



# Small fire mystifies Colby firefighters



KATHRYN BALLARD/Colby Free Press

A Colby firefighter feels along the roof of Montana Mike's, looking for hot spots from a small fire that started inside the wall on Monday. The department still does not know what caused the fire.

By Kevin Bottrell

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The Colby Fire Department was perplexed by a small fire inside a wall at Montana Mike's on Monday.

Assistant Fire Chief Sean Hankin said the department hasn't been able to find a cause for the fire, which started inside a wall in the southwest corner of the building. That wall is in a private party dining room, far away from the kitchen.

Hankin said the fire was difficult to investigate because it was inside a one-inch space between the outside brick and the inside wall. The fire was out by the time the firefighters arrived.

There was a crew replacing windows on the building near where the fire started, Hankin said, but they weren't doing anything that would have caused it. Hankin added that no one on the crew smokes, but there were other people in and out of the area that day.

Hankin said it was a good thing the crew was there. Montana Mike's normally closes on Mondays, and if there had been no one there to spot the fire it could have involved the whole room or the building.

Hankin said firefighters took apart some of the inside wall and get a look at where the first started. Although there are some power conduits in the wall, he said, there was no evidence of damage or arcing.

One of the tools the department used to get a look inside the wall is a thermal imaging camera. Hankin said the camera can sense differences in temperature down to a half-degree. Higher temperatures appear lighter and lower temperatures darker.

"We've had that camera for 10 years," he said. "It's been invaluable."

With the camera, the firefighters could see hot spots left over from the fire. They could tell the spots were three feet high and lower on the wall.

Hankin said he also used the old "tried and true" method of feeling the brick wall with his hand.

## State on alert for retaliation

TOPEKA (AP) — State and military installations across Kansas have stepped up security following news of the death of Osama bin Laden in Pakistan.

Gov. Sam Brownback issued a statement saying the state's Homeland Security Office heightened its threat alert, although the governor doesn't say specifically what actions are taken.

The Kansas National Guard says the security threat is elevated because of bin Laden's death. Actions were also taken at Army posts in Kansas, but no specifics were given.

Officials say there are no specific threats to Kansans or military installations, but they urge residents to report any suspicious activities.

## Council approves stage renovations

By Kevin Bottrell

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In two divided votes, the Colby City Council approved bids to replace the floor and bleachers on the stage at the Colby Community Building.

The floor has both water damage and wear and tear from the bleachers. The bleachers themselves are old and have no safety railings. At the end of the budget year, the city will have saved \$75,000 for improving the community building.

The council voted 4-3-1 to approve Northwest Decorating to install a new hardwood floor on the stage. Councilmen Omar Weber, Stan Schmidt, Pat Mallory and Fred Taylor voted in favor; Council President Dave Voss and Councilmen Mark Beringer and Tim Hutfles voted against; Councilman Mike Hake was absent.

Hutfles questioned the need for the improvements, saying he was not opposed to improving the community building, but the old pool — which sits in the community building parking lot — should be given priority. He had been over to look at the stage, and said that while it needs work, it is not pressing.

"I don't think the stage warrants this measure at this time,"

he said.

The council could move the money and use it to tear down the old pool. He said he did not want to see the city leave an unsightly hole in the ground for years and never do anything about it.

City Manager Carolyn Armstrong asked Hutfles why he hadn't brought that idea to her. Hutfles said the thought had just occurred to him during the week. He was too busy working during the day but wanted to bring up the idea for discussion at the meeting.

Beringer disagreed with Hutfles. He cited a study that the city had done in 2002-2003 that found the stage would be needing repairs. At the time the city began setting aside the money, he said, and the time to use it is now.

"If we don't stay with our plans, we end up with a town with no maintenance done," he said.

Mallory said he didn't want to spend the \$75,000 anywhere else since the council had been saving it for that purpose. Mayor Gary Adrian said the community building is one of the city's best assets and needs to be kept in good shape.

Armstrong said the city has about \$130,000 left over from the construction of the new pool.

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## A good day for a burn



KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

Smoke from this controlled grass burn east of town could be seen for miles on Tuesday, but just for a few minutes. Landowners took several days to set up the burn so that none of it would escape the prepared area. The burn itself took only 15 or 20 minutes for several hundred acres.

## Dozens of issues to resolve in budget talks

By John Hanna

AP Political Writer

TOPEKA — Kansas legislators negotiating over a \$14 billion budget made progress Tuesday toward resolving differences between the House and the Senate, preserved state funding for arts programs and considered approving additional bonds for State-house renovations.

Three senators and three House members continued talks over the spending plan for the fiscal year beginning July 1. They had three rounds of negotiations on the 82nd day of their annual session, out of 90 scheduled — compared to only

### Deeper cuts voted down

TOPEKA (AP) — A Kansas House committee has rejected proposals from conservatives for fresh budget cuts.

Eudora Republican Anthony Brown pushed the Appropriations Committee on Monday to go beyond the spending cuts already approved by the House.

He wanted to trim an additional \$74 million from the bud-

get for the fiscal year beginning July 1. But the Appropriations Committee voted 14-4 against his plan.

Wichita Republican Gene Suellentrop then offered an amendment to make \$30 million in cuts beyond what the full House has approved. The amendment was voted down 11-9.

one in the previous four days.

Leaders of each chamber's negotiating team said they're pleased

by the movement they saw Tuesday, but they still have dozens of issues to resolve.

The next budget will eliminate a projected shortfall that has approached \$500 million and could leave a small cushion of cash reserves. Overall spending is likely to drop between 5 and 6 percent, or by \$770 million to \$870 million, with much of the decrease reflecting the disappearance of federal economic stimulus funds.

Lawmakers can't wrap up their business for the year until the budget is finished. Republicans control both chambers, and some of them had hoped spending issues would be resolved by the end of the week.

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## Briefly

### College choir to sing Thursday

The Colby Community College concert choir and the Sunflower Singers will hold a spring concert at 7:30 p.m. Thursday in the Northwest Kansas Cultural Arts Center located on the southeast corner of campus. There is no cost for admission. For information, call Dr. Phillip Shuman at 460-5520.

### Get together and pray Thursday

There will be a praise and prayer rally for the National Day of Prayer at 7 p.m. Thursday, May 5, in the Little Theater at the Colby Community Building. Everyone is invited to the rally, which includes prayer time for local, state and national needs. For information, call Karen Merryman at 443-3715.

### Group plans fellowship day

Church Women United will hold May Fellowship Day at noon Friday in the First Presbyterian Church

fellowship hall. Lunch will be provided and donations accepted. For information, call the church at 462-6342.

### City, county clean up week is here

Colby and Thomas County are sponsoring a countywide Cleanup Week from today to Friday. Service clubs will clean parks or public places and city garbage crews will be on hand to handle any extra trash. Trash should be boxed or bagged and placed at the street in front of the property for pickup. Electronic waste should be taken to the recycling center. Anyone who wants to volunteer to help the elderly or infirm should call Anita Powell at 460-4420.

### Meal, auction to benefit family

There will be a pancake feed, bake sale, silent auction and "slave" auction to benefit the family of Dalen Schlageck from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday at

the Veterans of Foreign Wars hall. Money raised will help the family with medical and funeral expenses. Thrivent Chapter Activity will provide a matching donation. For information, call Julie Ross at 443-1811.

### Dance the night away Saturday

There will be a singles and couples dance from 6 to 10 p.m. Saturday at the Meadow Lake Golf Course clubhouse. Craig Stevens will provide music. For information, call Lue Duffey at (785) 269-7057.

### Department to distribute food

The United States Department of Agriculture will distribute extra commodities from 1 to 2 p.m. next Monday at the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program office in the Senior Progress Center. Commodities are given according to income guidelines and distribution is first-come, first-served. Participants are

asked to not arrive before 12:30 p.m. Commodities include cereal, corn, peaches, canned beef, juice and cranberry sauce. For information, call the program office at 462-6744.

### Diabetes class is Tuesday

Citizens Medical Center Inc. will hold a diabetes class, "Continuing Your Journey with Diabetes," at 7 p.m. Tuesday in the Citizens Medical Center conference room. This class is free for a limited time, but registration is required. For information or to register, call Courtney McCarty at 460-1237.

