



ANDY HEINTZ/Colby Free Press
Peter Keenan talked to board.

Wind farm nearly ready to go

By Andy Heintz

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A representative of a Spanish firm told Thomas County commissioners today that the preconstruction stage of the Solomon Forks wind power project planned for the southeast part of the county is about done.

"We don't see any critical issues that would derail the project," said Peter Keenan, project developer for Acciona Energy North America Corp. He said the company estimates the project will cost about \$300 million.

Keenan said the company has already leased land from owners in the county. Colby residents Richard and Neva Epard, Loren Guilly and Hal Kistler and contrac-

tor Troy Sporer of Oakley all attended the meeting to hear about the project.

The project should produce 108 megawatts of energy using big wind 72 turbines, Keenan said. In the future, though, the company might end building enough turbines to produce 500 megawatts. Keenan said in order for this much energy to be produced, the transmission system serving the area will have to be upgraded.

The federal stimulus bill included tax credits for wind power that will cover some of the projects' construction costs, said Keenan. The stimulus includes two types of tax credits for wind projects: production-based and investment-based, he said. A production-based tax credit goes on for several years and is based on how much

energy is produced, while the investment-based credit is based on how much money is spent on a facility. He said the company has not decided what type of tax credit they will use on this project.

"The project will create 250 temporary jobs and 10 to 12 permanent jobs," Keenan said. He said the project is not as far along as he would have liked because big banks and large corporate investors are unwilling to put much money into any project due to today's lousy economic conditions.

"When we go to start construction, we want to make sure capital is available," he said, adding that the firm hopes to get going sometime this year.

Kansas provides a good climate for wind-power projects because the state has good

wind, community support, a favorable tax environment through property and sales tax exemptions and good access to transmission, said Keenan. He said wind power is attractive to utility companies because it provides a stable cost of energy that will be known to the companies for the next 20 or 30 years.

Wind power is good for taxpayers because it's a domestic source of energy that is produced here and does not contribute to global warming, said Keenan.

"It's a sustainable form of energy," he added.

When the wind is not producing energy, he said, there's a thousand other power plants in the transmission system will take up the slack



VERA SLOAN/Colby Free Press

Lloyd Cersovsky and Becky Dempewolf (above) made order out of chaos Saturday, checking to see that every little nut and bolt was in place for the opening of the new Colby Implement store on Monday. Shelly Aufrecht (right) arranged a display of green mailboxes on shelving in the front foyer.



Irrigators get ideas at session

Tri-State conference focuses on the plains

By Marj Brown

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Farmers, irrigators and others from the Tri-State area of Kansas, Nebraska and Colorado packed a two-day meeting of the Central Plains Irrigation Association at the City Limits Convention Center.

Participants were able to view displays from 18 irrigation equipment companies and to hear speakers on all aspects of irrigation, conservation and wind energy from a corporation's point of view. There were two general-session speakers and eight technical speakers each day.

The association is an organization for those interested in finding the most efficient ways to irrigate, promote water and soil conservation through the use of economic irrigation practices, get information to farmers and encourage cooperation among all segments of the industry and financing agencies.

The group held its first conference in Colby in 1989, but goes to a different state each year, said Donna Lamm of Colby, executive assistant for the association and one of the organizers of the conference. President of the organization last year was Jan Windschaffel, Central Plains sales manager for Netafim USA Irrigation from Salina. Sessions were held Feb. 24 and 25; at the close of the meeting, he introduced the new president, Kettie Olsen of Aurora, Colo.

After looking at different irrigation systems, farmers said that even though equipment and techniques have improved through the years, all systems will have their problems during extreme drought situations often experienced in the area. Most agreed irrigation is a must here on the High Plains, where we have such dry weather.

Among the participants was Larry Werth, who works for Agsun Feeders in Brewster. He said he is concerned with the cost of irrigation, efficiency and the falling water table.

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John Deere dealer moves to new digs near freeway

By Vera Sloan

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Colby Implement, an icon on the Colby business scene for many years, has moved its new headquarters at 405 W. Horton Ave, south of Interstate 70.

The John Deere dealership was open for its first day of business in the new facility today.

The move from the old lot on East U.S. 24 was prompted by growth over the past 40 plus years, said Manager Ryan Ortner. Bigger machinery and expanded sales and service made the move attractive, he said.

The new facility sits on 10 acres and the building spans 40,000 square feet. Besides an expanded shop and parts areas, there are 13 offices and a meeting and training room.

Ortner, also a part owner, said he started his career with John Deere in sales in 1997. He is originally from Sioux City, Iowa, he said, but he likes being in Colby and Oakley, where the same owners operate sister store, Oakley Implement.

Colby Implement employs 38 people in sales, service and parts, Ortner said. The one who's been there the longest is Mary Lou

Jones, who has been with the dealership 25 years, plus several when the business was known as Lane Equipment.

John Deere is the oldest line of farm equipment in the country and the No. 1 manufacturer of farm equipment, Ortner said. The firm had its beginnings in a one-man black smith shop, in 1837, when a young man named John Deere made the first commercially successful steel plow. It is said that Deere forged the plow that tamed the west.

The outlet here is owned by a group whose corporate office is in Garden City, Ortner said.

When asked what immediate challenges he sees besides the move, he said it is to be on the cutting edge of technology to keep customers at the top of the game to get the most production and the most profitability out of their operations.

Changes in the way farmers will do business come through the Real Time Kinematic systems, known as RTK, a satellite guidance technology. Ortner said it is a sub-link to an accuracy guidance network. Through towers in Thomas, Logan and Rawlins counties, information can be transmitted to farmers which

will allow them to pass through a field, drive down the same lanes and plant back on the same strips within 1 centimeter of the last pass.

Ortner said that although leasing programs are available, most farmers prefer to buy their equipment. Sales are not limited to this area, he added.

"We sell nationally and have even sold to customers in Canada," he said.

Colby Implement employs 16 service technicians.

"We have three mobile service

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Briefly

Daffodils expected here Friday

Bad weather on the West Coast has delayed daffodil harvest, said Jennifer Van Eaton, said community manager in Colby for the American Cancer Society. Flowers promised for delivery today now are expected on Friday, she said. For questions, call 460-3684.

Kids get to work with players

The Colby-Thomas County Chamber of Commerce is offering future Thomas County basketball players a chance to learn from their role models at a fund raiser on Friday, April 3, at the Colby Grade and Middle school gyms. Colby Community College players will teach kids in second through fifth grades from 4:30 to 6 p.m., then coach them in a game at 6 p.m. Admission will be \$3 for adults, \$1 for students and free for children under 5. Registration for the clinic is \$5, including a T-shirt; forms must be turned

in by Wednesday. For information, call the Chamber at (785) 460-3401.

Fair board to meet Thursday

The Thomas County Fair Board will meet at 8 p.m. Thursday. The agenda includes repairs done to the solar building and a fence in the southwest corner of the grounds, changing the rodeo to the Kansas Professional Rodeo Association, fair themes, the demolition derby, the fair book and advertising. The meeting, at the 4-H Building, is open to the public.

Coalition meeting is Thursday

The Thomas County Coalition, an alliance which works to reduce underage substance abuse, will meet at 11:30 a.m. Thursday at the Pioneer Memorial Library. Organizer Brock Fairbrother said they hope to have a large group. Everyone is invited. For questions, call (785) 460-8177.

Seniors plan potluck Tuesday

The group More Fun Together plans a potluck dinner for people 50 or older who are alone, widowed, divorced, separated or who have partners in nursing homes at 6 p.m. Tuesday at the First Presbyterian Church. Bring a dish to share. For information, call the church at 462-6342.

Justice scholarships available

The Thomas County Community Foundation is looking for applications for criminal justice scholarships to attend Colby Community College. Money comes from the Colby Police Department Special Law Enforcement Fund and the Cory R. Wang Memorial Scholarship. For an application, contact the foundation office at 350 S. Range, Suite 14, in Colby. These must be postmarked by Tuesday. Call Melinda Olson at 460-9152 for information.

Churches continue Lent series

The Lenten Brown Bag and Bible program at noon Wednesday will be led by the Rev. John Schmidt on the topic of Pilate. The program will be in the fellowship hall of the First Presbyterian Church. Bring your own lunch; drinks are provided.

Stop at Fotogirl for After Hours

The Colby-Thomas County Chamber of Commerce Business After Five will be at Fotogirl Photography, 230 E. Fourth, at 5 p.m. Wednesday. Any business or organization interested in hosting a Business After Five should call the Chamber office at 460-7643.

