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## Building might replace courthouse

By Heather Alwin  
Colby Free Press  
colby.society@nwks.com

Thomas County commissioner Paul Steele presented a proposed floor plan for a new county building at the commissioners' meeting last week. The new building would house offices currently now located in the courthouse, along with a new jail and courtroom.

Though the commissioners do not have a cost estimate on the building, Steele said he hopes to pay for it with a new sales tax, something which would require voter approval.

The new building had been planned as a replacement for the current Law Enforcement Center, which houses the jail and offices for the sheriff and Colby Police.

The new jail will have room for 36 inmates, Steele said, and it will be more secure.

In 2012, Steele said, the county spent over \$45,000 to house prisoners at other jails, including facilities in Atwood and Goodland, because Thomas County's jail was overcrowded.

"As we continued to assess our needs, it grew beyond just the jail," Steele said, adding that plans had been expanded over the winter to include other county offices and court functions as pipes began breaking in the current courthouse.

"Problems that we've had with this building just keep coming," he said, referring to the 1907 landmark courthouse. "The building has become a money pit."

He said it will be cheaper for the county to move offices to a building than it

would be if the county tried to maintain the current courthouse and a jail at a separate location.

The old courthouse is shifting and iron pipes are breaking throughout the building, said County Clerk Shelly Harms, adding that parts of her office floor are uneven due to the shifting.

The building was constructed on crushed rubble, not concrete footings, said Steele. The builders made a wider foundation to compensate for potential instability, but over time, the building shifted as water soaked into the foundation.

The county so far has no plan for what to do with the historic courthouse when the new building is built, he added.

Steele said he is looking for ways to decrease costs in the new building, includ-

ing placing the Court Services, or probation, office and the Road and Bridge Department in the current law enforcement building. This could decrease the size of the new building, he said, lowering the cost.

Despite recent attempts at the state level to consolidate and regionalize the justice system, the county's current plan shows only one courtroom. Steele said they could add on to the building later if necessary.

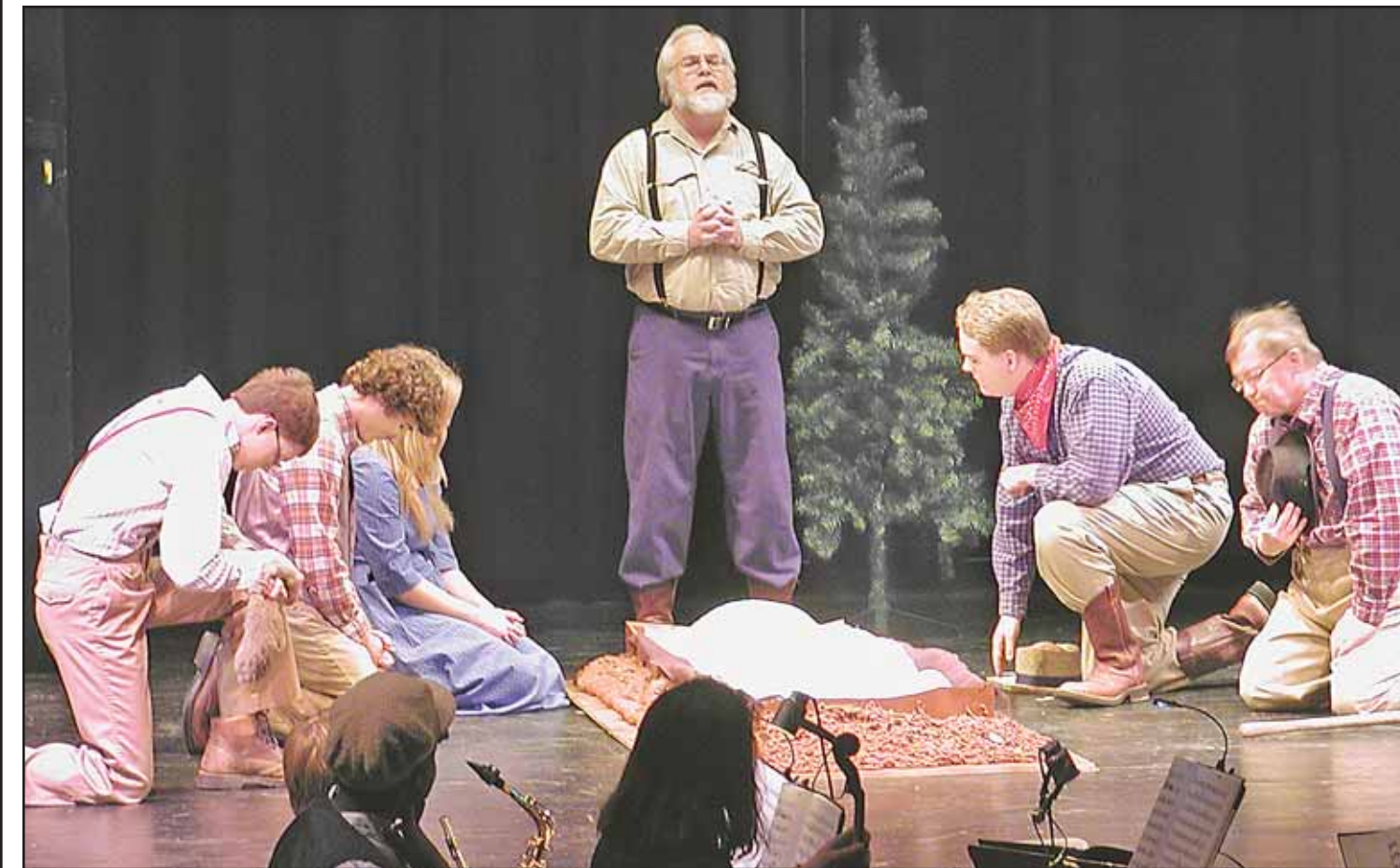
The building plans are not final yet. Steele said he wants to be "very deliberate in reviewing what our needs are," adding that he is meeting with department heads to determine their needs.

The commissioners have not yet decided on a location for the new building, he said.



Historic Thomas County Courthouse.

## Prayer for the dearly departed



Ben Rumson (played by Rodney Nelson) said a prayer over the grave of a fellow miner killed in a fire in the play "Paint Your Wagon" on Thursday at the Cultural Arts Center of Colby Community College.

Others in the cast included (from left) Brock O'Brien, Jaydon Bixenman, Rachel Myers, John O'Brien and Dan O'Brien.

## College board plans meeting to see budget

By Kayla Cornett  
Colby Free Press  
kcornett@nwks.com

Chief Financial Officer Alan Waites told the Colby Community College trustees last Monday that the first version of the 2013-14 budget is complete and a second is well underway.

He asked the board for a special meeting at 5:30 p.m. Monday to talk about the budget and the board agreed.

Waites, vice president for business affairs, presented the March financial report, which showed expenses are still on track for the year and \$141,600 of encumbrances as of March 31.

The annual forecast for \$13.880 million in spending has not changed, Waites said, and budgets reports show about \$4 million remaining. The cash balance was \$1.5 million on March 31, and that has to last the college for the next two months.

Waites said the staff is watching the cash situation, but it will be tough again to get through May.

In other business, the board:

- Approved the minutes of the March 18 and March 25 meetings, agreements, contracts and payment of claims as separate items.
- Approved the resignations of Kathryn Franz, nursing instructor, Molly Olson, nursing instructor, and Rusty Grafel, living center resident advisor, with regrets.
- Tabled bids for a new generator for the Information Technolo-

gy Department. Wederski said the generator, which will be paid for with federal money, will be used to provide backup power for the department. He said they received two bids for a generator, one from Cummins and the other from Detroit Diesel, and two bids for the installation from Jim's Electric and Bickner Electric, all in Colby.

College attorney John Gatz pointed out that the bids for installation were not sealed bids, and the college's policy says that for more than \$20,000, bids need to be sealed. The actual generator bids were under \$20,000. After more discussion, the trustees decided to table the item and start over by having an independent engineer draw up specifications for the project and have each company then draw up its own specs. Then they will take new, sealed bids for the installation part of the project.

• Approved trading out an old hematology analyzer for a new model for the vet tech program. Dr. Stephen Vacik, college president, said they saved some money on the new product and the remainder of the cost will be paid from a \$40,000 Excellence in Technical Education award given to the college by the Kansas Board of Regents.

• Approved increasing student program fees and clinic patient fees for the dental hygiene program. Washburn said the student instrument kit will go up by \$100 and clinical services will go up \$5.

## Storm blankets area, closes I-70

Another spring storm shut down Interstate 70 on Monday night, dropping about half a foot of snow in town.

Snow started falling at about 7 p.m. Monday and was coming down hard before sunset. Measurements of five to six inches were reported here, with 8 1/2 at the Goodland station of the National Weather Service.

"It really seems like the band set up ... from Goodland to Colby," said Scott Mentzer, meteorologist in charge at the Goodland office.

He said only four inches was reported in Oakley and Dresden, 2 1/2 in Quinter and one in Atwood. Winds in the area were from 10 to

20 mph.

Light snow was falling for most of Tuesday, but it only left a trace. Mostly clear skies were expected for the rest of the week. Daytime temperatures are expected to rise into the 50s today and into the 70s by the weekend.

Officials closed both lanes of Interstate 70 between Burlington, Colo., and Goodland from 8:45 p.m. Monday, until 10:45 a.m. Tuesday. Kansas Department of Transportation noted that a construction project along from the state line to Caruso has two-way traffic running in the westbound lanes. That was cited as a reason for the closure, along with poor visibility

and snowy conditions. Department crews were busy cleaning up the roads, overnight. The highway patrol reported several slideoffs and a non-injury accident in Gove County and one in Sheridan County near Selden. The Thomas County Sheriff did not work any here.

The storm also closed down schools in the area. Oakley, Brewster, Goodland and Triplains school districts were among those that had no classes Tuesday. Colby and Sacred Heart some others started classes one hour late, and Rawlins County schools started two hours late. The Oakley Senior Center was closed.

## Commissioners inspect big washout

By Heather Alwin  
Colby Free Press  
colby.society@nwks.com

Thomas County commissioners toured roads throughout the county during their April 15 meeting, including a large, caved-in section of County Road 28 in North Randall township.

The east side of the road, which is maintained by the township board, has a washed-out area large enough to hold several vehicles. The damage is at least 10 feet deep in spots.

Township board President Lonnie Wilson said the road's shoulder began washing out shortly after construction about three years ago, and he began digging in the area after it washed out. The road sits atop a sandy area that has long been unstable and prone to

wash-outs, Wilson said.

Before the current road was built, it was an "old trail," he said, and it washed out down the middle because of the sand. At that time, the county maintained the road, he said; the new road was built after the township took it over.

Each township is responsible for maintaining its own roads. While the county maintains a few through routes, most roads are not repaired by the county even if they are called "county" roads for 911 purposes.

Thomas County is one of three Kansas counties that still operate under the township road system, said Commissioner Paul Steele. In most other counties, the county road department maintains all

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Sawhorse barricades and two cones are the only markers to warn drivers of a deep dug-out area on County Road 28 in North Randall Township.

HEATHER ALWIN/Colby Free Press

## Pat Roberts could set age record

HUTCHINSON (AP) - If Pat Roberts wins re-election next year, he stands to become the oldest Kansan ever to serve in the U.S. Senate by the time the six-year term ends.

Roberts, who turned 77 on Saturday, has served continuously in Washington for more than 32 years and so far has drawn no Republican or Democratic challenger for the 2014 election, the *Hutchinson News* (bit.ly/15xPMLW) reported.

Roberts would be 84 by the time his next term ends in January 2021, if re-elected. That would eclipse the previous record of Topeka newspaper publisher Arthur Capper, a Republican who served

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