



Courthouse study to be authorized

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

The international structural engineering firm of Walter P. Moore will perform a structural assessment of the Thomas County courthouse under the terms of an agreement with the Thomas County commissioners that may cost the county as much as \$20,000. The commissioners, who discussed these topics at their Monday meeting, are also considering a sepa-

rate jail feasibility study. Commissioner Paul Steele recently asked architect Glen Strait to arrange for a study by a neutral engineering firm with expertise in restoring historic buildings after public outcry in response to the idea of replacing the current county courthouse. To avoid a potential conflict of interest from using firms Strait has worked with in the past, Strait selected Walter P. Moore, a firm he has never used before. The firm has worked on dozens of histor-

ic Midwest buildings, including a Saline County, Mo., courthouse that closely resembles the Thomas County courthouse. Consultants will travel from the firm's Kansas City office to inspect the courthouse, identifying structural deficiencies and providing a cost estimate. As part of the analysis, the county will hire a masonry expert to remove a small section of a courthouse wall to give the consultants a view of the condition of load-bearing walls.

The Walter P. Moore condition as-

essment will be the first of its kind for the courthouse and the first engineering-based analysis of the structure since 2006. The commissioners hope the firm's report will guide decisions on whether to refurbish the current courthouse or build a new one. Strait, who was hired by the county at a cost of \$5,000 to design a new courthouse and jail complex, said of the analysis "it's going to be absolutely essential to determine if the building is stable enough for continued use or, perhaps, repurposing."

He said he toured the courthouse attic privately last week with a "local construction professional who shall remain nameless." According to Strait, his companion did not think the building should be repurposed. Strait indicated he does not believe the building is structurally sound. "If this building were in a seismic zone other than the one we're in, I would question whether it should even be occupied."

See "COURTHOUSE," Page 2



SAM DIETER
Colby Free Press
Conrad Weaver (left) filmed a conversation among harvester Jim Deibert, former Miss America Teresa Scanlan and farmer Don Woofter of Colby on the Fourth of July while Deibert's combines (above) cut wheat on the Woofers' land north of town. Weaver and his son Spencer (right) kept their cameras ready as Scanlan went to take a ride in a combine. He has been following Deibert and other harvesters across the Great Plains as they cut wheat, filming a documentary about their work.



Documentary on harvest films in Colby

By Sam Dieter
Colby Free Press
sdieter@nwkansas.com

A filmmaker and former Miss America dropped by Colby on the Fourth of July to film a custom combiner from Colby and his crew harvesting wheat on a local farm. Teresa Scanlan, a Nebraskan who was crowned Miss America in 2011, flew out from Denver for the day help film a segment of the documentary, "The Great American Wheat Harvest," in Garden City and Colby. Conrad Weaver, director and producer of the movie, said she worked with him in the past, and he asked her to help with the project. Scanlan said she set her crown aside and started going to college in Virginia last year. Although she did not grow up on a farm, she grew up close to the lifestyle in the west Nebraska town of Gering. "Even if you don't grow up on a farm, you grow up on a farm out there," she said. She and Weaver stopped at Woofter Farms north

of town to talk to custom harvester Jim Deibert of Colby as his crew cut the wheat and Weaver filmed them. Don Woofter, his sisters and almost a dozen people watched the filming and got their picture taken with Scanlan. Deibert offered her a ride in one of his five combines, which together cut a 200 foot swath of wheat. That evening, the beauty queen went to the Fourth of July celebration at the Thomas County Fairgrounds. "I figured, what better time to do (the filming) than on July fourth?" Weaver said. The filmmaker, who lives in Frederick, Md., said he has always been interested in the wheat harvest, and his wife Jodi suggested he make a documentary. "She was joking, and I took her seriously," he said, "and that was three years ago." Now he, Jodi and their son Spencer, 15, are following Deibert and several other custom combine crews as they travel from Texas to Canada, following the wheat. The Misener family of Elk City, Okla., and Jim and Tracy Zeorian from Nebraska

will also be featured in the film. "People have no clue how food is produced and what all goes into that," Weaver said, explaining he wants his film to show the process of how a loaf of bread is made and where it comes from. Deibert said he met Weaver about the time he got the documentary idea, while doing a safety program for custom harvesters. Soon after that, Weaver ended up staying in a camper with his family for three days in South Dakota, getting film of Deibert's work. "And when he got done, he says to his wife, 'I think there's a real story here.' She asked him, 'Why don't you film it?'" Deibert said. Along with his combines, Deibert said he has four grain carts and eight semitrailer rigs, along with about 14 employees, mainly English and Irish students who came here through a work program with Ohio State University. He starts harvesting wheat in Texas each May, drops by his hometown about this time of year, then goes through the Dakotas, wrapping up in

Montana around Labor Day. Then he goes back to Texas and starts on the ripening corn. Deibert listed a half-dozen towns he stays in during harvest, usually for around two weeks. He said he started combining as a summer job in 1969, when he had never left western Kansas, and found an adventure that takes him across the country twice each year. He said each stop and each town are like a yearly visit with the farmers he works for, and he's made those trips for years, watch their kids grow up with each stop in town. Woofter said he has used Deibert's crews to cut wheat since 1976. Weaver said everyone he talked to said the harvester from Colby is the best in the business. "Everybody I've talked to say this guy, he's the best there is," he said. The film will be between 60 and 90 minutes long, Weaver said. It will premier on Ag Day next March in Washington D.C., then he wants to show it in theaters in Colby and 10 or 12 cities across the Midwest.

Threshing show showcases steam

Ten working steam engines and more than 200 antique tractors will be highlighted during the 60th annual Tri-State Antique Engine and Thresher Show Thursday through Saturday, July 25 to 27, at the show grounds in Bird City. With 17 buildings filled with antiques of all kinds from the past, there will be plenty to do and see for everyone of all ages. Beginning with a patriot flag raising at 10 a.m., daily events include corn shelling, blacksmithing, printing and saw mill demonstrations, quilt show, wheat threshing, player piano concerts, tug of war and a parade at 1:30 p.m. each day. Special events include: • Thursday - Community yard sale and swap meet, Community Club dinner and free concert in the Legion hall. • Friday - Indian teepee and buffalo camp, kids' corn dig, stage coach rides, barbecue and free steam engine rides, antique tractor, and kids pedal tractor pull. • Saturday - Chuck-wagon breakfast, fun run, bounce house, kids' corn dig, horseshoe tournament, free watermelon.

For information, call Rod Klepper at (785) 734-7369 or Darci Schields at (785) 734-7172.



Steam engines geared up for action at an earlier year's threshing show in Bird City.

EVAN BARNUM/Colby Free Press

Art grants beginning

TOPEKA (AP) - Nearly two years after most state funding for the arts was eliminated in Kansas, the state is starting to provide small grants to some arts groups. The Kansas Department of Commerce is expected to announce this week that it is granting a total of \$58,400 to arts groups across the state, *The Wichita Eagle* reported (bit.ly/18I2Pfj). In 2011, Gov. Sam Brownback vetoed a \$700,000 cultural arts budget, triggering the loss of about \$1.2 million in national grants that depended on the state showing a willingness to invest in the arts. The money was restored last year, but the new Kansas Creative Arts Industries Commission did not issue many grants, putting most of its money into next year's budget to show the National Endowment for the Arts it has money to match grants, said Dan Lara, Department of Commerce spokesman.

