



COLBY FREE PRESS

Ethanol plant enjoys \$4 million expansion

By Jan Katz Ackerman

Colby Free Press

CAMPUS — One year after taking its first load of grain, Western Plains Energy ethanol plant has expanded and will be able to produce 40 million gallons of ethanol annually.

Ethanol is alcohol that has denaturant added to it. The ethanol produced at Western Plains Energy is used as a fuel additive for oxygenating purposes in fuel. Ethanol is expected to eventually replace methyl tertiary butyl ether, also known as MTBE, an additive the Bush administration denied usage in California in 2001.

Although not classified as a carcinogen, MTBE has been shown to cause cancer in animals and has been found in well water, lakes and streams. It's phase out in California, led builders of Western Plains Energy to expect an added need of ethanol across the United States.

Mike Erhart, chief executive officer and general manager of Western Plains, is excited about the needs of the plant and its continued expansion.

"We are probably a year ahead of schedule. Market opportunity led us to expand. We've added a 750,000 beerwell tank, a third cell to the cooling tower, a centrifuge, and changeover pumps and heat exchangers to handle the capacity," Erhart said last week.



JAN KATZ ACKERMAN/Colby Free Press

A truck delivers a load of grain to the Western Plains Energy ethanol plant. The plant has grown since opening early last year.

The \$4 million dollar expansion at Western Plains Energy will allow it to continue its goal to compete in the national ethanol marketplace.

"It's made a tremendous, well, there's not too many places like this that's got this type of return on its

investment," Erhart said.

Having sold shares at \$5,000 per share in order to build the plant, Erhart said stockholders have just been delivered their second dividend checks.

Erhart said Western Plains En-

ergy currently has 610 stockholders, and for the first 9-month operating period they were paid \$700 per share in dividends.

"That's not bad when the plant started operating on Jan. 19, 2004," he said. Making the situation better,

Erhart said the company has benefited from tax credits.

"We did capture a \$3.5 million dollar high performance incentive program tax credit and we also got the \$1.5 million dollar small producers tax credit," he said.

Both tax credits are offered through the state of Kansas.

The newly completed expansion will boost the plant to 40 million gallons of ethanol annually. The total production of ethanol in the United States in 2004 was about 3 billion gallons.

Production of distiller's grains for use as premium cattle feed supplement in western Kansas feedlots will jump also.

The expansion will allow the plant to annually produce 275,000 tons of wet distiller grain, and 125,000 tons of dry distiller grain.

A 15-million bushel grain supply demand at Western Plains Energy is being met by producers in Kansas, Nebraska, and Colorado.

In Kansas, producers from Cheyenne, Rawlins, Decatur, Norton, Sherman, Thomas, Sheridan, Graham, Wallace, Logan, Gove and Trego Counties are currently contracted with Western Plains Energy to supply the grain used to produce the ethanol. That 12-county area is 62 percent irrigated and 38 percent dryland.

A typical bushel of U.S. Number Two corn typically yields 2.65 gallons of undenatured fuel ethanol. The output from these 12 counties can generate over 245 million gallons of ethanol. Western Plains Energy is located at 3022 County Road 18 and the telephone number is (785) 672-8810.

Colby council takes no action on street

By PATTY DECKER

Free Press Editor

A petition to pave about 450' of street on East Ash was nixed by the Colby City Council during its meeting this week.

Justin and Darlene Selley, who own 51 percent of the front footage along that area, brought the petition forward for approval.

The two other owners, Brad and Amy Wildeman and Ron and Dena Hutfles with 49 percent, also attended the meeting after reviewing the resolution.

"All the owners were notified of the petition," said Carolyn Armstrong, city manager, "and the next step is for the council to determine whether or not it is advisable to pave East Ash Street."

After all three owners had an opportunity to talk about their concerns, the council chose not to take any action, which in turn stopped everything leaving the area the way it is now.

Armstrong explained to the council that the reason for the Selley's petition was prompted by their decision to build a house on the prop-

erty. However, before a house can be built, there needs to be a street and right now that particular portion of East Ash is unpaved and unimproved.

When council queried about the building code, Armstrong said the code has been that way for many years.

The code requires a paved surface so that emergency vehicles or fire trucks can turn in the event those services are needed, she said.

Recent examples included Woofter Avenue, where the street dead ends, but there is a cul-de-sac (turn-around) or on Davis Avenue where the two houses are located behind Colby High School. In those particular cases, Mike Woofter, owner of Woofter Construction, and Charles Davis, land owner, both chose to pay 100 percent for those streets in order to develop the areas.

In this particular situation, the Selleys have two lots they said could be developed, but in order to make use of the land they need the street.

Without the street, the land is useless to the couple.

Although both of the other landowners said they empathize with the Selleys, they also said they hoped the Selleys could see their side of it as well.

An alternative suggested by Brad Wildeman was that the Selleys build the house with the front facing to the north on Walnut.

Wildeman also pointed out that he and his family were not prepared to pay an additional \$100 a month on his property for the next 10 years.

Ron Hutfles voiced similar thoughts, adding that he too has no use for the street and suggested the Selleys reconsider building so the house faces to the north.

"We aren't trying to be unfriendly," Hutfles said.

Justin Selley said building a house with front to the north would not be practical for him. "It would be impractical having our driveway to the north," he said.

Another problem with building the house facing north would be that the two possible lots for development would end up as only one larger lot that way.

Selley said that the city told him

he could build and if he can't build on the property — it's useless.

It's would be a dead end street," said Wildeman, adding that they wouldn't be using it and questioning why they would want it.

Both Wildeman and Hutfles also said that the only owner to gain from the improvements would be the Selleys.

Armstrong did suggest that the Selleys pay for all the improvements themselves.

The cost of the paved street was estimated at \$48,565 and the city would do all the labor.

Mayor Warren Hixson added that this situation was somewhat different than in the Copeland street improvement recently approved.

In that case, there were nine property owners and five of them signed the petition with four owners who either weren't ask to sign or didn't sign since the initial five owners totaled more than 50 percent of the property.

In this current scenario, two-thirds of the landowners are against the petition, Armstrong said, with only one-third seeking approval.

Grain first arrived in 2004

By Jan Katz Ackerman

Colby Free Press

Western Plains Energy took its first delivery of grain on Jan. 19, 2004, and it took Dave Heier, owner of Heier Farms and Feedlot, Quinter, 12 minutes to weigh in, deliver the first 900 bushels of milo and depart from the plant.

Once grain was unloaded at the elevator, Mike Erhart, plant general manager and chief executive officer, visually inspected the entire process of the grain being carried by conveyer belts to the cleaning and grinding units.

The plant's location hinged on several key components. Ethanol plants must be located near a main railway, have railway switching capabilities, have an uninterrupted source of power, be close to a natural gas pipeline, have an adequate supply of clean water and have access to key highways.

Western Plains Energy occupies about 20 acres of a 53-acre area. Western Plains purchased the rights to drill a water well 2 miles north of the plant site, and plans include an option to purchase an additional 137 acres east of the plant site. The two water wells on this tract would be used for future expansion of the plant.

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Hoxie resident Jeff Torluemke, president and chairman of the board, was one of several people who helped the plant become a reality. When the plant opened, Torluemke said 20 percent of Western Plains Energy was owned by people from South Dakota.

He said people there invested in the company because they were "looking for a company this far west where they could put most of the distiller's grain wet and capture the ethanol market in the western United States."

Other board members and managers are Ben Dickman, Grinnell, Brian Baalman, Menlo, Ron Blaesi, Sharon Springs, Gary Johnson, Oakley, Dave VanderGriend, Colwich, David Mann, Quinter, and Robert Casper, Wichita.

The company employs 30 people and anticipates this year's payroll to be right at \$1.4 million.

Rexford man to face assault charges next week

By Jan Katz Ackerman

Colby Free Press

A Rexford man has been charged with three counts of aggravated assault of three law enforcement officers nearly two years ago.

Roger F. Wark, 49, has been charged in Thomas County District Court with allegedly having tried to "feloniously, willfully and intentionally" threaten or attempt to do bodily harm to three officers.

According to court documents,

Wark allegedly assaulted or struck Thomas County Sheriff Deputy Jim Engel, and Colby Police Officers Ron Alexander and Ray Schweitzer with a rifle or shotgun while on duty.

All three officers, the complaint says, were uniformed or properly identified when the incident took place.

On the evening of May 7, 2003, officers from the Thomas County Sheriff's office and the joint Tho-

mas County and Colby Police Department Special Response Team were called to Wark's residence after receiving a report he was threatening suicide and firing a gun inside his home.

About 1 a.m. on May 8, Wark confronted officers with a gun. The officers fired back, striking and injuring Wark.

Wark was transported by ambulance to Citizens Medical Center in Colby, and was later transferred to

a hospital in Denver and has since been released.

The Kansas Bureau of Investigation assisted in an investigation which ultimately led to charges being filed.

If convicted, and depending on the outcome of a presentence investigation, Wark faces from just under 3-years to almost 8-years in prison and a fine of up to \$100,000.

Wark is scheduled to appear in court at 9 a.m. on March 9.

Briefly

Heartland Share signup continues

Heartland Share signup is continuing through Friday at the State Farm Insurance Office, 905 E. 4th, Colby, said Gene Griffin, one of the coordinators. This month's delivery is planned for Saturday, March 19, at 10:30 a.m., in the Sacred Heart School gymnasium, 1150 W. 6th. For questions about the program, call Griffin at 460-3579.

Students collect items for soldiers

Student Senate members at Colby Community College are collecting items and or cash for U.S. soldiers in Iraq. Suggestions for donations include snack items such as sunflower seeds, cookies, hard candy, toothpaste, toothbrush, deodorant, body lotion or powder, eyeglass lens cleaner; board games; playing cards; DVD movies; music CDs; or money to buy products. Donated items may be left at the Campus Bookstore or the dean of students' office located in the Student Union before April 1, 2005. For information, call Skip Sharp, dean of students' services, (785) 462-3984.

Parade entries wanted for celebration

A celebration is planned in conjunction with the Enlisted Association

of the Kansas National Guard meeting in Colby on Friday and Saturday, March 18-19, said Leilani Thomas, executive director of the Colby Convention and Visitors Bureau. As part of the celebration, she said, a parade is being organized and entries are requested. The parade will begin at 2 p.m., Friday, March 18 from Fike Park to the National Guard Armory. For those who would like to be part of the parade, call the Chamber of Commerce or Convention and Visitors Bureau at 460-3401.

Colby district music concert next week

The Colby Public Schools Music Department presents "Music in Our Schools," the district concert, at 7 p.m. Tuesday, March 15 at the Colby Community Building. The concert will feature musicians from Colby Grade, Middle and High Schools.

Judges needed for Forensics tourney

The Colby High School Forensics Tournament will be hosting their home meet on Thursday, March 17 and judges are still needed for the tournament. Training is available, said Nancy Rundel, head coach. Persons interested in judging should call Rundel at 460-5300 or at nrundel@colbyeagles.org

Colby
Hoxie
Oakley



50s and 60s to linger

Friday...Partly cloudy. Highs in the mid 60s. Southwest winds 5 to 10 mph shifting to the north in the afternoon. **Friday night...**Partly cloudy. Lows in the upper 20s. Northeast winds 10 to 15 mph. **Saturday...**Partly cloudy. Highs in the upper 50s. East winds around 10 mph shifting to the southeast in the afternoon. **Saturday night...**Partly cloudy. Lows in the upper 20s. **Sunday...**Partly cloudy. Highs in the lower 60s. **Sunday night...**Increasing clouds. Lows in the upper 20s. **Monday...**Decreasing clouds. Highs in the mid 50s.

The numbers

Wednesday high, 62

Low this morning, 25

Year ago today, 44 and 24

Records for this date, 80 in 1974 and -22 in 1960 (Colby's coldest March temperature ever)

Precipitation past 24 hours to 8 a.m. today, 0.00

Precipitation for month to date: 0.00

Snowfall for month to date: 0.00

Soil temperature, 41

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.

