



COLBY FREE PRESS

Board hears about flaws in security

By Joey Falkoff

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A free security assessment, which pointed out several weaknesses in the Colby public school buildings, may prompt the district to empty its pocketbooks later on.

Employers Mutual Casualty Company (EMC), an insurance agency out of Des Moines, Iowa, spent two days in Colby at the end of February inspecting each of the eight district buildings and summed up their findings in a 105 page report received by board members and administrators at the end of April. The report was discussed briefly at the last board meeting May 19.

"We have a heightened state of awareness of the areas we need to address," said technology director Phil DeYoung.

Among the security concerns addressed in the report were inadequate lighting outside buildings, keys lying around, doors being held open with pieces of wood, computers not being locked up and posters blocking the windows outside of classrooms.

"Some of this is kind of alarming to me," said board member Joel Powell.

Powell didn't specify exactly what part of the report he was disturbed by.

DeYoung's biggest concern stemmed from the lack of security at entrance-ways. In addition to doors being left open and some being able to be pulled open, the report noted visitors being allowed in without being identified.

"It surprised me how easy it was to get into the buildings," said DeYoung. "There are lots of instances where people gain access. What good is it to lock all of the doors, if one is left open?"

Overall, the report described the district's security as "above average," and superintendent Kirk Nielsen noted a lot of the concerns are commonplace. Technology advisor Shawn Reinert added that many are simply a "quick fix."

Nevertheless, the report recommended the district install security cameras both inside and outside of its buildings. According to Reinert, cameras alone would cost the district anywhere from \$90-116,000. That doesn't include the infrastructure needed to support it.

Despite the recommendation by EMC, DeYoung believes security cameras are unnecessary and said just installing access controls is probably the best way to go.

"Personally, I'm for getting access controls," DeYoung said to the board. "Access controls would alleviate the key problems. People think having cameras in the parking lot would prevent vandalism, but chances are it's not going to. We may be able to see someone doing it, but we won't be able to

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Joel Powell,
School Board member

tell who it is. Certainly with internal cameras I don't see a need."

Installing access controls in coordination with the wireless network DeYoung plans to put in the high school this summer would cost an estimated \$125,000.

Reinert said he had discussions with the Colby Police Department about a grant they could get from the Justice Department in which the school would receive a 50 percent match on the project. The deadline for getting that grant proposal submitted is June 16, and Reinert said he plans on continuing those discussions before the next board meeting Monday.

"If we're going to get 50 or 75 percent, this is something we need to pursue," said board president Tracy Rogers.

Access controls would involve replacing standard keys and door code systems with electronic cards, which would allow the district to monitor who is getting and when.

A camera would be installed at the door that would take a picture of the person entering. After the door was open for a certain amount of time, an intrusion alarm would sound.

Those alarms could alert the police department, if the school wished to do so.

"What we have a problem with is people getting into our buildings at all hours of the night," said DeYoung. "We have no way to trace who that is with master keys. We want accountability with the access to our buildings. If everyone did their part, we wouldn't need these measures."

DeYoung said doors, such as those at the front of the high school, would remain open during school hours and wouldn't require a card until after school closes.

He also said doors frequently used by sports teams after school could be programmed to not lock during certain hours of the day.

Those wanting temporary access to school buildings could be granted cards only good for a certain amount of hours as well.

"It's going to be a change," said DeYoung. "People are used to going through doors whenever they want."

"It's going to be an inconvenience. If the administration is not on board 100 percent, it's not worth spending the money."

The school's security plan will be discussed at 7 p.m., Monday, which is the next board meeting.



JAN KATZ ACKERMAN/Colby Free Press

Awaiting a new roof on the Thomas County Courthouse, some 50 plus buckets sit in the attic to catch rain as it falls through the hail damaged roof. Commissioners Ken Christiansen, Paul Steele and Byron Sowers had hired Overland Park-based energy savings company, Custom Energy Services LLC to lead them through the process of selecting a contractor to install a new roof.

County looks at energy upgrades

By Jan Katz Ackerman

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Thomas County Commissioners took the first step on Thursday to make sure a new roof on the courthouse is only months away.

"I am concerned about the community and finances of the county and its buildings," Commissioner Byron Sowers said. "When we get this roof done, we want it done right."

Commissioners Ken Christiansen, Paul Steele and Sowers met with a team of executives from Overland Park-based Custom Energy Services who will lead the commissioners through a process of updating facilities to make them energy efficient. Dayton "Buddy" Hash, president of Custom Energy, along with Kevin Green, vice president of Custom Energy, and Ellen Edwards, project engineer, talked for more than three hours about how to proceed with the upgrades.

Hash said he, as well as Green and Edwards, would meet with the commissioners and Thomas County Clerk Shelly Harms at various times over the next couple months until they define the priorities of which need comes first for the county's energy savings.

"Our job is to try and get the right solution for this courthouse," Hash said.

Besides installation of a new roof on the courthouse and law enforcement center, projects scheduled for review are upgraded heating and air conditioning units, improved lighting and water saving restroom equipment. Targeted areas are the courthouse, located at 300 N. Court; the law enforcement center, located at 225 N. Court; the Thomas County Office Complex, located at 350 S. Range Ave.; and the Road and Bridge Department Shop, located just



JAN KATZ ACKERMAN/Colby Free Press

Custom Energy Services LLC executives Ellen Edwards, left, Dayton "Buddy" Hash, middle, and Kevin Green met with the Thomas County Commissioners to start the process of upgrading the county's buildings to make them more energy efficient.

east of the courthouse.

Steele said the commissioners would be relying on the Custom Energy team's expertise to help them make decisions.

"The taxpayers and voters expect us to get something they will be proud of," Steele said. "They are not going to be hearing stories about the bucket brigade, but get the best for their dollar."

Harms over the past several months has had to assemble a bucket brigade of county employees to place more than 50 plastic buckets in the courthouse attic to catch water as it runs through the roof during thunderstorms. Replaced 10 years ago, the roof has had considerable hail damage and is the key priority on the list of work to be overseen by Custom Energy.

Hash, Green and Edwards on Thursday morning and afternoon conducted what they call an investment grade audit, a lengthy meeting and walk-through of

county owned property, to start the process of finding out what projects will be done and in what order. The cost of the audit was \$3,700.

The morning session with the commissioners included talking about how projects will be financed; accessibility of Custom Energy employees to county property; common policies Custom Energy employees will adhere to during the process, such as no tobacco use, camera use or restrictions to document property and work, and a zero tolerance for sexual harassment.

Another key topic discussed was the use of local contractors and businesses to complete projects.

Green said the process of "design build" is different than basic letting of bids for government work. Supported by the state, energy companies such as Custom Energy often sit down with a group of contractors at one time to

learn about what they can or can not provide to a project, Green said.

"What we want to do is leverage our group to get you the best offer," Green said. "We'll look at whether contractors are bonded and insured, and look at their experience."

Hash said Custom Energy would "show consideration to local contractors and laborers."

Besides local contractors and laborers, Green said local financial institutions will be given first option of financing the county's projects.

Edwards requested three years worth of figures from Harms as far as what the county has spent for utilities such as gas, electricity and water.

A tentative start date for the projects to begin has been set for July 28, with projects to be completed by mid-January. No dollar figures have been set for completion of the projects.

Briefly

Safety fair Saturday

A community summer safety fair is planned from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Saturday, in the parking lot of the Colby Wal-Mart, 115 W. Willow. There will be displays and activities related to summer, organizers said. Many area resource agencies will participate in this safety fair with family activities including water safety, food safety, vehicle safety. For questions about the event, call 462-8634.

Moving Wall to visit

American veterans and their supporters will have an opportunity to visit one of the county's famous memorials, the Moving Wall, while it is in Hoxie from June 12 to 16. Starting with an opening ceremony at 8 a.m. on Thursday, June 12, the Moving

Wall will stand on the Sheridan County Fairgrounds through a closing ceremony at 2 p.m. on Monday, June 16. Also referred to as the Traveling Wall, the half-scale replica wall and the Healing Wall, contain the names of each veteran as listed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D. C. The Moving Wall is paid for entirely by donations.

Benefit set Sunday

A benefit to help defray medical expenses for Connie Menges, 40, of Colby, is scheduled from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., in the Little Theater of the Colby Community Building, 285 E. Fifth St. Menges suffered a stroke in February and spent many weeks in a Denver hospital before returning home. For tickets or other questions about the benefit, call Malinda Cheney, (785) 462-7621 or Carol Raile, 443-3089, organizers.

Tractor, car show Sunday

Selden's Main Street Sunday will be the site of the 15th annual Antique and Tractor Show starting with registration at 9 a.m. for tractors and cars. Activities will include a horseshoe pitching competition, antique baler demonstrations, basketball free-throw contest, and other events such as a barrel roll contest and craft show throughout the day. For questions, call (785) 386-4481, 386-4331, or 386-4536.

Ice-cream social Sunday

The Thomas County Relay for Life Committee is having a come and go ice-cream social from 2-4 p.m., Sunday, at Fike Park to celebrate National Cancer Survivors Day, said Diane Stithem, publicity chair. Cancer survivors in Thomas County are encouraged to attend the social, complete with ice cream and all

the toppings. A booth will also be available for anyone wanting to sign up for this year's Relay for Life scheduled for Friday, July 25, also at Fike Park.

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.

Class of '98 plans reunion

The Colby High School Class of 1998 are planning a 10-year reunion July 25-26. For information visit: www.eaglesalumni.org.