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Courthouse designates smoking area

By Tisha Cox
Colby Free Press

Anyone wanting to smoke at the Thomas County Courthouse will have to take it outside.

The commissioners decided at their Monday meeting to have a lean-to built behind the courthouse to give people a designated smoking area, said chairman Ron Evans.

The commissioners listened to concerns from Marilyn Bailey and County Appraiser Mary Cech and Register of Deeds Maybelle Moore.

Evans said the county has a non-smoking courthouse, which has prompted people to smoke outside at the north and west entrances.

“That’s not going to happen anymore,” he said.

County Clerk Shelly Harms said the courthouse has been smoke-free since Nov., 1998.

In other business, several appointments were made.

The commissioners approved the appointment of Raenette Martin as the Thomas County representative to the Developmental Services of Northwest Kansas board of directors.



R. Evans

Martin replaces Dave Jennings, who held the position for 21 years, and his tenure ends Dec. 31.

Three other appointments were approved.

They were: Francis Landry to the board of zoning appeals; Tylon Mengel to the planning commission and Steve Richards to the Thomas County Economic Development Alliance board. All three will serve three-year terms.

The commissioners also discussed a clothing allowance for employees at the landfill and road department to purchase work shirts, overalls and boots for cold weather.

Evans said it has nothing to do with payroll.

Commissioner Paul Steele said they should limit it to \$250 per employee.

Sand for county roads was also on the agenda. Road department supervisor Clair Schrock talked about a new sand pit the county has drilled.

The Cousins pit should be producing by the beginning of February. Schrock said that’s when they’ll put out bids for asphalt, which will be produced at the pit.

Commissioner Ken Christiansen asked how many years of sand they have left. Schrock said 15 years possibly, and that depends on how well the county’s asphalt holds up.

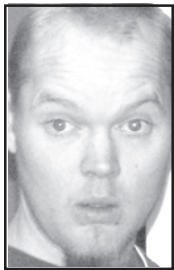
If and when it runs out, Evans said they will have to bring in sand, which could get expensive.

Authorities search for Oakley man

By Jan Katz Ackerman
Colby Free Press

An Oakley man is on the run and authorities want help finding him.

Colby Police Department Detective Sgt. Gary Shull said this morning the department is looking for Eric Schiltz.



E. Schiltz

Schiltz, 24, along with, Goldie Mae Moore, 22, also of Oakley, have been charged in Thomas County with burglary, felony theft and criminal damage to property. They are suspected in the Nov. 23 break-in at Murray Enterprises, Murray Roofing, JM Tree and Law Service and Sundance Spas. All four businesses are located at 780 E. Fourth St. Schiltz and Moore allegedly gained access to the building by breaking a window. Taken in the incident were laptop computers and a checkbook.

Schiltz also has charges pending against him in Thomas County for allegedly trying to accept contraband while in Thomas County Jail

on Aug. 4.

He is scheduled for a preliminary hearing in that case on Dec. 20. Schiltz is scheduled for a jury trial Jan. 15 for allegedly having stolen fireworks in his possession for an incident July 3 in Colby.

Shull asks anyone seeing Schiltz or knowing his whereabouts to call 911 or their local law enforcement agency immediately.

“Miss Moore has been located in Oklahoma and is being extradited back to Kansas. I don’t know who is going to get her first,” Shull said.

Assistant Ellis County Attorney Brenda Basgall said Schiltz and Moore are wanted in that county on pending forgery charges.

She said she’s received reports from the Hays Police Department about forged checks and is “waiting on more reports” which could link them to other crimes in the Hays area.

In addition, Logan County authorities are investigating a break-in at Oakley Motors Nov. 23. At that time, Oakley Police Chief Danny Shanks said the two break-ins were thought to be connected.

Shanks said various hand tools used in the mechanic shop were taken from the auto dealership.

Federal lawsuit filed on suspended student

KANSAS CITY, Kan. (AP) — An attorney representing a 16-year-old student who was suspended for speaking in Spanish at a Kansas school says two other parents have told him their children were sent home for the same infraction.

The father of Zachariah Rubio filed a federal lawsuit Monday against the Turner Unified School District, the principal of Endeavor Alternative School, and six teachers, claiming his son’s civil rights were violated when he was sus-

pended Nov. 28 for speaking Spanish in a school hallway.

Rubio’s lawyer, Chuck N. Chionuma, said two other families told him their children also were suspended from the school for speaking Spanish.

He said the case has “strong potential” to become part of a class-action discrimination suit.

School district lawyer Greg Goheen said he had no reason to believe any other Spanish-speaking students had been reprimanded.



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Bev Biel put Santa Claus with his sleigh in the Department 56 North Pole village set up in the basement of her home. Biel and her husband Bill, collect the different villages by Department 56, and their basement is filled with the displays.

A town within a town

By Tisha Cox
Colby Free Press

Christmas is visible every day at the home of Bev and Bill Biel in Colby. Go to their basement, hang a right and be prepared to be amazed. The basement is filled with a miniature village, all twinkling like the lights of real homes in Colby.

The couple has acquired Department 56 collectibles since about 1983.

“We just love to do it,” she said. “I leave it up all year.”

People who see the collection for the first time are amazed. And there’s no wonder. More than 800 buildings and too numerous to count people, animals and accessories make up the Christmas scenes.

Pieces include a Dickens village, the North Pole, Christmas in the city, an Alpine village, New England and new pieces that have been put together until they can be put in their villages.

The collection started when Bev saw a church from the Dickens collection, which reminded her of a miniature church her family used to have sitting on their piano when she was a child.

The Dickens church was part of a Safeway store promotion. Bill purchased the eight build-



The Biels’ “Christmas in the City” village has a cars that drive around the town square. It’s one of several such scenes in their home.

ings for her. Another first piece was Santa’s workshop, which she saw on a trip. The workshop was no longer in production.

“That’s how we got started,” Biel said.

All their pieces are from the Spruce House in Estes Park, Colo., and she keeps an inventory of the collection. Only so many pieces are made each year, and some are retired. After new pieces are made, the molds are broken. On the bottom of each piece, it states Department 56, the village series, the building name and the year it was made.

This is the first year they haven’t bought every new piece that’s available. They’re running out of space but will continue to collect the pieces they like the most each year.

“We wanted to do each village separately,” she said.

Each village occupies its own table, which Bill built.

Famous buildings include Independence Hall, the Capital Building, the Ryman Auditorium (Nashville’s original Grand Ol’ Opry) and a building from New York’s Times Square, complete with the New Year’s Eve crystal ball that drops —

just like the real thing.

Bev has arranged the city Christmas scene to look like Central Park during the holidays with a giant Christmas tree, ice skaters, vendors and the Salvation Army band playing nearby.

The alpine village features the church where “Silent Night” was written and the von Trapp family of “Sound of Music” fame and Heidi and her goats.

The Dickens village has the homes of both Scrooge and the Cratchet family.

New England has many farm scenes, along with items that reflect the seafaring heritage — a schooner, lighthouses, fishermen and fishing boats.

Her favorite is the North Pole. Bill’s is the Alpine Village.

Their family loves the collection, along with their grandchildren, who learned early on to look and not touch.

“They touch with their eyes,” Biel said.

The two love to show the collection to people and have many pieces they haven’t displayed.

The Biel’s also has more than just Christmas. The New England village has fall scenes, and she also has many just for Halloween.

“It’s hard to choose the one you like the best,” she said.

Sounds of the Season

Colby Elementary School fifth grade trombone players (from left to right) Bailey Terrell, Trek Keck and Mishaela Benson showed off their musical skills during the annual winter concert which featured the fifth grade band, Colby High School band and the Colby Middle School jazz band Monday at the high school auditorium.



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press