



Heartland graduates first students

By John Van Nostrand
Free Press Publisher

Even though it was the first ever graduation ceremony for Colby's Heartland Christian School, the ceremony looked like something the school had done many times before.

Friday, Jake Beckley and Shawna Goossen earned the first diplomas from the school that started in 1995 in Mingo. The students walked into the gymnasium while "Pomp and Circumstance" played. The school's choir sang. A slide show of the two students was held. Speeches were given.

"This was an exciting idea and event," said Rick Roberts, administrator of the school from 1997 to 2006. "It's reality tonight."

Roberts was the featured speaker. Roberts was instrumental in the school's development of high school classes, one thing the school didn't have when it opened.

Roberts' speech connected various Biblical scriptures to what Beckley and Goossen learned during school and how they should live after graduation.

"My challenge is to don't wait until your old and gray to serve the Lord," Roberts said. He referred to James 4:14 that states how life is like a vapor, it appears and vanishes.

Roberts hoped Beckley and Goossen showed the school's underclassmen how to live their lives.

"Show the underclassmen what life is like, holy and under God's service," he said. "Life not centered on God is meaningless."

Roberts reminded the two graduates they can be set apart from society but still make an im-

pact. He described the life of John the Baptist, who he called eccentric by eating insects and wearing unusual clothes. But John the Baptist was still influential.

"You don't have to be of the world to change the world," Roberts said.

Beckley thanked Heartland's school board for letting him be one of the school's first graduates. When Beckley and Shawna were nearing high-school age, the board approved to expand to high school classes which became an ongoing project during their high-school years.

"I thank the board for sticking it out," he said.

Beckley was also thankful for what current Administrator Jesse Vincent has done in his first year. Vincent replaced Roberts who left for a similar position at Elyria Christian School near McPherson.

"When Mr. Roberts left, I thought no one could fill his shoes, but I liked Mr. Vincent just as much," Beckley said.

Goossen was thankful for what Roberts and her parents did for her during her school years.

Goossen's father, Lynn, who serves as the school board's vice chairman, was one of the original founders of Heartland. The same time Shawna started Heartland in first grade, her mother was fighting cancer.

"I thank my parents' dedication to the school," she said.

Shawna thanked Roberts for sacrificing some of his own family time because of things that needed done at school.

Lynn presented the diplomas to the two students.

"There's no better way to wrap it up with a father giving his own daughter a diploma," Vincent said.



JOHN VAN NOSTRAND/Colby Free Press



A proud moment

ABOVE: Heartland Christian graduate Jake Beckley shows his diploma to others during a reception held after graduation ceremonies Friday at the school. This year was the first graduation ceremony for the school that opened in 1995. **LEFT:** Heartland Christian graduate Shawna Goossen embraces a man during the reception. Beckley and Goossen were the two graduates.

County in need of new air units

By Tisha Cox
Colby Free Press

Keeping things cool at the Thomas County Courthouse and office complex were on the agenda at the commissioners meeting today.

Custodian Jim McGuire talked about air condition units at both buildings. He said two units at the courthouse need repaired. One needs a valve replacement, which won't be difficult to fix.

However, the second unit is another issue.

"That's the unit we need to replace completely," McGuire said.

The county already has a replacement for it, but it will have to be done on a weekend when the air conditioning at the courthouse can be turned off so the work can be completed. The replacement is one of several units the county received from Cheyenne County when it replaced its air conditioning system. Thomas County has been using the units for parts or replacement as the need arises. Air conditioning at the office complex is also a concern.

McGuire said they are not running at full capacity yet, but some of the window units in different offices there need repairs. Twelve out of 32 are not working.

Commissioner Paul Steele asked how much it costs to replace one unit. McGuire said it would be between \$650 and \$900. He also said it would cost nearly \$43,000 to replace the system at the courthouse.

The commissioners told him to get estimates on both buildings.



Steele

Graduates reminded of attitude beyond high school years

By Patty Decker
Free Press Editor

Is graduation from Colby High School simply the completion of a 13-year odyssey? Is it the best years of a person's life? Is it the transition to college, votech school, or a job? Or is it leaving the teen years and becoming an adult?

For Greg Koenig, former Colby High School English teacher and head football coach in 2004-06, his message focused on expectations, excellence and enthusiasm during the commencement address Sunday at the Colby Community Building.

"Is the fun over?" he queried, "Is graduation the end and all that's left is the big, bad world?"

Koenig encouraged students to take on a positive attitude and not a negative one.

"This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it," Koenig quoted from Psalms.

"I see graduation as the beginning of an incredible journey," he said. "It's far from the truth to say that graduation is the best day of a



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

Amanda Albers, left, received her diploma during commencement ceremonies Sunday. Rocky Robbins, right, high school principal, announced the names of the graduates.



Koenig

have positive expectations.

"We can choose positive expectations and make a big difference," he said. He spoke about choosing negative expectations and how in doing so creates the attitude of expecting the worst and getting just that.

"Remember the horror stories about a certain teacher or class?" he asked. Because of negative expectations, he said students would not pay attention in class, not give their best and the result would be a "lousy

experience."

On the other hand, students who went to that same class with eager anticipation, an open mind and good attendance resulted in a enjoyable, valuable experience, he said.

Koenig's second "E," for excellence, is the opportunity to rise high as opposed to mediocrity.

"When someone settles for climbing only half the mountain, the view is not the same as reaching the summit." Graduates who go only halfway, will miss out on living life to the fullest.

"Getting by means you miss out on great experiences while others reap rewards from rising high," he said. "Don't settle for mediocrity, strive for excellence."

The word "enthusiasm" from the Greek word means "God in you or God within."

"There's great excitement waiting for that diploma, and with great enthusiasm," he said.

"Enthusiasm must be chosen — some focus on negative and others focus on the positive with great enthusiasm." The negative ones don't have God within. Success, he said,

is not just a choice but a way of life.

In addition to Koenig's address, five of the six valedictorians and the salutatorian spoke. Ashley Barnes, the salutatorian, said when she looks back, she sees all the changes and challenges over the years.

"We are the Eagles and a symbol of freedom," she said. "Always walk tall and stand proud because you are the class of 2007."

"Enjoy what you are doing and you will always be happy," said Valedictorian Kristin Cox.

Valedictorians Elizabeth Erickson, Michael Juenemann, Rishonna Martin and Trevor Siebert also added their comments on graduation and the future.

Many spoke of the transition from childhood to adulthood; the amount of support received from family, friends and teachers to make it to graduation; the search to find happiness and finding their own way in life.

Andrew Toth, the sixth valedictorian, is out of the country on an exchange program.

Seventy students received diplomas.

Conservative pressure could make state budgeting more open

TOPEKA (AP) — A four-page proposal received relatively little notice when legislators tucked it into the next state budget, but it could change how state government's spending plans come together in the future.

The measure requires the Department of Administration to set up a Web site that allows Kansans to search through information on revenues, spending, contracts, salaries and other financial information about state government. The goal is to make finding data as easy as using Google and other

search engines.

The legislators who pushed the idea most ardently are conservative Republicans who worry that the ongoing growth in spending is out of control. They believe the more Kansans learn about how their tax dollars are spent, the more they'll want to ratchet down on individual budget items.

Whether greater transparency fulfills such political goals or not, it's likely to make it easier for more Kansans to find more detailed information about the bud-

get — and to ask pointed questions more often. That is likely to change the dynamics of the annual debate over spending, in which much of the information — and the power to influence events — rests with a small group of lawmakers.

"Most legislators and probably most of the people whom they serve in Kansas probably don't fully understand how the money is spent," said Rep. Kasha Kelley, R-Arkansas City, the measure's primary sponsor. "That's a tragedy."

The budget is an annual source of frustration for state officials and constituent groups who don't think agencies or programs receive enough money, for legislators and groups advocating limited government and even for people who simply want to track what's going on.

Total spending — including what's financed with federal dollars — will be about \$12.5 billion during the fiscal year beginning July 1. The spending financed from the state's general revenues, about \$6.1 billion,

will grow 8.1 percent.

"I will always defer to the judgment of the public," said Alan Cobb, director of the Kansas chapter of Americans for Prosperity, which favors limited government. "I have a firm belief that the public is — to put mildly — disappointed with the rate of our budget growth and maybe even appalled."

But there's another concern. Most legislators don't see much of the budget, beyond summaries that are prepared by their staff when spending bills are debated.