



State jobs may move to Colby

By Kevin Bottrell
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The Colby City Council had just a few words for the Kansas government after hearing that the Embark building could be considered as a place to house relocated state jobs: "remind them that they own it."

City Manager Carolyn Armstrong said at the Tuesday council meeting that the Economic Development Alliance received an inquiry from the state about relocating anywhere from 10 to 75 state employees. Gov. Sam Brownback has proposed moving these jobs to one of the Rural Opportunity Zone counties, a program that Thomas County joined in July.

Councilman Omar Weber, who also sits on the Alliance board, said the inquiry hadn't specified what jobs were being moved, but he suspected they were jobs that could be done from anywhere in the state over the Internet.

Council President Dave Voss said the state should be reminded that they own the Embark building, which is currently sitting empty and it would be well suited for government office space. The state Department of Commerce owns the building, while the city holds the mortgage.

Mayor Gary Adrian said he

would try to get in touch with the governor about the building.

The council also considered taking a stake in the Ace Services Property in 2013. The property is currently being decontaminated of chrome by the Environmental Protection Agency under Superfund. The agency is required to run the cleanup for 10 years before giving it over the state, a transition that will happen in 2013. Armstrong said the state wants a partner when they take it over.

City Attorney John Gatz said he sees little advantage to the city in taking over the property. It would cost the city as much as \$800,000 a year, he said, and provide little in return. The city currently gets about 1/3 of its water from the site, after it is filtered, but that would be shut down once the cleanup is complete. Armstrong said the EPA has the site about 90 percent cleaned up, but the last 10 percent might be difficult. Once it is cleaned up, the extraction wells will be shut down and unavailable to the city.

Armstrong said last she knew Turkey Creek Trust owned the sign and had an access agreement with the EPA to do the decontamination. The state would have to negotiate a new agreement.

No action was taken.

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Quenching thirst for a good cause



April Swartz (right) used a cute puppy to entice passers by to come to her lemonade stand Tuesday at Swartz Veterinary Hospital. Swartz runs the stand each year to raise money for the Northwest Kansas Animal Shelter in Goodland.

Record temperatures reported across Kansas in July

MANHATTAN – For a time this summer, Kansas was a state divided. Not in the political sense, but in terms of weather extremes, from rain and flooding in the northeast, to drought conditions through much of the southern and western portions of the state. And now the extreme heat has settled in statewide and drought conditions are spreading.

"Kansas recorded its fifth hottest July on record, with an average statewide temperature of 84.7 degrees F. (combined day and night)," said Mary Knapp, who

serves as the state's climatologist. "That's 5.8 degrees higher than usual. July rainfall across the state averaged 1.84 inches, which was just 55 percent of normal."

The July heat did set a record in south central Kansas, which posted an average temperature of 88.5 degrees – 7 degrees above average. The previous record of 87.8 degrees was set during the Dust Bowl days of 1934, said Knapp, who runs the Kansas Weather Data Library (www.ksre.ksu.edu/wdl), based at Kansas State University. The library maintains weather

records for the state.

A local National Weather Service observer recorded 106 degrees in Colby on July 1. On the same day Oakley also hit 106 degrees while the Atwood observer reported 108 degrees. The Colby observer recorded nine days in July with temperatures at 100 or above.

With a July average rainfall of 0.77 inch or 22 percent of normal, south central Kansas also recorded the least amount of rainfall compared with other areas of the state.

Temperatures broke 100 degrees in all areas of the state that have weather stations, with many approaching a record number of days above 100 for July.

And where was the temperature the hottest during July? Barber County in south central Kansas earned that distinction, with a reading of 116 degrees F at Medicine Lodge on July 31. The previous record in Medicine Lodge was 114 degrees set in 1985.

On July 26, the U.S. Drought Monitor, droughtmonitor.unl.edu, rated 70 percent

of Kansas as "abnormally dry" to "exceptional drought," with 12 percent of the state in the latter category.

The extreme heat and drought are taking a toll on crops and livestock and have prompted numerous disaster declarations by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Thirty-eight percent of the state's corn crop was rated poor to very poor for the week ended July 31, "as the extreme heat during the critical pollination stage has

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Filming wraps on historical documentary

Principal photography has wrapped for "Harvesting the High Plains," the documentary about wheat harvesting in the 1930s and 40s.

Director Jay Kriss spent several days shooting with vintage cars and period costumes in downtown Colby in July, then the production moved to Gering, Neb. There, Kriss got more footage of old-style farm equipment from the Farm and Ranch Museum. These scenes including harvesting a field of Buckskin wheat – a variety grown in the 1930s – with a vintage combine.

Kriss said there are a few minor "pick up" shots left to film in the next few weeks, but he and his crew are happy to be done with the long days of shooting in 100 degree heat.

When completed, the film will have a premier in Colby and air on Public Television.



Jay Kriss and his film crew shot a vintage 1930s Baldwin Gleaner combine harvesting an old variety of wheat at a farm in Gering, Neb.

July revenues up; debate renews over spending

By John Hanna
The Associated Press

TOPEKA – Kansas collected \$23 million more in tax revenues than it expected in July, and the release of the figures Friday intensified a partisan debate over spending cuts pushed earlier this year by Gov. Sam Brownback and fellow Republicans in the Legislature.

The state Department of Revenue reported

that tax collections exceeded \$437 million for the month, when the state's official projection was \$414 million. The surplus is 5.6 percent, and it was the fourth consecutive month that tax collections exceeded expectations.

Revenue Secretary Nick Jordan said it's a sign the state's economy is growing, something also suggested by better-than-expected revenues from the state's sales and individual income taxes.

For now, the surplus funds will bolster the state's cash reserves, and that's a sore point for many Democratic legislators. The budget for the current fiscal year, which began July 1, cuts overall state spending by 6.1 percent, and some Democrats questioned whether the reductions in the \$13.8 billion spending plan needed to be so deep.

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State to offer early retirement

By John Milburn
The Associated Press

TOPEKA – Gov. Sam Brownback's administration is beginning an early retirement program for eligible state employees in an effort to reduce Kansas government spending.

Secretary of Administration Dennis Taylor said Tuesday the voluntary plan has been extended to about 4,000 state employees and runs through Sept. 19. There are more than 23,000 state employees.

Employees would have the option of retiring early and receiving up to 60 months of state-paid health insurance coverage for single members, 42 months for members plus dependents, or a lump sum of \$6,500.

"Whether they do or don't (retire) is clearly an individual situation," Taylor said.

The secretary didn't have an estimate for how much the retirement program could save the state, though some estimates on similar proposals have pegged the savings as high as \$25 million.

State employees were notified Tuesday afternoon through statewide email about the plan, which had been in discussion for several weeks. Taylor said he didn't

know how many fewer employees the state would need to keep providing services without putting a strain on the system.

"I don't have a right size," he said.

The program doesn't require the approval of legislators or unions that represent state employees.

Jane Carter, executive director of the Kansas Organization of State Employees, said she was disappointed that the administration went forward with the program before it met with union representatives.

"Their haste in not talking first with the workforce shows disregard for the workers and the work they provide," Carter said.

She declined to comment further about the proposal, citing agreements with the state to "meet and confer" before publicly discussing any employment policy.

Taylor said the administration couldn't and wouldn't recommend that any employee take the early retirement program. He urged all eligible employees to consult legal and financial advisers, as well as the Kansas Public Employee Retirement System before making any decision.

