



College may face \$260,000 shortfall

By Andy Heintz
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Alan Waites, vice president of student affairs, told the Colby Community College board Monday that the school is on course to have a \$260,000 shortfall in revenue this year because of a decline in income from student tuition and fees.

creased by 1.5 percent compared to the previous summer, fall hours were down 9.6 percent at the beginning of the semester and eight weeks later, credit hours still were down 2 percent.

Waites said, based on data from the past years, the college had estimated it would have 20,000 credit hours sold by now, but they have only 18,144 thus far. He said the board needed to come up with a plan to address the shortage moving into the next budget year.

If retention of students from fall to

spring doesn't stay as strong as its been, Waites said, the revenue shortage will worsen.

Waites said the college has \$8.6 million - or 68 percent - left to spend in the 2010-2011 budget. If spending stays constant for the rest of the year, the institution will end up spending about \$100,000 below the budget.

Waites did say the fear that cash flow might be too low to cover payroll in November and December has been solved.

"Declining revenue created additional

challenges to meeting payroll in November and December," he said, "but the administration worked through the issues."

Interim President Max Heim underlined the serious nature of the income shortage.

"I believe I told some of the faculty I've been at school budget-making for a long time and I've never been as scared as I was in November and December to make payroll," the president said. "It was that serious."

Heim said he was pleased everyone had

worked together to solve the problem.

In other business, the board:

• Heard Athletic Director Ryan Sturdy report that the men's cross country team finished 11th in the National Junior Athletic Association National championships and freshman Edward Limo took fourth in the meet. He said freshman Erica Rappard, the one member of the women's team who ran at nationals, finished 83rd. He said that was ahead of half the runners

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Celebrating Thanksgiving



KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

Colby Grade School student Kaitlyn Nelson read part of a poem on Thanksgiving food before her fellow students broke out in song about the glories of mashed potatoes at the third grade's fall concert Tuesday.

School finance a bleak picture

By John Milburn
The Associated Press

TOPEKA - Kansas school districts might have to consider cutting budgets for the current year as state revenues slowly recover, education officials said Wednesday.

Officials estimate as much as \$75 million is needed in the current budget to pay for growing numbers of students, and more of those students need help because of the economy, stretching the state's school money.

Kathy Cook, executive director of the group Kansas Families for Education, said districts will have to consider reducing staff or programs or even closing schools.

"That's the quickest way to save the most money if they don't appropriate the supplemental aid and find something to fill the hole with the loss of stimulus dollars," Cook said.

State revenues are improving in part because of a 1 cent increase in the state sales tax passed this year, but the growth isn't raising enough to keep pace with spending. New projections from economists and state researchers show a gap of as much as \$500 million in the 2012 Kansas budget, which starts in July.

Senate Ways and Means Com-

mittee Chairman Jay Emler, a Lindsborg Republican who's serving on Republican Gov.-elect Sam Brownback's transition team, said the committee hasn't made any decisions about the budget.

But he said there's no appetite for a tax increase after last year's.

"I have a great deal of difficulty figuring out where we're going to get the money to replace the (federal) stimulus dollars," Emler said.

According to statistics prepared by the Kansas Department of Education, districts have some 816 fewer certified staff this fall, including 653 fewer teachers. As many as 844 support staff, including teacher aides and administrative workers, were cut.

Kansas received \$92 million in federal money to use for schools this year, said deputy Commissioner of Education Dale Dennis, but how the money will be distributed won't be known until legislators return in January.

Another question is whether Brownback and the large GOP majorities in the Legislature find ways to replace close to \$200 million in federal money that expires at the end of June. Absent new state dollars, schools could see state aid cut from the current \$4,012 per student by as much as \$300 per child.

Extension agents show citizens ways to better life

Ag agent helps 4-Hers and wheat farmers

By Vera Sloan
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Kansas State Extension and Research is more than cows and cookies. And if you don't believe it, try following Thomas County agents Diann Gerstner and Clint Milliman around.

Gerstner is the family and consumer sciences agent while Milliman handles agriculture and natural resources. The two work with and for people here, helping them to improve their "knowledge for life" through education based on research.

The co-operative extension program, involving the state and federal government and the county,

is made possible through K-State being a land-grant college. The Hatch Act of 1887 and the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 provided federal money to establish experiment farms and extension services under the control of land-grant colleges. K-State once operated extension offices in all 105 Kansas counties, though some of these have been consolidated into districts. Thomas County still stands on its own.

Milliman said he grew up on a farm near Newton, Ill., and attended the University of Southern Illinois in Carbondale. He came to western Kansas to be the county agent in Osborne County. He married Jessica, a girl from his home state he met in college, but only after both

arrived in Kansas.

Milliman said he learned she was the family and consumer sciences agent in Sheridan County, and they got re-acquainted, later married, and lived in Sheridan County. When the job for an agent came open in Thomas County, he took it to shorten his commute. They still live north of Hoxie.

One of the many things he does for the biggest wheat-producing county in the state and the nation. Milliman says, is to help plan and operate the county wheat demonstration plot. This is a great way for farmers to get information on seed varieties that work well in this area, he said, which ones resist diseases and which ones can take a drought.

Milliman also keeps farmers

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Family agent fights against radon exposure

By Vera Sloan
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If you think being what has been commonly referred to as a home economist agent is only about teaching 4-Hers how to cook and sew, then you'll need to think again.

Diann Gerstner wears that hat for Thomas County, and her job never seems to let up.

She grew up on a farm at Elkhart, way down in southwest Kansas, and went to school at Kansas State University, earning a degree in home economics education. She came to Thomas County right out of college when she was 22 to be an Extension agent.

She said it was here three years before she met Chris Gerstner, a Colby native. They married in the Methodist Church, and have four children.

Her big push this year, she said, has been to encourage testing for radioactive radon gas for every home in the county.

"In Kansas, as many as one in four homes have elevated indoor radon levels," Gerstner said, "and it is ranked as the second-leading cause of lung cancer."

In her quest to get all homes here tested, she said, she managed to have 67 tests taken in 2008, and the results revealed that nearly half measured at 4 picocuries per liter or greater, a level that is considered a health risk.

She said the only way to know if your home has a radon problem is to test the air, because radon levels can't be predicted. She said she had some success at getting test kits out because she didn't give up. She said that after repeated requests to the state, she was allowed to have a table in the front lobby at the Colby Better Home and Living Show.

"It worked great," Gerstner said, "and I sold 45 kits and could have sold more if we'd have had them available."

She said after having information at another event, word began to spread and people continue to trickle into the office buy the kits. Compared to last year's sale of seven, she said, this year she sold 77. The kits are only \$5, and 84

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Briefly

Food bank needs donations

The Genesis-Thomas County food bank needs nonperishable items to fill its Christmas baskets. Donations can be dropped off at the Genesis office, 350 S. Range Ave., Suite 13, from 10 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m. Wednesdays; Leroy's Printing, 560 N. Franklin Ave.; Sacred Heart Catholic Church, 1065 W. Fifth St.; the First Presbyterian Church, 515 W. Fourth St.; the Colby United Methodist Church, 950 S. Franklin Ave.; or Trinity Lutheran Church, 855 E. Fifth St. Genesis also needs money to help buy food. Donations are being accepted now as well as after Christmas to restock the pantry. For information, call 460-7930.

Church plans Thanksgiving feast

The Colby United Methodist Church will put on its annual Thanksgiving dinner from 11:30 to 1 p.m. Sunday at the church. Donations will be accepted to

help the church's missions and ministries. For information, call the church office at 460-2761.

Pets available for adoption

Looking for a pet? The Colby Animal Clinic has a neutered 7- to 8-month-old black male pug available for adoption. Lost or strayed animals are often brought to the clinic. Call or stop by 810 E. Fourth St. All animals have current shots, and costs are minimal. For questions, call 460-8621.

City to measure home water use

If you need to water the garden or wash the car, it'd be wise to do it right away. The City of Colby will read water meters by Friday. Water use from then through Feb. 21 will be used to calculate sewer charges for the year beginning April 1. Any outdoor or excessive use during that time may affect your bill. For information, call City Hall at 460-4400.

Area writers coming to museum

Kansas authors will be on hand to chat and sell autographed books from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. Saturday at the Prairie Museum of Art and History. Area writers Ray Imhof, Larry Dilts, Jim Oliver, Nancy Sanders, Millie Horlacher and Gary Adrian will join out-of-town writers Evelyn Ward, Helene Landenberger, Angela Bates, Doris Johnson and others. Each has agreed to donate 20 percent of their book sales that day to the museum. Refreshments will be served. For information, call the museum at 460-4590, or e-mail museumed@st-tel.net.

Ministers plan citywide service

The Thomas County Ministerial Association will hold a community Thanksgiving service at 6 p.m. Sunday in the Colby High School auditorium. Tom Peyton, pastor of the Mingo Bible Church, will speak. Donations will be taken for the association's

benevolent fund. For information, call Jarrod Spencer at 443-2403.

License offices to close at noon

The Colby driver's license office will close at noon Wednesday when the Kansas Department of Revenue in Topeka closes down the computer system - used by satellite offices when issuing licenses or identification cards - for maintenance. License service at the county treasurer's office also will be suspended. Both offices will be closed Thanksgiving Day and the Friday after, and will resume a normal schedule on Monday, Nov. 29.

