



COLBY FREE PRESS

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Pancakes for thanks



KATHRYN BALLARD/Colby Free Press

Katerina Harter (center) and Haileigh Shull, members of the Colby High School FFA Chapter, made pancakes for Karlyn Frahm Thursday morning during the FFA Community Appreciation Breakfast at the Colby High commons area. The group was also serving sausage and bacon as they celebrated National FFA Week.

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Colby mail will be sent to Nebraska

By Steve Haynes

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Postal Service officials announced Thursday that a plan to close the mail processing operation in Colby has been approved, but with a twist: rather than mail being hauled to Denver for sorting, it'll go to North Platte, Neb.

The closing is part of a nationwide plan to save the struggling agency up to \$2.1 billion a year as it fights to avoid insolvency in the face of an \$8 billion to \$10 billion annual deficit.

With Congress considering bills to help the service and a request for an advisory opinion on first-class service standards pending with the Postal Regulatory Commission, no date has been set for the changes.

In Colby, acting postmaster Joe Welshon said he had not seen anything about the decision, which was announced by regional officials in Denver.

"I haven't got anything official," he said. "We'll just have to wait and see what happens here."

At a public meeting on the proposal here in December, officials said the change would have little effect on operations that customers see, since most mail now is being taken to Salina to be sorted overnight. Savings are estimated at only about \$14,000 per year beyond those realized by consolidating work in Salina.

The service emphasized that mail delivery, counter operations and business mail service would continue as usual, no matter what happens with the mail-sorting "plant."

Colby is one of seven plants in Kansas on the "hit list" for closure. Others are in Hays, Salina, Dodge City, Hutchinson, Liberal and Topeka. Mail sorting for most would be moved to Wichita, but Topeka's would go to Kansas City, Mo., Liberal's to Amarillo, Texas,

and Colby's to Nebraska.

As part of the overall plan, the Postal Service hopes to change the standard for delivery of First Class mail from overnight to three days, depending on distance, to two to three days regardless of distance.

The current system is designed to get mail moved overnight within about 200 miles, said Brian Sperry, a spokesman for the service in Denver. After realignment of the network, he said, the service would plan to deliver mail within three days anywhere in the country.

That means a letter to the person next door would go to North Platte for sorting the day after mailing and be delivered by the second or third day.

Sperry said all the changes are contingent on completion of the Rate Commission case, filed Dec. 5. While the commission's opinion will be advisory only, he said, the service is required by law to seek its advice.

"The Postal Service will make the final decision," Sperry added.

The service had promised Congress it would hold off on any changes until May 15 to give legislators time to consider several bills to ease the agency's financial crisis.

Sperry said the service went ahead with its internal decision-making process because it needed time to get proper notice out to workers under their union contracts.

Why North Platte rather than Denver?

At the meeting here in December, citizens pointed out that the service couldn't depend on trucks getting through to Denver day and night, since the freeway can be closed for one to three days at a time by winter storms, usually several times a year between October and May.

Asked if any of the plans have

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City council weighs proposal to replace water, electric meters

By Kayla Cornett

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Representatives of Johnson Controls gave a presentation Tuesday to the Colby City Council on a \$2.2 million proposal to replace most of the water and electric meters in town with new equipment that can detect water leaks and be read from the street.

Cris Christenson, Tim Mense and Robert Sullivent came to represent the company. In the first presentation, Christenson and Mense walked the council through how the company would complete the project.

The city would pay a total of \$2,217,080 over 15 years on a lease-purchase agreement at 2.7 percent interest, they said. Without the interest, the contract cost will be \$1,784,636, which the men said is a guaranteed price. After the contract is signed, they said, Johnson will not be allowed to submit change orders. Payments would stop after 15 years, but the project will be under warranty for 20 and the results are guaranteed for 15 years.

Christenson said that Johnson will provide support and verification for the entire length of the project, something he said most other companies would not do.

He said the net benefits of the

project would be seen immediately and would increase throughout the 20 years, with the firm projecting that the city will save \$132,763 over its costs in the first year. The total net benefit, or savings, over 20 years would be \$2,892,625.

The city will realize its benefits through less water loss and more accuracy from the meters and more accurate billing.

In year three of the project, they said, the company would replace 146 of the installed meters and have the old ones tested for accuracy. The replaced meters will then be sent back to the city to serve as extra meters in stock.

At the start of the project, the company would replace 2,280 water meters and 2,880 electric meters in four months' time. The city would be switching brands of meters from Sensus to Itron and the automated meter-reading system would be upgraded to the latest generation. The new system will read both the water and electric meters and will have automated leak detection for the water meters.

Christenson said the Itron reader has advanced technology that can read the meters digitally and send the data to a computer. The system tests for leaks and can pinpoint the location. He said that up to this point, the city has assumed a 23 percent water loss due to meter in-

accuracies and systems leaks.

This new technology means that there will be virtually no need for replacing meters, he said.

The men said the company can guarantee the project price due to the Facility Conservation Improvement Program, created by the state of Kansas to help local governments maintain and upgrade their infrastructure. In a competitive process, they said, Johnson had to "bid out" the as-

sociated costs that go with this project so it would qualify for the program.

Other requirements are that the benefits must pay for the cost of the project with a long-term guarantee and there must be vendor neutrality and cost transparency.

In the second presentation, Christenson went through the price structure of the project to

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Mingling at S & T



KATHRYN BALLARD/Colby Free Press

Leslie Focke (left) and Tom Schrick, employee of S&T Communications, enjoyed food and drinks while conversing Wednesday evening during the Business after 5 reception held at S&T Communications.

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Senator's office gets suspicious letter

WICHITA (AP) — The FBI is investigating a suspicious letter sent to the downtown Wichita office of Sen. Pat Roberts, one of several congressional offices around the country receiving similar letters in recent days.

KWCH-TV reports (bit.ly/yWL6jH) the letter containing a white, powdery substance arrived at the office Thursday. Traffic was

restricted in the area while police and hazardous materials crews investigated.

The FBI says no hazardous material has been found so far in similar letters sent to district offices of members of Congress around the country.

Roberts' communications director, Sarah Little, says the Kansas Republican was in Topeka on Thursday, and two staff members were in the Wichita office. Little says the office will reopen Friday.

