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Commissioners reverse course on medic issue

By Vera Sloan
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After hearing from Emergency Medical Services Director, Ken Gatlin on Monday, the Thomas County Commissioners rescinded a previous motion that would have paid for Dawnelle Umberger, emergency medical technician and training coordinator, to finish her associate's degree plus get training to become a paramedic.

"I'm curious to know why we need a paramedic ... whose budget will it be taken from, and why you want our service to be an Advanced Life Service," Gatlin said.

Commissioner Paul Steele told Gatlin that the county is always interested in upgrading skills, and that he was curious as to why there has been such a backlash from the commissioners' decision to have someone trained to be a paramedic.

"The implication of you wanting to have a paramedic indicates that you want a full time staff, which involves changing protocol, involves having \$50-60,000 dollars worth of drugs on an ambulance - and there are two of them - plus when those drugs are outdated, we can't use them, it would require

having more than one paramedic, and it's just not economically feasible," Gatlin said.

"We can't maintain as a paramedic unit unless we have 12 to 15 (paramedics), and are you willing to pay \$40 to \$50 thousand each, when there isn't that much for paramedics to do? If we had 3,000 runs a year, it would be different, but when there are around 400 runs a year, the expense would be prohibitive. A lot of the volunteers wondered if it was an open invitation to send others (to school) that volunteer their time for the EMS."

Gatlin said there isn't a need for a paramedic service here because paramedics have to practice their skills on a regular basis in order to stay proficient in the skills.

Umberger said her reason for wanting to be a paramedic was because it would be good to have one here to do the training.

Gatlin said there are 21 volunteers in the service right now, and seven of them are "Emergency Medical Technician I," meaning they are advanced in their skills because they are trained to start an intravenous drip. There are eight new ones in training at the pres-

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Brewster students sing for Christmas

By Bonnie Holm
Colby Free Press

Music director Melanie Biel and the Brewster students presented their Christmas program to a packed house last Thursday. The theme was "Through the Eyes of a Child."

All the grade school students wore their pajamas to the program, and sang Christmas songs such as "I Want a Hippopotamus for Christmas" and "All I Want for Christmas are My Two Front Teeth."

The program started with the fourth grade performing two songs on their recorders. The fifth grade band shared its musical talent with the crowd, as they played "Jingle Bells" and "Aura Lee." They were followed by an outstanding performance by the Brewster band,

made up of students from the sixth through 12th grades.

The high school vocal students sang several songs, including an entertaining rendition of "Santa Baby." Senior Ryan Allen kept the grade school students enthralled with his story of "'Twas the Night Before Christmas." A slide show dedicated to the men and women serving in the armed forces was accompanied by a vocal trio sang by Emily Klemm, Jessica Klemm and Rose Bear.

The Brewster art students did a fantastic job of decorating the stage, and the grade school students added their own touch with handmade decorations. Santa Claus made his annual appearance at the end of the program, handing out goodie bags donated by the Brewster Lions Club to all attendees.

State government delays aid payments to school districts again

TOPEKA (AP) — A cash crunch forced Kansas to delay \$173 million in aid payments to its public schools this month, and a top education official said Tuesday that a few districts need help from the state to make their December payrolls.

State Budget Director Duane Goossen confirmed that there hasn't been enough money in Kansas' main account to meet its obligations to its 295 school districts.

Some funds due in December might not be sent until early January.

But Deputy Education Commissioner Dale Dennis said the state will relent for a few districts and send funds so they can pay their employees on time. Other districts, he said, may have to violate state laws governing their cash management for a few weeks.

"We don't want anybody to miss pay-

roll," Dennis said during a meeting of the State Board of Education.

Dennis listed seven districts who needed the state to relent so they can make their payrolls: Hays in northwest Kansas; Ashland, Hugoton and Skyline in southwest Kansas, and Buhler, Haven and Wellington in south-central Kansas. He said he expects a few more will fall into the same category.

Hays Superintendent Fred Kaufman said: "You'd think you could depend on the state of Kansas to provide the funding they're obligated to provide."

The state was supposed to make \$196 million in general aid payments to school districts Dec. 1 but delayed half of the payments — about \$98 million — until the end of the month.

Also, the state is supposed to make an

additional \$75 million in payments Dec. 15 for special education programs. Those payments could be about three weeks late, he said.

"It depends on when we have the cash to do it," he said.

School districts faced similar delays in their November general aid payments.

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Briefly

Food bank needs holiday helpers

Genesis-Thomas County needs volunteers to help fill food baskets at 7 p.m. Friday at the 4-H building at the Thomas County Fairgrounds. Anyone can come help. The baskets will be given out from 9 to 11 a.m. Saturday at the 4-H building. For information, call the Genesis office at 460-7930.

Bible, lunch merge for Advent

The Thomas County Ministerial Association is sponsoring "Advent Brown Bags and Bible" from noon to 12:50 p.m. Wednesdays in the Fellowship Hall of the Colby Presbyterian Church, 515 W. Fourth St. The theme this year is "Joy to the World." Jarrod Spencer (Church of Christ) will speak next Wednesday, with Larry Booth on Dec. 23. Everyone is welcome for fellowship, scripture, hymns and a brief Advent message. Bring a sack lunch; dessert

and beverage will be provided. For information, call 462-6342.

Heartland program Thursday

Heartland Christian School will present its annual Christmas program, featuring students in preschool through high school, at 7 p.m. Thursday. Preconcert music will start at 6:30 p.m. Everyone is invited to attend the free "Our Reason for the Season" concert. Bring a canned food item for the Genesis-Thomas County food bank. For information, call the school at 460-6419.

Vocal concert Thursday night

The Colby Community College Vocal Music Department's annual winter concert is set for 7:30 p.m. Thursday at the Cultural Arts Center on campus. It will feature the Concert Choir and Sunflower Sing-

ers, led by vocal music Director Dr. Phillip Shuman and accompanied by Pat Ziegelmeier. Everyone is invited. For information, call college spokesperson Debbie Schwanke at 460-5411.

Legion offers Christmas dinner

The Colby American Legion will hold a Christmas dinner at 6 p.m. Sunday at the American Legion Club, 1850 W. Fourth St. The public is invited for soup, sandwiches, drinks, and gifts for children 9 and under. If the dinner is snowed out, it will be held on Sunday, Dec. 20. For information, call Jim at 269-7074.

For latest flu info, call 460-4599

A hot line for questions on seasonal influenza and the H1N1 flu strain will be available throughout the flu season at (785) 460-4599. The Thomas County

Health Department says information about the status and availability of vaccines, priority groups and the like will be available at this number.

Hospital auxiliary needs help

The Citizens Medical Center Auxiliary is looking for volunteers to greet visitors, operate the gift shop and help patients and their families, among other things. If you'd like to get involved, call Tama Unger at (785) 460-1214 or Mary Smith at (785) 462-3387.



KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

Colby climbed out from under at least six inches of snow, blown into deep drifts, on Wednesday. Snow blowers and shovels were put to good use clearing sidewalks, sometimes at the expense of parked cars.

Three-day storm hits Colby

By Kevin Bottrell
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A far reaching snowstorm blanketed much of the western United States this week, leaving Colby and the surrounding communities with anywhere from 6 to 9 inches of snow after three days.

The snow moved into western Kansas early Sunday. The Community Collaborative Rain, Hail and Snow Network reported snowfall from 3 to 4 inches around Colby on Sunday. The snow let up a little Monday with between 1 and 2.5 inches of new snow. Temperatures never climbed out of the teens and the area was left with snowpacked roads, but little ice.

On Tuesday, blowing snow cut visibility down to about a half-mile in some areas. The Department of Transportation kept I-70 open the whole day, but oversized loads were restricted. Wind-chill dropped the temperature Tuesday night down to 30 degrees below zero. Weather stations in Colby reported 2.5 to 3 inches of new snow, making for a total of 6 or more inches in town. The high



HEATHER WOOFER/Colby Free Press

Colby students had the day off Tuesday, Colby High School students Quade Wooffer and Beau Brown took the opportunity to go sledding at Villa High Park. Area schools had a two-hour late start Wednesday.

winds blew the snow into drifts up to several feet deep in places. The Thomas County Road and Bridge plow crews reported large drifts on the county roads.

Kansas State Research and Extension reported snow depth up to

9 inches in Colby.

Snowfall totals were much the same around northwest Kansas. The town of Norcatour got 6 inches over the past three days,

while Norton, just to the east, got 8 inches. Oakley got 6.5 inches;

Goodland, 5 inches; Atwood, 3 inches; and St. Francis, 2.8 inches.

Parts of the Rocky Mountains in southern Colorado and east-

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