

# Mail pickup time could change soon

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A proposed consolidation of the Colby mail processing facility could move mail pickup time at the St. Francis Post Office forward by as much as two hours.

A U.S. Postal Service official took great pains Monday to tell a group of about 50 postal employees, newspaper publishers, city officials, business people and citizens that the Colby post office is not being closed.

Rick Pivovar, district manager for Nebraska and Kansas, said the service is studying consolidating the mail processing centers in Colby and Hays into the one in Salina as part of an overarching plan to combat crippling revenue losses over the past decade. The service held a public meeting Monday at Colby Community College to discuss the proposal.

If the proposal goes through, Pivovar said, the bottom line for customers is that mail put in the blue collection boxes for any destination outside the 677 area – basically the nine counties of northwest Kansas around Colby – would go to Salina to be sorted. Mail going to addresses in this area would be sorted in Colby, then sent to individual post offices.

Pivovar said that mail going to be processed in Salina should actually get improved delivery to much of eastern Kansas – overnight instead of the current two-day service. However, outbound trucks will have to leave earlier, and mail not brought in before the deadline will go out the next day.

Even if a letter misses the truck, he pointed out, the mailer doesn't lose anything. The service will be the same as if it had made the truck today – two-day delivery in much of the state.

- Some sample cutoff time:
- St. Francis: now 4:40 p.m., would change to 2:15 p.m.
  - Colby: now after 5 p.m., change to 4 p.m.
  - Brewster: now 6:20 p.m., change to 3:25 p.m.
  - Goodland: now 4:40 p.m. (mountain time), change to 1:45 p.m.
  - Hoxie: now 5:56 p.m., change to 3:21 p.m.
  - Jennings: now 4:05 p.m., change to 2:25 p.m.
  - Norcat: now 2:55 p.m., change to 4:35 p.m.

Trucks with mail from from Norton, now sorted in Hays, would leave at 3:30 p.m. instead of 5:30 p.m.

Pivovar said there would be no changes in delivery times, retail services, business mail acceptance or commercial rates. However, some carriers, especially those in rural areas, wouldn't be able to make it back in time to get outgoing mail onto trucks that night.

A letter announcing the public meeting said, incorrectly, that the pickup times would not change. Officials said that's true in some of the areas under study, but not here. The letter did not get changed to reflect that – and news stories about the meeting as a result were incorrect.

Pivovar said the consolidation will save about \$99,000 a year at the Colby post office, mainly from reduced work hours. The consolidation would reduce afternoon work hours here by 2,269 per year. That's a little more than 43 hours per week, a little more than one full-time position.

Asked if any clerks here would be reassigned to Salina, Pivovar said he would have to follow collective bargaining agreements in the contracts with the American Postal Workers Union, which represents mail clerks. A new contract is being voted on now, he said, so he's not sure what the rules will be. Employees can request transfers, however, and Pivovar said has a limited ability to transfer excess work between facilities.

The Postal Service is in what Pivovar called an "acute financial crisis." Electronic communication, the recession and changes in the make-up of the mail have resulted in a 42 percent decline in first class mail since 2001. The service lost about \$8.5 million last year, and Pivovar estimated it would have to spend an extra \$500 million this year on gas alone, as it has one of the largest transportation fleets in the country.

The demand and volume of mail has been reduced, he said, but the Postal Service still has the manpower and equipment to process the larger volume, and so it has to make reductions.

He said in addition to the Hays and Colby centers, consolidation proposals are in the works for the mail processing centers in Lincoln, Neb., Hutchinson and Indepen-

dence. "It's the same thing that's happening across the country," he said. Pivovar said the Postal Service already consolidates Saturday mail sorting from Colby to Wichita, and has done so for some time. "We're already doing a lot of that," he said. "It's making us more efficient."

Pivovar emphasized several times that the Postal Service is not closing the Colby post office, but rather moving part of the mail processing work. However, the service has been closing smaller post offices around the country.

He said he has been reviewing post offices with nine carrier routes or less that have another office within 10 miles to see if the carrier routes can be combined. He said he just finished 23 public meetings in towns where the service plans to close offices that have had vacant postmaster positions.

"What I've been telling my employees is everything potentially is on the table for review," he said.

James Foster, rural development representative with the Kansas Department of Commerce, asked if the Salina processing facility will need to be upgraded to handle mail from Colby and Hays. Pivovar said part of the reason the service chose Salina is because it already has enough capacity. The service will have to have to add more man-hours in Salina to process the mail, however.

Foster also asked how many of these studies are not implemented. Pivovar said several consolidation proposals, such as some for Saturday deliveries, have not been approved, while others take years before they are implemented.

Colby City Manager Carolyn Armstrong said the change will require her employees to have their work done earlier so their outgoing mail can make it to the post office on time.

Steve Haynes, president of Nor'West Newspapers, owner of the *Colby Free Press*, said the changed time will affect the printing and mailing schedules at small businesses, especially newspapers. He asked if the service had studied the economic impact of the plan, and Pivovar said it had not.

Pivovar, while defending the change, said he recognizes that for anyone who's service will be downgraded, the change will be important.

"To that one customer, that's 100 percent of their mail, we do recognize that," he said. "That's something we are weighing."

Colby City Councilman Dave Voss said the local impact of closing the Colby sorting facility on the town would be greater than its national impact, which would be a drop in the bucket compared to the service's financial problems. Employees here spend money in town and their families attend our schools, he said.

"I think that you guys should look for bigger fish to fry," Voss said.

"\$99,000 doesn't sound like much," Pivovar said, "but we're looking a hundred of these AMP studies. Some are 500-person facilities."

Sandy Wilks, who works at the Colby High School library, asked Pivovar if the Postal Service had ever studied the local impact. Pivovar said it had not. Wilks also asked Pivovar to consider moving more equipment to Colby and expanding services, rather than cutting back.

Larry Barrett asked if the Postal Service had ever looked at a north-south consolidation instead of east-west. Pivovar said the service has already consolidated sorting in Garden City with Hutchinson, but was not considering a north-south consolidation at this time.

Holly Whitaker, executive director of the Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce, said she wanted the record to state that local businesses and citizens preferred local mail processing.

"We like local hands and familiar faces that we can trust with our most important mail," she said.

Pivovar said his office has done its initial review of the proposal. The Office of the Inspector General has also done an audit, he said, and found the overall scheme to be financially sound. Notes from the community meetings, as well as any concerns or suggestions sent in by mail, would go into the official records submitted to the regional office in Denver and then to the national office, he said.

If the plan is approved, the public will be notified and the service then has 60 days to make the change.

Pivovar said anyone who has further comments to mail them to Consumer Affairs Manager, Central Plains District, Box 19904, Omaha, Neb., 68119.



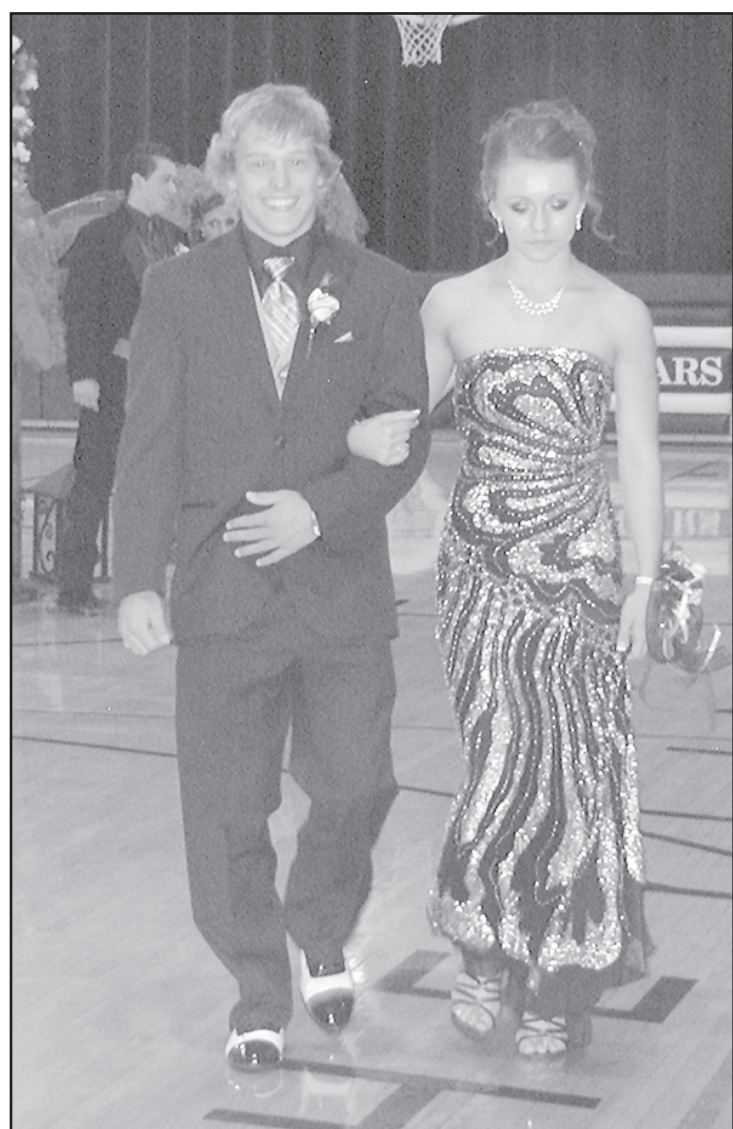
CHEYLIN juniors and seniors and their dates at the Cheylin prom dinner; there were five sophomores who were the servers for the evenings meal: Heath Churchwell, Joshua Keltz, Ruben Razo, Nakita Schneider, Grant Shrader.  
Times photo by Darci Schields

## 2011 Cheylin Promenade



ESCORTING THEIR DATES — (above) Craig Busse and Samantha Jones; (left) Jeremiah White and Tasia Reuber walk through Promenade on Saturday night.

Times staff photos by Norma Martinez



## New ad manager at the newspaper

Anita Schmid has joined *The Saint Francis Herald and Bird City Times* staff as the new advertising manager.

Ms. Schmid was born and raised in Atwood, then spent the next 30 years in Colorado. She recently returned to Northwest Kansas where she spent some time working in Atwood.

"I read the ad in *The Herald* and thought it would be an interesting and challenging job," she said.

"I've already met a lot of people and it has been a real pleasure."

Working as an ad salesperson wasn't Ms. Schmid's first newspaper job. As a teenager, she delivered the *Gazette Telegraph* in Colorado Springs. She has also had several retail jobs and outside sales positions.

Her grown children, Sarah and Seth Olson still reside in Colorado. As they will testify, she said, parenting requires "shock absorption!"

"Respectively, I am looking forward to working with *The Herald* staff and the people in the communities they serve," she said.

"Anita has jumped right into the job, starting with selling several special sections," said Karen Krien, publisher. "We are happy to have her as part of the staff."



ANITA SCHMID works at her desk in St. Francis. She is the new advertising manager for *The Saint Francis Herald and Bird City Times*.

## Club Clip

### McDonald Senior Center

President Joan Tongish welcomed 32 guests to the May 2 meeting at the McDonald Senior Center.

Phyllis Wingfield had decorated tables with tiny vases of pretty pastel flowers at each place setting. Nurse Rose Whitehurst was present to check blood pressures.

Birthdays and anniversaries were acknowledged. Pastor Mark Adams gave the meal blessing.

After enjoying the meal and visiting, bingo was played. The blackout game was won by five players.

A short business meeting was held. Reports were accepted as

given. Joan thanked everyone who helped. The hall is rented May 11 and May 28.

June Committees: Poem and Prayer, Eleanor Swihart; Bingo, Ray Johnson; Prizes, Marlene Johnson; Kitchen Duty, Phyllis Wilkinson, Joan Tongish and Eleanor Swihart

