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Board to hold hearing on academy closing

By Kevin Bottrell

Colby Free Press
kbottrell@nwkansan.com

The Colby School District has scheduled a public hearing on closing the Thomas County Academy for the last two weeks of April. The date of the meeting will be decided at tonight's school board meeting.

The school board and administration discussed closing the academy for several years before making the final decision to

close the school in 2009. The district has been phasing out the academy for two years, cutting the teaching position to half time and limiting enrollment to eighth graders this school year.

The academy was partially funded by states grants, which began to dry up two years ago with the state's budget crisis. In 2008, the estimated cost to run the academy was about \$185,000 a year.

Principal Diana Wieland said that, despite the impending closure, she feels the academy has been a positive thing for the

district.

"We've been very successful," she said. "We've gained a lot and we've learned a lot."

Wieland said she, Colby Middle School Principal Rob Ross and then-superintendent Kirk Nielsen began the academy after attending/holding some summer workshops in 2003. Wieland said they decided they wanted some kind of alternative learning environment for kids who might not do well in regular classrooms.

"We wanted to have a pilot or a lab

school like they do at colleges to try some things before you disrupt all the students," she said.

Wieland said there were start-up grants available from the state education department for equipment and staff. Her first application was unsuccessful, but a second application got a planning grant from the state for \$7,500.

"We did scenario building," she said. "We looked at what kinds of things we wanted."

Wieland said she and her planning

committee had a year to design their charter school. They visited several others in Kansas and Colorado to generate ideas, including the Pleasant View Academy in Hutchinson and the Eagle Rock School in Estes Park, Colo. Wieland said these schools provided a lot of good ideas.

The district hired teacher Kristin Eberle and assistant Pat Terrell, a retired Colby teacher, to staff the school, which saw its first class in the fall of 2005. Wieland

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Combines in a row



KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

Just in time for spring, drivers on Horton Avenue this past week have been treated to an impressive display of John Deere combines in the field next to Colby Implement. Together, these combines could be worth as much as \$5 million.

House passes health care bill

WASHINGTON (AP) — Summoned to success by President Barack Obama, the Democratic-controlled Congress approved historic legislation Sunday night extending health care to tens of millions of uninsured Americans and cracking down on insurance company abuses, a climactic chapter in the century-long quest for near universal coverage.

"This is what change looks like," Obama said a few moments later in televised remarks that stirred memories of his 2008 campaign promise of "change we can believe in."

Widely viewed as dead two months ago, the Senate-passed bill cleared the House on a 219-212 vote. Republicans were unanimous in opposition, joined by 34 dissident Democrats.

A second, smaller measure — making changes in the first — cleared the House shortly before midnight and was sent to the Senate, where Democratic leaders said they had the votes necessary to pass it quickly. The vote was 220-211.

Sen. John McCain said today

that Democrats who championed the historic health care bill that passed the House haven't heard the last of the issue, predicting reprisals at the polls and in the courts.

The Arizona Republican declared that Republicans "will challenge it every place we can," and called the measure, approved on a 219-212 vote, "terribly wrong for America." He said he was repulsed by "all this euphoria going on" and argued that "outside the Beltway, the American people are very angry. They don't like it and we're going to repeal this."

Kansas Rep. Jerry Moran released a statement today announcing new legislation to repeal the health care bill.

"Americans want health care reform that improves our current system and reduces costs," Moran said. "The bill that passed the House yesterday fails on both accounts — instead, it will jeopardize Kansans' access to care, stifle businesses with job-killing tax hikes, increase our national deficit,

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Bike Across Kansas tour to stop overnight in Colby

By Vera Sloan

Colby Free Press
vsloan@nwkansan.com

As of Thursday, there are 749 people signed up for the annual Bike Across Kansas tour. It's a rain or shine ride, and is strictly a social event with the main goal of having fun, exercise and experiencing the beauty of the Kansas landscape and people.

The first all-night stop in the eight-day ride is slated for Colby, where riders will be camped on the

Colby Community College campus. First Presbyterian Church will be serving sundaes and banana splits on the church lawn at 515 West Fourth St. in the late afternoon.

"This will be happening the same week-end as the Chautauqua," said Lelani Thomas of the Colby Convention and Tourism office, so it will be a very busy and exciting time."

Many of the riders will be from Kansas, but entries

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Senior centers worried by cuts

By Vera Sloan

Colby Free Press
vsloan@nwkansan.com

An urgent call is going out to all senior centers to contact their state legislators regarding state budget cuts to senior programs.

"The biggest area to be affected by cuts would be the meal sites," said Rosalie Seemann, Colby, a committee member of the Area Agency on Aging, Hays division.

"It will take away over \$2 mil-

lion dollars a year for food for many people who get only that one good meal a day," said agency Executive Director Greg Hoover.

For the three months, Dec. through Feb., the Colby site served 1,530 meals at the Progress Center and delivered 1,197 meals to the home bound.

Seeman stressed that without calls, letters and/or e-mails there will be little or no state funding for the Senior Care Act, the nutrition programs at senior centers, and no

re-instatement of the ten percent Medicaid payment reduction.

"Right now, it looks like plans are for the state to cut \$8.6 million for this most needed service," she added.

Seemann said the Senior Care Act helps seniors to stay in their homes and out of nursing homes. The state-funded Senior Care Act and Meals services are "family friendly," and are essential in

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TOM BETZ/Goodland Star-News

Kansas Army National Guard Adjutant General Tod Bunting (right) presided over a small ceremony Thursday turning over the Goodland armory to the city government. Soldiers who used to train at the Goodland armory will now be coming to Colby.

Goodland Guard armory closes

By Tom Betz

The Goodland Star-News
nt.betz@nwkansan.com

A group of about 40 people gathered at the National Guard armory Thursday afternoon for a short ceremony to turn the keys over to the city and end 25 years of guard service to the town.

Among the group was a contingent of Kansas

guardsmen lead by Maj. Gen. Tod Bunting, state adjutant general, and included several former members of the Goodland detachment of the 170th Maintenance Company. Lt. Col. Greg Salisbury was present, and said he was the first detachment commander when the Goodland unit was formed in October 1985.

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Briefly

County office close for lunch

Because employees will be training for a yearlong conversion to new computer software, the Thomas County treasurer, clerk and Bridge offices will close for the noon hour this week. County Clerk Shelly Harms said these departments will continue to do business during normal business hours. For information, call the clerk's office at 460-4500

Series highlights Lent season

The Thomas County Ministerial Association is offering *Lenten Brown Bags and Bibles* programs at noon each Wednesday throughout Lent with the theme, "The Prodigal Son." Speakers will be Larry Booth Wednesday and Jarrod Spencer, Church of Christ, March 31. Come to the Fellowship Hall of the First Presbyterian Church, 545 W. Fourth St. Bring your own lunch; beverage and dessert will be

provided. Call 462-6342 for information.

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.

Enroll at Puddle Duck April 1

Puddle Duck Preschool will hold an enrollment open house for the 2010-2011 school year from 4 to 6 p.m. Thursday, April 1, at the school, 520 W. Fifth St. Children ages 3 to 5 from all denominations are welcome. For information, call Amy Jennings at 460-2603.

Childbirth classes start soon

Citizens Medical Center will hold a four-week

series of childbirth education classes from 7 to 10 p.m. beginning Thursday, April 1 at the hospital and continuing on April 8, 15 and 22. Expectant mothers in their last trimester or who are due before August, 2010, and labor support partners are encouraged to attend. For information, call Jeanene Brown in the hospital's education department at (785) 460-4850.

Scholarship deadline extended

The Thomas County Community Foundation has extended the scholarship application deadline to Monday, April 5. The foundation has numerous scholarships available for area high school and college students. For information, go to www.thomascountycommunityfoundation.com or call Executive Director Melinda Olson at 460-9152.

Barbershop event Saturday

The Colby Tumbleweed Barbershop Chorus will

perform two shows at 3:30 and 7:30 p.m. Saturday 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 meeting

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.



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