citizens Medical Center records about people involved in a car accident, the hospital might even have a good guess where the accident happened.



McCart

That was just one of the bits of information hospital Administrator Janice McCart told Colby Rotary during its meeting Tuesday.

Finances for the hospital, which opened in 1982, have improved since 2003. McCart said that year the hospital lost about \$1.2 million. Last year, the hospital ended with a profit. McCart began work at the hospital in 2004.

McCart said part of the reason for the plus has been the growth in the number of patients combined with better tracking of expenses.

In 2003, there were 47 babies born, 27 of which were girls. Last year, there were 81 girls and 77 boys delivered. Last year's births included three sets of twins.

Surgeries have also increased in the past four years. In 2003, there were more than 500 surgeries and more than 900 performed last year. McCart did not have specific numbers for all statistics she explained. McCart said most people in need of immediate surgeries are transferred to other facilities.

Outpatient visits also increased. In 2003, there were about 5,000 appointments compared to the nearly 9,000 in 2007.

Last year, about 2,500 people utilized the emergency room. McCart said that number has been stable since 2003, as at least 2,000 visits to the ER are recorded every year. Of the people injured in auto accidents from Interstate 70 who were sent to Citizens Medical Center, McCart said the most popular location for those auto accidents is between milemarkers 43 and 45, west of Colby. Milemarker 45 is the Levant exit.

She did not know why accidents are so popular among that stretch of the interstate.

Another thing that intrigues McCart about those accidents is the tendency for those people not to pay for services at the hospital.

"A lot of the people from I-70 are uninsured," she said.

Citizens Medical Center does use a collection agency to contact people who have not paid for services.

The people who do pay add up. McCart said the hospital's total revenue for 2007 was about \$32 million. That is up from the \$20 million in 2004. Of that about \$8 million is spent on payroll, an increase from the \$6.1 million in 2004. Last year, McCart said the hospital averaged having about \$87,000 a day in revenue.



See page 5 for all state qualifiers



Briefly

Car wash Friday

Thomas County Emergency Medical Services staff are continuing their week-long celebration recognizing EMS week. The group will hold a car wash from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., Friday, at their facility on South Franklin Avenue. A free-will donation will be requested. The community is also invited to stop by the Colby Community Building from 5 to 9 p.m., Saturday. In addition to many booths available to inform the public about the services offered, the staff has also planned a presentation at 7 p.m.

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.

Bible School scheduled

Trinity Lutheran Church in Colby has scheduled Vacation Bible School from 9:15 a.m. to noon, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, May 27 - May 30. This year's theme is Power Lab "Discovering the Power of Jesus." The school is open to children ages 3 through sixth grade. To register, call 462-3497.

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, Coby 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.

Free trap shoots planned

The Colby Trap Club, Hunting Heritage Group and the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks "Pass It On" program are sponsoring free shoots this summer for all area youth, women and inexperienced shooters. For questions about upcoming events, call Benny Young, 462-7602 or Matt Bain, 462-3367, both with the state wildlife and parks department.

Teams forming for event

Teams are now forming for the July 25-26 annual Relay for Life in Thomas County, said Diane Stithem, publicity chair. This event will again be held at Fike Park in Colby and all proceeds will go toward cancer research, finding a cure and fighting the disease. If interested call 462-2383 or 443-2119 and register.

Class of '98 plans reunion

Members of the Colby High School Class of 1998 are planning a 10-year reunion. "We hope all are able to attend and please update your contact information at www.eaglesalumni.org," said Jada (Johnson) Tubbs.