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Fitting the bill versus footing the bill

Farmer, business owner, seniors ponder Colby College's proposal and its effects

By John Van Nostrand
Free Press Publisher

Thomas County farmer and landowner Jon Friesen said there are solutions to every problem.

He is not sure Colby Community College has the right solution to its problem — and is more uneasy about paying for it.

In January, college board of trustees proposed a new gymnasium, wellness center and dormitory, totaling \$20 million. The 2,400-seat gymnasium, auxiliary gymnasium, locker rooms, coaches' offices and other amenities is estimated at \$15 million.

Board members said the proposal will help increase enrollment and provide the area a better facility to hold a variety of events, including its own. The proposal

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John Friesen, Thomas County farmer

may bring some vitality to an area of Kansas with dwindling enrollments at public schools surrounded by an aging population.

“I thank the trustees for having some vision,” Friesen said. “I'm not sure it's the right solution. I question the solution.”

Thomas County voters will determine that solution at the polls April 3. Voters will decide on two separate funding questions

for the project. One question will ask if voters want the college to pursue about \$4.5 million from general obligation bonds. The second question relates to the college acquiring \$10.5 million in certificates of participation, similar to a lease purchase.

If approved, Thomas County property taxes will increase for the next 20 years. College officials said both questions must

pass for construction to begin.

Friesen said he has seen his portion of property taxes for the college increase over the years. Giving more money to the college is not necessarily the answer for Friesen.

Reviewing how his property taxes are distributed, the college currently receives 23 percent of the total amount. Colby and Oakley public schools, which Friesen's land sits in, receive a cumulative 32 percent of the total. Thomas County receives 24 percent.

“The commissioners haven't done bad for what we are getting,” Friesen said.

Knowing the increase in property taxes among educational entities with declining, or stagnant, enrollments confuses Friesen.

“With proper management it should take

less tax dollars,” he said. “Something is not working here.”

If the college's proposal passes, Friesen said his contribution to the college will increase to near what the public schools receive.

Part of the college's proposal is to build a new 260-bed student living centers to replace the current ones which are more than 30 years old. College officials have said the school will not use property taxes to pay for the building. Officials will use grants, donations and other sources of money. The preliminary cost of construction is \$5 million. Vernon Flanagan said he hopes the school will get every dollar needed for construction.

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Homeward Bound program needs Colby volunteers

By Tisha Cox
Colby Free Press

Volunteers are needed in Thomas County to help children, and the family they come from.

The Homeward Bound program through High Plains Mental Health offers families in crisis a possible short-term solution.

Audrey Harper Schoenberger, program manager, said the program was made possible through a state grant.

“It provides crisis services to children and families in 20 north-west Kansas counties,” she said.

Schoenberger explained the program is an early intervention service for families and children that are mental health clients of the center. The program helps children with emotional or behavioral problems to spend time away from their family for a short period of time.

“It's a cooling off time for parents and the child,” Schoenberger said.

Homeward Bound is an intermediary step to avoid calling the police, or sending a child to the state hospital.

“We are trying to catch problems while they are still small, and keeping them from becoming big. This is a very short-term service,” Schoenberger said. “This is something like one day to a weekend, up to six weeks the child could stay.”

The time away is not a vacation for the child or parents. During the time, the child receives services, and so do the parents.

Unlike foster care, it is not a complete separation. Parents remain involved in their child's life, and don't lose custody of their children.

The separation is to gain perspective for both parent and child

“Services are in place to decrease the conflict,” she said.

Keeping children in their home

community helps eliminate disruptions in their everyday life. Not having to leave their school or hometown helps.

“That's what is unique about it,” Schoenberger said.

Homeward Bound needs host families or single volunteers in the communities around the area. Volunteers must become licensed.

“We will bring the seven-week training to prepare people to have the kids in their home,” she said.

Volunteers have signed up in other counties, but not in Thomas County where there is a need.

“Nobody has expressed an interest in Colby yet,” Schoenberger said. High Plains will make daily contact with the host family.

“They're going to get a good high level of support from us,” Schoenberger said.

There is also a second aspect to the service. Schoenberger said they also provide a respite service. It is for kids diagnosed severely emotionally disturbed, who have a mental health diagnosis such as depression, anxiety disorder, attention deficit disorder.

If parents need a temporary break from their home situation, arrangements can be made. For example, if a child needs a break once a month from their parents, children can stay a weekend with one of the volunteer families.

“That is another side to it,” she said. “These work hand in hand together.”

She said the program is a chance to mentor both a child and family. It also offers a chance for families to form a network for support.

“A lot of these families don't have that support,” Schoenberger said. “It gets very difficult.”

For information, call (785) 628-2871 or e-mail Schoenberger at aschoen@hpmhc.com.



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Stacey Marcum, Russell Rodenbeck and Tim Wilson readied the Colby Glass booth for the Better Home and Living Show which

starts today at the Colby Community Building. The show runs through Sunday.

Home show features new ideas

By Patty Decker
Free Press Editor

Organizers of the Better Home and Living Show, which opens today at the Colby Community Building said the event is a great time to wander around and think about ideas for spring and summer.

“This is our 17th year,” said Mike Fell, KXXX-KQLS general manager and co-sponsor of the event, “and what makes the show special is the non-threatening atmosphere allowing people to envision what they want to do.”

The show continues from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Saturday and 11

a.m. to 3 p.m., Sunday.

In describing the show, Fell said it's a mix of lawn and garden exhibits with health and fitness booths and everything in between.

“The name ‘Better Home’ referring literally to a better home and ‘Living’ Show denoting a better way to live,” he said.

Exhibitors include Colby area businesses to some as far away as Nebraska.

With almost 40 exhibitors, the show will have displays throughout the gymnasium, on the stage, and outside featuring home construction, landscaping, siding, interior decorating, home entertainment, appliances, hot tubs and more. Exhibitors include Four Sea-

sons Landscape and Irrigation, Cal Spas, Dougherty Implement, Colby College, Decision Weather, Colby Ag Center, S&T Communications, Fotogirl Photography, Superior Homes and World Pest Control.

In addition, Office Works, Colby Glass, Discount Siding, Morton Buildings, Beringer Hardware, Schertz Mower Sales, Bird's Alternative, Barton Concrete Works, Farmers and Merchants Bank, Wolf Creek Accents and Great Western Tire will be available to answer questions.

Other businesses with displays are Lang Diesel, Unicel, Sears, Tri-State Spas, Northwest Wireless, Waddell and Reed, Commercial

Sign, Creative Curb, ABC Siding, Colby Implement, St. Francis Academy, Reliv, and Wal-Mart.

All the exhibitors will be available to help the crowd envision what they want their home to look with many offering discounted merchandise and services.

The show's other sponsor is the Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce with volunteers welcoming people to the event.

“There is no admission fee,” Fell said, “and we hope there will be something for everyone in making their home more energy efficient, valuable and livable.”

Ladies take charge in home building

LAWRENCE (AP) — Alice McKinzie drove 2 1/2 hours to work in biting cold temperatures, only because she's a woman.

“To be a part of something bigger than myself,” she said.

McKinzie, of Wichita, helped construct the walls of a home in North Lawrence.

Her sister, Kaye McKinzie, stood on the other side of the wood and carefully bolted the boards to the foundation.

“It's a day of empowerment,” she said.

The sisters, both wearing carpenter's belts, are dedicated volunteers to Habitat for Humanity working on the fourth “Women Build” home for the group that helps build affordable housing using volunteers.

“Women raised the money, women plan to build it and we're building it for a woman and her children.”

Jean Lilley,
Lawrence's Habitat for Humanity

“Women raised the money, women plan to build it and we're building it for a woman and her children,” said Jean Lilley, executive director of Lawrence's Habitat. “We've got other homes that the men can build on.”

The house will go in Habitat's Comfort Neighborhood in Lawrence, where the charitable organization is building 16 houses all

together for families in need.

The nonprofit organization must complete seven homes in the North Lawrence neighborhood by the end of June to receive a \$130,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

“Women are perfectionists,” said Toni Husted, who will eventually own the home.

“I have no doubt in my mind that

my house will be one of the sturdiest on the block.”

After Husted helped her three children drive nails into boards as a part of Habitat's traditional nail-driving celebration, she stayed in the brisk winds and continued beating nails into boards that will become her shelter.

Other women ran to their cars after the ceremony and said they'd be back to help build when it was warmer.

A majority of volunteers working on the house were men on this particular day.

“That will definitely change,” said Janet Smalter, Women Build construction manager.

Construction on the house continues every Saturday through June, Lilley said.



See special insert in today's issue