



COLBY FREE PRESS

County reviews vehicles

By Jan Katz Ackerman
Colby Free Press

Equipment used in Colby, Rexford and Brewster was discussed Monday by Thomas County Commissioners.

Marty Rinehart, assistant emergency medical service director, told commissioners an ambulance in Rexford is being repaired.

“Right now we are waiting on an electrical inverter coming back from Colorado where it’s getting fixed,” Rinehart said. “The estimated repair will be \$795, versus \$12,000 for a new one.”

Rinehart said it has not been determined whether lightning or a power surge damaged the inverter in the 1995 ambulance. Also being replaced is the alternator for \$371.

Rinehart, along with interim director Kenny Gatlin, told commissioners the emergency medical service uses a five-year replacement program.

“We only buy one truck at a time,” Rinehart said. “When we get to the last payment on a truck a year before it’s paid off we look at what truck we need to replace it with and bring you proposals.”

Thomas County Clerk Shelly Harms told commissioners she was uncertain whether schedules were to be made for public transportation vans stored in Brewster and Rexford. In January, it was decided the van owned by the county would pick up residents twice a month in Brewster and Rexford and transport them to Colby. However, all three commissioners were not aware both towns owned their own vans.

“We’ll need to talk about the vans with the mayors of Brewster and Rexford,” Evans said.

Harms said although the county’s van is currently scheduled to pick up residents at Brewster City Hall at 9 a.m. on the first and third Tuesday and return them at 3 p.m. from Colby, she’s not been sending the van because of the cost of fuel.

“I haven’t been sending it unless someone calls,” Harms said.

Scheduled to pick up residents in Rexford on the second and fourth Tuesday of the month, these trips too are only being done when someone calls Harms.

Deputies confiscate marijuana

By Jan Katz Ackerman
Colby Free Press

Two California men were arrested in Thomas County Tuesday and an estimated \$367,406 in marijuana was taken of the streets.

Thomas County Sheriff Mike Baughn said a routine traffic stop resulted in a major bust for the county.

Frank Anthony Grey, Jr., 21, and Miguel Alejandro Contreras, 20, both of Pacoima, Calif., were arrested for possession of marijuana with intent to sell.

The two men were stopped for speeding near exit 53 of Interstate 70.

Baughn said the stop, and further investigation by the the department’s drug dog, netted 188 pound of marijuana that was located in a hidden compartment of the pickup the men were driving.

“My deputies continue to do an excellent job in removing illicit drugs from highways passing through Thomas County,” Baughn said. “We also continue our investigations of drug possession and use within the county.”

Grey and Contreras were booked into Thomas County Jail pending filing of formal charges.

Swing time!



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

Dawn Stasser, nursing student at Colby Community College, enjoyed a spin around the floor with Ike Griffin of Levant during the Thomas County Conservation District’s 62nd annual meeting and awards banquet held Monday at the Thomas County 4-H Building in Colby. Myrna Jones of Oberlin played some old favorites on the piano while the majority of about 75 guests dined. More highlights appear on page 7.

Katrina exposed a government indifferent to disaster

WASHINGTON (AP) — The deaths and suffering of thousands of Hurricane Katrina’s victims might have been avoided if the government had heeded lessons from the 2001 terror attacks and taken a proactive stance toward disaster preparedness, a House inquiry concludes.

But from President Bush on down to local officials there was largely a reactive posture to the catastrophic Aug. 29 storm — even when faced with early warnings about its deadly potential.

A 520-page report, titled “A Fail-

ure of Initiative,” was being released Wednesday as Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff testifies before a Senate committee conducting a separate investigation of the government’s Katrina response.

The Associated Press obtained a copy of the report Tuesday night.

“The preparation for and response to Hurricane Katrina should disturb all Americans,” said the report, written by a Republican-dominated special House committee chaired by Rep. Tom Davis, R-Va.

“Passivity did the most damage,”

it said. “The failure of initiative cost lives, prolonged suffering, and left all Americans justifiably concerned our government is no better prepared to protect its people than it was before 9/11, even if we are.”

The hard-hitting findings allocated blame to state and local authorities and concluded that the federal government’s single largest failure was in not recognizing Katrina’s likely consequences as it approached. That could have prompted a mobilization of federal assets for a post-storm evacuation of a flooded New Orleans, the re-

port said, meaning aid “would have arrived several days earlier.”

It also found that Bush could have speeded the response by becoming involved in the crisis earlier and says he was not receiving guidance from a disaster specialist who would have understood the scope of the storm’s destruction.

“Earlier presidential involvement might have resulted in a more effective response,” the inquiry concluded.

White House spokesman Allen Abney declined to comment Tuesday night. On Monday, White

House homeland security adviser Frances Fragos Townsend said Bush was “fully involved” in Washington’s preparations and response to Katrina.

The inquiry into one of the nation’s worst natural disasters looked at everything from the evacuation to the military’s role to planning for emergency supplies and in each category found much to criticize. The House study is the first to be completed in a series of inquiries by Congress and the Bush administration into the massive failures exposed by Katrina.

District approves new switches for network

By Tisha Cox
Colby Free Press

The Colby School District is improving its computer network capability. The school board approved a bid for new switches for its network at its Monday meeting.

The approved bid of \$73,033 was from Continental Resources in Illinois. District technology coordinator Phil DeYoung presented the bids.

“The technology purchase is a step in laying the groundwork for the next few years.

“It will increase the bandwidth of the district’s data network,” DeYoung said.

Installation fee is not included

and DeYoung will install the switches. However, there is a service contract included on two enhanced switches.

Eventually, the entire high school will go wireless.

DeYoung said the school should have wireless Internet within the next year with the installation of the new equipment.

It will take about 20 wireless points to provide full coverage for the school.

“We are looking at a lot of different things down the road,” he said.

“Within the next 18 months, the district could implement its laptop initiative, that will provide laptops for students in the high school.

Colby schools form search committee

Applications incoming for AD, assistant principal position

By Tisha Cox
Colby Free Press

The Colby School Board heard a brief update Monday for the search of a new assistant principal/activities director for the high school

Superintendent Kirk Nielsen said the district has received applications. He asked high school principal Rocky Robbins to lead a search committee and wanted two board members on that committee when they screen applications and do interviews. Board members Kevan Taylor and Joel Powell agreed to be on the committee.

Board president Tracy Rogers said the hiring process is just starting.

“This is being treated like any other position that comes open in the district. It’s being advertised across the state and no timeline has been set at this point.”

Rogers also said the deadline for applications for the high school’s head football coach position is Monday.

In other school news.

The board heard how the year is progressing at the high and grade schools.

Colby High School Principal Rocky Robbins updated the board on how conferences went last week. Robbins said they had about 65 percent attendance for parent-teacher conferences held last week. They tracked attendance by class and had 51 percent, seniors; 73 percent, juniors; 64 percent, sophomores, 66 percent, freshmen.

Colby Grade School Principal Terrel Harrison said they had nearly 95 percent attendance.

“Our parents aren’t on PowerSchool like the older stu-

dents,” she said.

Harrison said the Parent-Teacher Organization book fair was held last week. This week, the school will have an Internet safety program for kindergarten through fifth grade students.

Next week will be the fourth and fifth grade spelling contests.

Curriculum director Diana Wieland and activities director Jeff Quenzer also gave their reports.

Quenzer said the end of the winter sports season is nearing, and they’re getting ready for spring activities.

He said the high school scholars bowl team qualified for the state tournament, and went 1-4 in pool play.

“It’s a young team, he said, and they hope to go back again next year,” Quenzer said.

Quenzer said two students qualified for the state piano festival Saturday at Wichita State University.

Wieland reported they have finished meeting with all of the charter school students and are making improvements.

She also applied for an “Enhancing Education Through Technology” grant from the state. The district was awarded one of the grants before, but can’t apply for the same school twice.

Wieland said she applied for it for Thomas County Academy, the district’s charter school.

“Hopefully we’ll be successful there,” she said.

In other business, the board approved:

- Emergency substitute licenses for Jeff Harsh, Jennifer Sorenson and Malinda Wilson.

- Out-of-district field trip request for high school drama, forensics and debate students to attend a theatre workshop/matinee and performance of Shakespeare’s “Twelfth Night” March 3 at Sterling College.

- The resignation of grade school counselor Lois Unger, effective at the end of her 2005-2006 contract.