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Fire district wants out of agreement

By Christina Beringer

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Thomas County commissioners met Monday with volunteers from the Rural Fire District No. 5, which covers parts of Sherman and Thomas counties around Brewster.

Since December, commissioners have been aware that Sherman County wants out of a long-standing agreement with the district and Thomas County. The issue needs to be resolved by June 14, said fire district volunteers Willard Crumrine and Rex Jamison of Brewster.

Crumrine and Jamison told commissioners that the Brewster department operates under a complex system of shared resources involving the district, the city of Brewster and Sherman County.

Sherman County owns about \$268,000 worth of equipment housed in Brewster used and maintained by the district. Crumrine said the district takes in about \$7,000 a year from a 1.418-mill property-tax levy, and pays Sher-

man County \$5,000 a year to help provide equipment and protection to people in the district. The \$5,000 payment falls short of Sherman County's operating costs for the district, he said, adding that it costs about \$9,500 a year for fuel, salaries and training.

Sherman County wants the district to take over operations and buy the equipment from the county, the men said. Instead of the district paying \$5,000, Sherman would pay the district \$10,000 a year to operate and provide protection. The city provides the building.

"I don't know if we can generate enough money to own the equipment, run it appropriately and update it, too," Crumrine said. "They (Sherman County) do a phenomenal job, and I don't think people realize that they've been getting by on a song for the last 20 years."

Sherman County has a mill levy of 4.552 mills that covers the entire county, which takes in much more than the district could.

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Finley signs with...



KAYLA CORNETT/Colby Free Press

Colby High School senior Emilea Finley (center) signed a letter of intent Friday to run track and cross country at Wichita State University this fall. Her mom, Sondra Finley (bottom left), football coach Chris Gardener (left), and Finley's track and cross country coaches, Gordon Rasmussen, Bob Manneback, Chris Giersch and Lesley Wagoner, gathered around to watch her

sign the letter. She received a four-year academic scholarship for signing with Wichita State and will begin running her first semester. She will not be redshirted, or not allowed to compete in her first year of school. Finley was considering offers from Kansas State University and University of Nebraska-Kearney, but decided Wichita State was the best fit.

City council approves lease for oil, gas drilling

By Kayla Cornett

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The Colby City Council agreed Tuesday to changes in a letter of intent with a firm that wants to lease city land for oil and gas drilling.

JoAnn Miltner of Manhattan Energy-One appeared to talk about the changes. The council signed a letter with the company about a month ago, she said, but since then, the city has acquired two more pieces of property, so the letter was revised and reviewed by City Attorney John Gatz.

Gatz said they he also added time limits. The company has 30 business days to return the lease, which is 45 calendar days, and another 30 to complete a title search after the council signs and approves the lease.

Councilman Pat Mallory asked if the letter was void if nothing is done by the specified time limits, and Gatz said that was correct.

Councilman Tim Hutfles asked if the

letter would be void if the city doesn't receive a check in that time, and Miltner said that was correct as well. The city will receive \$45 per acre for 828.44 acres of land, so the lease payment each year will be \$37,279 for five years.

Miltner said these deadlines are going to be tight because the city has a lot of small parcels on which the titles need to be checked.

Councilman Mark Beringer then asked what the chance is for "fracking" of the wells to interfere with the Ogallala aquifer water used by the city. Miltner said it's minimal, because they are going to be drilling deep, and fracking, or fracturing the rock structure to free up oil and gas, won't affect the water table.

"We're going to about 5,000 to 10,000 feet deep," she said.

Beringer said he had heard some concern from people in town because the drilling depth is not stated in the letter, and they're worried there's nothing stopping the company from drilling too shallow.

Miltner said they will look at all the

structures on the way down, but they can't frack in the water table.

"If we can take anything from it at all," she said, "it's going to be very minimal because water is at a premium in this area...."

"If we get any of it at all, it will be by approval from the Kansas Oil and Gas Commission."

Miltner said the company just came from Ohio, and to her knowledge, there were no problems with the wells there. She told the council that she was now allowed to say that her company represents SandRidge Energy, and this firm has been around for 20 years and has a good record. She said she has decades of experience from when she was in Michigan and she never had problems there.

"I liken it to the rarity if you go out driving on the highway and you get in an accident, yes it's a terrible thing but that doesn't stop anyone from driving, and you fix it," Miltner said. "If anything happened, they do fix it."

There was no further discussion and a motion to approved the letter of intent

passed with councilman Fred Taylor opposing.

In other business, the council:

- Heard a presentation from Cris Christensen and Tim Metz of Johnson Controls about their initial audit report for recommended upgrades to the city's water and electric meters. The company needs to make some adjustments to the report, they said, and it will be discussed again in the next meeting on Tuesday, Feb. 21.

- Awarded a bid for demolition of the old pool and bathhouse, old wastewater facilities and underground water storage facility to McCormick Excavation & Paving for a total of \$93,900, as recommended by City Manager Carolyn Armstrong.

Armstrong said she has asked McCormick to consider delaying the project until June or July so that it doesn't interfere with all the events going on at the Community Building in the next few months, especially graduation. She also said she has enough in the budget to pay for the project.

- Approved the 2012 street sealing list and authorized the staff to buy rock and

oil for the project. Armstrong said rock for the streets will be \$7 per ton, and for the planned streets the total is \$24,500. Based on the current price of oil, \$3.02 a gallon delivered to Colby, the oil will cost \$54,360.

Beringer asked if they could lock in that price right now. Public Works Director Chris Bieker said the market is fluctuating so much that he won't have a firm price for oil until June.

Councilman Stan Schmidt asked how the city determines which streets get sealed. Bieker said they choose the streets that had wide cracks filled in the fall because those are ready to be sealed. He said they can add more to the list if they want to.

- Approved a proposal from Black and Veatch to update the spill prevention, containment and control plan for the power plant. Armstrong said the Environmental Protection Agency requires that the city's plan has to be updated every four years. She said the cost is \$2,600.

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KAYLA CORNETT/Colby Free Press

Recreation Director Stacy Lee (center) and Colby Community college women's basketball player Mallorie Salmans sold pink ribbons during the Colby High varsity basketball games Thursday in the Community Building while Mitch Kane (left) bought

one of the ribbons. The ribbons are part of the Pink Zone fund raiser that will be supported Wednesday during the college basketball games and next Friday during the Colby High basketball games.

Pink Zone campaign kicks off next week

Colby High School and Colby Community College women's basketball teams will join next week to promote the Women's Basketball Coaches Association Pink Zone, a global campaign to raise awareness of breast cancer – and money to help patients.

Everyone is asked to come to the games, support the effort and, of course, wear something pink.

A Pink Silent Auction will be featured during high school games next Friday at the Community Building. All proceeds will go to help area cancer patients through the Northwest Kansas Foundation for HOPE.

Stacy Lee at the Colby Recreation Department is collecting items for the auction, which could include cosmetics, jewelry, clothing, candles, toys, gift certificates, sports equipment and home décor. Pink items would be nice, she said, but that's not required.

There will be a bake raffle during Colby Community College games Wednesday. For information, contact Lee at 460-4440. She said she needs auction items by Thursday and baked items by Tuesday afternoon or Wednesday

morning.

The college basketball teams have been participating in Pink Zone for three years, and last year, the high school girls jumped on board. The Colby campaign is headed by Lee, city recreation director and an assistant women's basketball coach at the college.

"This will be the third year for the Colby Pink Zone," she said. "I think this campaign is so dear to my heart simply because I am a woman at risk for this disease. So many people are affected by breast cancer, whether they are currently fighting, surviving or have known a victim."

Lee said Pink Zone began in 2007. The late Kay Yow, former North Carolina State University women's basketball coach, served as the catalyst for the initiative after her third reoccurrence of breast cancer in 2006.

In its first year, more than 120 schools joined the effort. In 2008,

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