



COLBY FREE PRESS

August electric bills to reflect rate hike

By **Patty Decker**

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Colby utility customers are going to see a major increase in their August bill for electricity — going from 8 cents to 12 cents a kilowatt hour — but city officials wanted to emphasize nobody is making money off the increases.

In addition to residential increases, electric rates for business will go from 8 cents to 11 cents and industrial rates from 6 cents to 10 cents.

The good news, however, is that while rates will be higher for the August billing, city officials believe winter rates will be more in

line with last year's rates.

City Manager Carolyn Armstrong talked about the rate hike today citing this is the first bill under the new contract with Midwest Energy.

"Prior to this month," she said, "the city had purchased firm energy at the average monthly cost of all energy purchased by Midwest and non-firm energy at a fixed price."

Firm energy, she said, is power



Armstrong

that customers have to pay for every hour, whether they use it or not.

Non-firm energy, she explained, is power that customers pay for only when they are using it.

Armstrong spoke about examples involving firm and non-firm energy. Regarding firm energy, she said the city purchased 5,000 kilowatts of firm power because its load usually doesn't go below that amount anytime during the day or night, even in the winter time.

"Our lowest usage," she said, "was at 2:30 a.m., April 24, 2007, when we used 4,400 kilowatts (of firm power)."

As an example in non-firm en-

ergy, Armstrong spoke about last year, at 4:30 a.m., Aug. 13, when the peak load was 17,500 kilowatts, which at that point, would have used 12,500 kilowatts of non-firm energy.

"To give customers some idea of the difference this makes, the bill from Midwest Energy in June of 2007 was \$191,601 for 4,983,986 kilowatt hours of energy, transmission and scheduling charges," she said.

"The bill from Midwest Energy in June of 2008 was \$435,638 for 4,915,000 kilowatt hours for those same charges."

As for the increase, Armstrong thought it important to note that Midwest Energy is not making

any additional money off the contract with the city.

"The new contract for energy," she said, "reflects the price of increases being experienced by everyone in the industry."

A main reason is due to demand. The price for energy during the summer months, she said, is higher than the price in the winter months due to demand.

"Of course, the price of natural gas also plays a big part in the price of energy," Armstrong said.

In an effort to reduce power costs, the Colby City Council approved the Eco@Home energy tips in mid-June to help its customers try to conserve electricity. Some suggestions included in the

brochure are to use energy-efficient compact fluorescent bulbs, raising the thermostat above 72 degrees, purchasing "energy-star" appliances, running the washer and dishwasher only when fully loaded, unplugging electronics and chargers when not in use, to name a few ideas.

The city will mail energy-saving tips to its customers every other month beginning with the next bill.

The cost of purchased power is the highest from 1 to 8 p.m., Armstrong said, and less use during that time will lower the amount of the bill from Midwest Energy and lower the rate charged to customers.

County could raise taxes; accounts not reconciled

By **Jan Katz Ackerman**

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Thomas County Commissioners on Monday approved asking the county's accountant to help get records up to date.

Accounting firm Adams Brown Beran and Ball of Colby is under contract to the county to audit the county's budget on an annual basis until 2010.

"I think we need to authorize Adams Brown Beran and Ball to work as needed," Commissioner Paul Steele said. "I don't want to approve the budget until our books are reconciled."

Thomas County Treasurer Donita Applebury has asked Deputy Register of Deeds Lora Volk to help in getting county checkbooks current. Some of the bank registers have not been current since 2006.

"So in a nutshell, Lora has found the entries and Adams Brown Beran and Ball will write the journal entries, correct?" Commissioner Ken Christiansen asked.

The commissioner for the past couple months has waded through mounds of paperwork preparing the 2009 county budget.

While no dollar figures were talked about, Steele said the

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Thomas County Commissioner Paul Steele

first draft of it indicates taxpayers will have to cough up more money than they did for the 2008 budget.

"Unfortunately, it looks like we'll have to raise taxes by about 1 mill," Steele said.

He said two things that attributed to the tax increase.

"Interest rates went down and we didn't receive the money we anticipated," Steele said. "And the second is the increase in fuel costs."

"I don't know who we can budget for fuel," Christiansen said.

In other business, the commissioner met with Public Health Administrator Lisa Molstad and Public Health Nurse Connie Walden. Molstad said she has received two applications for the job of bookkeeper and finance manager.

Molstad is leaving her job Aug. 1 to move closer to her teenage son who lives in Florida.

She suggested the commis-

sioners hire someone to replace her, as well as another registered nurse to assist Walden.

The commissioners on Monday told Walden they have not yet decided whether they will make her the head of the medical side of the public health department.

Walden has asked the county for \$25 an hour to head up the medical side.

"We want to maintain flexibility," Steele said.

"I don't know, but I don't think that person will be the whole enchilada," Christiansen said.

Molstad and Walden met with Commissioner Byron Sowers, Steele and Christiansen in executive session for 20 minutes for non-elected personnel matters.

No action was taken after the executive session.

The commissioners said they hope to make a final decision about the public health department's future at their meeting on July 31.

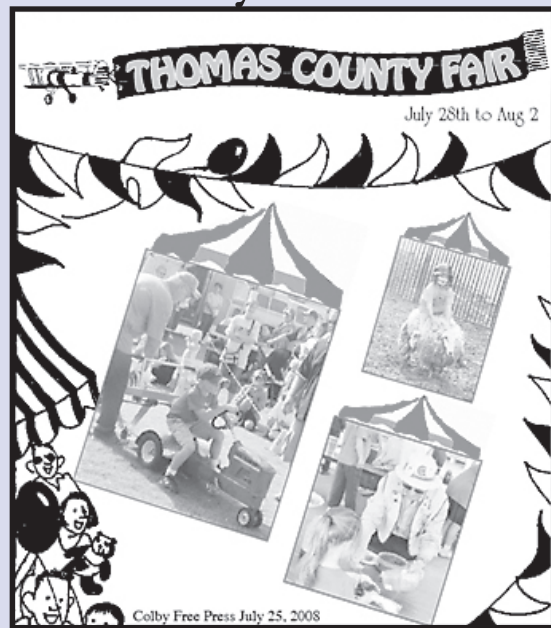
A brighter look



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

Trey Barnett, a Colby High School graduate, is one of two people hired by the Public Utilities Department for the city of Colby, to spruce up the many streets in town by repainting the faded parking lines. Barnett was working on West Fifth Street Friday morning with assistance from Joe Kring, the other summer helper.

In today's edition!



Colby Free Press July 25, 2008

Voters needed for eight wonders

To steal some phrases from college basketball, it's time to turn the Sweet 16 of Thomas County into the Elite 8.

The Colby Free Press, in collaboration with Colby Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Hays Daily News are asking area residents to select the 8 Wonders of Thomas County. In June, voters submitted their favorite eight places in the county. Those ballots have been tabulated to list the top 16 vote getters. Now, voters will again vote for their top eight places in the area.

There was no specific criteria for voters to consider. The top 16 vote receivers were, in no particu-

lar order, Bourquin's, Colby Visitor's Center, First Presbyterian Church, Prairie Museum of Art and History, Starbucks, Villa High Park, Colby City Hall, Cooper Barn (within museum), Houston House (in Rexford), Shepherd's Staff, The Craft Peddler, Colby Community College, Fike Park, Northwest Research and Extension Center, Someplace Special and the Thomas County Courthouse.

The ballot is within this edition of the Colby Free Press. It will also be in the Aug. 1 paper. Voting ends Aug. 5. Ballots can be dropped off at the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St. in Colby.



FILE PHOTO

The Colby Visitor's Center is one of the candidates in the 8 Wonders of Thomas County.

Briefly

Relay For Life tonight

The Thomas County Relay for Life, which raises money to help fight cancer, begins at 7 p.m., tonight, in Fike Park. Coined the world's largest slumber party, the event will continue until 7 a.m., Saturday. Everyone is invited to enjoy the fun and take part in the many activities available.

'Iron Athlete' set Saturday

The Colby Recreation Department is hosting its first Iron Athlete Triathlon beginning at 9 a.m., Saturday, at the gazebo in Fike Park. Even though some participants have already signed up, they will still need to take part in the final registration starting at 8:30 a.m. Others interested in the triathlon can still register the day of the event. The triathlon is open to the public but scholarships will be awarded to the

top three high school graduates of 2008, said Stacy Lee, recreation director. The triathlon begins at 9 a.m. with a 30-mile bike ride, then a 600 meter swim at the Colby Municipal Pool, and will end with a 5K run. "We will start at the gazebo," she said, "and end right behind the Community Building."

Football camp planned

A free Colby Middle School football camp is scheduled from 9 to 11 a.m., Monday through Thursday, July 28-31, for students entering seventh and eighth grade, said Todd Murdock, head coach. All camp activities will be held at the middle school practice fields.

Pet adoption available

Colby Animal Clinic has a young, male Basset Hound ready for adoption. Clinic officials said he is

friendly, has lots of energy and would make a good farm dog. The clinic also has a five-month-old, male, Chocolate Lab puppy who is cute and playful and a male grey kitten needing a loving family. Interested people can call or stop by the facility at 810 E. Fourth St. All adopted animals have current shots. The goal is to find homes for these animals rather than have them euthanized. For questions or minimal adoption costs, call 460-8621.

Marching academy Aug. 4

The Colby High School band will be having its Marching Academy from 9 a.m. until noon, Monday through Friday, Aug. 4-8, in the high school bandroom. Every member of the Colby High School band program is requested to attend, said Joey Nickols, instructor. For questions, call Nickols, 460-0599.

Fair Kickoff Monday

Farmers and Merchants Bank and Dillons will be set up in the Dillons' parking lot on South Range Avenue to kick off Thomas County Fair week from 5 to 7 p.m., Monday. The two businesses will also be selling spare ribs and bottled water; and handing out brochures outlining the events at the fairgrounds throughout the week. The Amusement Association will have a sign up sheet there if someone still wants to work a game shift. The proceeds from the "Fair Kickoff" will go to the Thomas County Amusement Association.

Massage class offered

A new therapeutic massage program is being offered at Colby College. The first day of classes will be Tuesday, Aug. 19. For questions call, 460-5427.