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TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Sue Taylor, director of the Prairie Museum of Art and History in Colby, took a look at some of the items on display in one of the museum's two galleries as part of the on-going Kuska Collection exhibit that opened in November. Taylor said, February is "Membership Month" at the museum.

Wal-Mart sparks controversy during city council session

By **PATTY DECKER**
Free Press Editor

One Colby councilman said he wants to see Wal-Mart come to town, but during Tuesday's meeting at city hall, he doesn't believe it should cost the taxpayers in street improvements.

Councilman Jim Tubbs said it bothers him that Wal-Mart cannot pay the entire cost for street improvements on Willow, which is the street running in front of the new store on the proposed site plan.

After a lengthy discussion, the council voted 4-3 in favor of paying 52 percent of the cost for Willow St. improvements with Wal-Mart picking up the other 48 percent.

Those in favor of paying for improvements were Council members Ken Bieber, Bev Eicher, Jim Brown and John Bremenkamp. Those opposing any kind of payment for the Willow Street improvements were Tubbs, and council members Eugene Wieland and Mark Beringer.

Tommy Martin, employed with Spear and McCaleb based in Oklahoma City, which is the engineering firm on the proposed Wal-Mart project, was at the meeting and listened while council members debated the street improvement issue.

Mayor Warren Hixson told Tubbs that as with all street projects, it costs the taxpayer. Hixson also explained that in most situations, a business requesting street improvements doesn't pay any of the cost.

"I just think it is ridiculous to pay (even 52 percent) when someone is making \$8 billion a year," Tubbs said.

"If the taxpayers don't agree with me (on the street improvement question), they can always recall me."

Jim Tubbs,
Colby City Councilman

Tubbs also was concerned about the revenue and taxes generated by Wal-Mart some 10 years down the road and whether or not the investment would compensate for the improvements proposed now.

Bieber told Tubbs he disagreed with him on his logic, while Brown added that he thought the city will see a great deal of benefit from the new store.

"I am not saying I don't want Wal-Mart in town," Tubbs told fellow council members. "I just don't think the city should pay any of the street improvements."

"If the taxpayers don't agree with me — they can always recall me," Tubbs said.

Following the motion and passage to improve Willow and accept the 52-48 percentage split between the city and Wal-Mart, Carolyn Armstrong, city manager, talked about how the city would pay for the upgrades.

Based on the engineering figures for the improvements, the total street project cost would be about \$860,760 with the city paying up-front costs on the street and then collecting Wal-Mart's share after it is completed, Armstrong said.

"The city's share would have to come from general obligation

bonds similar to those used for other arterial streets in Colby," she said.

The total bonded indebtedness at the end of 2004 will be about \$1,050,000 (including the \$515,000 for the intersection improvements on Range and Franklin.) Armstrong further assured the council that there is plenty of capacity for the Willow-Franklin project. In her assessment of the proposed infrastructure needs of Wal-Mart, Armstrong said it would be cheaper to make improvements before the new store is in business rather than waiting until the store opens and dealing with traffic problems.

In addition to talking about the street improvements on Willow, the council needed to decide on other infrastructure questions such as sewer, zoning and annexation of the proposed site within the city.

(Editor's note: With respect to sewer improvements, the council agreed that for the short term, upgrades needed to be split out and the segment in the area south of Colby needed to be provided with the anticipation of Wal-Mart moving in. More information about the aforementioned issues, along with the council's decision on the wastewater treatment site will appear Monday.)

New athletic league is the latest talk in area

By **TISHA COX**
Colby Free Press

That strange thing peeking over the horizon might be a new athletic league.

Just ask Jeff Quenzer, Colby activities director.

The idea of a new league has been on the drawing board for a couple of years, he said.

"We've been talking about it the last two years...We're still in the planning stages right now," he said.

He said the most likely scenario would be Colby and Goodland pulling out of the Northwest Kansas League and reforming their own with six other schools. That would require the consensus of the northwest league schools. The Northwest Kansas League members are Colby, Goodland, Hoxie, Atwood, Oakley, Oberlin, Quinter and St. Francis.

The new league would be made up of 3A and 4A schools, including

Ulysses, TMP in Hays, Holcomb, Scott City, Lakin and Hugoton.

Quenzer said it would increase travel slightly but Colby already plays some of the schools the new league might contain.

The projected date to implement the league is the 2006-2007 school year.

Quenzer said the only way to get the idea a reality is to get all of the school boards for the other communities to approve the plan. That, he said, will take time.

"It won't happen overnight," Quenzer said. "It will take several years to get it in place."

He said the heart of the matter is what's best for the students in Colby. It would give students the chance to compete against schools of similar size with many of the same athletic and non-athletic events would

Quenzer said Colby and

Goodland have a good relationship with the other schools in the current league but the 1A and 2A schools have suffered declining enrollment and can't offer the same things they used to. He would still like to work with and play against the northwest league schools, adding a new league would create the chance for schools south and east of Colby to expand the northwest.

"I'm hoping it's a win-win situation for everyone involved," Quenzer said.

"I think there's a lot of potential out there we need to look at." Superintendent Kirk Nielsen said many of the schools west of Larned are looking at forming new leagues because many of the schools they traditionally play have suffered a decline in numbers.

With fewer students, they no longer want to play a larger opponent.

"There's interest in finding out what people want to talk about," Nielsen said.

He said it's almost certain that Colby and Goodland would be in the same league, especially since the Cowboys will play their inaugu-

ral baseball season in spring 2005.

The Northwest Kansas League which has been in existence for more than 75 years. Nielsen said he's sure there would be resistance to change but many might embrace trying something new.

Clark, Morrison schedule area town hall meetings

Sen. Stan Clark, 40th District, and Rep. Jim Morrison, 121st District, are conducting legislative townhall meetings in the areas on Saturday.

For Thomas County residents, the first meeting is in Rexford at Shepherd's Staff Ranch House from noon to 1 p.m., following that is Colby from 1:30 to 2:30

p.m. at the Thomas County Office Complex (Chamber of Commerce room), with the third meeting in Brewster from 3 to 4 p.m. at Hunter Hall. Other meetings include Goodland at Hank's Cafe (formerly Ray's) from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. (MST) and King's Cafe in Kanorado from 5 to 6 p.m. (MST).

Briefly

Share delivery Saturday

Heartland Share delivery is Saturday starting at 10:30 a.m. in the Colby Sacred Heart gymnasium. There are a few Shares of food left, which are five meats, seven fruits and vegetables at a cost of \$17.50 and two community service hours. If interested, call Gene Griffin, 460-3579.

Daffodil fund raising event begins

The Thomas County Chapter of the American Cancer Society is once again taking orders for daffodils as a fund raising event to benefit research and a cure. Bundles are 10 for \$5 and orders can be placed by calling either Tina Dreiling, (785) 460-8677 or Stephanie Stones at (785) 462-8076. The deadline for ordering is Monday, March 1. The daffodils will then be delivered on Monday and Tuesday, March 8 and 9.

Pre-kindergarten screening offered

The Colby school district, along with Northwest Educational Service Center staff will hold pre-kindergarten screening on March 9 and 10 at United Methodist Church in Colby. Appointments can be made by contacting school nurse Emily Strange at Colby Elementary School at 460-5111. Parents of students entering kindergarten in August are encouraged to take advantage of this developmental screening. The screen-

ing will be done by professionals who know how children grow and learn. The screening will take approximately one hour to complete.

New play group forming

A play group is currently being formed for mothers and young toddler-age children to give them all a chance for interaction. Known as *Community Play Group* the moms and children will meet once a week, said Michelle Mettlen, one of the coordinators. The first meeting of the new group will be at 10 a.m., Friday, Feb. 27, at the Colby United Methodist Church nursery. For questions, call Mettlen at 460-3310.

Parent survey reminder

The Regional Prevention Center in Colby is reminding the parents of sixth, eighth, tenth and twelfth grade students in Colby who received parent surveys they need to be filled out and mailed back in to be eligible to win Chamber Bucks. Participation will assist the Social Norms Project to establish a baseline of parent and youth attitudes about substance abuse in Thomas County. Call the Regional Prevention Center at (785) 462-8152.

Music workshops Saturday

Dr. Jan Kraybill, formerly of Colby, will offer two work-

shops on Saturday for age groups 2nd to 8th grade from 9 to 11 a.m., teaching Christian songs and techniques for making music together. The second workshop is for singers ages 9th through adult from 1 to 5 p.m., featuring choral techniques, global music and learning music and descants for the evening hymn festival at 7:30 p.m. (See page 5 for details.)

Pancake feed Saturday

The Colby Knights of Columbus will sponsor a "Pancake & Sausage Feed" on Saturday from 7 a.m.-2 p.m. in the basement of Sacred Heart Church. Proceeds will benefit the needs and causes of the Thomas County Amusement Association.

Beef Weigh-In Saturday

Beef Weigh-In for 4-H members enrolled in the market steer and yearling bucket calf project will be held on Saturday from 9 a.m. until noon at the Thomas County Fairgrounds, said D'Ette Scholtz, extension agent.

Voter registration open

Voter registration books are now open for anyone who has changed their name, address or who will turn 18 before the next statewide general election. You may stop in at the County Clerk's office to pick up a registration card or call (785) 462-4500 with questions.

