



A new water meter for the trees



VERA SLOAN/Colby Free Press

A city crew was busy digging to reach a water line on Tuesday morning to install a meter for the South Range Tree Project, rushing to beat rain expected in the afternoon. Their timing

was perfect, because they got the meter set before the day was over. By afternoon, rain water was standing in ditches near the new meter.

City rejects Embark loan at meeting

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The Colby City Council voted unanimously Tuesday to deny Embark Health, the end-of-life services company with a call center here, a \$100,000 loan after hearing from citizens opposed to the loan.
'The council took directions from the citizens,' said Mayor Ken Bieber.
Councilmen Patrick Mallory estimated 100 to 120 people jammed the Little Theater, downstairs in the Community Building, where the council had moved the meeting after hearing a lot of comment on the loan request. Normally, only a few city employees and a reporter attend council meetings, along with those who have business on the agenda.
Comments at the hearing on the loan were uniformly against

changing the way the city uses economic development tax money or making the loan to Embark. The firm had asked for money to help with cash flow, executives said, after council members suggested that could be done.
Thomas County farmer Bill Miller said he thought the \$483,899 the city had given to Embark as a loan could have been better spent if it had been doled out to 48 businesses in Colby.
Kris Cameron, who works at Bankwest, asked what kind of criteria were in place to determine what businesses the city should give money to.
Bieber said the city tries to lend money to businesses that have the potential to create new jobs here. Councilmen Tim Hutfles said if the \$100,000 is approved, it would go towards covering Embark's payroll and utility costs in Colby.

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District gets \$125,000 for middle school computers

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Students at Colby Middle School next year will have a lot more technology to play with, thanks to a \$125,000 grant from the Kansas Department of Education.
The Colby School Board accepted a 'Technology-Rich Classrooms' grant for at its meeting Monday. The district will

get 48 laptop computers, plus interactive whiteboards, projectors for classroom display, digital cameras and iTouch mobile devices.
Curriculum Director Diana Wieland said this would mean one laptop for every two students in four classes and one for each teacher, in addition to the other equipment.
Wieland said four classrooms in grades six, seven and eight will get the equip-

ment. The grant includes money for training so the teachers can help the students use the new gear.
Wieland said the district had to invest \$50,000, but did so with 'in-kind' contributions, money that the district has already budgeted such as staff development, tech support or staff hours that met the grant requirements. This way, she said, they provided the \$50,000 without having to actually spend extra money.

Superintendent Terrell Harrison gave the board an update on the state Legislature. The session is in recess until April 28, she said, and legislators are waiting on April revenue estimates before they decide on a budget. Until then, schools won't know how much they'll have to spend next year.
'It's still just a waiting game for us,' she said.
One bit of good news, Harrison said, is

that the state's March tax revenues showed a slight increase over projections.
Harrison said there are several bills she is watching. One (SB-362) would move the date by which the district has to notify teachers or administrators that their contracts aren't being renewed several weeks later in the year. Currently, districts have to notify by May 1 and employees have

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Class of '61 keeps in touch with round-robin letter writing

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To keep a round-robin letter going for 44 years may not be a record, but it's probably a whole lot better than a good average.
After the first Colby High School reunion in 1969, several young women from the class of 1961 decided they wanted to keep in touch more often than once every five years, and the best way to do it would be to write letters and send them around to each one, so the round-robin style of communication caught on.
'In the first few years, the content of the letters centered around jobs, then hobbies, then kids,' said Sara Jane (Munday) Barrett. 'Now, 44 years later, the things we write about has changed to grandkids, travels and illnesses. The first letters were all hand written,' she said, 'and now the majority of them are written on the computer.'
Through the years, there have been various careers, ranging from homemaker to a nurse with

a tour of duty in Vietnam, to artist, to investment broker, and various others.
'Now I guess we're all just desperate housewives,' said Kookie (Neff) Koenig with a chuckle.
'I remember graduation like it was yesterday,' Koenig said. 'I sat next to Sarah Jane at graduation and she was crying her eyes out. When I asked her what in the world she was crying about, she told me she didn't want to see all her friends break up and leave. I told her I couldn't wait to get the heck out of there and leave Mr. Pechin (the American government teacher) in the dust!'
They chuckled and agreed he probably left them in the dust, because he is tooling around somewhere out in Colorado and they're still here.
Although this is only graduation anniversary number 49, the class is going to pretend it's No. 50 so that they don't have to make the effort get everybody together next year, the women said. They said it would seem like having their 50th without being a year older.
Last week, the two got together

at Barrett's home to open the latest packet of round-robin letters with pictures and news of their friends through the last year. They said once they receive the packet and have read all the letters, they've had lots to laugh about and sometimes there is even reason for tears. Then they take out their old letter that has made the rounds back to them, and write a new one and send it with all the rest to the next one on the list.
'We lost track of the letter one time and it was three years before we figured out who had it last,' Barrett said, 'so right now, we're sort of building for this years reunion, and we want a newspaper article to be included in the letter, so that means I'm needing to get busy and write a letter and get it in the mail so it gets all the way around before the reunion.'
She and Koenig are near the bottom of the list, she added, so it looks like they'll make the deadline in plenty of time before the class of '61 gets together for the thier 50th reunion one year early at the All School Reunion in June.



VERA SLOAN/Colby Free Press

Sarah Jane Barrett (left) and Kookie Koenig, members of the Colby High class of 1961, had to rack their brains a little in trying to figure out who was who when they looked over a 1960 photo of the girls' choir. The pair got together last week to share a few memories, read letters from friends and talk about this year's school reunion.

Briefly

Clouds delay tornado siren test
Due to the overcast skies and the chance of thunderstorms Monday, Thomas County Emergency Management postponed the monthly tornado drill. Tornado sirens will be tested again at noon Monday. Sirens are normally tested the first Monday of every month. For information, call Director Susan McManahan at 460-4516.
City to start grass clipping route
The Colby Public Works Department will begin picking up grass clippings on Monday, April 26, said Public Works Secretary Anita Powell. Clippings must be at curbside by 8 a.m. on your regular trash day, in a separate tipper can from your household trash. Clippings should be placed in the tipper can loose, without plastic bags. For information, call the department at 460-4420.

Landfill goes to summer hours
The Thomas County Landfill has changed to summer hours. It will be open from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday and 1 to 4 p.m. Sunday. For information, call 462-8139.
Win a vacation from Heartland
Heartland Christian School will hold a rock-paper-scissors tournament at 10 a.m., Saturday at the school. Tickets are \$20 per ticket or six for \$100. First prize is a five-day, four-night trip to Mexico. For information, call the school at 460-6419.
Sheriff to hold big auction
The Thomas County Sheriff's Office will hold an auction at 10 a.m. Saturday at the Law Enforcement Center on Court Avenue. For information, call the

sheriff's office at 460-4570.
Church to hold conference
The Rexford Community Church will hold its annual mission conference at the church Saturday and Sunday at the church. The theme is 'Let the 'Son' Shine in 2010.' For information, call Rex Carswell at (785) 687-4361.
Swim Club to meet Sunday
The Colby Swim Club will hold a parent meeting and fun swim at 4 p.m. Sunday in room 809 of the Health Science Building at Colby Community College. The swim will follow at the college pool. For information, call Sondra Finley at 460-2955.
Commodity distribution Monday
U.S. Department of Agriculture surplus commodi-

ties will be distributed from 1 to 2 p.m. Monday at the Retired Senior Volunteer Program office in the Senior Progress Center. For information, call 462-6744.
Kindergarten screenings coming
The Northwest Kansas Educational Service Center and the Colby School District will hold kindergarten screenings from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday and Tuesday at the Colby United Methodist Church. Parents of next year's kindergartners are encouraged to take advantage of the screenings, which include speech, sight, hearing and learning tests. For information, call school nurse Amy Hutfles, 460-5111.

