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Cole Ziegelmeier (above, left) set up for a game of pool with his friends Karson Haggard, left and Nick Brown, far right, while their parents visited in the Gem Community Building during the town's 125 year anniversary. About 50 to 60 people showed up Sunday for food and reminiscing. Cole later gave Nash Ziegelmeier a lift down the slide outside the building, as Carly Nieman waited her turn.

Gem marks anniversary

The City of Gem celebrated its 125th anniversary with a community potluck on Sunday.

The city provided pork sandwiches and hot dogs for the occasion and many families came to enjoy the Gem Community Center, the former Gem Baptist church.

Gem, population 85, was founded in 1887. Andrew Reed, along with his wife and three kids, were the first people to settle in Gem in a section south of the present town. One of Reed's children was the first to be buried in the Gem Cemetery.



Bed and breakfast opens in Rexford



SAM DIETER/Colby Free Press

Girls from Victory House Teen Challenge, a Christian school in Brewster, were among the attendees of the ribbon cutting for the Philip Houston House in Rexford. About 30 people showed up at 4:30 Wednesday afternoon for dedication. Joan Dingwerth, executive director for the conference center Sheppard's

Staff, which held the dedication for the house, spoke to the group about its history. It was moved from its original foundations along with being renovated and will be used as a bed and breakfast.

State official visits community college

Colby Community College President Steve Vacik had a visit from Andy Tompkins, president and chief executive officer of the Kansas Board of Regents, on Wednesday.

The Regents are the governing board of the state's six universities and the statewide coordinating board for the state's 32 public higher education institutions, including 19 community colleges and six technical colleges. The

board administers the state's student financial aid, adult education, General Educational Development and career and technical education programs.

Dr. Tompkins asked about problems affecting Colby and other community colleges, then gave an update on bills which could affect the college budget next year.

Vacik and other community col-

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Former Colby wrestler wins Jiu-Jitsu tourney

Scott Miller, a former member of the Colby Community College wrestling squad, won the championship in his weight class of the brown/black belt division at the 2012 Colorado Open Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu tournament.

Miller also grappled his way to the final match in the tournament's absolute division, an open competition for contenders of all weight classes, on Aug. 25. His final opponent, Marcelo Motta of Brazil, a three-stripe black belt and international Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu champion, subdued all other opponents that day, but only managed to defeat Miller by 6 points.

The mixed martial arts event drew hundreds of competitors from the Rocky Mountain region

to the National Western Complex in Denver.

Miller wrestled for the Trojans from 2006-08 under Coach Steve Lampe, qualifying for national competition both years.

A 2006 Decatur Community High School graduate, he wrestled for the Oberlin Red Devils under Coach Joe Dreher and was a three-time state qualifier. In Denver, he is a Jiu-Jitsu brown belt under Brad Gumm of Gumm Martial Arts, where he is an instructor.

Miller is the son of Jerry Miller of Gem and Carolyn Miller of McCook, Neb. He lives in Denver where he is and account manager for the Budweiser distributor covering Blackhawk and Central City.

State leaders go on tour to support small business initiatives

By Carleen Bell

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The Norton Telegram

Three state top state officials stopped in Norton last week on a tour of the state to discuss tax-policy changes that will affect small-business owners. On the tour were Commerce Secretary Pat George, Revenue Secretary Nick Jordan and Labor Secretary Karin Brownlee.

The leaders addressed a small crowd at the conference room of the Norton Sleep Inn, talking about the state's Rural Opportunity Zone program and new tax policies.

Secretary George reported that

500 people have taken advantage of the state program that provides incentives for people to move from out of state into Kansas counties with declining population. Norton County, George said, ranks second statewide for the most people taking advantage of the program and moving into the county.

Secretary Jordan said state government has little to do with property tax policy, but income-tax regulations are decided at the state level.

"We have lost about \$1.9 billion of income taxes from people leaving Kansas," Jordan said. "The people who leave go to Texas more than any other state."

In response to the need to at-

tract and keep citizens in the state of Kansas, Jordan said, new tax policies will collapse the top two income-tax brackets and lower the rate on the third bracket.

"We've lowered the tax rate for everyone," he said, "and doubled the standard deduction for individual tax returns."

He said that effective Jan. 1, state will no longer tax income from most small businesses except for wages, which will hopefully alleviate some of the financial burden on business owners. Jordan said that 98 percent of the businesses in Kansas have 100 employees or fewer and 77 percent employ 10 or fewer.

In addition, he said, the state

has eliminated the two-year tax exemption on oil drilling for operations that produce more than 50 barrels of oil a day. The exemption will still be in place for operations that produce less than 50 barrels a day.

With the state sales tax slated to drop from 6.3 percent to 5.7 percent next July, Jordan said, he hoped the decrease, along with other tax changes, will help keep Kansas small businesses thriving and entice more people to move into and stay in Kansas.

Labor Secretary Brownlee reported that her department is primarily focused on unemployment benefits. Brownlee said that in July, the Kansas unemployment

rates increased from 6.1 percent to 6.3 percent, adding that a lot of workers dropped out of the workforce during that time.

"That may be a sign that the stock market has turned around," Brownlee said. "We believe that older workers are starting to feel like their investments and retirement funds are back at a comfortable level and they are choosing to retire. The workforce shrank, so there is a higher unemployment rate."

Brownlee touted the state's turnaround on job growth as a sign that the Kansas is headed in the right direction for people looking for work.

"In July 2011, Kansas was at the

bottom of job growth," she said. "We were 48th or 50th. In July 2012, we were 18th."

Overall, the state leaders reported, the new tax regulations should help the Kansas economy, but emphasized that it won't be immediately clear.

"2014 is going to be a tight year," said Secretary Jordan, "but it will get better from there. We're projecting \$6 to \$9 billion of new revenue for the state and we will get our first severance tax returns in mid-October, so that will be an early indication of the bottom line."

