



Poverty level fluctuating at local level

By Kevin Bottrell
Colby Free Press
kbottrell@nwkansas.com

Thomas County has more kids qualifying for free and reduced lunch every year, according to the latest version of a yearly study conducted by a national child advocacy group.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation, a private charity, released its annual Kids Count report last week. The report looks at poverty among children using several "indicators," such as percentage of children qualifying for free and reduced lunch programs. The latest report includes data up to 2010.

Last year, 42.6 percent of children in Thomas County qualified for free and reduced lunch at local schools. This percentage has increased every year since 2003, when it was 35.2 percent.

To qualify for free lunch, a family of four has to have income below \$29,055 a year. For each additional family member, the guideline increases by \$4,966. For reduced lunch, a family of four has to have income below \$41,348 a year, increasing by \$7,067 per additional family member.

In that same time period, the poverty rate among local families hovered between 9.8 percent (2000) and 13.4 percent (2005). For a family of four, the poverty line is a income of \$22,350 a year.

Reading proficiency reached a high of 89 percent in 2009, but dropped slightly to 88.8 percent last year.

The report also included some state-level numbers. In 2010, 9 percent of Kansas children had at least one unemployed parent. Across the state, about 45 percent of school children qualify for free and reduced lunch. That percentage has increased each year since 2006.

The percentage of children living below the poverty line has fluctuated over the years. In 2008, the latest available year, 14.5 percent of Kansas children lived in poverty. In 2006, it was 15.3 percent, while in 2000, it was 11.9 percent.

The good news, however is that reading proficiency increased from 78 percent in 2006 to 85 percent last year.

The full report can be viewed at datacenter.kidscount.org.

Employee fun day



KATHRYN BALLARD/Colby Free Press

Walmart employees and their families got an afternoon all to themselves at the Colby Aquatic Center on Saturday. The pool is available to rent for large parties, such as birthdays or corporate events.

University planning field days in Colby, Hays

Kansas State University will hold two Horticulture Field Days in Colby on Wednesday, Aug. 31, and Hays on Thursday, Sept. 1.

The programs, which are free and open to the public, will focus on western Kansas lawn and garden issues, including the most recent trends in flowers, vegetables, fruits and turfgrasses.

The Aug. 31 field day will begin at 6 p.m. at the K-State Northwest Research-Extension Center, 105 Experiment Farm Road, with registration at 5:30 p.m.

The Sept. 1 event will begin at 5:50 p.m. at the K-State Agriculture Research Center, 1232 240th Ave. in Hays, with registration at 5:30 p.m. at the tent adjacent to the flower trials on the north side of the greenhouse complex.

Presentations by K-State Research and Extension speakers will include:

- 2011 Prairie Star Flower Trials - Alan Stevens, horticulture specialist.
• Lawn and Turfgrass Issues - Rodney St. John, turfgrass specialist.
• Recommended Plant Material for Northwest Kansas - Cheryl Boyer, nursery crops specialist.
• Vegetables and Fruit Crops for Kansas - Cary Rivard, vegetable and fruit specialist.
• Landscape Issues: Year in Review - Holly Dickman, horticulture extension agent (Colby).

At the Hays field day, the Ellis County Master Gardeners will provide a display of various tomato and pepper varieties currently in trials.

For more information, call Rodney Zimmerman in Colby at 462-6281 or Joe Becker in Hays at (785) 625-3425, ext. 222.

Report: unemployment drops from 6.6 to 6.5 percent in July

By John Hanna
The Associated Press

TOPEKA - Kansas' unemployment rate dropped slightly in July, according to a report issued Friday, but state officials offered a mixed assessment of the economy.

The state Department of Labor said the jobless rate was 6.5 percent last month, down from 6.6 percent in June and 7 percent in July 2010. The figures were adjusted to factor out normal seasonal trends, such as students entering and leaving the job market during the summer.

The report also showed that the state had 400 fewer people employed overall in July than a year

earlier, but Kansas also had a net gain of about 1,300 private-sector jobs over the year. Both figures are small, given that the total Kansas labor force is more than 1.3 million, excluding jobs on farms.

The brightest spots in terms of percentage over-the-year job growth were the state's small mining and logging industry and in education and health services. Construction and manufacturing employment also were higher last month than in July 2010.

"Private-sector jobs continued to grow last month - albeit at a snail's pace," Labor Secretary Karin Brownlee said in a statement. "However, we do recognize some encouraging signs in the job

gains seen in both the construction and the education and health services areas."

But the department also noted job decreases over the year in seven of the state's 11 economic sectors, with the steepest declines among information and finance businesses.

And the overall private-sector job growth over the year for July, at only 0.1 percent, came after it had remained flat for June.

"Kansas experienced its second month of very slow growth in private nonfarm jobs, increasing the risk of a stagnant recovery in the labor market," said department

See "REPORT," Page 2



CHRISTINA BERINGER/Colby Free Press

Thomas County Coalition member Jeanene Brown explained future plans of the Walking Trail to guests and other volunteers

who attended a Business After 5 event co-sponsored by the Pioneer Memorial Library on Thursday.

Salsa, walking trail on menu at event

By Christina Beringer
Colby Free Press
colby.society@nwkansas.com

Thomas County Coalition and the Pioneer Memorial Library partnered for a Business After 5 event on Thursday at the library. Sixty-four guests were welcomed to the open house, each earning the City of Colby a point for its ongoing Take Charge Challenge.

Melany Wilks, director of the library, welcomed coalition members and guests to the facility. She and her staff provided audio and video equipment and other accommodations.

"I am really quite pleased with the turnout," said Wilks. "And I think this generous spread of refreshments helped entice people to come."

Refreshments, Wilks said, were provided by coalition members and volunteers of the community garden who were also in attendance. Coalition volunteers Sue Evans, Melinda Olson and library adult services director Nancy Sadtler were eager to help guests try a variety of salsas and desserts.

"We have five different salsas that were made by coalition volunteers Jim Vap, Maureen Ostmeyer, Kasiah Rothchild and Colby May-

or Gary Adrian," explained Evans. "Many of the ingredients used are from the garden. We also have zucchini muffins made by Shelly Myers, Melinda made brownies and Duane and Jo Cheney of Sharing the Bounty donated dried cucumbers and stevia."

Evans explained that stevia, also known as sweet leaf, is a natural sweetener and can be used as a sugar substitute.

During the latter part of the meeting, coalition volunteers Jeanene Brown and Evans were available to explain Walking Trail developments and show off new blueprints.

"At this point, we are privileged to have so many groups working together throughout the community to share ideas and resources. But it has become difficult to coordinate envisions," said Brown. "It is so easy for us to dream, but there are construction limitations that have to be taken into consideration."

"Some construction projects have difficulty getting a blaze of

See "EVENT," Page 2

