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Council talks about water billing

By Sam Dieter
Colby Free Press
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The Colby City Council discussed changing how water use is billed next year due to the lack of moisture this winter, although no decision was made at a meeting Tuesday night.

Councilman Tim Hutfles pointed out that the city is measuring water use for residential sewer bills from November to February. He said the drought is forcing some people to water their trees and suggested allowing people to use more water without affecting their sewer rates.

“The reason I brought that up is that me and some other guys, we are a little concerned about the trees,” he said later.

Finance Director Debbie Zerr said that residential sewer rates for each year, set each year in April, are based on a person’s average water use from Nov. 20 to Feb. 20 the winter before. That’s taken by most area cities to equate with

“indoor” water use that affects the sewer treatment system.

Council members discussed ways to measure the water use in the city. Councilman Pat Mallory said that giving up some money on “excess” water would be a lot cheaper than replacing a tree. He suggested basing the sewer bills on a reading between Jan. 20 and Feb. 20 – in mid-winter and when no one is visiting with relatives for the holidays and using the kitchen.

Council members considered putting the discussion on the agenda for a later meeting, but held off on making a decision.

In other business, the council:
• Approved new terms of office and salaries for Municipal Court Judge Richard Ress and Clerk Dana Bolyard, and for City Attorney John Gatz. Ress’s and Gatz’s terms are both yearly, with Gatz’s starting at the beginning of the year and Ress’ Jan. 15. Bolyard will work no more than 17 hours a

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Thief steals police pickup

Colby Police are looking for a pickup truck belonging to the department that was stolen Monday morning.

An employee parked the truck outside his home near Maize and Wheat Ridge roads, between Pine Street and College Drive and east of Villa High Pond, about 9:30 a.m. Monday, Police Chief Randy Jones said. The officer noticed it had been stolen about 11 a.m. The chief said the truck is a silver 2011 Chevrolet four-door crew cab pickup. The keys had been left in the truck, he said, but not in the ignition.

Jones said given the time when it was stolen, he thinks the thief drove the truck only a short distance and hopes it will turn up nearby, perhaps in rural Thomas County. He asked that farmers pay close attention to places where a truck might be parked.

Sheriff’s officers will be on the lookout for the city’s truck, but also are keeping an eye out for thieves and people dumping trash in rural areas.

Undersheriff Marc Finley said that illegal dumping of trash and

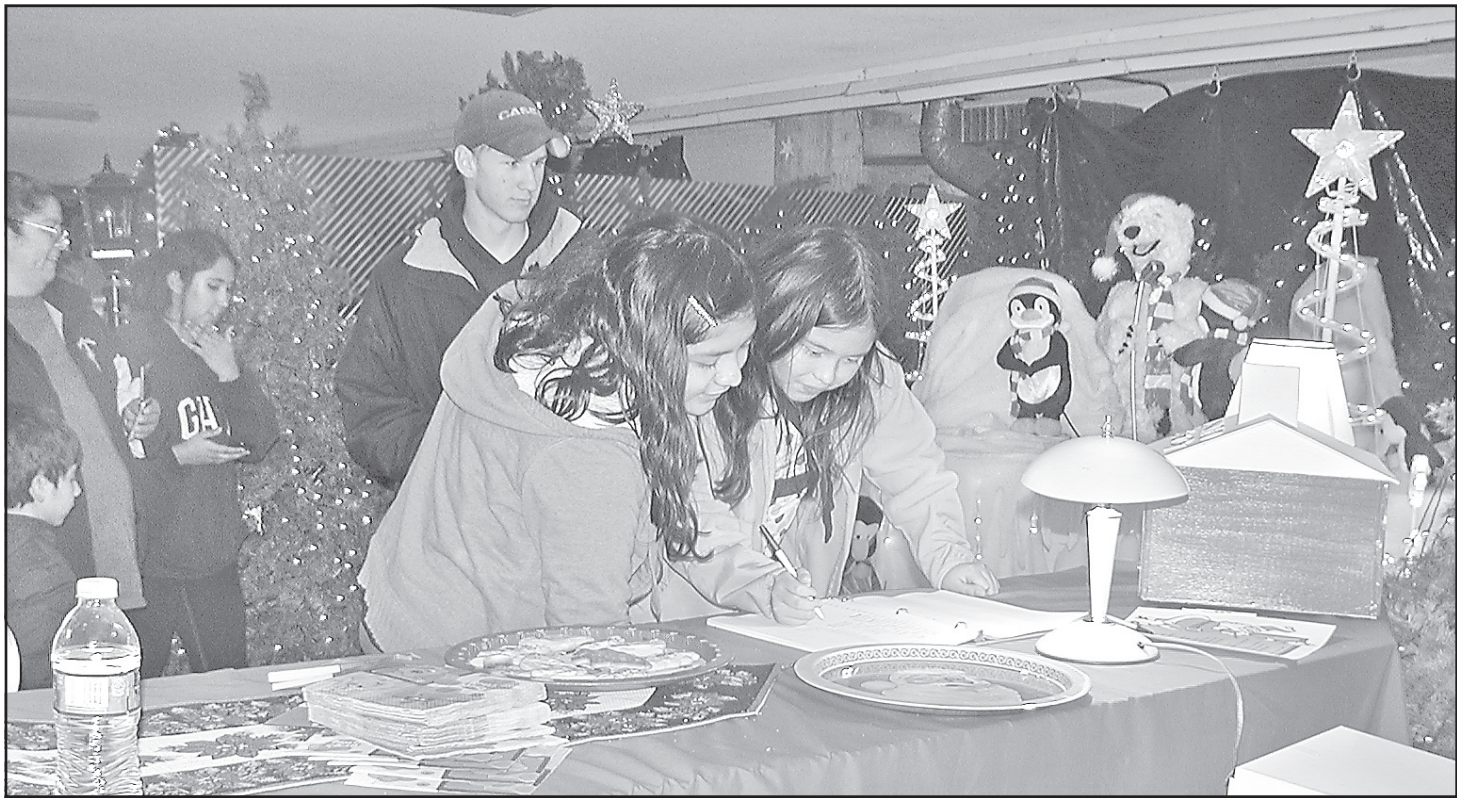
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A visit to see Santa

Joshua Moore sat on Santa’s lap (left), and Bob Coleman played the role of Santa for kids who came by just after the parade of lights Sunday night. After making their Christmas wishes, kids signed their names in the guest book (below), including from left, Ryan Moore, Natalay Oliver and Destiny Oliver.

SAM DIETER/Colby Free Press



Receiving a dictionary



CHRISTINA BERINGER/Colby Free Press

Colby Rotary members Connie Renner and Pat Sloan called names of students and presented each child with their very own dictionary to keep, including Nathan Stramel. Heartland Christian School board member Tim Morris and third-grade

teacher Marilee Gundlach watched the kids’ excitement as they inspected their gifts. The dictionaries were soon put to use; the first word students were told to look up, as part of their lesson, was “evangelism.”

Black boxes in cars raise privacy issues

By Joan Lowy
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON – Many motorists don’t know it, but it’s likely that every time they get behind the wheel, there’s a snitch along for the ride.

In the next few days, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is expected to propose long-delayed regulations requiring auto manufacturers to include event data recorders – better known as “black boxes” – in all new cars and light trucks. But the agency is behind the curve. Automakers have been quietly tucking the devices, which automatically record the actions of drivers and the responses of their vehicles in a continuous information loop, into most new cars for years.

When a car is involved in a crash or when its airbags deploy, inputs from the vehicle’s sensors during the 5 to 10 seconds before impact are automatically preserved. That’s usually enough to record things like how fast the car was traveling and whether the driver applied the brake, was steering erratically or had a seat belt on.

The idea is to gather information that can help investigators determine the cause of accidents and lead to safer vehicles. But privacy

advocates say government regulators and automakers are spreading an intrusive technology without first putting in policies to prevent misuse of information collected.

Data collected by the recorders is increasingly showing up in lawsuits, criminal cases and high-profile accidents. Massachusetts Lt. Gov. Timothy Murray initially said that he wasn’t speeding and that he was wearing his seat belt when he crashed a government-owned car last year. But the Ford Crown Victoria’s data recorder told a different story: It showed the car was traveling more than 100 mph and Murray wasn’t belted in.

In 2007, then-New Jersey Gov. Jon Corzine was seriously injured in the crash of an SUV driven by a state trooper. Corzine was a passenger. The SUV’s recorder showed the vehicle was traveling 91 mph on a parkway where the speed limit was 65 mph, and Corzine didn’t have his seat belt on.

There’s no opt-out. It’s extremely difficult for car owners to disable the recorders. Although some vehicle models have had recorders

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