



County authorizes revitalization plan

By Christina Beringer

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Thomas County Economic Development Alliance director Christy Rocca was given authorization by county commissioners Monday to prepare documentation for a Neighborhood Revitalization Plan. However, no approval was made for adoption.

Rocca was also given authorization to move forward with the plan by the Colby City Council on Tuesday.

Over 15 additional people attended the Monday meeting as a follow up to information that was presented on April 9.

During the first meeting, people gave both positive and negative thoughts on the plan, and were given the opportunity to express concerns and suggestions. It was led by Rocca, who primarily discussed benefits of adopting a plan.

Under a revitalization plan, the county would first have to be declared a blighted community. The tax rebate program is a refund of the property taxes which are paid on the actual value added to a property due to improvements and expansions after being accepted into the program, Rocca said on April 9.

The portion of taxes related to the assessed property value prior to the improvement may not be reduced and will continue to be payable in full, she said.

Under the plan, Rocca said that over a period of time – usually 10 years – the property owner slowly begins paying the property taxes incurred for expansions or new construction – not paying any taxes on improvement the first year and by the 11th year, paying 100 percent of the taxes.

There are restrictions and minimum requirements the property owner needs to meet before being accepted into the program, and any lapse in payment on property taxes, or any other taxes, will result

in immediate disqualification from the program.

On Monday, Colby Mayor Gary Adrian said most communities he looked into have a \$25,000 minimum in place: people must spend at least \$25,000 in new construction or expansions to be considered eligible for the program. Other communities have minimums as high as \$40,000, and Pratt County's minimum is the lowest he found at \$5,000. He said Pratt currently has about 700 plans in place.

After the presentation, he added that the levy in Mitchell County has decreased 1 mill since they adopted such a plan within their county, and if property tax revenues

increase enough in Thomas County, this may also be a reality here.

"It's vital for growth in our community," stressed Farmers and Merchants Bank president Brent Wiedeman, who was also present at the first meeting. Wiedeman said he has received feedback from many businesses about the plan, all of which are in favor.

He presented several line graphs indicating the sharp increase of property tax revenues in counties who have already adopted a plan, quashing peoples' concerns of the plan negatively affecting the

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Special Olympics coach Jane Mentlick (left) of Colby stood by as her son, Greg Mentlick, Colby, and Justin Bell (right), Quinter, received medals for the tennis ball toss at the 2011 Special Olympics event in Garden City.

Special Olympics holds track event for 170 in Colby

By Kayla Cornett

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Special Olympics Kansas-West Area will hold its spring games in Colby at Dennen Field on Saturday.

The day will begin with an opening ceremony at 10:30 a.m. with a parade of athletes and a torch run. Seven teams are expected for the event, from Dodge City, Garden City, Colby, Hays, Great Bend, WaKeeney and Liberal, with about 170 participating.

Field events will begin at 11 a.m. and track events at 1:30 p.m. A volunteer meeting will be held before the day's activities at 9:30 a.m.

Jane Mentlick, coach and coordinator for Colby's team, the Colby Angels, said a few of the events for the meet will be a softball throw, shot put, a tennis ball throw and an assisted walk, which is an event for participants that need crutches, walkers, etc.

Mentlick said all of the participants receive medals for their

events.

Mentlick said she began helping with this event about 12 years ago because of her son, Greg Mentlick, who has intellectual disabilities. The Colby Angels team was formed in 1998.

She said she wanted to give disabled adults the chance to compete athletically and her daughter, Denise Mentlick, who works with the Northwest Kansas Education Services Center in Oakley, has brought school-age kids into the event.

"It's pretty impressive when you go out and see it," Jane Mentlick said. "Everyone feels really good when they leave."

Mentlick said Special Olympics was founded by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, sister of former President John F. Kennedy, in conjunction with the Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation.

Shriver started a summer day camp at her home in Maryland in 1962 as part of the effort and Special Olympics held its first event

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Flags to fly half-staff for law enforcement

Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback has ordered flags to be flown at half-staff from sun-up to sun-down on Friday in honor of the Kansas Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Day.

"The heroes on the memorial paid the ultimate price performing their duty to protect the people of Kansas," said Gov. Brownback. "We should take this opportunity to remember their lives and honor their sacrifice. To their families, I offer my deepest thanks for their sacrifice and I offer my assurance that the people of Kansas will not forget you and the price that you have also paid."

Since last year, Kansas has lost one Law Enforcement Officer in the line of duty. On Dec. 9, Atchi-

son Police Department Sgt. David Enzbrenner was killed on duty while assisting city code enforcement officers who were serving a nuisance order.

Sgt. Enzbrenner was 46 years old, and a 24-year veteran of the Atchison Police Department. Sgt. Enzbrenner leaves behind his wife, Kerri and three daughters, Avery, Abbi and Celia.

The 30th Annual Kansas Law Enforcement Memorial Ceremony will be held at noon on Friday on the south steps of the Statehouse grounds.

Sgt. Enzbrenner's name joins the names of 266 law enforcement officers already listed on the Kansas Law Enforcement Officers Memorial.

U.S. unemployment aid drops sharply last week

By Christopher S. Rugaber
AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON – The number of people seeking unemployment benefits fell last week by the most in nearly a year. The figure was a hopeful sign that hiring could pick up in coming months.

The Labor Department said Thursday that weekly unemployment aid applications fell 27,000 last week to a seasonally adjusted 365,000. The four-week average,

a less volatile measure, ticked up to 383,500 last week.

Applications are a measure of the pace of layoffs. When they fall below 375,000, it generally suggests that hiring will be strong enough to lower the unemployment rate.

Last month, applications jumped after steadily declining since the fall. At the same time, hiring slowed. Those figures sparked concerns that the job market was worsening after strong gains during the winter. But some econo-

Celebrating with hot dogs



Thomas County landowner Marvin Urban (right) stood in line for a free hot dog last Thursday at Colby Implement during a promotional event sponsored by Southern Star Central Gas Pipeline. The pipeline company shared information about a

free telephone service to help people safely identify underground pipes and cables before digging, in line with 811 Safe Digging Month in April.

JARED HAMILTON/Southern Star Central Gas Pipeline

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