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Colby goes batty with new cages

By Patty Decker

Free Press Editor

A new batting cage located beyond left field of the American Legion baseball diamond at Colby's ball fields will impact hundreds of young players for years to come.

Prompted by frustration, John Gatz of Colby, said his son Mitchell spoke to him in November 2005 after he tried unsuccessfully to practice batting in the old cage.

Following that conversation, John said Mitchell asked for suggestions on how to improve the batting cage.

After talking with Lyle Saddler, whose son Brian plays baseball, and Ryan Sturdy, director of city recreation, Gatz said the first step was to raise money to either upgrade the existing cage or build a new one. The old cage needed new net-

ting and a foundation. The old batting cage, located behind the storage shed and near the concession stand, was beyond cosmetic repairs. Consensus was to opt for a new structure.

For the next several months, Gatz said he and others asked for money or materials to build the new cage.

"It's been a long process, but worth it," he said. "So many people either contributed time, materials or money. The potential benefits; however, made the project worthwhile."

The cages are open to everyone and will be used by the high school's softball, baseball and summer baseball programs Gatz

"This is a big improvement over what we had," Lyle Saddler said. "The new cage is all-weather. In the near future we hope the city will get lights up so players can use the cage at night too."

The new structure can accomdimensions are 70' x 14' x 10', Kevin Cox. with concrete base and carpeting.

Gatz and others coordinating the project thank the following people and businesses for their support: the City of Colby public works department; Colby Baseball Association; Colby Booster Club; Colby Canvas; City Recreand Gravel); Office Works; Orscheln Farm and Home Supply; Tarbet Redi-Mix; Thomas Coun-



time late last week adding the finishing touches to the new batting to use the facility. BELOW: The new cages are a big improvecage just beyond left field of the American Legion baseball dia- ment, said Lyle Saddler, one of the organizers.

ABOVE: Brian Saddler, left, and Mitchell Gatz, both of Colby spent monds. There are four batting stations and anyone is welcome

ty Attorney Andrea Wyrick; Thomas County Community Foundation; Thomas County Sheriff Mike Baughn; and Colby Public Schools. In addition to organizations and

businesses involved, recognition also goes to the following people: Jeremy Dietz, John Gatz, Mitchell Gatz, Jay Hawk, Larry Heier, Daryl Meyer, Chad Niermeier, Stan Orth, modate up to eight players — one Martin Ruda, Brian Saddler, Lyle person pitching and one batting Saddler, Wayne Sulzman, Jon Tole, Brett Wilson, Ryan Sturdy and For those unfamiliar with the

Colby Baseball Association, Lyle wanted to remind everyone that the advertising signs located on the fencing around the ballfields is what makes many programs pos-

"We hope everyone will take noation; Tim Hutfles (Hutfles Sand tice of the advertisers who help the K-18, 12-year-old traveling team and other baseball programs," he



Drought forces grazing on CRP

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

Drought conditions in western Kansas are forcing the opening of Conservation Reserve Program land for emergency grazing.

Ross Sloan, county executive director of the Thomas County Farm Service Agency, said so far producers are short of the necessary grain for feed and rainfall the past four months.

Thomas County is one of 31 counties in the state where emergency grazing on CRP land has been approved. Other counties in northwest Kansas are Cheyenne, Decatur, Gove, Logan, Rawlins and Trego counties.

"We were pretty short," Sloan

Usually, producers can't graze livestock on conservation grass until after July 15, when upland bird nesting season is over. Producers can apply now for the emergency grazing. However, if they do they will have to give up 25 percent of their annual rental payment.

Producers must also have a resource management plan, which the Natural Resources Conservation Service will complete.

Sloan said producers can leave no less than five inches of grass and can use the land until Sept. 11. The state can extend the use 30 days, if nec-

Conservation Reserve Program is where producers have a 10- to 15year contract to take environmentally sensitive land out of production and receive an annual rental payment. They are required to plant the land to grass, usually a native species. In Thomas County, 2004 was the last year the land was opened for emergency grazing.

"It's very, very dry," Sloan said. "It's going to be a tough winter."

Producers are already providing supplemental feeding to offset the lack of grass, and he said they will be short on feed this winter.

Before recent rains, not much feed was planted, but he expects that might change. To apply, Sloan said producers

can call the Farm Service Agency at 915 E. Walnut, Colby at 462-

County approves increase to dispatcher contract for 2007

By Jan Katz Ackerman

Colby Free Press

What might be the smallest budget request increase was proposed to Thomas County Commissioners contract for 2007. Monday by Colby City Manager Carolyn Armstrong.

Armstrong, along with Deb Zerr, county law enforcement, emer-

Colby's finance director, and Chief gency medical services. of Police Randy Jones asked comlars more for the communications

The city and county share the cost for dispatching services for city and

"My thought was it needs to go up missioners Ron Evans, Paul Steele to 39 percent," Armstrong said and Ken Christiansen for \$451 dol- about the county's contribution toward dispatcher services. In 2006, Colby contributed \$117,485, or 65 percent of the \$180,720 contract, ance and state unemployment inand the county contributed, \$63,235, or 35 percent.

Jones said his department currently has five dispatchers. As in the past, the communications contract covers salaries, Social Security, medical insurance, retirement, workman's compensation insursurance. Armstrong said the city and county need to continue their

effort to provide good wages and make more money," Armstrong benefits or risk loosing employees to the private sector.

Steele said he liked the fact the goal." budget request was less than

"But if we get a few more businesses in town my people are going

said. "This is a joint effort and we are all working toward the same

Commissioners approved the new contract increasing the county's share to \$70,657, or 39 percent. The city's share is at \$110, 514, to quit and go to where they can which is 61 percent of the \$181,181

turns

A crowd standing on the Interstate 70 Exit 54 overpass in Colby waved flags at a military convoy that passed by Wednesday. The convoy and gathering were in celebration of the 50th anniversary Federal Aid Highway Act, signed by President Dwight Eisenhower, enacting the U.S. Interstate Highway System. The convoy reenacted the 1919 Transcontinental Motor Convoy. Eisenhower traveled on that convoy and his great-grandson, Merrill Atwater, was a passenger Wednesday.



Celebration has some thinking of new projects

TOPEKA (AP) — With the interstate system's 50th birthday approaching, some Kansans are preparing to push for a new state transportation plan, partly to ease urban congestion.

A national group released a report Tuesday saying Kansas' interstates save money, travel time and even lives.

But, the report said, if improvements aren't made over the next decade, more than half the state's urban interstate miles could become dangerously congested.

The report noted that the state Department of Transportation has identified four stretches of urban interstates as needing to be widened by 2016, at an estimated cost of \$515 million. None is covered by the state's 10-year comprehensive transportation program, which ends

President Eisenhower signed legislation creating the system on June 29, 1956, and the first eight-mile stretch, for I-70, was completed west of Topeka five months later.

Eisenhower's presidential library in Abilene, where he was raised, is hosting a celebration, with events scheduled Wednesday and Thursday evening. A vehicle convoy from San Francisco plans to arrive in Abilene at 7:45 p.m. Wednesday, going backward along the approximate route Eisenhower took as a young Army officer in 1919, until the convoy reaches Washington on June 29.

That trip helped convince Eisenhower that the nation needed an interstate system, and the report released Tuesday suggested it has lived up to its promise to make travel and commerce easier and