



COLBY FREE PRESS



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

Ethan Maier, 6, of Colby, was one of the children drawing Christmas On Us! numbers during the finale held Saturday at the Thomas County 4-H Building. Helping Ethan is Colby Free Press staffers, Crystal Rucker (left) Leatte Bandy and Jasmine Crotinger (background). Other children assisting in the drawing were Lexy Kraft, Kylie Ritter, and Emma and Kate Maier.

Grand prize winners named in Christmas On Us! contest

The annual *Colby Free Press Christmas On Us* drawing was held Saturday at the Thomas County 4-H Building and five lucky people walked away a little richer.

The winner of the \$1,000 grand prize in scrip money was Connie Ritter of Colby.

Vernon Flanagan of Colby was the second biggest winner, with the \$500 in scrip.

Three \$50 winners were also given away. They went to Charlie

Powell, Matt Augustine and Dana Bolyard.

Winners can redeem their scrip money at any of the businesses participating in the annual promotion. They were: Beringer Hardware, Colby Photo, Colby Implement, Kansas Country Store, Rasure Lumber, Great Western Tire, Cal Spas, Kasual Country, Office Works, Colby Ag, T.O. Haas and the *Colby Free Press*.

The promotion runs four weeks and 10 instant \$50 winners were

given out over that time period. Ticket numbers appeared in random ads in the Christmas On Us section, and anyone matching a ticket to an ad number won \$50 in scrip.

For each \$10 spent at a participating business, people received a ticket.

Other instant winners were Charlie Powell, Carolyn Miller, Bruce Bohme, Joel Powell, DeLores Linville, Tess Baumfalk and Juanita Fell.

A new way of voting

Commissioners get look at new machines

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

The Thomas County commissioners got a look at the future of voting during their meeting today.

Bob Morris of Voting Technologies International in Olathe had a voting machine like one the county recently purchased to demonstrate how the units will work.

All three commissioners had a chance to test the machine, and Morris explained to them how an election will work once the switch to the units is made.

The earliest election for them to be used is August 2006.

Morris said County Clerk Shelly Harms has worked hard to get everything ready to make the county compliant with the Help Americans Vote Act.

"I think she needs to be commended for the work she's done," he said.

Morris explained the machines will save on paper ballots and the time it takes Harms and poll workers to finish.

Harms will be able to build ballots for each precinct on computer, which will then be used at each voting location. Results will also be saved to disc, which will help cut down on time it takes to count ballots.

"It's extremely safe," Morris said.

The units the county purchased are unique in one important aspect. He said they use off-the-shelf Dell computer components so if anything goes wrong, they can be easily replaced.

He also talked about how the system will work.

Voters will each be given a personal identification number that can be used only once. The enter it on the touchscreen, and can then start to enter their choices for each race. Only one race at a time is displayed on screen, which helps cut down on confusion and makes it easier to vote.

Once done entering their choices, they can review their ballot before finally casting it. The system also provides for provisional ballots, and advance voting.

With advance voting, people will get a printout of all the races and a card to mark, which can be sent back by mail to be counted.

Printouts are on traditional paper, which will help eliminate printing costs for an election.

"There's some good checks and balances here," Morris said.

Chairman Ron Evans said the



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Thomas County commissioner Paul Steele tried out a voting unit like one of the seven the county purchased earlier this month. Bob Morris of Voting Technologies International in Olathe gave a demonstration for the commissioners of how the machines work.

new machines will require patience from voters and poll workers alike, but he thinks people will like using them.

Commissioner Paul Steele suggested a mock election early next year to give people a chance to use them.

Evans suggested setting one up at the fair, and Morris said it wouldn't hurt to have one at the courthouse next summer so people can stop by and familiarize themselves with the voting machines.

Counties are being required by the state to get voting equipment that is compliant with the American Disabilities Act. The voting ma-

chines were purchased earlier this month.

In other business, the commissioners tabled a maintenance agreement with IBM for the courthouse's AS400 computer, which serves as the operating system for the various departments.

They also heard an update from Jim McGuire on the smoking area behind the courthouse, which was approved last week.

McGuire said he's already applied for a building permit from the city and has sent drawings and other information to the state historical society for approval. That will take several weeks.

City Council to hold public hearing on budget amendments

By Patty Decker

Free Press Editor

A public hearing on amending the 2005 budget for electric utility by \$70,000 and capital improvement reserve funding by \$130,000 will be held at 7:30 p.m., Tuesday, at the regular city council meeting.

In addition, the council will consider

approving cereal malt beverages for the following restaurants or locations to include: China Buffet, Dillons, J-J Oil, Co., Kabredlos, Inc., Love's Travel Shops and Country Stores, Inc., S & S Ventures, Inc. (Stop 2 Shop East), The Service Oil Company, Triplett, Inc., WKRP Management (Pizza Hut), and Oasis Travel Center.

Mayor Warren Hixson is expected to

approve the reappointment of Larry Barrett to the Thomas County Economic Development Alliance until December 2008.

He will also consider reappointing JoAnne Sunderman and Armun Jones to the Housing Authority for a term to expire December 2009 and the reappointment of Ivan Lee and Hal Kistler to the Planning Commission for another three-year term.

One new appointment to the Planning Commission is Rod Williams.

The council is also expected to take action on other items to include reviewing bids for the east interceptor sewer and negotiating the lowest responsible bidder for phase one of that sewer project.

The council could also approve appointing the municipal court judge and clerk and

city attorney; establishing date for the end-of-the-year meeting; setting a public hearing on the sanitary sewer expansion on the north side of Horton Avenue; and approving the preliminary site plan for the mall area west of Wal-Mart Super Center property. For questions or an agenda, call 460-4410 or stop by city hall, 585 N. Franklin Ave. All meetings are open to the public.

President's candor on Iraq praised, but critics still want withdrawal

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats and Republicans are applauding President Bush for acknowledging mistakes in Iraq and taking responsibility, but critics say he still has not given Americans a realistic plan that will lead to the withdrawal of U.S. forces.

"I know that some of my decisions have led to terrible loss — and not one of those decisions has been taken lightly," Bush declared in a televised speech to the nation Sunday, his first from the Oval Office since announcing the invasion of Iraq in March 2003.

He held out the promise that when the Iraqi military gains strength and self-government

moves forward, "it should require fewer American troops to accomplish our mission. I will make decisions on troop levels based on the progress we see."

The language was not specific enough for Bush's critics.

"While I appreciate the president's increased candor, too much of the substance remains the same and the American people have still not heard what benchmarks we must meet along the way to know that progress is being made" and when the troops "can begin to come home," said Senate Democratic leader Harry Reid of Nevada.

His House counterpart, Rep. Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said: "To-

I know that some of my decisions have led to terrible loss — and not one of those decisions has been taken lightly."

President George Bush

night the president acknowledged more of the mistakes he has made in Iraq, but he still does not get it. Iraq did not present an imminent threat to the security of the United States before he began his war of choice."

Bush said that despite setbacks, "Not only can we win the war in Iraq

— we are winning the war in Iraq."

There is a difference, he said, between "honest critics who recognize what is wrong, and defeatists who refuse to see that anything is right."

That drew a rebuttal from Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass.

"It's wrong for him to silence his

critics by calling them defeatists," said Kennedy. "Every American — including those that thought this war should never have been fought — understands that we have no choice for own security but to win in Iraq."

Bush should acknowledge, "as his own generals do, that the Iraq war has emboldened the terrorists and increased their ranks," Kennedy said.

Critics also said a change in direction is essential.

Iraqis must be told the United States will reconsider its presence unless the new constitution is revised to give the minority Sunni Arab community a stake in running

the country, said Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich.

"They've got to share power, they've got to share oil resources," said Levin, senior Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee. There can be a significant withdrawal of U.S. troops only if there are enough capably trained Iraqi soldiers by the end of 2006, he said.

On NBC's "Meet the Press" earlier Sunday, Levin said Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has "ducked the question" of whether the United States would tell the Iraqis they need to change their new constitution. "The amendment process is there and it ought to be used," said Rice, also appearing on NBC.