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City to buy farmland for new pool

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The Colby Aquatics Center, the city's new pool and water park, has found a home.

The City Council authorized Mayor Ken Bieber on Tuesday to buy a 10-acre piece of farmland between Colby Community College and Colby High School on Franklin Avenue for up to \$15,000 an acre, for a total of \$150,000. The cost was included in the \$5 million project estimate given by Aquatics Design, the firm contracted to provide plans for the pool.

The land is owned by the family of Charles Davis, a widely known Colby businessman, journalist and philanthropist

City Manager Carolyn Armstrong said the council wanted a central location that kids could safely bike to. The land on Franklin was one of the sites recommended by the pool committee, which pushed for the new park.

Armstrong said the pool needs at least six acres, but the council wanted to have extra room in case they want to expand some day.

Armstrong said she had ordered a topographical survey of the site, which will go to the design firm so they can start working on plans. The site has utility access except for sewer, she said, adding that the city will be looking at that soon.

Armstrong said the council does not have a firm timeline, but hopes to seek bids on the project in March and begin construction in June for a targeted opening in May 2011.

In other news:

• The council voted to raise the limit on the city's medical reimbursement plan for employees to \$6,000. Bob Harper of AFLAC insurance said the limit had been set at \$4,500, and while no one is nearing that cap right now, an unexpected medical procedure could get up there.

"You're at \$4,500," he said, "and you can run \$4,500 in a heartbeat."

The council also voted to continue its copayments with Blue Cross and Blue Shield on any plan at 70 percent of the \$1,000 deductible on employee medical and hospitalization insurance. Armstrong said continuing the same copayment for employees would not affect the budget either way.

• The council discussed a 1.5 percent cost-of-living increase for full-time city employees that had been brought up during the budget process. Armstrong said the council asked the city staff to budget for an increase, but with the bad economy, postponed a vote.

The council did not vote on the issue at Monday's meeting, which, Armstrong said, effectively turned down the increase.

Councilman Fred Taylor brought up merit increases. Once city employees reach \$50,000, they can no longer qualify for merit increases each year. Taylor said there are only a few so far who are at the cap, but eventually most would be. Taylor said he was concerned that the cap - which was set in 2006 - might not be the right scale anymore.

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A mug full of Christmas cheer



Wayne Woerpel accepted a new coffee mug filled with goodies as a gift from the Senior Progress Center on Thursday. Staff members Sharon Lanning (at right) and Gloria Guard handed out presents to members who had gathered at the center to sample goodies from a holiday table and visit before lunch.

VERA SLOAN/Colby Free Press

Governor looks for shallow cuts

TOPEKA (AP) — Kansas Gov. Mark Parkinson says he doesn't plan to propose deep budget cuts again to avoid a deficit and that he opposes further cuts in school spending.

The Democratic governor confirmed Thursday that he's considering revenue-raising measures to avoid cuts in the 2011 fiscal year. He stopped short of saying he'll propose ending tax exemptions or seek a general tax increase when the Republican-controlled Legislature

convenes Jan. 11.

Parkinson said during an interview that he's hoping a second federal stimulus package now being considered by Congress will ease the state's budget problems. And he hopes the economy will improve more quickly than state revenue forecasters expect.

The governor's comments set up a conflict with many GOP legislators, particularly House conservatives, who believe the state should

continue to cut spending. But Parkinson said cuts this year damaged programs and threatened the state's education system.

"We cannot afford a mediocre school system," Parkinson said. "Our excellence is at risk, and we are drifting toward mediocrity, and mediocrity is not acceptable."

Kansas has had five rounds of spending cuts

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EVAN BARNUM/Colby Free Press

Kate McFadgen (left), from Colembally, New South Wales, experienced at an American tradition at the Gem Lions' annual pancake feed last week with her host mom, Carol Severson. She said the food was good, but the pork sausage was much different from the sheep sausage she's used to eating in Australia. The Lions International exchange student end her stay with the Severson family in Gem on Monday to visit a rural family in Kentucky.

Australian exchange student visits Gem on whirlwind tour

By Vera Sloan

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Kate McFadgen, a Lions International exchange student from Australia, says she had never played in the snow before landing in Gem earlier this month.

McFadgen is from Colembally, New South Wales, Australia, and right now it's summer in the land of "down under."

"I don't think I have ever been this cold," she said, "because it's usually never colder than two to five Celsius (high 30s to low 40s on the U.S. thermometer), and it's probably 20 Celsius (about 68) at home now."

"I'm having the best time of my life. It's like a fairy tale."

The 17-year-old arrived Dec. 5 and is staying at the home of Wallace and Carol Severson, whose daughter Ariel is a Colby High School sophomore.

She said she wanted to come to the U.S. because she was looking for a new experience.

When she flew into Denver, however, she was beginning to think she would never find her host family.

"I was the only one from my group on the flight," she explained. "My phone wouldn't work when I got

to America, and I was beginning to panic because I thought my luggage was lost. I finally just asked some one in the crowd of people if I could use their phone to call my host family."

Her hosts weren't doing any better.

"There were just hordes of people in the airport," said Ariel Severson, McFadgen's host sister, "and we had to stand behind a barrier when people got off the plane. We were expecting to see someone with sandy-colored hair, and wearing gold and purple, the Lions Club colors."

"We couldn't use our phone either, since hers wouldn't work. Her hair was darker than her picture showed, and she was wearing blue and green, the Lions Club colors for New South Wales. But we finally found each other."

"My dad filled out an application to host an international student, and we had only a week's notice that she would be coming," Severson added. "My parents lived in Australia several years ago, when my dad taught school over there, and they were really excited when we learned we would be hosting a student from Australia."

McFadgen's said her hometown is in an agricultural region, so it's not a lot different from here. It

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Briefly

County offering H1N1 flu shots

The Thomas County Health Department will offer H1N1 flu shots at a clinic from 8:30 to 11:30 a.m. and noon to 4:30 p.m. Wednesday at the department's office, 350 S. Range Ave. This for all county residents. No appointment is needed and there is no charge. For information, call the flu hot line at 460-4599 or the department office at 460-4596.

Church plans pageant rerun

The Mingo Bible Church will hold a Christmas pageant at 9:30 a.m. Sunday at the church, revisiting a slide show it produced two decades ago. Everyone is invited, especially those who will recognize their (much younger) selves in the slides. Refreshments will be served. For information, call Pastor Tom Peyton at 462-2930 or Roxy Wilson at 443-0362.

Bible, lunch merge for Advent

The Thomas County Ministerial Association will hold its final "Advent Brown Bags and Bible" session from noon to 12:50 p.m. Wednesday in the Fellowship Hall of the Colby Presbyterian Church, 515 W. Fourth St. The theme is "Joy to the World." Larry Booth will speak. Everyone is welcome. Bring a sack lunch; dessert and beverage will be provided. For information, call 462-6342.

Library plans long weekend off

The Pioneer Memorial Library will be closed four days for Christmas, from Thursday to Sunday, Dec. 24 to Dec. 27. For information, call the library at 460-4470.

Want to be a Master Gardener?

It's time to sign up for Master Gardener Training to

be held in Colby in February and March. The deadline is Thursday and the cost is \$90. For information or to register, contact the Thomas County Extension office at 460-4582.

City trash schedule to change

The Colby Sanitation Department will have the day off Thursday and next Friday for Christmas. Thursday's trash route will be picked up Wednesday, said Public Works Manager Chris Bieker, and next Friday's route will be picked up Saturday, Dec. 26. People on these routes should have their trash on the curb by 8 a.m. For information, call Public Works at 460-4420.

Fatherhood program to start soon

The Northwest Kansas Regional Prevention Center's "24/7 Dad" fatherhood program will be offered

again starting at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 5, at the First Presbyterian Church in Colby. For information, call the center at 460-8177.

Hospital plans birthing classes

Citizens Medical Center will hold a four-week series of childbirth education classes from 7 to 10 p.m. Thursdays beginning Jan. 7 for women due to deliver before May. The partner who will be with the mother during labor should attend. Classes will be held on the hospital campus. The next classes will begin April 1. For information or to register, call Jeanene Brown in the Education Department at (785) 460-4850.



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