



County questions smoking

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The Thomas County commissioners approved sale of surplus county property and addressed issues with county employees smoking on hospital property at their meeting Monday.

The commissioners accepted a \$200 offer from Colby Wrecking Yard to purchase a Ford Ranger formerly used by the Thomas County Appraiser's Office.

The county recently purchased a new vehicle to replace the pickup, which had engine problems. At a previous meeting, the commissioners had asked the road and bridge department to find a way to dispose of the vehicle.

Autumn Arasmith, Emergency Management director, asked for and received permission to sell an extra desk from her office.

Arasmith said she sent e-mails out to the other county departments to see if any of them wanted the desk, but no one expressed interest in it. The commissioners directed Arasmith to sell the desk the best way she can, including hauling it off if it will not sell.

Emergency Medical Services Director Joe Hickert asked the commissioners to advise him on what to do about his employees smoking in their vehicles while parked on land belonging to Citizens Medical Center Inc.

The county currently rents space for the hospital for \$1,100 per month.

Hickert initially asked to discuss the issue in private with the commissioners, but Steele informed him this was not an authorized closed-session topic.

Hickert said he had been told by a company representative last week that his employees could not smoke on hospital property, even the portion leased by the county, since the hospital has a completely smoke-free campus.

Hickert cited several other problems he has had with the hospital and asked the commissioners to help him determine what smoking rules apply to his employees.

Under the county's smoking policy, employees can smoke in their own vehicles while on breaks. The company's lease with the county does not appear to address the issue, said Hickert.

The commissioners did not have a conclusive answer for Hickert.

"Our policy says that we do not authorize smoking in any county facilities, including our vehicles," said Baughn. "But where we are tenants, that's not a county-owned facility. That would have to be something worked out in the agreement (between the county and hospital)."

The commissioners suggested Hickert discuss the issue with County Attorney Kevin Berens.

In other business, the commissioners:

- Passed and signed a resolution for the mill levy increase the commissioners approved at their Aug.

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Century Award recognizes lifetime native

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The winner of this year's Thomas County Farm Bureau's Century Farm Award has spent almost all her life on the plot of land where she was born.

Velma Barnett, who will turn 95 next month, was born on her family's homestead about five miles north of Gem. She lives there with her son Marvin and daughter-in-law Alberta.

Her grandfather, Edwin Bourquin, and his brother Achile, came here from Switzerland and settled on the land in the 1890s. Members of the family have been working the land there ever since, she said. To earn the award from Farm Bureau, a family has to own at least 80 acres of land for 100 years.

Velma is Edwin Bourquin's granddaughter; her mother was Pansy Schiffer, and she married Ralph Barnett in 1936. She grew up on the farm surrounded by her relatives and their children, learning early how to help take care of them all.

"I liked to cook, so cooking was all right," she said. "All the kids would come over to our house."

"Mom raised the kids," her daughter-in-law added.

Velma said she played pinochle on Saturday night with her relatives and their spouses, and they went to church often. She said she can still remember Achile Bourquin coming by with a horse-drawn sleigh in the winter from the quarter of farmland to the west to take his kin to holiday gatherings. She said she thinks the snows were deeper back then.

"We would go to church and somebody would say, 'Come on over for dinner,'" Velma said, and each of the guests would bring a dish with them.

People had a lot of dinners, such as on the last day of school, Velma said. They were a form of entertainment. Family and neighbors would gather to help with tasks like slaughtering hogs, each going home with a piece of liver. The tools they used for salt-curing meat are still kept on the farm, she said.

Asked what has changed since then, she simply answered, "neighbors."

"You hardly know your neighbor (today)," she said. "We depended on each other a lot then. We had good neighbors."

The two women described a time before much of the family left this area. Velma went to the old Mount Olive school house — across the road from her farm — which was in its own rural district.



Velma Barnett



College starts another year

Family members (above) all seemed happy to be helping Colby Community College students move into their new dorm homes on Saturday. The college also offered free pizza to make this process even more enjoyable. Justin John (right), assistant pastor at the Colby Wesleyan Church, talked with a student during the Block Party on Tuesday that welcomed students back to school in Colby. Walter Vacik (below) helped sophomore Jaydon Bixenman of Colby buy books for the fall semester at the Campus Bookstore. Sunday afternoon, students participated in a get-acquainted activity on the baseball field (bottom).

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