



COLBY FREE PRESS

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The Open Mike session Saturday morning was pure fun for sisters Avery (left, at right) Colby and Brady Inman, as they wowed the audience with their number at Pickin' on the Plains. Later that day, Cowgirl Janey (below right) showed off the mustache she donned so she could be "just like Marshal Bailey" in announcing some of the evening acts. Friday evening, Sappa Strings was back on stage in the No. 1 slot to kick off this year's festival. And the festival had something for everything (above) as this little gal stretched to make a purchase from a vendor.

MARIAN BALLARD, R.B. HEADLEY and KATHRYN BALLARD/Colby Free Press



Festival sets new records

By Sam Dieter

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"This was the biggest year by far," said Susan McLemore, who organizes and performs at the Pickin' on the Plains Bluegrass and Folk Festival. "It was a very memorable year, nobody will forget."

Well over 800 people attended the 18th annual festival, including some who stayed

in campers. Leilani Thomas, facilitator of the festival committee, said that was about 100 more people than in the past. It started as a group of friends meeting each year and has grown to include nationally-known acts several years in a row.

A total of eight acts took the stage at the Thomas County Fairgrounds Friday evening, Saturday afternoon and Saturday night. Rhonda Vincent, a singer and multi-talented musician, finished the night

Saturday, along with The Rage, a five-man backup group. Before her was the five-man group Blue Highway.

Vincent has five grammy nominations to her name and was crowned the queen of bluegrass in 2004. Blue Highway has won a Dove Award, one of the most prestigious in gospel music, and has two grammy nominations.

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City sets hearing for budget

By Sam Dieter

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The city council set the date for a public hearing for next year's budget at its meeting Tuesday night.

There will be a hearing for the \$18,460,707 million proposed budget at the Tuesday, Aug. 6, council meeting. The city's proposed budget for the 2013-2014 fiscal year is on Page 5 of today's in the *Colby Free Press*.

The city will need an estimated \$1,483,166 in taxes for the proposed budget, and a tax levy of about 33.277 mills will be needed. The city wants a .072 mill increase to its tax levy from last year, which works out to about another \$3,200. City officials came up with that after a planning session with the council a week earlier.

During the planning session, Council President Fred Taylor remarked that the city has been keeping the tax rate roughly even for about three years now. City Manager Tyson McGreer said it's hard to compare tax rates with other towns, but that the tax rate for Colby is in the right "ballpark," for a town its size.

City Finance Director Debbie Zerr said during the planning session that the total budget that the city will spend \$200,000 more than last year, but that all of those added costs will come out of capital improvement reserve funds and municipal equipment reserve

funds, which consist of money saved up over previous years.

After the planning session, city officials cut \$75,445 in expenses from the budget, largely from the street and general funds, to come up the final draft of the proposed budget.

In other business the council:

- Agreed to go ahead with plans to add a drug dog to the police department that were put on hold.

"I'm going to hope you guys brought your sense of humor," said Ron Alexander, who takes over as the police chief on Aug. 1, "the vendor that we were going to get our dog from is currently in jail, currently has embezzlement problems."

Randy Jones, the outgoing police chief, said a dog would cost \$9,000, and that he remembered an old one the department had sold for \$4,000. Because of the problems with the vendor - Alexander said Friday he cannot confirm he is still in jail - the total cost of buying a dog, training it and getting a car to go with it will now add up to about \$38,000 instead of about \$27,000, he said. But that money would come out of an upcoming auction of police vehicles, and impound fees, not taxes. When Councilman Pat Malory asked where that money goes otherwise, McGreer said it just rolls over year after year.

Alexander said he heard from a Kansas Highway Patrol official

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Statehouse to have map

Kansas' 105 counties will be represented in a marble floor map of Kansas planned for the visitors center of the newly restored Kansas Statehouse, but the project needs money.

The Kansas Association of Counties has adopted the Statehouse County Map project and is asking for \$1,000 donations from each Kansas county to cover the costs of construction and installation.

But they aren't asking for tax dollars. Instead, the association is asking each county to develop its own fund raising plan to raise the needed \$1,000.

Mike Baughn is accepting donations for Thomas County's share.

Once visitors' center construction is complete, all visitors to the Statehouse will pass through the visitors center, stepping over the floor map.

The map, measuring 15 feet by 30 feet, will be inlaid into the floor and will include each county's name so visitors and guests can learn about county place names and geography while visiting Kansas' governing bodies.

The Association of Counties plans to combine money sent by each county, presenting a check to the state on Oct. 1.

Health care pilot project pursued

By Heather Alwin

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Joe Hickert, Thomas County's Emergency Medical Services director, received the blessing of the county's commissioners to pursue involvement in the Kansas Rural Health Systems Improvement Pilot Project after briefing the commissioners on the project at their meeting last Monday.

"We have the opportunity to determine our own future here in Thomas County," said Hickert.

The project was developed to address the organizational and clinical roadblocks for health care in low-population and low-vol-

ume "frontier" communities.

It will assist up to four rural communities in developing improved local health systems and use knowledge captured during the project to replicate improvements in other communities.

Rather than focusing on expanded services, the project's goal is to create system improvements through provider and payment restructuring.

If Thomas County's medical system is accepted for this project, phase one will be a year-long information-gathering process. Phase two will implement proposed system changes and evaluate those changes.

The project, scheduled to cost

\$1.5 million, is funded by United Methodist Ministry Health Fund, Sunflower Foundation, Kansas Health Foundation, BlueCross BlueShield of Kansas Foundation, Kansas Hospital Education and Research Foundation and Kansas Hospital Association.

In response to questions from Commissioner Paul Steele, Hickert said he did not know exactly how much the project would cost the county, but indicated the county would only have to pay travel expenses plus \$2,500 to hire a local person to help. The project administrators also estimate that project participants will spend about 20 hours per week gathering data.

Hickert said the hospital would have to open up all their records to allow the project to gather information about demographics, charges and more. He told the commissioners he had talked to the hospital already.

Changes are going to happen to local health care systems whether or not Thomas County wants them, Hickert said. "If we want to be a part of how those changes will be made, the four communities chosen as part of this pilot project will have a chance to say how the changes will be made."

"If we don't attempt to control our own destiny," he said, "our destiny will be controlled by others."

Judging contest open to all comers

The Colby FFA chapter is organizing a livestock judging contest for kids and grownups alike at 1 p.m., Friday, Aug. 2, at the livestock arena. Cattle, sheep and hogs and goats will be judged as part of the Thomas County Fair.

Tom Rundel, who heads up the Colby FFA, said there will be a division for 4-H and FFA members, and another for those not in either group.

The FFA and 4-Her's will give an oral defense of their judgments, Rundel said, but other than that

the groups will compete in the same events.

There will be breeding and market categories for cattle, pigs, sheep and goats, he said, with six categories in all. Awards include medals and plaques.

Contestants have until the start of the contest to register, and there is no fee. To sign up, call Rundel at (785) 899-4203 or chapter president Chelsie Calliham at 443-1166.



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