



COLBY FREE PRESS

County budget will increase by \$251,000

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

The Thomas County 2006 budget has been hammered out. And it's going to cost taxpayers about \$251,000 more than last year. County Clerk Shelly Harms said the 2006 budget is \$5,310,629. Last year's was \$5,058,871.



S. Harms

She explained the increase in the budget is due to expenses that weren't there last year.

Harms said a big portion of the additional money is slated for the election fund to buy voting equipment required by the American Disabilities Act.

However, the commissioners hope to spend only \$25,000 instead of \$120,000 because Harms is seriously considering consolidating polling places in the county into one location in Colby.

Other increases in the budget come from the hiring of Jim Engel as the county's full-time emergency management director, which includes his salary and expenses for the department, which are around \$26,000.

Other increases are from additional vaccine at the Thomas County Health Department, which had to purchase meningitis vaccine and a two percent raise for county employees, which is a \$35,000 increase in the budget.

The Thomas County commissioners began working on their 2006 budget at their Monday meeting.

The budget has to be published by Friday and the commissioners will

approve it at a meeting later this month after a public hearing.

Brian Staats of Adams, Brown, Beran and Ball presented a copy of the audit and a preliminary budget, which he said was basically a copy of the 2005 budget rolled forward, with only a few minor changes.

The budget Staats presented didn't reflect any budget requests or raises and was only adjusted for health insurance.

"Health insurance seems to be a big issue with municipalities," Staats said.

Chairman Ron Evans asked Staats to include a three percent raise for county employees and the effect it would have on the budget. In the 2005 budget, employee salaries made up \$1.6 million of the total.

The raise would cause a \$53,000 increase in that area of the budget.

Evans said the budget is "almost identical" to last year's budget, a total of 35.527 mills as opposed to 35.523 mills in 2005.

He also said the county valuation went up this year, \$78,425,000 compared to \$76,846,263 last year, a difference of more than \$1.5 million.

Evans said next year, they will probably start the process three weeks earlier than usual in the beginning July so the group has enough time to get through everything.

He said he and fellow commissioners Ken Christiansen and Paul Steele appreciated the help they received from Staats, the county clerk's and appraiser's offices. Evans said they answered questions and provided necessary information to get the budget hammered out.

"We're really happy with the way things went," he said.

Flying high



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Treasure and Tessa Nye took a spin on the paratrooper Wednesday night at the Thomas County Free Fair. The carnival midway was teeming with people riding the rides, playing carnival games

and more. There is also putt golf, jumping castles and food vendors. The carnival is open each night starting at 6:30 p.m. and until 11 p.m., including Friday and Saturday.

Former professor saving lost language

LAWRENCE (AP) — A former University of Kansas linguistics professor said he had no idea when he went to a watermelon feed in Oklahoma in 1974 that he would find an important part of his life's work.

Robert Rankin went to the gathering in Shidler, Okla., to meet Maude McCauley Rowe, one of three speakers of the Kansa or Kaw Indians language still alive at that

time. Since that meeting, Rankin, 66, a now-retired linguistics professor, has spent 31 years documenting the language of the Kaw, who were forced to move from Kansas to Oklahoma in the 1870s.

Rowe, then in her 70s, recited the Lord's Prayer for Rankin, who transcribed it using a special phonetic alphabet.

"When we met the next afternoon, I said I had some questions

about some of the words in the Lord's Prayer," Rankin said.

Rowe believed her tribe's language could not be written and would disappear when she died.

Rankin compiled between 50 and 60 hours of reel-to-reel tape recordings of Rowe translating words and phrases, sharing legends and telling stories, before she died in 1978. He made similar recordings with Kaw elders Walter Kekahbah and Ralph

Pepper, the other two surviving Kaw speakers. Pepper died in 1982, Kekahbah in 1983.

All the tapes' contents are now on 55 compact discs.

With a one-year, \$40,000 fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities, Rankin is working to finish a Kaw dictionary and grammar manual. He has about 4,500 entries in the dictionary, with another 1,000-1,500 to include.

Colby School Board schedules public hearing for 2006 budget

By Tisha Cox

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The Colby School District started work on the 2006 budget at its Monday meeting. DeYoung said the proposed 2005-2006 budget would allow the district to spend up to \$12,129,462. The school board approved publishing the budget and will give it final approval after a public hearing at its Monday, Aug. 15 meeting.

The 2004-2005 budget authorized spending up to \$11,148,545. DeYoung said

the difference between the two is deceptive because of the way some of the funds in the budget function.

"It's going to look like we're going to spend a lot more money," DeYoung said.

She said that and \$366,259 more in state aid are the biggest differences in this year's budget.

DeYoung explained the way some of the funds are set up make it look like the money in them is spent twice, which inflates the numbers.

For example, she said if the money for at-risk was transferred from the general fund, it would show up as spent twice when it's only spent once.

The district's mill levy is also going down to 46.708 from 47.502 in 2004-2005.

More state aid is coming to the district this year but because the state gave districts tax money at an accelerated rate this year, more money will come from the local taxpayers. DeYoung said a little more money will come from local taxes, but doesn't

know how much because it depends on the final valuation.

Other preparations for the 2005-2006 school year are also under way. The board took a tour of the boys lockerroom at the Intermediate Building to look at pipe that needs replaced.

Superintendent Kirk Nielsen said the district's custodial crew could do the work when they have time. He said doing the work in-house would save money.

In other business, the board approved:

- The handbook for Thomas County Academy, the district's new charter school that opens this fall.

- Supplemental contract for T.J. Scholz, Colby Middle School seventh grade assistant football coach.

- The resignations of bus driver Cindy Black and paraprofessional Victoria Zwegardt.

The board went into executive session twice to discuss teacher negotiations. No action was taken.

Free food



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Thomas County Fair Board member Nancy Rundel and others helped served up grub at the free barbecue during the fair Wednesday. Several hundred people turned out for a dinner of barbecued beef sandwiches, pickles, potato chips, tea and watermelon.

Cloned dog latest milestone for South Korea's stem cell pioneer

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — The "Pride of Korea" has struck again.

Pioneer South Korean stem cell researcher Hwang Woo-suk and his research colleagues have succeeded in cloning a dog, a global first that extends the remarkable string of laboratory successes by the Seoul National University professor.

Last year, Hwang's team created the world's first cloned human embryos.

They followed that in May by creating the first embryonic stem cells that genetically match injured or sick patients.

Now, they've come up with Snuppy, an Afghan hound, now 14 weeks old, that Hwang's research colleague, Gerald Schatten of the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, called "a frisky, healthy, normal, rambunctious puppy."

The goal of Hwang and his team, who reported their achievement Wednesday in the journal Nature, isn't to reproduce lovable pooches but to find ways to eventually help treat human diseases by creating a reliable research model.

Monkeys are the closest model to humans and they are crucial to medical research, but Hwang told reporters Wednesday that cloning a monkey "is technically impossible at the moment."

"Dogs share physiological characteristics with humans," Hwang, clad in his trademark white lab coat, told reporters in Seoul. "A lot of diseases that occur in dogs can be directly transferred to humans."

Embryonic stem cells are the source of all tissue. Researchers believe they can be coaxed to grow into heart, brain or nerve cells that could be used to renew ailing organs.

Hwang's previous achievements grabbed worldwide headlines and instantly made the 53-year-old a national hero in education-mad South Korea, which consistently scores in the top tier of world math and science surveys.

The cloning news was reported on the front pages of most major South Korean dailies Thursday.

"It's a matter of great national pride that such a person came from our country," Ro Suk-rae, a merchant in downtown Seoul, said of

Hwang. "All Korean people are waiting for the final results of his research ... to be applied to cure humans."

The name of the cloned puppy, the lone success from more than 100 dogs implanted with more than 1,000 cloned embryos, highlights the importance of Hwang's research base. Snuppy is shorthand for "Seoul National University puppy."

Seoul National is South Korea's top school. Admission is considered a sure ticket to the corridors of power and influence here.

"The ability to use the underlying technology in developing research models and eventually therapies is incredibly promising," said Robert Schenken, president of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine.

"However, the paper also points out that in dogs as in most species, cloning for reproductive purposes is unsafe."

Other animals that have been successfully cloned are sheep, cats, goats, cows, mice, pigs, rabbits, horses, deer, mules and gaur, a large wild ox in Southeast Asia.

