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COLBY FREE PRESS

County increases budget total

By Christina Beringer

Colby Free Press
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Thomas County commissioners approved a budget authority for 2013 expenditures of \$7,553,499 last Monday after a two-hour public hearing, increasing proposed spending by \$330,000 from actual 2011 expenses.

Several county department heads showed up to discuss the amount their departments would be receiving next year. Most got increases.

The amount to come from property taxes is \$3,276,462. The proposed property tax levy for all county funds would be 34.612 mills, compared to 34.596 mills this year.

Commissioner Paul Steele said he had tried to avoid increasing the levy.

Director Joe Hickert received an increase of \$226,000 for Emergency Medical Services and Road Supervisor Clair Schrock will see an additional \$394,000 in his 2013 budget from what he actually spent last year.

Hickert said his budget is actually \$85,000 less than what he'd asked for. Schrock was not at the meeting.

Commissioner Steele, a retired accountant, explained his rationale for increasing the emergency

medical services budget was because it is an enterprise service and the amount that the county puts into it comes back in fees.

"It's a business," he said. "They send bills out and it brings in revenue to Thomas County. And they've increased their service from basic ... to advanced life support. We've gone from an EMS service to a paramedic service."

He and Hickert explained that with these additional services also come some additional expenses — including \$175,000 for a new ambulance chassis and box — although the department hopes to find a more affordable, used vehicle to add to their four-fleet service in the future. That doesn't include any equipment or supplies, they added.

At this point, the county has about \$95,000 set back in reserve for ambulance equipment, only a little more than half what's needed.

"Our community's health and safety is our top priority," added Christiansen, "so I think putting money into EMS is a good investment."

"We've levied an eyebrow over 1 mill for them," said Steele, an increase of half a mill, "and we may need it or we may not. But you've got to have money for this

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Grass fire breaks out

Smoke rose from a grass fire (above) Friday evening as it approached a field of corn. The fire was one of several that started along the side of Interstate 70. A crew from the Colby Fire Department stopped the spread of the fire just before it reached the corn (below). The fires were spotted about 6 p.m. Friday and contained by 7:15 with the help the Brewster Fire Department and farmers' tractors. Mop-up of the fires took until about 7:45 p.m.

SAM DIETER/Colby Free Press

College to hold campus party

Be sure to catch the annual Community Campus Block Party from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Tuesday at Colby Community College.

The college, the Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce and the Colby Convention and Visitors Bureau have planned the party, which

will be set up on the north side of the student union.

The college will serve a free barbecue lunch. Display booths and tables will be manned by businesses, churches and other local organizations. For information, call Holly Whitaker at the Chamber office, 460-3401.

Accepting scholarships



Megan Schroeder (middle) and Kasey Hoyt (right) accepted scholarships from the Thomas County Farm Bureau at its 63rd annual meeting Tuesday in the basement of the Community Building. Schroeder said she plans to study at Kansas State

County cuts landfill budget

By Christina Beringer

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Many of the county's department heads were present during the 2013 budget hearing last Monday to voice their opinions on the amount allocated to them by commissioners for next year, but the landfill budget created the biggest stir.

The \$3,276,462 Thomas County budget was unanimously approved as presented, even though the landfill supervisor was unhappy with an unexpected \$116,000 cut in his budget. County Commissioner Byron Sowers listened in and gave his approval via telephone.

A transfer of \$111,000 out of the landfill fund was discussed, but nobody seemed to know the

details. The commissioners said it may have been done at the request of the county's auditors from Adams, Brown, Beran and Ball. The budget was passed without determining how this will affect the landfill's operations next year.

Landfill Director Larry Jumper is the lone supervisor who'll have to deal with drastic cuts for 2013. His actual expenses for 2011 were \$474,000. Next year, he'll be expected to operate with \$357,000.

"You're down a little bit, Larry," said Commission Chairman Ken Christiansen.

"He'll do just fine," said Commissioner Paul Steele.

Jumper asked why his budget is getting cut when his department has received more revenue than ever.

"If you take it out, I'll never get it back," he said. "Why? I feel like my tail is getting cut off right under my ears."

"The short reason," Steele said, "is because I don't want to raise taxes."

After the hearing, Steele ex-

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Gem Lions Club's hog roast Wednesday

One of the traditions of late August in Thomas County is the Gem Lions Club Hog Roast, coming this Wednesday evening at the Gem Community Building, at the corner of Main and Elm streets.

Gem is seven miles east of Colby on U.S. 24 and two miles north on County Road 27. The turn is marked with a sign for the town.

The hog roast features a picnic atmosphere, with horseshoe pitching, a playground for the kids and live bluegrass and country music, swelling the population of this tiny town from about 85 to nearly 800 people. New and old friends catch up with each other there, said publicity chairman Ken Poland.

In addition to barbecue pork and all the fixin's, the club will have a drawing this year for half hogs, so someone will have more to take home. The meat was bought from 4-H members at the sale following the Thomas County Fair and

donated to the Lions as a boost to this annual fund raiser.

Money from donations goes to projects the Lions are involved in, including a Colby Community College scholarship, gifts to the Thomas County Foundation, the Kansas Sight Foundation and to Leader Dogs for the Blind, as well as individual donations to meet needs of county residents.

Everyone is encouraged to bring their old glasses and hearing aids for the Lion's ongoing recycling efforts.

The Bugbee Sisters, Scott Cameron, the Spersers, Shannon Meyer, Wayne and Millie Lauritsen and the Sweet Adelines are all planning to appear. Bob McLemore will be the master of ceremonies.



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