

College helps build Colby economy

By John Van Nostrand

Colby Free Press
jvannostrand@nwkansas.com

Some people say a college education is an investment, but for Thomas County, the investment is the college — Colby Community College.

Most students get a degree after two years and what the college generates for the economy is a valuable benefit for the town. And what the college does, even outside the classroom, could attract potential students and growth.

“Dr. (Lynn) Kreider wants to see Colby College be more of an economic catalyst,” said Barry Kaaz, economic development director at the college. “We just need to get them on campus.”

Kreider is in his second year as president, while Kaaz has been with the college since 2003.

The “them”, he adds, is not necessarily students, but ways the college can create more activity and draw people, which could mean income for both college and town.

Kaaz said for fiscal year 2006 (July 1, 2005, to June 30, 2006), the college generated \$3.08 million in tuition and fees. It generated \$1.24 million in its auxiliary budget, covering the bookstore, housing, student meals and other items. Last year’s enrollment was 1,755 students.

The college also took in \$2.81 million in property taxes. Of the 19 Kansas colleges, Colby is one of five in an area that has less than \$100



million in assessed valuations. The assessed valuation it works with is \$80 million.

The tax base is key to a college’s income, said Dan Erbert, vice president of business affairs.

“Places like Seward, Dodge and Garden have similar enrollments,” he said, “but their assessed valuations are at least four times greater than Colby’s.”

A larger population and more and diverse business and industry give colleges like those communities an edge over Colby, he said.

Excluding federal money, Colby’s operating budget is about \$10 million a year, he said. The total payroll is \$5.14 million.

The college faces increases in utilities and health insurance for employees. For example, Erbert said, a 10 percent increase in health insurance premiums could be \$100,000 or more. Money to pay for those increases must be generated by the college.

“We don’t get that money from the state,” he said.

College officials have noticed a gradual decline in enrollment over the past few years, Kaaz said and it’s starting to reach beyond the 14 northwest Kansas counties.

Last winter, the college campaigned for a \$20

million facility upgrade to include new student housing, a wellness center and a new gymnasium. Officials said the facilities would make the college more appealing. However, Thomas County voters turned it down on a 1,740-821 vote in April.

The college staff is reviewing ways to increase the school’s exposure, Kaaz said. Preparations are underway to hold a Boy Scout Powwow Aug. 10-12. The event has been held in Hays for the past 20 years but leaders decided they need a new location for the estimated 600 Scouts.

“We met with the scoutmaster and there is an interest in Colby,” Kaaz said, adding that the event should attract boys from eastern Colorado and southwest Nebraska as well as Kansas.

Kaaz said having such an event in Colby should be ideal.

“Because of our territory, we could draw more from the area,” he said.

And all it takes is for one of the Scouts, already in high school and thinking about college, to get to like the campus and Colby, he said.

“We just need to get them on campus,” he said. “Here is where you start building the relationships between eastern Colorado and Kansas kids.”

Kaaz said he hopes those potential students will see the benefits of attending the college. Eastern Kansas students with an interest in the outdoors and the Rocky Mountains, he said, could attend Colby and be halfway between home and skiing.

Kaaz said the college has not ruled out creating programs to take Colby college students to those places on trips. Creativity helps to lure more students, he said.

“It’s a logistic fight getting resources and money out here,” he said. “We need to develop ideas with the limited number of people we have.”

One of those ideas is Colby college’s relationship with Kansas State University. It’s common for students interested in being a veterinary technician to begin their studies at Colby, then after two years, transfer to K-State to earn a bachelor’s degree, he said.

Kaaz said there have been discussions with Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence. Colby could offer some of its courses to Haskell, which serves more than 1,000 American Indians a year, he said.

The college will also ask other Kansas community colleges what works and what doesn’t.

Plans are in the works for a conference of representatives from smaller community colleges across the country, he said, with the meetings at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs next year. Discussions will focus on what schools have done to increase growth.

Even though what Colby college has to work with is limited, he said, ideas to help boost the school are not.

“It’s like a hunter coming up on a covey of quail and they take off,” Kaaz said. “Which one do you shoot at?”



Jamestown I 1,232 sq ft



Bridgeport 1,344 sq ft



Albany 1,840 sq ft



White Pine 1,988 sq ft
NEW PLAN!



Kinsley 1,860 sq ft
NEW PLAN!



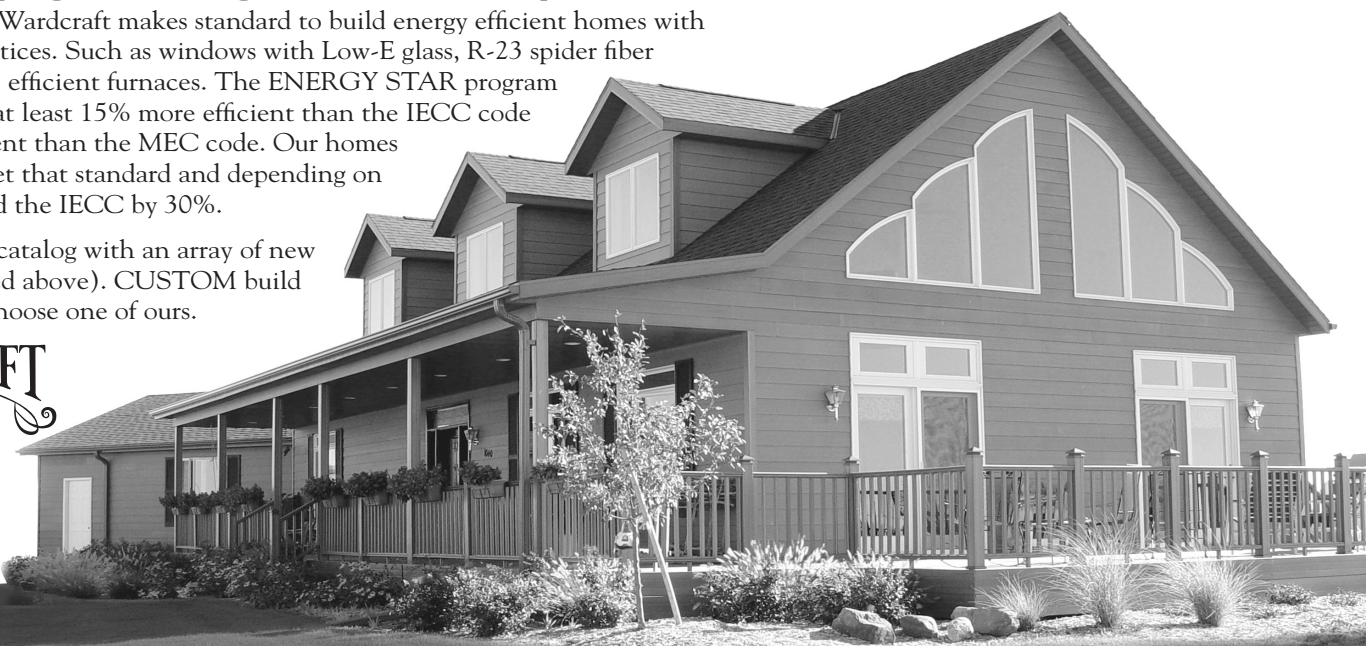
Redstone 2,112 sq ft
NEW PLAN!

ENERGY STAR SPECS!

FREE 116 page catalog with over 85 plans.

See what upgrades Wardcraft makes standard to build energy efficient homes with green building practices. Such as windows with Low-E glass, R-23 spider fiber insulation & 90+% efficient furnaces. The ENERGY STAR program ensures homes are at least 15% more efficient than the IECC code or 30% more efficient than the MEC code. Our homes are designed to meet that standard and depending on your climate exceed the IECC by 30%.

Request our NEW catalog with an array of new plans (some featured above). CUSTOM build your own plan or choose one of ours.



20870 Hwy 34
Ft. Morgan, CO
614 Maple
Clay Center, KS
1230 E 9th
Minden, NE

1-888-927-3272 (toll free) or www.wardcraft.com