



COLBY FREE PRESS

Center almost finished

By TISHA COX

Colby Free Press

In a few months, travelers will have a place to stop in Colby to get more information on the community and its events and attractions. The new visitors center is located west of Taco John's on Range Avenue/Kansas Highway 25.

The official grand opening won't be until the first week in May, which is National Tourism Week, said Leilani Thomas, director of the Colby Convention and Visitors Bureau.

"We're a little bit from opening but it will be soon, probably April," she said.

There is still some interior work to be completed and furniture needs to be moved in but the building is mostly finished.

It's a project that goes back a few years.

"We have been planning for this a minimum of four years," Thomas said.

Travelers will be able to get information on the Prairie Museum of Art and History, Colby events, shopping in the community and more.

Thomas said it's main purpose is to encourage travelers to spend more time in Colby. The building planning was done by a committee and Glen Strait of Strait Associates was the architect.

"We thought it was interesting using the grain bin as part of the building," she said. "We feel that we needed an interesting first-class building to encourage



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Jarrod Taylor of Jim's Electric worked to hook up the outdoor lighting fixtures at the Colby Visitors Center.

people to stop." Construction started in 2002 and is nearly complete.

Thomas said the funding came from the hotel guest tax and no local tax money was used in the

building's construction. Thomas said they have yet to hire staff and will also need volunteers.

Wal-Mart materializing

By PATTY DECKER

Free Press Editor

City officials anticipate that construction on a new Wal-Mart store will start in the spring or early summer based on information received from Wal-Mart representatives.

The most recent meeting with Wal-Mart officials was held during the latter part of January, said Doug Lewis, the city's code enforcement officer.

"The property they (Wal-Mart officials) are interested in has been surveyed," Lewis said on Wednesday, "and is at the corner of S. Franklin Ave. and Willow Street (the road that runs east and west by Bourquins Campground)."

While plans are moving forward on the new store, he said, Wal-Mart officials are still working with the current property owner on the land.

The city is also needing documents from the company to start the process of annexation, rezoning and the preliminary and final plat approval on the proposed site at Wil-

low and Franklin.

Once the paperwork is submitted, the city's planning commission is expected to set a public hearing date sometime in March to consider issues of annexation, rezoning, site location, and other discussion on drainage, road improvements and utility services.

With respect to road improvements, Wal-Mart officials will be looking at the existing traffic patterns in the Franklin/Willow area and studying the anticipated traffic volume from the new store. According to city officials, Wal-Mart representatives could ask for some consideration on road improvements, but that would be a question for the city council at a later date.

The determining factor for the groundbreaking will depend a lot on how long the process takes to complete the zoning, annexation, and other issues.

Company officials are looking at plans to open the new store either in late 2005 or early 2006, Lewis said.

Council approves fire rescue truck

By PATTY DECKER

Free Press Editor

Tubbs and Sons Ford Sales was awarded the bid on a chassis for the city's new fire rescue truck and an out-of-state firm was awarded the body portion of the bid during the Colby council meeting Tuesday night.

At the January meeting, Jim Tubbs, one of the newest council members, recommended the previous bids be rejected because local bidders were excluded from the process. After the council voted to do the bidding process again, the result was Tubbs being the low bidder on the chassis at a cost of \$28,181 plus the trade-in of a 1980 GMC pump truck.

During discussion and voting, Tubbs excused himself from the meeting due to the conflict of interest since he is a co-owner of the dealership. The vote was unanimous to approve the bid from Tubbs and Sons for the chassis.

Danko Equipment of Snyder, Neb. bid on the rescue truck body at \$81,135.

The council also reviewed the city's airport board recommendations. Armstrong said the board

needed to decide on one of two designs dealing with either a two-lane or extending to a third lane on taxiway to hangars. The recommendation was with the two-lane taxiway to hangars. It was also decided to remove two hangars for the proposed improvements.

Other recommendations that will be submitted to the Federal Aviation Administration included work totaling about \$2.7 million. Those items included updating the airport's master plan, rehabilitating the taxiway and south apron, doing a crack and seal in 2005 or 2006, acquiring an additional 18 acres of land and striping.

In addition to those improvements, the board will also submit plans for extending and widening the runway, installing taxiway guidance signs, installing 7,000 feet of perimeter fence and construction of hangar.

The next council meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, Feb. 17, at 7:30 p.m. at city hall, 585 N. Franklin.

For questions or to receive an agenda, call Jo Strange, executive secretary to the city manager, at 462-4410.

Bill advances on '911' system

By JOHN HANNA

Associated Press Writer

TOPEKA (AP) — The House has advanced a bill that would fund improvements in county 911 systems with a new, 50-cent monthly fee on wireless phones.

The fee would raise at least \$7.8 million a year, proponents said. The money would be used to upgrade county's emergency phone systems to make it easier to locate someone making a 911 call on a wireless phone.

House members tentatively approved the bill Wednesday on a voice vote, forwarding the measure to final action. The Senate passed a version last year and would have to decide whether to accept the

House's version or seek a compromise.

Currently, personnel in most Kansas counties' dispatch centers are shown the number but not the location of a cell phone on which a 911 call is made — information automatically provided on calls made from traditional phones.

In addition, 911 calls made on cell phones are sometimes mistakenly routed to other counties or even across state lines, supporters of the legislation said.

Proponents of the bill said wireless phone companies have the technology to deliver information about a caller's location but most counties lack the equipment to receive it.

Rep. Carl Krehbiel, R-Moundridge, called the bill "great for public safety."

But some legislators said even a relatively small monthly fee would add up over time for consumers.

"It will keep taxing and taxing and taxing for years to come, long after its original purpose has been effected," said Rep. Eric Carter, R-Overland Park.

The House rejected Carter's proposal to have the fee expire in 2010. Krehbiel and other supporters of the bill said some counties would issue bonds to buy new equipment and would need the fee revenue to pay off the debt. Counties already can impose a 75-cent monthly 911 fee on traditional telephones.

Winter storms pile new worries on state's cattlemen

WICHITA (AP) — With calving now under way on Midwest ranches, a wave of winter storms is forcing already-weary cattlemen to try and keep their newborn calves from freezing to death.

Debbie Lyons-Blythe and her husband, Duane Blythe, have 250 cows that calve each year in January and February on their ranch near White City in northeast Kansas.

Usually they check only their

heifers every four hours at night. But with the current cold, snowy weather, they are checking all their cows every two to three hours — especially at night.

It takes an hour to go through all the herds.

Then they go back to sleep for an hour or two before doing it all over again.

"I don't think my husband and I have had a full night's sleep since

we started calving," Debbie Lyons-Blythe said Wednesday. "It sounds like we have a new baby, but actually it is a lot more work than a new baby."

Despite their efforts, five of the 25 calves born since Monday have died in the extreme temperatures a half hour to an hour after being born.

On Tuesday, temperatures warmed before the arrival of the

next storm. Lyons-Blythe watched her newborn calves running and kicking belly deep through the snow.

"When the weather does clear and the cows are healthy and you think about how many you have saved, it is a good thing," she said. "It is a good life."

In north-central Kansas, Aurora cattleman Tom Forshee was hauling water and feed Wednesday to

his 125 head of cattle.

With his heifers just starting to drop calves, he checks on them at least every three hours, day and night.

"You get used to it after a while," he said. "That is part of the love of cattle."

Forshee uses a hair dryer to thaw the calves' ears when they are born. So far, he has not lost any calves to the cold.

Briefly

Singles dance planned Friday

Weather permitting, the Colby Singles Group will sponsor a dance from 8 p.m. to midnight, Friday. Entertainment will be provided by Jim Christiansen, Kearney, Neb. In the event the dance is cancelled, Don Birzer, local coordinator, said it will be announced on KXXX-KQLS or by calling Birzer at 462-2127.

Landfill hours for winter

The Thomas County landfill is operating on its winter hours, said Larry Jumper, supervisor. The hours are Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Saturday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Sunday from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Pancake feed Saturday

The annual Oddfellows and Rebekahs pancake and sausage feed is planned for Saturday from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Colby Community Building. Proceeds from the pancake feed

are used for freshman and sophomore scholarships, organizers said.

Rotary soup supper scheduled

The annual Colby Rotary soup supper will be from 5 to 7:30 p.m., Tuesday, Feb. 17, during the Colby High School basketball game against Goodland at the Colby Community Building.

All proceeds from this event go to benefit various organizations. Tickets will be available at the door or from any Rotary Club member.

Share sign up this week

Heartland Share sign up for February began today and will continue through Friday at the State Farm Insurance office in Colby.

Delivery will be at Sacred Heart School gymnasium starting at 10:30 a.m., Saturday, Feb. 21.

For questions or information, call Gene Griffin, 462-3579.

Red Cross offers first aid

The Thomas County Red Cross is offering Standard First Aid at 1:30 p.m., Friday at the Thomas County Office Complex. This course consists of first aid and adult CPR only. To enroll, call (785) 462-7161.

Tax help available

AARPTax Aide help is now available on Mondays and will continue through April 15 from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. at the meeting room at Pioneer Memorial Library. Wednesdays, help will be available on simple tax forms from 1-3 p.m. at the Senior Progress Center. For information, call Alvin Volk at 462-2645 or Lela or Don German at 460-3062.

Workforce Center has new hours

The Colby Workforce Center (formerly the Job Service Center) is now operating under new hours: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. The center is located at 485 N. Chick.



Clearing, cool

Colby, Oakley, Hoxie area

Tonight...Mostly cloudy. A chance of snow then a slight chance of snow after midnight. Windy. Lows around 18. North winds 10 to 15 mph becoming northwest 20 to 30 mph after midnight. Chance of snow 30 percent. **Friday...**Partly cloudy in the morning then clearing. Windy. Highs in the upper 20s. Northwest winds 25 to 30 mph decreasing to 15 to 25 mph in the afternoon.

Friday night...Mostly clear. Lows around +8. Northwest winds 10 to 15 mph. **Saturday...**Mostly sunny in the morning then becoming partly cloudy. Highs in the lower 30s. Northwest winds around 15 mph shifting to the southwest 10 to 15 mph in the afternoon. Gusts up to 30 mph. **Saturday night...**Partly cloudy in the evening then becoming mostly cloudy. Lows around 10. **Sunday...**Partly cloudy in the morning then becoming mostly cloudy. A 20 percent chance of snow. Breezy. Highs in the upper 20s.

The numbers

Wednesday's high, 29
Low this morning, 20
Records for Feb. 5, 77 in 1904 and -22 in 1899
Year ago today, 35 and 18
February precipitation, 0.13 inches (correction from reporting agency)
February snowfall, 6 inches
Snowfall past 24 hours, 1 inch

The sources:

The forecast is from the National Weather Service, and other numbers are from the Northwest Research-Extension Center, Colby. A recorded forecast updated throughout the day is available by calling (785) 899-7119. Current temperatures are available by calling 460-TEMP.

