



COLBY FREE PRESS

Voting machine decision unsettled

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

The Thomas County Clerk had a Friday deadline to decide on new voting machines for the county.

Deputy County Clerk Barb Hopper said two companies gave presentations at the office last month.

They were Diebold and Electronic Software Systems of Cedar Park, Texas.

County Clerk Shelly Harms was unavailable for comment. Hopper did not know what decision had been made.

The deadline was set by Kansas Secretary of State Ron Thornburgh after he decided Voting Technologies International of Milwaukee, Wis., did not meet its contractual obligations after the Nov. 7 general election.

Their equipment used in Thomas County will be sent back and neither the state nor the county has paid for the machines.

Problems arose during the vote count, and there were technical support problems. The company also failed to comply with state and federal requirements.

"They were never certified," Hopper said.

Thomas County was one of seven counties in the state that received voting machines from the company.

Hopper said Voting Technologies was chosen after attending a vendor show about two years ago. Diebold and Electronic Software Systems were there also.

"They were willing to come here," she said. "Some acted like we don't exist."

Those two companies were selected by most of the counties in the state, and their systems have proved to be reliable.

With a school, college and city primary election looming Tuesday, Feb. 27, time is short to learn a new system.

"Whoever we choose will have to get us the equipment and get us trained," Hopper said. "That's the key."

The county has \$24,000 set aside for the voting machines and the state's share is \$44,000.



Thornburgh



DEBBIE SCHWANKE/Colby Free Press

Colby College President Dr. Lynn Kreider, left, parents Aaron and Kristin Mann and new baby Hayden Renae spoke about the infant's college opportunities at Citizens Medical Center last week.

New year baby arrives

Community welcomes first child of 2007

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

Thomas County has a New Year's baby.

The first baby of the year, Hayden Renae Mann, was born Monday at Citizens Medical Center in Colby.

Her parents are Aaron and Kristi Mann of Colby.

Hayden was born at 7:48 p.m., weighing 7 pounds, 1 ounce.

He and Kristi are excited about Hayden, who is their first child, and her birth was made more special by the fact she arrived on the first day of the year.

"She was just a few days early," Aaron said. "It's been fun."

Kristi's due date was Tuesday. The delivery was quick, with no complications.

Aaron didn't know of any other family member with a Jan. 1 birthday.

"We were surprised but we were happy," he said.

The couple plans on having more children, but not in the immediate future.

In addition to gifts provided by merchants in the city, Hayden received a basket from the hospital and from Colby Community College, her books and tuition paid for during the length of time it takes to finish an associate's degree.

An early arrival for Hayden resulted in some welcome news for her parents.

Colby Community College President Lynn Kreider visited the first baby of the year delivered at Citizens Medical Center.

"We are pleased to offer Hayden a full scholarship to include tuition, fees and books for two years when she is ready to begin college," said Kreider.

"Both Hayden's parents attended CCC and it is especially gratifying that she will be able to continue the family tradition."

Presents from area businesses included: a free large pizza from Pizza Hut for the parents; a \$20 gift certificate from Dillons; \$10 gift certificate from Pastimes; \$50 savings bond from First National Bank; a "Lovie" from Wark's Embroidery and Gifts and a gift certificate to get the baby's name on it and a one-year subscription to the *Colby Free Press*.

According to Hayden's mother Kristin, her original due date was set for Jan. 9.

"It was a quick labor and easy delivery," said Kristin. "Everything turned out well and we're appreciative of the college's scholarship offer."

Maternal grandparents are Tim and Kelly Hawkins of Goodland and paternal grandparents are Don and Evelyn Martin of Colby and the late Craig Mann of Goodland.

Hoxie hires former deputy from county

By Jan Katz Ackerman

Colby Free Press

A chance at advancement has led a Thomas County sheriff's deputy to accept the job as Hoxie's top cop.

Brian Diercks, 29, accepted the Hoxie Chief of Police position and will start Jan. 16. Diercks said his interest in law enforcement started as a teen at Eastern Heights High School in Agra. After attending a law enforcement cadet academy sponsored by the Kansas Highway Patrol he knew he wanted to become an officer.

"I have almost nine years in law enforcement, all of it in Thomas County," Diercks said.

After earning an associate degree in criminal justice from Colby Community College, Diercks went to Fort Hays State University to earn a bachelor's degree in the same field.

"This move is a chance of advancement and better pay," Diercks said.

Starting at \$38,000 plus benefits, Diercks said he will move to Hoxie within the next two weeks. Moving with Diercks will be his wife, Sarah, and their four children; Matthew, 5; Emily, 3; and 20-month-old twins Isaac and Connor.

Asked how he plans to handle

shift work between himself and deputy, Jim Bainter, Diercks said he plans to work part of each shift, day and night.

Diercks said he anticipates no problems making the transition from Colby's population of about 6,000 to Hoxie's 1,250 residents.

"I look forward to coming over and serving the community," Diercks said. "If anyone has any questions they can call me, and don't hesitate to call."

Thomas County Sheriff Mike Baughn said he is not pleased to see Diercks leave his employment with the sheriff's office, but wishes him well.

"I hate to lose good people, but I understand his position," Baughn said. "I've always told the staff if they can better themselves they should do it."

Baughn said Diercks' degree in criminal justice will benefit Hoxie.

"I think he'll make a good chief and I wish him all the best in his career advancement," Baughn said.



B. Diercks

Deadline to file for election Jan. 23

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

The deadline to file to run in the April 3 Colby general election is Tuesday, Jan. 23.

Thomas County Deputy Clerk Barb Hopper said anyone wanting to run for city council, the Colby Community College Board of trustees or Colby School Board needs to fill out the necessary paperwork at the courthouse before the deadline.

A primary election is slated for Tuesday, Feb. 27.

The deadline for voter registration is Monday, Feb. 12.

Terms who expire at the college are Don Kready and Larry McDonald, who were elected in 2003, and Mark Winger.

Winger is filling out the remain-

der of Larry Arehart's term.

For city council, terms who expire are Mayor Ken Bieber; Ward I Councilman Pat Mallory; Ward II Councilwoman Bev Eicher; Ward III Councilman Jim Brown; and Ward IV Councilman Jim Tubbs.

Colby School Board members Kevan Taylor, Dewey Augustine, Joel Powell and Stan Molstad's terms expire.

Hopper said they have not yet received any paperwork from any of the people currently in office, or anyone else intending to run.

For information, call the Thomas County clerk's office at 460-4500 or stop by 225 N. Court Ave.

Inquiries regarding the city council positions can be made by calling 460-4410.

Thomas County rape trial and jury selection begins today

By Jan Katz Ackerman

Colby Free Press

Jury selection in the trial of a 60-year-old man charged with raping a child started today in Thomas County District Court.

A pool of 200 people gathered at the courthouse in Colby to see if they would be

one of 12 jurors selected to hear testimony against Melvin W. Meyers. Meyers goes on trial for five sex crimes he alleged to have committed in July. The trial is expected to last three days.

Meyers was arrested at a residence in the 3400 block of County Road B July 14. The state's key witness is the young girl who

was expected to take the late today or early Tuesday.

Other witnesses will be law enforcement officers, psychological and medical care professionals, social workers and the girl's teacher and principal.

Meyers pleaded not guilty to rape, aggravated indecent liberties with a child, two

counts of aggravated criminal sodomy and aggravated indecent solicitation of a child. He has lived in Thomas County for about seven years under the alias name of Pete Helt.

His attorney is Doug Spencer of Oakley. Representing the state are Thomas County Attorney Andrea Wyrick and Assistant At-

torney General Nola Wright of Topeka.

According to Thomas County Sheriff Mike Baughn, using the fake name allowed Meyers to reside in the county without raising concern he was wanted in Oklahoma on a probation violation for similar charges. Meyers was charged in Oklahoma for the 1999 sexual abuse of a minor child.

State's budget picture sees growing economy

TOPEKA (AP) — It's not hard to understand why good times make governors, legislators and other state officials giddy.

A growing economy naturally boosts tax collections, dumping revenues into the state treasury faster than expected, first covering over potential budget problems, then creating a surplus to distribute.

Government's permanent constituents — the poor, the elderly, educators, higher education officials, would-be road builders — see their chance to address neglected ideas or expand programs.

There are also proposals for cutting taxes, from conservatives who are later joined by more liberal-minded lawmakers.

Kansans are seeing a little of that giddiness as the 2007 Legislature starts. Gov. Kathleen Sebelius has hinted that her budget will include a few initiatives; university presidents are looking to address maintenance problems on their campuses, and advocates for the needy want more generous social services. There's also talk of cutting taxes.

"We're going to be making a whole series of short-term decisions, but we have to keep them in context with the longer-term commitments that we have also made," said Duane Goossen, the governor's budget director and secretary of administration.

"We do know that we've made promises."

Farewell party

Thomas County Commissioners Ken Christiansen, left, and Paul Steele, right, visited with outgoing commissioner Ron Evans during a farewell party today at the courthouse. Evans served 12 years as a commissioner, and was replaced by Byron Sowers.



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press