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Doctors focus on the future

Morrison, Wahlmeier, Slavens to merge practices in new building

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

Piles of dirt and a pit mark the spot where a new medical clinic is being built in Colby.

Work started Wednesday on the site of the new VisionSource and Slavens Family Practice Clinic on Range Avenue.

Morrison and Wahlmeier Optometric changed its name to VisionSource and will be moving to the new location when it opens in January 2008. Construction should be done by the end of the year. Slavens Family Practice will join them.

Andy Rose, a physician's assistant with Slavens' practice, said the move was a joint decision.

"They decided it would be more cost-effective and better for patients," Rose said.

He said the building costs about \$2 million. It will have a 12,000-square-foot basement and ground level the same size totaling 24,000-square-feet.

Jeff Morrison, optometrist, said the idea came about when Mark Wahlmeier joined the practice in 2000. They had outgrown their current building at 180 W. Sixth St., and began planning and saving for something bigger.

"It's evolved into what it is now over the past year," Morrison said. "It was good for everybody."

Dr. Gary Slavens said, friends with Morrison, and they felt moving into the same building would be a good combination.

"We have a lot of the same patients," he said.

Morrison said he is excited about the new building, and will be adding additional services and employees.

Services will include an on-site optical lab, where glasses will be manufactured regardless of prescription. They will no longer have to send out to have glasses made, which will reduce the time people have to wait for new glasses.

Morrison and Wahlmeier are considering another optometrist as well as extend surgical services with visiting ophthalmologists.

"This will allow us to take better care of our patients," Morrison said. "We'll have more room and it will make us more efficient and patient-friendly."

Expanded hours and adding up



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

ABOVE: Construction started Wednesday on a new clinic for VisionSource/Slavens Family Practice on South Range Avenue. **RIGHT:** Physician Assistant Andy Rose, Jane Slavens and optometrist Mark Wahlmeier and their children looked at the construction site.



to four employees are also goals.

Between their Colby and Goodland clinics, they have 15 employees, not counting themselves.

Slavens is excited about the move. It means more room, and the

chance to expand also. His current building is about 2,400-square-feet.

"We were overgrown the first day we moved in," Rose said.

Seeing up to 60 patients a day, more space and staff will be an advantage. Slavens said they already

have one doctor coming in six months.

"Our goal is to have four MDs," he said.

The clinic currently has 12 employees.

"Having both clinics in one place

makes sense," Rose said. "For example, diabetic patients need eye exams, and the optometrists sometimes refer patients to the medical doctors."

The medical side will have lab and x-ray, including new digital x-ray technology.

Golden Plains to search for superintendent

Golden Plains School Board is expected to continue its search for a new superintendent when the board meets Monday for its regularly scheduled meeting.

Last month, board members said little after the move not to renew superintendent Dr. Roger Baskerville's contract.

Baskerville said about a year ago he told board members he might retire in the near future.

Kansas law allows individuals who have a certain combination of age and time in service to draw retirement from the Kansas Public Employee Retirement System.

The point value is figured on an individual's current age, plus the current service credit for years worked.

In Baskerville's instance, he is 60 years old and has been a superintendent for 31 of those years. He has been with Golden Plains for seven years.

Primary not in state's budget

TOPEKA (AP) — Next year's presidential primary and the state's newest park were among the casualties as Republicans prepared Friday to push a budget through the House that was incomplete despite more than \$12 billion in spending.

House members planned to take final action on three bills containing the bulk of the spending plan for the fiscal year beginning July 1. The measures contained a spending plan that was an alternative from the GOP majority to one offered by Democratic Gov. Kathleen Sebelius in January.

But it's missing some items by design, such as \$2 million in the secretary of state's office for a presidential primary in February 2008, money many House members thought could be spent better.

And the Department of Wildlife and Parks would have no money to operate its newest park in northwest Topeka, officially known only as Park No. 24. It has become embroiled in controversy, including over a lease for a new regional parks office on the site.

The budget also is missing dozens of items because GOP leaders wanted to put off decisions on them until late April or early May. For example, the spending plan contains no aid for vocational colleges, normally a \$40 million item, because some lawmakers want to examine how it's distributed.

Meanwhile, the Senate Ways and Means Committee planned Friday to debate and endorse its own proposed budget. The entire Senate hopes to debate that spending plan next week.

A final version will be written by House and Senate negotiators, and legislative leaders hope to pass it before lawmakers begin their spring break on April 4. Then, lawmakers will adopt one final budget bill after they return April 25 to wrap up their business for the year.

When legislators adjourn, the next budget is likely to be about \$12.4 billion, roughly the same size at the current one, though there will be big shifts in funding. The budget for fiscal 2008 will contain an increase in spending on public schools, in keeping with a plan approved last year, while spending on highway projects, which fluctuates from year to year, is expected to drop by about 24 percent.

The House debated budget issues for nine hours Thursday. Among its first decisions was eliminating funding for the presidential primary next year by passing an amendment to strip the money from the secretary of state's budget on an 85-34 vote.

"I think we can utilize that \$2 million in a much better fashion," said Rep. Kay Wolf, R-Prairie Village.

If the state doesn't hold a primary, the Republican and Democratic parties will have caucuses to allocate delegates to their national nominating conventions. That's been the practice in most years.

The state had a primary in 1980 and then began scheduling them every four years, starting in 1992. But legislators canceled the 1996, 2000 and 2004 elections, either because the races weren't competitive enough or because the state faced financial problems.

For backers of a primary, the attraction is greater participation by Kansans. Caucuses in 2004 drew about 2,100 participants, according to the secretary of state's office, while more than 373,000 Kansans cast ballots in the 1992 primary.

We're still in Kansas, Toto

Colby High School teachers and students dressed up as characters from the "Wizard of Oz" watched a dodgeball tournament Monday at Colby High School. Teams dressed up and played in the game, which was a fundraiser for the school's C Club.



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