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Alliance recommends dropping tax

By Kevin Bottrell
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The Thomas County Economic Development Alliance board is recommending the city of Colby allow a quarter-cent sales tax to expire next year.

The tax, first put in place in 2005, brings in about \$23,000 a month that goes into an economic development fund used for big projects. The fund has more than \$1.56 million. The tax is set to end in March, 2012, unless the city council votes to keep it.

"It has finished its job," said board member Larry Barrett. "I think we have enough to take care of our needs and folks need a tax break."

The council can follow the board's recommendation and simply let the tax expire next year, Barrett said, or it can vote to put the tax up for voter approval.

Economic Development Executive Director Rick Patrick isn't in favor of the board's decision. A quarter-cent sales tax is so small that consumers rarely notice it, he

said, and wouldn't see much savings if it were eliminated.

Another downside to letting the tax expire, Patrick said, would be trying to get it back later. Back in 2004, the tax passed by a slim margin, 1,166 to 1,047. By contrast, the 3/4 cent sales tax to pay for the Aquatic Center and fire station passed 896 to 311.

Barrett said he believed the city would pass the tax again if there is a specific project to use it for.

"I think the people would vote for it if there's a specific need," he said.

The fund is not used for salaries or operating costs for the economic development alliance, but rather is designed to be used for big projects to either bring in new businesses or make the town more attractive to businesses. Barrett said the city will be taking \$1 million from the fund to help pay for the airport expansion, money that will be paid back by the Federal Aviation Administration. The fund was also used to help support the failed Embark Health project.

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KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

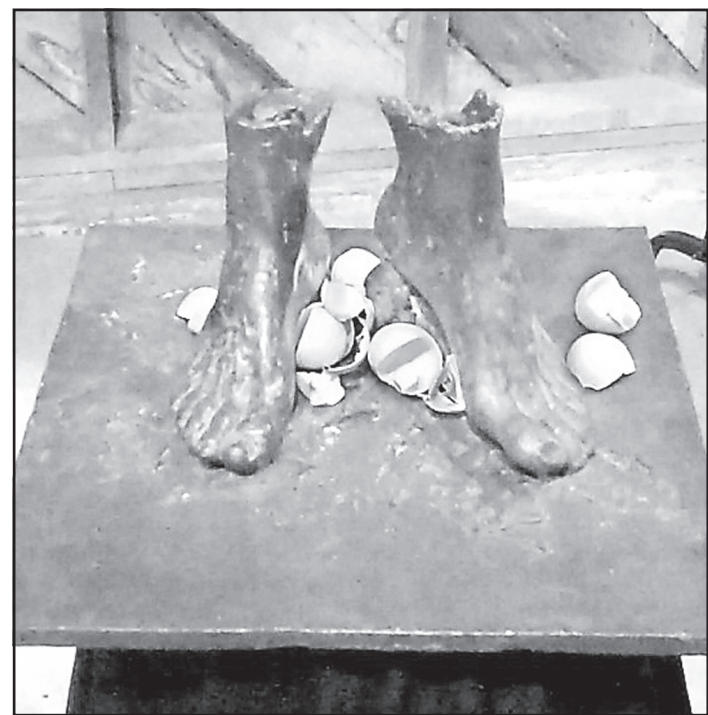
Livestock shows draw big crowds

Taylor Todd (above) showed off her grand champion market lamb to a big crowd of potential buyers at the 4-H livestock auction Thursday night at the Thomas County Fairgrounds. Colton Rundel (left) showed his Angus in the Dairy, Bucket Calf, Breeding and Market Beef show Thursday morning. Justin Schmidt (below) got a ribbon at the 4-H Swine show Wednesday morning. The fair wrapped up this morning with the 4-H Round Robin. The carnival will continue from 7 to 11 p.m. tonight and Saturday. The F&M Insurance Summer Shootout races will also begin at 7 p.m. tonight and Saturday.



SHARON FRIEDLANDER/Colby Free Press

Walking on Eggshells



SHARON FRIEDLANDER/Colby Free Press

"Walking on Eggshells" was just one of several unusual sculptures by Colby artist Rebel Jay on display at her art show Saturday. Jay, an art teacher at Colby Community College, is a mixed-medium artist who often uses recycled materials to create her works.

Region gears up for largest convoy

Special Olympics Kansas is looking for truckers to participate in the fifth annual World's Largest Truck Convoy on Saturday, Sept. 10.

The convoy will have two legs again this year. The east leg will start at Mitten's Travel Plaza in Oakley at 10 a.m. The west leg will start at Wilken's Truck and Trailer in Goodland at 9:45 a.m. (Central Time). The legs will meet up in Colby and parade through downtown, ending up at the Thomas County Fairgrounds for lunch.

To drive in the convoy takes a minimum donation of \$100. A valid driver's license and proof of insurance are required. To register, download and complete a waiver from www.kssso.org/quick-links/worlds-largest-truck-convoy.html and mail it to SOKS, 5280 Foxridge Dr., Mission, Kan., 66202. Walk-up registrations are accepted on the day of the convoy.

There will also be a spaghetti supper at 6:30 p.m. Friday, Sept. 9,

the evening before the convoy, at the Thomas County Fairgrounds. The event will include live music and a fireworks show. Donations will be accepted.

Special Olympics groups put on convoy events around the United States and Canada each year to raise money. Southwest Kansas had its convoy in Cimarron in June, with 37 trucks, 12 motorcycles and 4 classic cars. It raised \$24,000.

Proceeds go to programs for Special Olympics athletes in Kansas, providing medals, ribbons and meals for athletes, training for coaches and equipment.

For information, call Joe and Jane Mentlick at 443-1682, Tom Sloan at (785) 675-8540, Jack Collins at (785) 675-8375, Daryl Goetz at (785) 673-4336, Mike Pipelow (620) 874-4177, and John Hinger (785) 899-5454.

Rural population loss not just a Kansas problem

By Hope Yen
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Rural America now accounts for just 16 percent of the nation's population, the lowest ever.

The latest 2010 census numbers hint at an emerging America where, by midcentury, city boundaries become indistinct and rural areas grow ever less relevant. Many communities could shrink to virtual ghost towns as they shutter businesses and close down schools, demographers say.

More metro areas are booming into sprawling megalopolises. Barring fresh investment that could bring jobs, however, large swaths of the Great Plains and Appalachia, along with parts of Arkansas, Mississippi and North Texas, could face significant population declines.

These places posted some of the biggest losses over the past decade as young adults left and the people who stayed got older, moving past childbearing years.

For instance in West Virginia, now with a median age of 41.3, the share of Americans 65 and older is now nearly double that of

young adults 18-24 — 16 percent compared to 9 percent, according to census figures released Thursday. In 1970, the shares of the two groups were roughly equal at 12 percent.

"This place ain't dead yet, but it's got about half a foot in the grave," said Bob Frees, 61, of Moundsville, W.Va., which now has a population of just over 9,000. "The big-money jobs are all gone. We used to have the big mills and the rolling plants and stuff like that, and you could walk out of high school when you were

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