



8 pages

COLBY FREE PRESS

75¢

Monday

January 16, 2012
Volume 123, Number 8
Serving Thomas County since 1888

Grant awarded to health department

By Christina Beringer

Colby Free Press
colby.society@nwkansan.com

The Thomas County Healthy Communities Coalition continues to move forward in its drive to make Colby the most walkable community in the state, securing an \$88,000 grant to help create a positive culture for exercise here.

The group has been working on a plan for walking trails in Colby, but wants to be sure people use the trails, too, members say.

The coalition learned Friday that the Thomas County Health Department, as the sponsoring government agency, has been awarded an \$88,000 grant from the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors for use by the coalition.

The coalition also has been selected for inclusion in the Action Communities for

Health, Innovation and EnVironmental changeE program, making Colby one of 15 towns throughout the United States added to a program to develop and implement activities to promote healthy life styles.

ACHIEVE (Action Communities for Health, Innovation, and EnVironmental changeE) is an initiative of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention designed to bring people together to create healthy communities and provide their leaders with education and resources. Targets include reducing tobacco use, encouraging good nutrition and increasing physical activity.

Coalition members taking on the role as coaches for the Achieve effort are Kasiah Rothchild, director of the health department, and Sue Evans, director for the Northwest Kansas Council on Substance Abuse.

“Our goal is to create a community cul-

ture and built (an) environment through policy change and infrastructure development that will make healthy choices the easy and desirable choices,” said Rothchild.

“We have a vision of making Colby the most walkable community in Kansas,” added Evans. “The Achieve program will provide us with the capacity and resources to influence physical activity and behavior changes in our community as well as the technical assistance, training and funding that is vital to ensure our complex and citywide mission is successful.”

The program will allow the coalition to work with other groups in other towns and national organizations in the movement to create healthier places where people live, work and play. So far, the federal agency says, 149 Achieve communities have been named across the nation. For the first time, a mentoring community re-

lationship has been added.

“The program’s national partners believe this unique component will contribute to the sustainability of our local efforts,” Evans said. “Colby’s mentor community is Salamanca, N.Y., ... a community that has shown success in producing policy, systems and environmental impact. Our mentor community will provide support and technical assistance to us as we create momentum that assists people in making healthy choices where they lie, learn, work and play.”

Evans said the grant money will be used primarily to provide nine committee members with training and education. A website will be designed and launched in the spring and other social media initiatives will be sought, and part-time salaries will be paid.

“We have been lucky to receive three grants so far,” Evans said. “A Safe Routes

to School grant, a Healthy Communities Design Initiative and now the Achieve grant.”

“Receiving this grant validates that the work the coalition has been doing is innovative and worthwhile,” said Jarrod Spencer, coordinator of the coalition. “Our coalition has been an example in the state of Kansas and now we are an example nationwide.”

Rothchild said the group has learned that to change the community’s culture, it needs to focus on two areas:

“Policy and system changes in conjunction with making infrastructure improvements both have to be tackled at the same time ... to get the desired results,” she said. “We have worked very hard on the 2.2 miles of walking trail that will be constructed this spring, but we also need

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Get healthy through free fitness program

By Christina Beringer

Colby Free Press
colby.society@nwkansan.com

Members of the Thomas County Coalition are challenging teams of up to six to make healthy lifestyle decisions in a fitness program called the Thomas County Melt Down.

Anyone who’s interested should register by Friday with Kasiah Rothchild, executive director of the Thomas County Health Department, at 350 S. Range, Suite 2, or e-mail findir@thomascohealth.com. Registration needs to include a team name, team captain’s name and contact information and the contact information for each team member. This should include mailing address, e-mail address and phone number.

“Beginning on Tuesday, Jan. 24, and running through Tuesday, Mar. 6, 2012, this free six-week program will encourage increased exercise and healthy eating habits that will promote healthy life styles and desired weight in a fun team format,” said coalition

member Diann Gerstner, a county extension agent. “Being in a team lets you have fun and develop a support system.”

“And it’s not about who can lose 20 pounds the fastest,” said Rothchild, who is also a member of the coalition. “It’s about becoming aware of how fit you are now, where you should be and how to get there.

“There are people who may look skinny but in reality aren’t healthy because of the lifestyle decisions they make.”

“The goal of the program is to help people make a life change, receive education and get motivated for a long-term commitment,” added Gerstner.

Gerstner said there will be weekly assignments and weigh-ins, but no regular meetings to attend. She said the assignments will be easy and fun to do, and will relay into one of the many ways to earn points.

“The assignments will be about education and learning tips about

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Accident on busy street

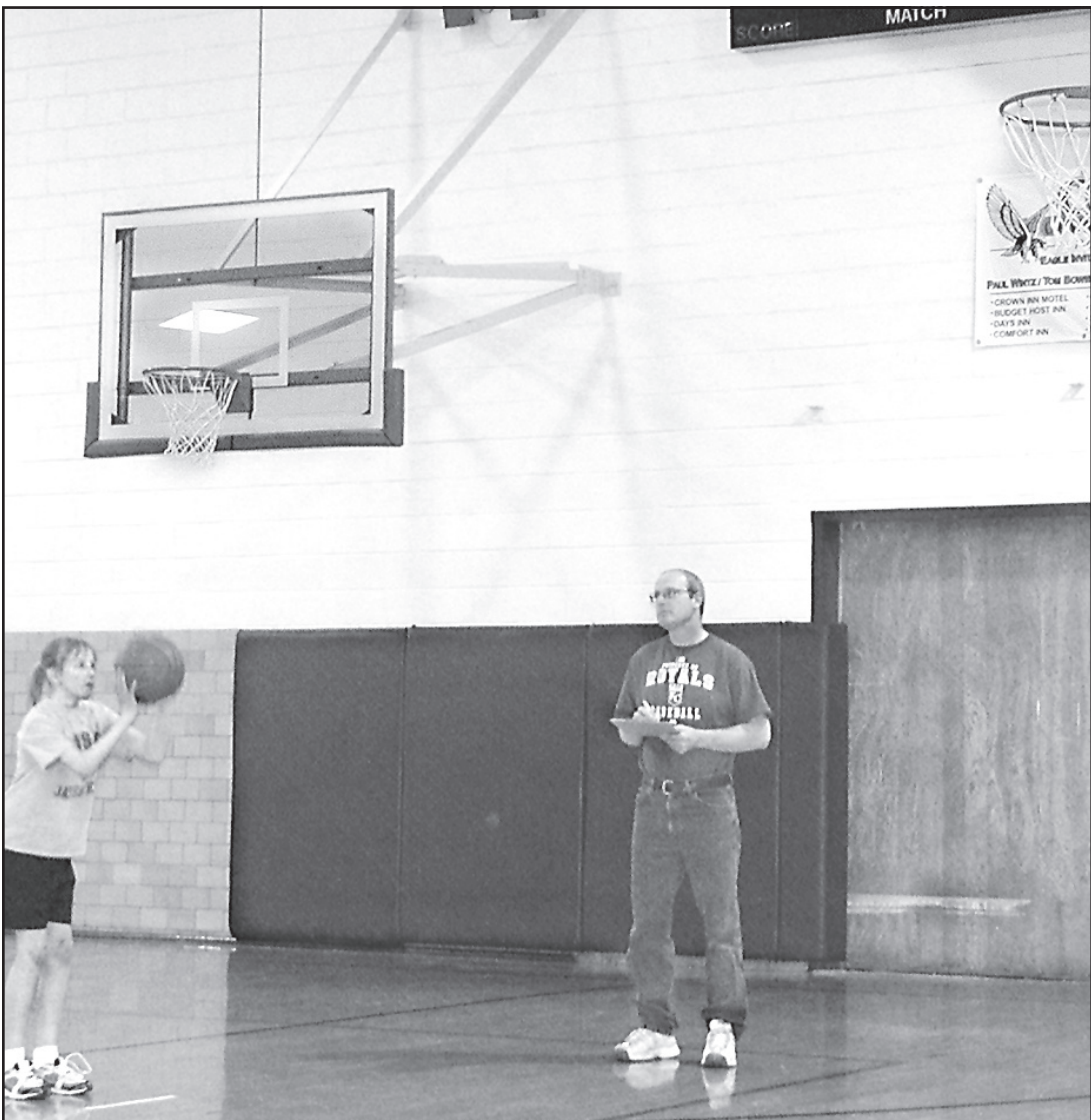


A pregnant woman in the front seat of a van was taken to Citizens Medical Center for a checkup after two vehicles collided at Fifth Street and Court Avenue in front of the post office and the Community Building about 4:30 p.m. Friday. The street was crowded with parked cars with the Western Kansas Lib-

erty League basketball tournament underway. Apparently, one of the vehicles pulled out from the stop sign southbound at Court and the two collided at low speed. At least six police and sheriff’s officers, a Thomas County ambulance crew and the fire chief responded.

MARIAN BALLARD/Colby Free Press

A sharp shooter



KATHRYN BALLARD/Colby Free Press

A girl prepared to shoot a free throw during the Colby Knights of Columbus’ annual free throw contest on Sunday at the Colby Elementary Gym. The contest was open to all boys and girls ages 10 through 14. There were seven winners that will be moving on to the district contest.

Republican Huntsman out of GOP race this morning

By Kasie Hunt and Philip Elliott

Associated Press

MYRTLE BEACH, S.C. – Jon Huntsman abandoned his once-promising campaign for the Republican presidential nomination today and endorsed Mitt Romney as the man “best equipped to defeat Barack Obama” in the fall.

The former Utah governor coupled his announcement with an appeal to the remaining contenders to stop attacking one another in television commercials. “At its core, the Republican Party is a party of ideas, but the current toxic form of our political discourse does not help our cause,” he said.

He noted that he and Romney have had their differences, and he did not respond to questions when asked if he still believes – as he said while campaigning for last week’s New Hampshire primary – that the former Massachusetts governor is out of touch and unelectable.

Huntsman said he was suspending his candidacy, but his endorsement made it clear that was a euphemism. He dropped out less than a week after finishing third in New Hampshire, the state where he had staked his candidacy. While he has campaigned for nearly a week in South Carolina, he lacked the funds for television commercials or other essentials of

a modern campaign.

Given Huntsman’s decision to back Romney, his departure seemed unlikely to clarify the overriding question of the Republican campaign, whether conservative voters could or would unify behind either Rick Santorum, Newt Gingrich or Rick Perry to create a strong conservative challenger to Romney.

Huntsman’s resume had suggested he could be a major contender for the Republican presidential nomination: businessman, diplomat, governor, veteran of four presidential administrations, an expert on China and foreign trade. But the former ambassador to China in the Obama administration found a poor reception for his brand of moderate civility that he had hoped would draw support from independents, as well as party moderates.

Huntsman was almost invisible in a race often dominated by Romney, a fellow Mormon. One reason was timing. For months, Romney and other declared or expected-to-declare candidates drew media attention and wooed voters in early primary states.

Huntsman, however, was half a world away, serving as ambassador to China until he resigned in late April. Nearly two more months would pass before his kickoff speech on June 22 in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty.

The former Utah governor had already acknowledged that expectations for him in South Carolina’s primary this week will be “very low.” Word of the Huntsman withdrawal came on the same day that The State, South Carolina’s largest newspaper, endorsed him for president.

Although Huntsman was viewed as having little chance of finishing strong in South Carolina, his endorsement of Romney could give the former Massachusetts governor, who leads in state polls, even more of the look of inevitability.

The move comes as pressure has been increasing on Texas Gov. Rick Perry to leave the race to allow South Carolina’s influential social conservatives to unify behind either former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum or former House Speaker Newt Gingrich.

Santorum worked over the weekend at consolidating conservatives, trying to parlay into support in South Carolina the decision Saturday by an influential group of national Christian conservatives to back him.

“I think it’s important that we eventually consolidate this race,” Santorum told reporters Monday at a news conference in Colum-

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