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Questions ring loud at public hospital meeting

By **PATTY DECKER**

Free Press Editor

More than half of the hospitals in Kansas are critical access facilities, said John Helms, CPA, of Topeka, speaking to a group of 200 people Wednesday at the Colby High School auditorium.

“As of April 2003,” he said, “there are 61 critical access hospitals, which is 75 percent of the rural hospitals in Kansas.”

Of those 61 facilities, Helms said that 15 are in population areas of about 36,000.

“Colby and Thomas County only stand to benefit from this program,” said Vern Schwanke, chair of the Citizens Medical Center board of trustees.

During the nearly two-hour public meeting, Helms, along with three other out-of-town speakers talked about varying aspects of the program.

Since a critical access hospital must have a formal agreement with another larger facility, Jodi Schmidt with Hays Medical Center explained their relationship with Colby when the changes occur.

“We have been addressing the needs of hospitals in the network for 10 years,” she said, “and half of our patients are from outside the Hays area.”

As the “essential access community hospital,” Schmidt wanted to ease any fears that their facility would not take over the management or decision-making of the Colby hospital.

Following the presentations, written questions were accepted from the audience, but names were not included. One question involved the deficit on the expense-side from last year’s financial evaluation and how much of that was in attorney’s fees dealing with the hospital and conflict with Dr. Victor Hildyard. In response, Schwanke said that \$120,000 was spent on attorney fees in 2002.

One question from the audience was, “who approached who” with respect to looking at moving toward a critical access facility. Again Schwanke answered by saying the board of trustees had been looking at this option for a number of years, citing Helms and his firm being associated with the hospital since 1991.

In light of recent events involving Dr. Hildyard’s suspension of hospital privileges, one question asked was whether or not Drs. LaDonna Regier and Raymond Ketting will have a future with the Colby hospital.

Schwanke said both Drs. Ketting and Regier will continue to be a part of Citizens Medical Center. Although for many, said John Kern, president of Area Citizens for Health Care, there is still a problem.

“They (the board) have taken the doctor of our choice (Dr. Hildyard) away from us at the hospital and I feel that this is still very unfair.”

One question was that should the hospital decide to “switch back” to an acute care facility, would that be possible? Wade Baker, who is director of Prairie Senior Living Complex and head of the transition team, said the rules will allow the hospital to change back one time. “The cost to do so is minimal — basically just the cost of filing the application,” he said.

One question was will this conversion to a critical access hospital guarantee the survival of the Colby facility. In response, Helms said, “there are no guarantees in life,” but that the chances of survival are more likely with the program.

Jay Plank, chief executive officer at Logan County Hospital, said they have been a critical access facility for nearly two years. In their situation, he said, it was a good move. “It has helped us to continue to operate as a rural hospital,” he said. “For a hospital with low patient volume, the program is good.”



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

The strip mall located at the corner of Pine and S. Franklin recently underwent a facelift after Fred and Susan Haines, along with their son, Jake and his wife, Ashlee, purchased the prop-

Family breathes new life into strip mall

By **PATTY DECKER**

Free Press Editor

Major renovations were made recently to the strip mall on the corner of Pine and S. Franklin, said Fred Haines, co-owner of the property.

In addition to new wood siding to spruce up the exterior, the family-run operation reopened the laundromat and within the next few weeks, the car wash will also be reopened. Both facilities are in the same locations that housed those services when the strip mall first opened in 1984, he said.

Along with Fred and Susan Haines, their son, Jake and his wife, Ashlee, also are part of the corporation.

Both Fred and Susan said they were excited about bringing back the laundromat and car wash at that location.

The laundry facility is self-serve and open from 7 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. daily, Fred said. There are 14 washers with a 16-lb. capacity and

10 dryers with 30-lb. capacity, he said. For larger items, such as bedding and blankets, the Haines’ installed two 40-lb. washing machines, which are the biggest capacity washers in Colby, he said.

In keeping with water conservation efforts, Fred said all the washing machines are front loading and use about half the water of a top loader. As another convenience to laundry customers, he said, there is a coin changer that will accept one dollar, five dollar and ten dollar bills, a soap, bleach and softener dispenser and a vending machine complete with 264 snacks to choose from.

As an added service, Susan said they installed cable television and made sure that everything was as clean as possible for customers.

“Cleanliness is the key,” she said adding that the building was completely remodeled with new ceiling, sheet rock and all machines are in ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliance.

erty in February of 2003. The mall was built in 1984. As part of the remake, the Haines’ added wood siding, restored the laundromat and will soon be completing the self-service car wash.



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

Jake Haines (left), along with his mother and father, Susan and Fred Haines, all owners of the property, were busy last week putting the finishing touches on the new laundry facility.

Once the car wash opens, there will be four businesses operating in the mall. Those include Cutting Edge (a hair salon), and Videos, Games and Such, offering a wide

selection of videos and more.

The Haines’ also said there is a 400 square-foot space next door to the laundry that is also now available.

Crash sends two to hospital



MICHELLE L. HAWKINS/Colby Free Press

Shortly before noon today, a three-car crash at the corner of Country Club Drive and Fourth Street in Colby, involving an Oldsmobile, a Ford pickup and a City of Colby van, sent an elderly couple to the Colby hospital with injuries. Law enforcement personnel were tied up with the investigation and unable to provide any details as to cause. Condition reports were also not available. Colby Fire Department workers were also on scene to attend to the couple’s car which had wrapped around a light pole.

Briefly

Commissioners meet Monday

The Thomas County Commissioners will meet at 9 a.m. on Monday in the commissioners’ room in the courthouse. The bids for the motor-grader for the road department will be opened at 9 a.m., followed by a few routine agenda items. All commission meetings are open to the public.

Jaycees sponsor alcohol awareness

In conjunction with the Kansas Highway Patrol, the Colby Jaycees will be sponsoring an alcohol awareness presentation beginning at 7 p.m., Tuesday, at the Jaycee Center. The purpose of the program, said Tohanna Thompson, coordinator, is to provide information on the alcohol problem among youth. “With the average child taking their first drink at the age of 10,” she said, “this program will be of benefit to everyone.” Sgt. Travis Phillips, Hays, will be the guest speaker. For questions or other information call Thompson at 460-7147.

Arts program planned in June

Developmental Services of Northwest Kansas at 1675 W. 4th St., Colby, will host “Community Inclusion with the Arts.” Judy Kleinsorge, of the Prairie Museum of Art and History, will give a program, “Pens and Pics.” The program will begin at 9 a.m. on Thursday, June 5, and everyone from the community is welcome.

The program is free. For additional information call 462-3012.

Commodity distribution Monday

The USDA commodity distribution will be held from 3 to 4 p.m. on Monday at the Retired Senior Volunteer Program office in the Senior Progress Center, 165 Fike Park. Expected commodities that day will include peanut butter, beef stew, mixed fruit, green beans, pineapple juice, pudding cups, and roasted almonds.

For questions or eligibility requirements, call Laura Withington at 462-6744

Red Cross plans annual meeting

The Thomas County Chapter of the American Red Cross will hold its annual meeting at 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday, May 27 at the Thomas County Office Complex, 350 S. Range in Colby. All members are welcome, which includes anyone who has donated financially, or by volunteering or by giving blood. For questions, call Mary Smith, director, at 462-7161.

Carnival ‘work days’ continue

The Thomas County Amusement Association is holding “work days” each Saturday until fair time and everyone in the community is encouraged to lend a hand. The association, the driving force behind the home-owned carnival, has purchased several rides and with help on those work days may be able to have some of those in operation by July 4th.

Contact the association’s vice president, Chad L. Zimmerman at 460-1818 if you need additional information or have questions.

Board meetings on tap

The proposed wellness center on the campus of Colby Community College, will be among the items on the agenda for Monday’s meeting of the college’s board of trustees at 5 p.m. in Thomas Hall. All board meetings are open to the public.

Other items on the agenda include: Chartwells Food Service amendment to agreement; approval of contracts and agreements; resignations; natural gas bid; American Appraisal Associates’ capitalization report; and payment of claims and negotiations.

The Colby School Board will get an on-site report from the Booster

Club at Dennen Field as part of Monday’s 7 p.m. meeting.

Other reports during the meeting in the administration building, 210 S. Range, include the building principals, curriculum director and the superintendent.

New business includes a visit from Molly Oliver concerning an American Red Cross building use agreement, and discuss the woods class possibly building a house and a woods, vo ag, art building.

The 2003-2004 academic calendar will also be reviewed and tentative board meetings set for the year.

Three graduations this weekend

Three graduation ceremonies are on the weekend schedule in Thomas County.

They are:

- Colby Community College, Saturday, 2 p.m., Colby Commu-

nity Building.

- Brewster High School, Saturday, 4 p.m., school gymnasium.

- Colby High School, Sunday, 3 p.m., Colby Community Building.



Sunny, warmer

Thomas, Logan Counties

Tonight...mostly clear. Fog developing after midnight. Lows in the upper 40s to around 50. Light and variable wind. Saturday...mostly sunny and warmer. Highs in the upper 70s. South wind 10 to 15 mph. Saturday night...partly cloudy. Lows in the lower 50s. Sunday...mostly sunny, then becoming partly cloudy in the afternoon with thunderstorms a possibility. Highs in the upper 70s. Chance of rain 40 percent. Sunday night...mostly cloudy. Lows in the mid 50s. Monday...mostly cloudy. A chance of showers and thunderstorms in the afternoon and evening, then a chance of showers. Breezy. Highs in the mid 70s.

By the numbers

Thursday’s high, 58
Low this morning, 50
Year ago today, 69 and 52
Records, 93 in 1944, 28 in 1945
24-hour precipitation up to 8 a.m. today, 1.39
Month’s precipitation to date 2.27
Year’s precipitation to date 6.29
(Year’s precipitation to this date in 2002 was 1.56)
Water Usage/Colby
May 15 = 1.321 million gallons

