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County sales tax receipts up

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Thomas County has received more sales tax income this year than had been projected, prompting the Thomas County Commission to approve spending increases for county departments.

At their meeting Monday, the commissioners approved a \$25,000 cash transfer to the county's transportation van, which is \$31,000 over budget so far this year. This was in addition to a \$20,000 transfer approved at their Nov. 26 meeting.

The commissioners approved a \$128,999 spending authority increase to the 2013 general

fund budget from \$2,561,522 to \$2,689,522 and an increase to the health department's budget of \$97,480, from \$326,574 to \$424,054.

The health department increases were primarily due to a large transfer of grant money, said Commissioner Paul Steele.

Steele announced at the meeting that he had asked former commissioner Ken Christensen to help find land where the county could build a new administrative complex and jail.

"I felt that maybe in acquiring land, people expect to talk to a professional," he said, "so since our prior chairman is a licensed

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Drug charges filed on arrest

A California man has been indicted for allegedly trying to distribute 11 pounds of drugs after he was arrested just west of town last month.

Juan Vargas, 43, of Yucaipa, was charged with possession and intent to distribute five kilograms of methamphetamine, just over 11 pounds. The office of U.S. Attorney Barry Grissom in Wichita announced the indictment last Wednesday.

Sheriff's records show that a Highway Patrol Trooper pulled Vargas over at mile marker 52 of Interstate 70, about a mile west of Colby, on the morning of Nov. 9. The Thomas County Sheriff's Department helped the patrol with the stop.

Tod Hileman, public resource officer for the highway patrol's troop D, said Vargas was pulled over for speeding, and the trooper got permission to search the car.

The patrol's report shows that he was alone in the car.

"When we conduct traffic stops," Hileman said, "part of that stop is an interview of the occupants about their travel plans".

Vargas was booked into the Thomas County Jail the same day for possession of a narcotic with intent to sell and using a communication facility to arrange a drug sale, Sheriff's records show. He stayed in jail here on a \$250,000 appearance bond until being moved early Monday morning. Jim Cross, Grissom's spokesman, said he will stand trial in Wichita.

If convicted, Vargas faces at least 10 years in federal prison and a fine of up to \$4 million. Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Michelle Jacobs is prosecuting the case, and the Drug Enforcement Administration helped with the investigation.



Studio explores pastels



SAM DIETER/Colby Free Press
Shela Reilly, (top) an Aurora, Colo. artist who went to Colby Community College, came back to her old school to explain her technique for pastel drawings at Studio Friday. Rebecca Reuther, (right) a sophomore, was working on a pastel drawing of dragon. Freshman Sarah Krehbiel (above) watched Reilly teach as she worked on a class project.



MARY SHOAFF/Trinity Lutheran Church
The JuBellation Handbell Choir practiced for their upcoming program. Members of the group include (from left, back row) Dalene Cox, David Kruse and Brenda Knapp, along with (front) Robin Beckley, Lynette Ritter, Nancy Baker and Brenda Mattson.

Come on, ring those bells

Trinity Lutheran Church's JuBellation handbell choir will perform a free concert, called "Ring Christmas" at 7:30 p.m. Saturday at the church.

The choir, under the direction of Mary Shoaff, will be joined by friends from the Pride of the Prairie Orchestra, pianist Mary Beth Akers and violinists Josiah and Kendra Akers.

"Bells seem to capture the wonder and essence of the Christmas season and ex-

press Christmas music in such a fitting way," Shoaff said.

JuBellation will play both handbells and chimes using several techniques, all of which help to create the instrument's distinct, melodic tones and voicing, she said.

The group has been active at Trinity since 2001, performing for worship services throughout the year and for community groups.

The choir's ringers are Shoaff, Brenda Mattson, Linda Pabst, Nancy Baker, Kris Harper, Lynette Ritter, Dalene Cox, David and Betty Kruse, Mint Culver, Robin Beckley and Brenda Knapp.

The free concert is open to the public, but donations will be accepted to support the Genesis-Thomas County food bank.

For information, call Pabst at the church office, 462-2497, or go to www.trinitycolby.com.

County's children fare better than some

Thomas County kids are in statistically better shape in many areas than kids statewide, according to a recent study of health, education and economic indicators.

The Kids Count study, produced by Kansas Action for Children, evaluated measurable categories that can indicate how a county's kids are doing overall.

Thomas County mothers receive slightly less prenatal care than the average statewide at 77.12 percent, according to the study, but the percentage of low-birth-weight babies at 5.93 percent is lower than the state average. Statewide, 81.89 percent of Kansas mothers receive "adequate" prenatal care and 7.17 percent of babies are born weighing under 5.5 pounds.

More Thomas County teens use tobacco, at 11.06 percent, than teens statewide, at 9 percent, but fewer teens here admit to binge drinking, 8.13 percent in Thomas County compared to 10.61 percent statewide.

More of the county's fifth graders, 92.65 percent, meet reading standards, compared to 87.09 percent statewide.

Thomas County also has a higher high school graduation rate, 90.91 percent, than the statewide average of 84.92 percent. The county's rate fell 1.11 percent over the last five years, however.

Thirteen-and-a-half percent of Thomas

County kids live below the poverty level, less than the percentage of kids under the poverty level statewide, which was 23.25 percent.

"Although our county-level poverty rate is below that of the state, there is still bad news," said Sue Evans, executive director of the Northwest Kansas Council on Substance Abuse. "Consider this: the income of a single parent with two children living at or below 100 percent of the federal poverty level is \$18,498 and for a family of four with two adults and two children it is \$24,069.

"Providing food, housing, clothes and health care with these limited resources would be very difficult. Providing any extras like items from a child's Christmas wish list would be impossible."

For more on the study, go to datacenter.kidscount.org or contact Evans at 460-8177 or nwksrpc@st-tel.net.

