



COLBY FREE PRESS

75¢

Wednesday

March 17, 2010
Volume 121, Number 42
Serving Thomas County since 1888

10 pages

Bid sparks geothermal proposals

By Vera Sloan
Colby Free Press
vsloan@nwkansas.com

Since Tatro Plumbing of Garden City paid a visit to the Thomas County commissioners last week with a proposal to use geothermal energy to heat and cool the courthouse, two more companies have stepped forward to express interest in the idea.

Chad Briney of C and B Heating, Air Conditioning and Plumbing, Colby, and PM Contracting Inc. out of Hays and Kansas City both contacted the county, the commissioners learned at their meeting Monday.

"I think the best thing we can do right now is to contact all interested bidders and meet with them ... to go through the system we have now," said Commissioner Paul Steele. "That way, we should be able to plan on the last meeting in March to make a decision as to which direction will be best for the

county, to determine if we want to upgrade what we have now, or if we'll look at grants to help with a geothermal system."

Commissioner Byron Sowers said he didn't want to commit to anything they didn't have the money for, but favored looking at the grant situation and at what money the county has earmarked for the project.

"If we already have \$190,000 and can get a grant for 25 percent of the cost of the project," he said, "we still won't have enough right now if we're talking about a half-million-dollar project. It's going to be hard for me to make a decision if we don't have an idea where we're going to get the rest of the money."

The half million figure was a ballpark estimate thrown out by Tatro's representative if the commissioners chose have all work being done by the Garden City

See "HEAT," Page 3

History project needs your story

By Kevin Bottrell
Colby Free Press
kbottrell@nwkansas.com

Whether they have lived here for one year or 80, every resident of Thomas County has a story to tell, and the Thomas County 125th Anniversary Committee wants them all.

The committee is asking county residents to submit short essays and photos. The essays will be archived at the museum, then put on display for the 125th Anniversary celebration on Oct. 9. They eventually will be collected and published in a book.

The committee is looking for

500-word stories with one or two photos submitted both in print and on disk. Help is available at the library and museum for those who don't own a computer or can't make CDs.

Each essay should include a registration form, which gives the library, museum and historical society permission to use and publish the stories.

Brochures with about the program are in today's Colby Free Press. The registration packets are available at the Pioneer Memorial Library, Prairie Museum of Art and History, Colby/Thomas

See "STORY," Page 3



KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

City builds up new concrete under old grate

Jerry Reitcheck (above, left) got a thumbs up Friday from Josh Allen, Kevin Helus and Steven Samuelson when the concrete saw sputtered, then started in the cold morning air on Fifth Street west of Franklin Avenue. For the street crew, it was like "same song, second verse" when they started removing part of the concrete they had laid down in January, following a break in a water main that flooded the Colby Free Press offices. On Monday, Ron Kogler and Josh Allen (right) took advantage of the weather change while they finished up repairs to a collapsing storm drain that was the root of the most recent problem. The crew rebuild the catch basin and replaced the paving around it.



VERA SLOAN/Colby Free Press

House members delay tax-increase debate

By John Milburn
Associated Press Writer

TOPEKA — House members put off a debate Tuesday on tax policy, saying it's too early to determine how much more money they need to run state government next year.

Democrats and moderate Republicans pushed for the delay, saying forcing votes on raising the sales tax to pay for schools and social services was little more than "gotcha politics" by House conservatives.

"The people of Kansas deserve better than what we are doing today," said Assistant Minority Leader Jim Ward, a Wichita Democrat.

The vote was 64-57 to delay the debate until May 3, a week after legislators end their traditional spring break and three weeks after the latest revenue estimate for 2011 will be

released.

Republicans said they couldn't write a responsible budget that didn't include cuts in education and other programs without knowing how much money they'll have. Legislative staff are projecting a \$467 million gap between revenues and required expenditures for the fiscal year beginning July 1.

"This is not gotcha politics. This is about knowing how much to spend," said Rep. Peggy Mast, an Emporia Republican. "We are ready to cut, if necessary, down to the bone. I don't want to postpone this agony any longer than necessary."

Gov. Mark Parkinson agreed with the decision to put off the debate until after April 16, when economists release the new outlook.

"It would make no sense for the House to vote for a tax increase today," Parkinson said. "It makes a lot more sense to wait and see ex-

actly what the revenue hole is until we decide what taxes we need to raise, because no one wants to raise more taxes than we need to."

Parkinson spoke to a crowd of about 1,000 people on the east steps of the Statehouse in favor of raising taxes to prevent further cuts in school spending. They chanted "S-O-S! Save our schools!"

"We're standing here today to say enough is enough," said Noah Slay, a third-grade teacher from Berryton Elementary School south of Topeka, who helped organize the event. "We cannot solve this crisis with more cuts."

The House debate was over a bill that would raise about \$170 million by ending sales tax exemptions for churches, veterans groups and utilities.

See "BUDGET," Page 3

Governor names new secretary of state

By Kevin Bottrell
Colby Free Press
vsloan@nwkansas.com

In a small ceremony Tuesday morning, Kansas welcomed its new secretary of state, Chris Biggs of Geary County.

Biggs, 51, will replace Ron Thornburgh, who resigned four weeks ago to take a position in the private sector. Biggs, a Democrat, has served as the state securities commissioner since 2003 and is a former Geary County attorney. He was the 2002 Democratic nominee for attorney general and ran against Thornburgh for secretary

of state in the last election.

Parkinson said he picked Biggs for three reasons: his experience as a 20-year public servant, his reputation — Parkinson said Biggs was well respected as a county attorney — and that he has the same vision for government that Parkinson has: working hard as an administrator and less as a politician.

After being sworn in, Biggs thanked the governor, saying he is looking forward to the opportunity. He said he would take the rest of the day to meet the staff.

Biggs said he sought the posi-

See "STATE," Page 3

Briefly

Gospel quartet to sing Thursday

The Blackwood Brothers, a southern gospel quartet, will give a free concert at 7:30 p.m. Thursday in the Frahm Theater at Colby Community College. Colby musician Rachel Myers will be the opening act. Donations will be accepted. For information, call Shannon Myers at 443-2102.

Pizza sales to help Red Cross

Hungry for pizza? Order any regularly priced menu item at Pizza Hut on Tuesday and 20 percent of the proceeds will be donated to the Northwest Kansas Red Cross. For information, call Sherry White at 462-7161.

Smoky Hills board coming here

The board of Smoky Hills Public Television will meet at 1 p.m. Thursday at the Thomas County office

complex, 250 S. Range. The board travels around the western part of the state to make it easier for members to attend. The public is invited to sit in. For information, call (785) 483-6990.

Grant deadline March 31

The Thomas County Community Foundation is taking grant applications for the first quarter. Public Relations Coordinator Christina Schmid said proposals can be for any type of project, as long as it is not to benefit an individual, political activity or operating expenses. Nonprofit organizations, public agencies and religious institutions may apply. The deadline is next Wednesday. For information or applications, call (785) 460-9152.

Barbershop event March 27

The Colby Tumbleweed Barbershop Chorus will

perform two shows at 3:30 and 7:30 p.m. Saturday, March 27, in the Frahm Theater at Colby Community College. The show will include the Acoustix quartet and the Prairie Rose Harmony ladies' chorus. For information, call Tom McNutt at 462-2936.

Swim Club plans April event

The Colby Swim Club will hold a parent meeting and fun swim at 4 p.m. Sunday, April 11, in room 809 of the Health Science Building at Colby Community College. The fun swim will follow at the college pool. For information, call Sondra Finley at 460-2955.

Low-income tax help at library

The American Association of Retired Persons is offering offer a tax-help seminar from 1:30 to 4 p.m. every Thursday until April 15 at the Pioneer Memo-

rial Library. The seminar is designed for low- and middle-income people with special emphasis on those 60 or older. For information, call Alvin Volk at (785) 460-2645.

Head Start taking applications

Thomas County Head Start preschool is accepting applications for 3- and 4-year-old children. The program takes applications all year, but children must be 3 by Sept. 1 to start class in the fall. Tuition is free. To apply, call 460-6067.

