



8 pages

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Sacred Heart kids drop off donations

Sacred Heart preschoolers Eric Schroeder (above left) and Chloe Ackerman carried food into the Genesis Thomas County food bank Tuesday afternoon. Workers at the food bank (right) gave the kids a tour after they brought in enough paper grocery bags (below) to fill three shopping carts.

SAM DIETER/Colby Free Press



Grand opening planned for center

By Christina Beringer
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The new \$1 million Buffalo Bill Cultural Center in Oakley will be having its grand opening from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday with a ribbon cutting set for noon.

The center is south of the north Oakley Interstate 70 exit, on U.S. 83 at Second Street.

Director Laurie Millensifer invites everyone to join her and the center's board at the opening, enjoy some refreshments and take a

self-guided tour of the visitor and event center.

"We are very much looking forward to the grand opening," said Millensifer, "to show off this wonderful new facility and community center in northwest Kansas."

The event is expected to draw representatives from the Kansas departments of Transportation and Wildlife, Parks and Tourism, and artists Charlie and Pat Norton, who created the larger-than-life Buffalo Bill sculpture out front. The bronze has been named one of the 8 Wonders of Kansas Art.

The couple will answer questions about the 9,000-pound sculpture of William Cody chasing down a buffalo on horseback.

The Transportation Department, Millensifer said, helped make the center possible when the Wild West Historical Foundation received a \$500,000 Transportation Enhancement grant in July 2010.

Money from this 25/75 match was available for spending in November 2011, the site's groundbreaking took place in May and only about six short months later, the center welcomed Gov. Sam Brownback, other state leaders and more than 250 guests during the Second Annual Kansas Governor's Ringneck Classic last week.

The project raised over \$500,000 from private donations, she said, and the center is continuing to collect contributions.

"We are still selling commemorative bricks that can be inscribed to honor family, businesses or say anything you want," said Millensifer. "The bricks will be laid in the walkway leading to the building."

She added the log-cabin gift shop on the site has been sold and will be moved to make way for even more bricks.

Standard 4-by-8-inch bricks are \$250 and the larger 8-inch-square bricks are \$500. Information is available at www.buffalobilloakley.org.

Contact the center for questions and information at (785) 671-1000 or info@buffalobilloakley.org.

Council holds off on contract

By Sam Dieter
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The Colby City Council held off on approving a contract Tuesday allowing a communications company to install a fiber-optic communications system to serve commercial customers in town.

The contract, one of several issues discussed at the meeting, was tabled. The council tabled another about hangar lease fees at the airport, but approved two other motions to upgrade city infrastructure. Councilmen Mark Beringer and Tim Hutfles were absent from the meeting, held at City Hall.

The council held off on approving a request from Wildflower Telecommunications to operate a new communication franchise in the city, pending a closer look at the contract.

Daniel Friesen, president of IdealTek of Buhler, in central Kansas, Wildflower's parent company, presented the proposed agreement.

The contract would require the city to negotiate with Wildflower to allow attaching some of its

lines to city utility poles, but not necessarily to allow attachments. Friesen said after the meeting that his company wants to install fiber-optic cables and could start doing so by the end of the year.

The lines are intended for commercial customers such as the operators of cell phone towers, not residential use, he said, adding that he is not sure if Wildflower wanted most of the lines to be on utility poles or underground.

City Manager Tyson McGreer said that the city is required by law to allow the request, as long as it is fair to the other utility companies operating in the city. S&T and AT&T both have fiber optic lines in the city, but under agreements which stipulate that their lines be buried, he said, and they pay different rates than what Wildflower is requesting, although Friesen said his company's rates are higher.

"We need to make sure your language matches their language," he told Friesen. "We need to be fair whichever way we go."

See "COUNCIL," Page 2

School board discusses improvements

By Sam Dieter
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The Colby School Board spent much of its meeting last Monday night discussing how to pay for improvements to its buildings outlined in an "investment grade" energy audit by a consulting firm that focuses on energy efficiency.

At its Oct. 15 meeting, the board approved a \$15,000 audit of the district by 360 Energy Engineers, an engineering consulting firm based in Lawrence and Denver.

At earlier meetings, 360 representatives suggested that the district stagger improvement projects according to need. At the October meeting, the board discussed the order in which improvements should be made.

Board Member Brice Barton said that the middle school roof is probably the most important

improvement right now. He said the vinyl roof, covered with a tarp and egg rock, has been contracting over the years with enough force to rip several bricks from the walls, leaving cracks between the roof and walls about a foot wide.

"It's bad. I was shocked by how bad it was," Barton said.

Superintendent Terrel Harrison said the energy audit will be completed in January, and asked how the district should pay for improvement projects. The company had originally discussed projects costing millions of dollars, which would be done in phases to reduce the cost each time. The bill could be from under \$1 million to \$2 million for projects in the near future, said Jo DeYoung, district business manager.

Harrison suggested raising the levy for the capital improvement

See "SCHOOL," Page 2

Norton prison needs more mentors

By Sam Dieter
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Criminals face a tough environment in prison, but they often find going back out into the world after release to be an even greater challenge.

Lisa Thornton, mentoring coordinator at the Norton Correctional Facility, is looking for volunteers to help inmates through the Mentoring4Success program, now being used for the first time in Norton and northwest Kansas.

So far, Thornton said, she has seven mentors.

"This is changing a culture;

this is changing a mindset," she said. "We're enabling people to have an even greater percentage of success."

Started in July 2011 by Gov. Sam Brownback, she said, the program is designed to reduce the chance of offenders going back to prison after they are released. A mentor is paired with one offender, working with them for six months before and six months after their release. They communicate at least once a month with the offenders through letters, phone calls or in person, giving them encouragement and support as they em-

See "PRISON," Page 2

