



CRYSTAL RUCKER/Colby Free Press

Alan Jones of Gem got ready to rope a steer on Wednesday at the Dick Farmer arena in Oakley during a special clinic sponsored by Western Kansas Team Ropers. Rickey Green, Stephenville, Tex., a

professional roper, was on hand to offer tips and his expertise to more than 20 people from around the area, Nebraska and Oklahoma, who attended the two-day event.

Secret of sorts finally roped in

By PATTY DECKER

Free Press Editor

Until now, it's been somewhat of a secret.

But for the past four years, two Winona men have been bringing professional ropers to the area each spring for a two-day clinic.

The most recent event was held Tuesday and Wednesday in Oakley with Rickey Green of Stephenville, Tex., teaching a variety of roping skills.

George Collins and J.C. McHatton formed the Western Kansas Team Ropers to help others hone their skills or to learn the right way to rope.

"There's a lot of people who enjoy roping either as a way to relax or to improve their ability in more competitive events later on," Collins said today.

"There are no other clinics like this in our area," he said, "and over the years the school has continued to grow in numbers."

More than 20 people from Oakley, Colby, Winona, Brewster, Levant and Gem turned out for the two-day clinic with the furthest students from northwest Nebraska and eastern Kansas.

There were participants as young as 10 years old and the oldest roper was in his mid-60s, he said.

Green told ropers that the way a person approaches cattle can make or break the run.

He offered tips on a roper's swing, heading out of the box, balance and focus.

Although a champion, Green said he decided a few years ago to shift his emphasis from the hectic rodeo schedule to more on teaching others the art of roping.

In addition to the annual school, Collins said that he and McHatton also have jackpot roping events during the summer through the team roping organization.

"When we first started the jackpot roping," he said, "we had maybe 50 to 60 teams.

Now we have more than 300 participating — it's becoming popular."

As for the recent school, Collins said he and McHatton were grateful for the good turnout.

"We had a lots of fun and we appreciate our local people supporting this event, because without them, we couldn't do it," Collins said.

For information on roping clinics or the summer roping contest, Collins said to call him at (785) 846-7725 or McHatton at (785) 846-7444.

House struggles to eliminate \$700 million budget shortfall

By JOHN HANNA

Associated Press Writer

TOPEKA (AP) — Beset by members' doubts about deep spending cuts and besieged by protesters, the House struggled Wednesday to write a plan for eliminating a projected \$700 million budget shortfall.

In a series of votes, members restored money to the proposed budget for the next fiscal year to lessen the potential cuts in education and social services spending.

Members debated budget issues for four hours before adjourning Tuesday evening and resumed their work Wednesday.

They did approve, 71-52, a bill making minor changes in the budget for the

current fiscal year, which ends June 30. But the big issue is the budget for fiscal 2003, which starts July 1.

The debate centers on a plan by the House Appropriations Committee to balance expected revenues and required spending over the next 15 months without increasing taxes.

But that plan required deep spending cuts in education and social services, including a \$303 per pupil reduction in aid to public schools that House members deemed unpalatable. On a voice vote Tuesday, they restored \$175 million that the plan would cut, to keep aid per pupil at the current \$3,870.

On Wednesday, House members continued to consider an alternative

offered by conservative Republicans that avoids tax increases and some cuts in education and social services. It would cover the shortfall partly by dipping into cash reserves and utilizing extra federal funds.

They approved four parts of the conservatives' proposal to restore \$13 million to the higher education system and another \$18.1 million for social services.

"What it appears that comes out of this is that there isn't anybody who's willing to cut their way out of this situation," said State Budget Director Duane Goossen, who watched the debate inside the House chamber. "There has to be new revenues."

The possibility of reductions in so-

cial services brought about 100 disabled Kansans and activists to the Statehouse, where they chanted outside the House chamber.

House Speaker Kent Glasscock, R-Manhattan, said Tuesday night that members so far appear unwilling to cut the budget sufficiently to cover the shortfall.

"Ultimately, we're going to have to revisit the issue of tax increases," he said in a brief interview.

The GOP conservatives' proposal to avoid some cuts by using \$104 million from treasury reserves was approved on a 65-56 vote Tuesday.

By law, legislators must approve a budget that leaves a balance at the end of a given fiscal year equal to 7.5 per-

cent of spending. The conservatives' plan would leave just 5 percent — only for the fiscal year starting July 1.

Critics said the state shouldn't use a one-time source of money to pay for ongoing government programs. They noted the extra money won't be there next year for legislators to tap.

Supporters said the idea was more responsible than raising taxes.

Another part of the conservatives' plan was voted down Tuesday, as the House rejected 68-52 a measure to pack \$83 million in extra federal funds into the next fiscal year's budget. The state isn't guaranteed to get all of those funds — something critics noted.

"We've punched the Visa card and the MasterCard — they're maxed out,"

said Appropriations Committee Chairman Kenny Wilk, R-Lansing. "Now, we're going to American Express."

Gov. Bill Graves last week outlined a budget proposal that would balance spending cuts with \$364 million worth of increases in sales, cigarette, income and estate taxes.

The authors of the House conservatives' plan had helped defeat numerous proposals for tax increases during a series of test votes two weeks ago. Their budget proposal was intended as an alternative to keep the House from reversing itself on tax issues later.

"If you don't start thinking outside the box here, you're headed for a major tax increase," said Rep. Doug Mays, R-Topeka.

One-lane traffic in effect



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

Kansas Department of Transportation crews were painting white lines yellow on Wednesday afternoon in preparation for road reconstruction in the eastbound lanes of Interstate 70 from Colby to Levant, said transportation officials in Norton. Much of the lane closing work is nearly complete with visual signs and markings starting just after exit 53. The one-lane traffic for eastbound vehicles is expected to continue until October.

Briefly

Weather: Continued nice

March is going to go out on the dry side, if the National Weather Service forecast for the Colby region holds true. Tonight, mostly clear, lows in the middle 30s with variable winds 5-10 mph. Friday, sunny, highs near 60 and north winds 10-15 mph. Friday night, clear with lows in the lower 30s. Saturday, sunny, highs in the upper 50s. Saturday night, partly cloudy, lows in the upper 20s. And Easter Sunday, sunny, a good day for anything you've got planned with a forecast highs of 70.

The next shot for moisture comes on Monday (and we all know what Monday is). Colby's high Wednesday was 74 (nowhere near the record high for the date of 82) and the overnight low this morning was 27. The soil temperature

at the 4-inch depth is averaging 43 degrees. Precipitation for the month remains at only 0.16 inches. The records for March 28: 88 in 1988 and 0 in 1899. (The temperatures and precipitation are provided by the Northwest Kansas Research-Extension Center, Colby.)

Blood drive next week

The Thomas County Chapter of the American Red Cross is hosting a blood drive in Colby from 7:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., Thursday, April 4, at the American Legion, 1850 W. 4th St. Eligibility requires only that people be in general good health, at least 17 years of age and weigh 110 lbs. or more. For questions or to make an appointment, call Stephens at 462-8122, Frahm at 462-2082, or 1-800-GIVE-LIFE.

Corn growers to gather in Colby

The Northwest Kansas Corn Growers' 9th annual informational meeting will be Thursday, April 4, 7 p.m. at the Ramada Inn in Colby. Registration starts at 6:30. The meeting topic will be "Ethanol Production in Western Kansas." The supper is sponsored by area agricultural business supporters. For information contact Julie Saddler, 462-2237, or at the Ramada Inn, 462-3933.

Commissioners to meet Friday

The Thomas County Commissioners will meet at 9 a.m. Friday in their meeting room in the courthouse. Roads supervisor Chris Bieker will open pickup bids at 9 a.m., and bids on stripping the overlay from Dave Tole's sandpit at

9:30. Sheriff Tom Jones is on the agenda at 10. The meeting is open to the public.

Landfill to close Easter Sunday

The Thomas County landfill will be closed Easter Sunday, said Larry Jumper, landfill director.

Commodity distribution announced

USDA Commodity distribution will be held Monday from 11 a.m.-1 p.m. at the Senior Progress Center in Colby. Expected commodities include cranberry juice, potato flakes, peanut butter, cherries, apricots, plums, navy beans and canned potatoes. For questions, contact the RSVP office at 462-6744.

