

Weather
Corner



Weekend
looks warm

The forecast

Tonight — Mostly clear with a low around 27. West wind around 10 mph.

Thursday — Partly cloudy with a high near 64. West wind between 5 and 10 mph. **Friday** — Partly cloudy with a high near 59. West wind between 5 and 10 mph. **Friday night** — Partly cloudy with a low around 27. **Saturday** — Partly cloudy and breezy with a high near 52. **Saturday night** — Partly cloudy with a low around 25. **Christmas Day** — Mostly sunny with a high near 57. **Sunday night** — Mostly clear with a low near 25. **Monday** — Mostly sunny with a high around 56. .

Temperatures

Tuesday's high, Low this morning, 11

Records for this date, 72 in 1933, -15 in 1983

Precipitation past 24 hours to 8 a.m. today, 0.0

December's precipitation, 0.08

A recorded forecast updated throughout the day is available by calling (785) 899-7119. Current temperatures are available by calling 460-TEMP.

Briefly

Prairie Museum closes for holiday

The Prairie Museum of Art and History will close Saturday, Sunday and Monday, Dec. 24-26 so the employees can enjoy the holiday.

After-school program begins soon

The Thomas County Interagency Coalition in conjunction with area businesses and organizations will continues its After School Program for students in third, fourth and fifth grades. The program will run Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays Jan. 9 through March 16.

Sanitation schedule announced

The City of Colby's sanitation trucks will run the following holiday schedule: Friday, Dec. 23 - normal routes; Saturday, Dec. 24, normal commercial routes; Monday, Dec. 26, no sanitation service; Tuesday, Dec. 27, Monday route and regular Tuesday service routes.

County offices plan closings

The Thomas County Courthouse, landfill and health department will be closing next week for the Christmas holiday. The landfill will close at noon on Saturday, Dec. 24 and will be closed Sunday, Dec. 25 through Tuesday, Dec. 27. It will reopen at 9 a.m. Wednesday, Dec. 28 at 9 a.m. The courthouse and health department will reopen on the same day. The landfill will also be closed on Sunday, Jan. 1 and Monday, Jan. 2. It will reopen on Tuesday, Jan. 3 at 9 a.m.

Sweet Adelines rehearse

The Hi-Plains Harmony Chorus of Sweet Adelines holds rehearsals every Tuesday at 7:30 p.m. at the Colby United Methodist Church, 950 S. Franklin Ave. Everyone welcome.

Former college employee sentenced

By Jan Katz Ackerman
Colby Free Press

A former Colby Community College employee charged with 18 crimes at the college earlier this year will be sentenced next month.

Charles L. Heinrich, 44, pleaded guilty Dec. 2 in Thomas County District Court to having taken a laptop computer from the college March 16.

The charge of felony theft means an item valued at more than \$1,000 but less than \$25,000.

According to court documents, Heinrich waived his rights to a preliminary hearing and will be sentenced at 10 a.m. Jan. 4.

Depending on the outcome of a presentence investigation, Heinrich's guilty plea could result in him being placed on probation. Or it could mean a prison term between five and 17 months.

As part of the plea agreement, Thomas County Attorney Andrea Wyrick, representing the state, asked District Judge Glenn Schiffrer to dismiss 17 other counts


against Heinrich.

Dismissed were two felony theft charges for a second stolen laptop and digital camera. Six burglary charges, all felonies, were dismissed for Heinrich's alleged entry into the college's library, Bedker Building, Cultural Arts Center, the swimming pool building and offices of two instructors.

Also dismissed were three misdemeanor counts of Heinrich allegedly having taken a camcorder, trumpet and a clock all valued less than \$1,000. In addition, six charges of criminal trespass, all misdemeanors, were dismissed for Heinrich's alleged unauthorized presence at the campus on dates ranging from March 16 to April 24.

When employed by the college, Heinrich was a custodian. He was arrested May 1 after college officials suspected and observed him for several months. Police officials searched Heinrich's apartment at the time and found what they called "hundreds and hundreds" of items believed linked to the campus crimes.

Critter Christmas



Dave Evert/Sacred Heart School

Sacred Heart Catholic School students were dressed up as different critters for one of the school's two Christmas programs held this month. All of Colby's school have had holiday programs.

Criticism continues on state's new education commissioner

HUTCHINSON (AP) — Bob Corkins continues to face questions about whether he's qualified to be education commissioner and whether he's getting paid too much.

Corkins, starting his third month as commissioner, found himself defending his background during a meeting with teachers, administrators and interested citizens Monday at Hutchinson High School.

He is the state's first top school administrator in more than 80 years not to have served as a local superintendent first.

Before the State Board of Education hired him, he had run two small conservative research organizations, opposing large increases in school funding and advocating vouchers and other school choice initiatives.

"Just because I don't have an education degree doesn't mean I don't have the appropriate skill set for the job," Corkins told his audience at Hutchinson High. "No person running any agency is running a one-man show."

But Hutchinson resident Art Henry said he wonders why the state board thinks it's wise to hire Corkins and pay him far more than

the governor. Corkins' salary is \$140,000, compared with less than \$104,000 for Sebelius.

Board member Ken Willard, a Hutchinson Republican, defended the salary, noting it was slightly less than what the former education commissioner, Andy Tompkins, received when he left the job in May.

Willard added that many com-

missioners have earned more than the governor.

Corkins was hired by the board's 6-4 conservative majority, including Willard, who said he's disappointed public meetings with Corkins have become adversarial.

"Ordinarily," Willard said, "you would think people in education would be open to new ideas."

But Corkins has upset many educators by pushing proposals designed to allow more charter schools and to create vouchers, giving parents of at-risk and special education students \$5,600 a year and allowing them to send their children to the school of their choice, public or private.

Officials pay peach farmers to cut trees

FRESNO, Calif. (AP) — Canned peaches have been a cafeteria mainstay and part of the Central Valley's economy for decades. But with the market in the pits, government officials are paying farmers to tear down some of their trees.

California farmers grow about 85 percent of the peaches that end up in a can in the United States, but demand has been falling as consumers buy more fresh fruit and cheaper imports from places such as Greece and China cut into the state's share of the market.

The glut has led the U.S. Department of Agriculture to offer \$7 million to California growers who agree to cut their trees and promise not to plant peaches for the next 10 years.

This isn't the first time the USDA is helping struggling peach farmers. The agency regularly buys surplus canned peaches to supply government-funded institutions, making them a staple in school cafeterias, senior citizen centers and disaster relief programs. Last year, the USDA spent more than \$26 million on the syrupy fruit.

It's also not the first time farmers have been offered money to tear out

their peach trees. The California Canning Peach Association paid growers to cut down orchards four times over the past 20 years. But the effort failed when other farmers planted more orchards.

There are more acres devoted to the fruit now than there have been in a decade, according to the association.

And American consumers are eating more imported peaches than ever. According to Rich Hudgins, president of the canning association, the share of imported canned peaches has nearly doubled in the past decade, with foreign peaches now accounting for about 11 percent of the domestic market.

"The scope of the problem was just too big for us to handle," Hudgins said, explaining the government's decision to step in.

By the time the new harvest begins in June, growers will have removed more than 4,000 acres of orchards, bringing total canning peach acreage down to 26,250 — the lowest in 50 years, according to the association.

About a quarter of the state's canning peach farmers applied for the government's offer of up to \$1,700

per acre of trees destroyed.

Some farmers see the offer as a way out of an industry that is increasingly unprofitable.

"The risk just outweighs the rewards, unfortunately," said Ron Martella, a third-generation Merced County farmer, who is using the program to rip out about 350 acres. Martella, 61, plans to plant almond and walnut trees on his land.

It used to be hard to get a peach in the winter. People who wanted fruit year-round had to do their own canning. Eventually, plucking a can off the shelf at the local grocery store made it easier. But the global market has changed that.

"We can bring in fresh fruit from other countries or other parts of this country," said Harry Andris, an adviser who researches tree fruit for the University of California's cooperative extension program in Fresno County. "You can get fresh peaches year-round."

With the greater availability of fresh fruit, the demand for canned peaches has fallen. Retail sales for canned peaches in the United States declined from \$59.9 million in 2001 to about \$53.7 million in 2005, ac-

Saddam Hussein returns to his trial

BAGHDAD, Iraq (AP) — Saddam Hussein sat quietly in his defendant's chair at the resumption of his trial today, two weeks after he refused to attend the last session in a court he called "unjust."

Saddam and seven co-defendants are on trial in the deaths of more than 140 Shiite Muslims following a 1982 assassination attempt against him in the town of Dujail, north of Baghdad.

The deposed president, who was wearing a dark suit but no tie on Wednesday, refused to attend the previous session on Dec. 7.

"I will not come to an unjust court! Go to hell!" he said in an outburst in court the day before.

But on Wednesday his behavior was calm as the proceedings got under way. After greeting the court with a traditional "peace be upon you," he sat quietly in the defendants' area and appeared to pay close attention, writing frequently on a notepad in his lap.

It was Saddam's first court appearance following last week's election, when Iraqis swarmed to the polls to vote for the country's first full-term parliament since his downfall.

During previous sessions,

Saddam has been defiant and combative at times, often trying to dominate the courtroom. He and his half brother — Barazan Ibrahim, who was head of the Iraqi intelligence during the Dujail incident — have used the procedures to protest their own conditions in detention.

The chief prosecutor in the case, Jaafar al-Mousawi told The Associated Press by telephone on Tuesday that five prosecution witnesses were ready to take the stand Wednesday. It would be up to the court to decide whether to hear all of them. How many more prosecution witnesses, if any, is unknown.

We will be closed on
Monday, December 26th!

There will be no Free Press on Monday, December 26th and our office will be closed to celebrate this joyous holiday.

You should receive a
Free Press on Tues, Wed, Thurs. & Fri.

EARLY DEADLINES:

Tues., Dec. 27 Free Press: Thursday, Dec. 22 @ 3:00 p.m., display ads; Friday, Dec. 23 @ noon, word ads.

We wish everyone a...
Merry Christmas!

COLBY
FREE PRESS

155 W. 5th, Colby
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