



Blizzard shuts down region's roads

Colby schools reopened today, traffic returned to highways, and businesses, offices and homeowners started to dig out this morning after a fast-moving blizzard shut down most of the region Wednesday afternoon and into the night.

The storm left about three inches of snow around Colby and over much of the area to the north, the National Weather Service reported, but winds of up to 45 mph piled that into drifts a foot or more high on streets and roads.

By 10 p.m., nearly every state highway from the Colorado line to Hays and Phillipsburg was closed, though because the storm was trending to the northeast, U.S. 24 east of the Nine-Mile Corner remained open, if slick. Interstate 70 was closed from Russell to Denver as motel rooms filled up along the route.

The freeway reopened before midnight in Colorado, however, and was back in service through Kansas by 1:30 a.m. as the storm marched on out of the area and skies cleared. State crews patrolled the roads and plowed through the night. In Norton, Department of Transportation officials said maintenance crews had gone on 12-hour shifts to handle the storm around the clock.

All highways in northwest Kansas were open by 6 a.m. this morning except for K-25 from Atwood to the Nebraska state line. It was reopened by 7:20 a.m.

The snow started coming down in force about 3 p.m. Wednesday. With the snow moving east, Colorado officials closed I-70 from Airpark Road east of Denver to the state line. Kansas officials closed the westbound lanes at Goodland at the same time. As conditions deteriorated, the roadblocks moved east for several hours, backing up the closure point to Hays and then finally, to Russell.

Though the Kansas Highway Patrol handled dozens of wrecks and slide-offs, jackknifed semitrailer rigs and other incidents, only a couple of injuries were reported.

Two cars collided head-on on U.S. 24 about half a mile west of Colby

at 4:22 p.m. Wednesday, the patrol reported. A 2003 Mitsubishi Lancer driven by Tina Diane Hansen, 47, was eastbound near town, followed by a 1997 GMC driven by Michael C. Schmeiser, 46, when Hansen lost control and swerved into the westbound lane.

Charles M. Plumisto, 58, was westbound in a 2006 Ford F150. He swerved to miss her, entering the eastbound lane and colliding head-on with Schmeiser's vehicle. The Ford came to rest in the south ditch facing south, and the GMC ended blocking the eastbound lane. Both Plumisto and Schmeiser were taken to Citizen's Medical Center. The three drivers, all from Colby, were wearing their seat belts, the patrol said.

As officers hurried to accidents and closures late Wednesday afternoon, they reported a nearly complete lack of visibility at times.

Though open, roads were still slick this morning. At 8:11, the patrol reported, a westbound 2006 Dodge van hit some ice on I-70 about 15 miles east of town, rolling onto its passenger side into the north ditch. The driver, Robert D. Collins of Colorado Springs, was taken to the Logan County Hospital with possible injuries.

The National Weather Service had put Thomas and the other eight northwest Kansas counties under a blizzard warning from 10 a.m. Wednesday to midnight, but the storm actually cleared the area by around 10 p.m.

As the storm moved east, more and more of the highway was closed down while state troopers, sheriff's deputies and tow-truck drivers scrambled to deal with a slew of accidents. Other highways in northwest Kansas were soon closing down, starting at 3:45 p.m. with stretches of U.S. 40 and 36 east of the Colorado line and state routes K-27 and K-161 north to Nebraska.

By 11:15 p.m., almost all highways in the northwest part of the state were closed, including U.S.

See "BLIZZARD," Page 2



Wednesday night's blizzard kept residents and road workers busy all morning clearing and moving snow. Will Smiley (above left) and Brian Quagliano from the city Public Works crew cleaned up a fallen tree branch on Third Street north of the Colby Grade School. Andy Wright (left) shoveled snow behind Colby Spas. Quagliano cut up the fallen branch (below) before throwing it into the shovel of a backhoe.

SAM DIETER/Colby Free Press



City Council approves pay raises for employees

By Sam Dieter
Colby Free Press
sdieter@nwkans.com

A motion to give city employees a 2 percent cost-of-living pay increase passed at Tuesday night's Colby City Council meeting, but only after Mayor Gary Adrian cast a tie-breaking vote. A motion to raise entry-level salaries was put off.

In the end, the council agreed to give all city employees, except for City Man-

ager Tyson McGreer, a 2 percent raise. That followed a 10- to 15-minute debate over what the city pays now and how this compares to other area cities.

The original proposal from McGreer on the agenda was for a 3.6 percent pay raise for both the cost of living and entry-level salaries.

The manager provided the council with notes on the pay scales for 19 cities and local governments nearby, along with the most recent Social Security cost-of-living

adjustment and the federal Consumer Price Index. He said these indicated the cost of living going up about 2 percent this year.

Councilman Tim Hutfles said he was not sure the list offered an accurate picture, since it included agencies which don't have the same types of employees as cities.

"I just want to make sure that what we're doing here reflects what's going on in the community where we work and we

live," he said. Councilman Dave Voss pointed out that only one of the governments on the list, Larned, was offering a total pay increase as much as 6 percent.

"Sometimes, I feel we're Colby and we need to be the best out of these cities," McGreer said. "We need to be the best employer, we need to compensate our employees, whether it's 2 percent or it's 6 percent or 8 percent or whatever."

The council also debated how the cost-

of-living increase relates to increases in merit pay. Councilman Mark Beringer said the two aren't related.

"We don't all agree that the merit's right, we don't all agree that the COLA's right, but that's what we've got to work with here," he said, "so I still make a motion we do 2 percent (cost of living) across the board."

In the end, Hutfles, Voss and Stan-

See "CITY," Page 2

School board will vote whether to increase tax levy

By Sam Dieter
Colby Free Press
sdieter@nwkans.com

The Colby School Board agreed Monday to vote on its next meeting for a proposal to pay for improvements to the middle school by increasing the property tax levy for the capital outlay fund, rather than borrowing the money.

Superintendent Terrel Harrison said she would prepare a resolution to allow the district to levy

three more mills for capital outlay to be voted on at the January board meeting. The board discussed the plan at the November meeting.

An initial audit of the school buildings said that it would cost between \$4.8 million and \$5.5 million in all to repair buildings at the elementary and middle schools. The school district wants to start working on the middle school, especially the roof and the 1960s-era steam boilers used to heat the school

"What we're asking for is just consensus to proceed with the

plan," said Board President Janice Frahm.

Although there was no vote, no one objected to the plan. The improvements are designed to cut down on energy use at the school after an "energy audit" by a consulting firm.

At its next meeting, the board will get the results of an audit from 360 Energy Engineers, a company that specializes in upgrading buildings to make them use less energy.

During meetings throughout the

See "SCHOOL," Page 2

College energy project finished

By Kayla Cornett
Colby Free Press
kcornett@nwkans.com

The Colby Community College trustees were told Monday that the \$4.5 million Honeywell project was completed last week.

Account executive Phyllis Baker and project manager Tim Lester said the project was completed on Dec. 11.

Baker went through the details of the project, which was a 25-year contract for \$4.5 million. She said they started out by looking at all the mechanical systems on campus for upgrades. The goal was to reduce energy and create renewable energy as a way to help increase enrollment.

"The program included operational savings," Baker said, "as well as guaranteed energy savings."

The guaranteed savings, she said, was that the

college's energy bill would be reduced by 25 percent. If they didn't make that amount, Baker said the company would pay the difference.

She said throughout campus, they put in 20 different conservation measures, including solar panels, the wind turbine, heating and air conditioning upgrades and controls, boilers and building envelope items (roofing, doors, ceiling cracks and internal and external lighting).

Baker finished by saying the project was completed on schedule with a fixed budget, which means it was done without changing the price, and they will come out and check the energy conservation measures to make sure the savings are being met. She said a report will be given to Barry Kaaz, dean of external affairs, for him to accept or reject.

Trustee Kenton Krehbiel asked when the site

See "COLLEGE," Page 2

