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Enrollment drops, schools scatter

By Joey Falkoff

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The Colby Eagle football team will not be playing for a Northwest Kansas League championship in the next two years. Not because of a lack of talent on the Eagles part, but rather a lack of students that are currently filling the halls of Colby's rival schools in the league.

The 2008-2009 Kansas high school football classifications were announced Thursday, and based on student counts from grades 9-11, all Northwest Kansas League schools other than Colby, St. Francis and Rawlins County/Atwood had a decline in enrollment from the last count done in the fall of 2005.

Because of the growing disparity in enrollment between league schools, the Northwest Kansas

League and Mid-Continent League have agreed to merge in football for the next two seasons.

Knowing this would eventually have to happen, representatives from both leagues have been working on this proposal since last year.

Both leagues came to a consensus agreement to combine, and today in Salina, representatives from each school in both leagues will meet and hammer out the schedules for the next two football seasons.

Having to merge conferences is not something Colby High Athletic Director Larry Gabel wanted to happen, but it's the reality of the situation in western Kansas.

"Schools are losing enrollment all over, so it's difficult to schedule games with some of our league schools right now," said Gabel. "There really won't be a Northwest Kansas League champion anymore.

“There really won't be a Northwest Kansas League champion anymore. We lose that tradition, and it's not something we want ...”

Larry Gabel,
Colby High School athletic director

We lose that tradition, and it's not something we want, but with the changing population, we have to do what's best for our football team.”

The biggest loser in the area from the new classifications is Goodland, who saw their enrollment drop seven students to 197.

The cutoff for 4A was 202, meaning for the first year since schools were divided into classifications based on size in 1969, Goodland

will no longer be a 4A school.

“I think we had a good idea this was coming,” said Goodland Athletic Director Don Smith.

“It's disappointing for us in two ways. Losing your student base is tied to school revenue, so that's going to hurt all of our programs.

Also, being two students above the count in 4A for all other sports except football, we're going to be the little kid on the block the next

two years.”

Of any Northwest Kansas League school, Hoxie saw its enrollment take the biggest hit.

In just two years, Hoxie has gone from 78 students to 64, making them the smallest 1A/2A school in Kansas.

Other Northwest Kansas League reclassification losers were Oakley (113 to 108), Oberlin (112 to 102) and Quinter (79 to 75). Beginning next year, Quinter will start playing 8-man football.

Colby actually saw the biggest increase in students of any school in the Northwest Kansas League going from 238 to 249, but with the large disparity from the biggest 4A school (Bishop Miege, 552) to the lowest (Neodesha, 203), Colby still isn't exactly competing on a level playing field.

“We're clearly in the smaller half

of 4A, and there's quiet a discrepancy between the top and bottom,” said Gabel. “It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure that out.”

Eagle head football coach Chris Gardner is happy with where the school's enrollment is, but also knows it will be a challenge competing with the many bigger 4A schools.

“For this area, staying at 249 is pretty good,” said Gardner. “But there's not many 4A teams we'll be playing that are below us.”

Gardner will know for sure which 4A schools he will be facing after today's scheduling meeting in Salina. Scheduling scenarios have already been presented to each school in both leagues, but before those scenarios were passed out, the two leagues agreed to divide the

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A reader's dream



JOEY FALKOFF/Colby Free Press

Colby Middle School sixth grader Abby Friesen looked over a book during the district's annual Blizzard Book Fair held this week in the Colby Grade School library. The book fair ends at 8 p.m., Thursday.

Record prices for wheat entice farmers

By Kimberly Davis

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Wheat prices are well over \$8 a bushel, maybe the highest they have ever been, which could make a positive impact on farm income and the area's whole economy.

Dalene Horton, a grain merchandiser for the Decatur Co-op, said back in the 1990s, the price was up to \$6 and change, but she doesn't remember the price per bushel getting much past \$7.

On Monday, the market closed at \$8.61. Mrs. Horton relates the price increase to two factors: the need for export wheat and a lack of rain in Argentina and Australia right now.

The southern wheat crop hasn't been harvested and they are needing moisture in both countries, she said, and that has helped boost the prices.

The majority of the wheat here, she said, has already been sold.

A lot of people sold their wheat around harvest time because it was a good price — around \$5 — and they didn't know it would get this high.

She said she really doesn't have any predictions about what the price will do, but the new-crop bid for next year is around \$5, which is over \$3 less a bushel than people are selling at now.

Horton said that is based on a number of factors, one of which is weather now and how much wheat officials think will be available by next harvest.

She said she doesn't know how much longer the \$8 plus price will last. At some time the price will have to reach its top, but she said, she doesn't know what that might be.

One day last week, she said, the market went up 20 cents during the trading session and then closed 30 cents lower. That means the price varied by 50 cents in one day.

It is just a volatile market, said Ms. Horton, and no one knows what it will do.

Dan O'Brien, an agriculture economist with Kansas State University in Colby, said the high prices help boost farmers' income. Wheat prices aren't the only ones up, he said. As of Friday, corn was at \$3.47 per bushel, milo \$3.37, soybeans \$8.35 and wheat at \$7.70.

Last year at this time wheat was \$4.50 a bushel, milo \$4.19, corn \$2.50, soybeans \$4.60 and sunflowers \$11.15.

If someone is bringing in average to higher yields, he said, these prices will help a lot. For the most part, these are historically high prices, he added.

Brewster's water contamination clarified

By Patty Decker

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Brewster residents could be drinking tap water by Friday, according to a spokesperson with the Kansas Rural Water Association.

“We have drained the water tower,

boosted the amount of chlorination in the water, taken six new samples from various locations in Brewster to include private homes and one well,” said Doug Guenther, technical assistant for the Rural Water Association.

In the first advisory, coliform bacteria was indicated as the type of contamination; however Guenther wanted to clarify the

bacteria is not caused by organisms in the environment from human or animal feces.

“The contamination is a common coliform associated with dirt contamination and not any feces,” he said Tuesday.

“We wanted to make that clear to Brewster residents,” he said.

Guenther said the chlorinator system malfunctioned but is now back on line and

a higher than normal level of chlorination has been run through the system.

The advisory was first issued last Friday after water samples taken on Sept. 10 came back positive for a bacteria.

At that time, residents were asked to boil water as a precaution and prevent any potential threat to people.

“The boil order will remain in effect

until the samples show no contamination,” Guenther said.

In the meantime, Brewster residents are being asked to respect the boil order on water used for cooking or drinking and to observe previous precautions.

“The main thing is we don't want to alarm residents that the contamination was ‘fecal-related,’” Guenther said.

Briefly

Hunter course Tuesday

A hunter education course is being offered at Colby Community College from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m., Tuesday; from 8:30 a.m. to noon, Thursday, Oct. 11, and 8:30 a.m. to noon, Saturday, Oct. 13. Those wanting to attend all sessions must be 11 years of age. Pre-register available at The Pirates Den, 1115 S. Franklin, Colby. For questions, call (785) 462-6631 or Kansas Wildlife and Parks personnel, Benny Young (785) 462-4602, or Matt Bain (785) 462-3367.

Childbirth classes begin

Citizens Medical Center in Colby is sponsoring a four-week series of childbirth education classes from 7 to 10 p.m., beginning Thursday. The series continues Oct. 11, 18, and 25 and is open to all expectant mothers in their last trimester or are due to deliver before February 2008, said Jeanene Brown, RN, Citizens Medical

Center education department. To register, call Brown at (785) 460-4850.

Scrapbooking set Saturday

An all-day scrapbooking event will be held from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Saturday at Heartland Christian School in Colby. Meals will be provided. Call 460-7038 or e-mail jjvannostrand@nwkansas.com for more information.

Nominations deadline near

The Thomas County Conservation District is asking for nominations of individuals for the following Kansas Banker Awards for 2007 including Windbreak; Soil Conservation; Wildlife Habitat; Water Quality; Water Conservation; and Energy Conservation. Nominees will be considered by the selection committee, with awards presented at the district's annual meeting Feb.

11, 2008. Deadline for nominations is Friday and can be mailed to: District Manager Danielle Freeman, 915 E. Walnut, Colby, Kan. 67701 or call, 462-7482, ext. 303.

Tootsie Roll drive to start

The week of Oct. 14, has been designated as “Helping People with Intellectual Disabilities Days” in conjunction with the Knights of Columbus Tootsie Roll Fund Drive. “On these days, members of the Colby council will be at Dillons and Wal-mart Saturday and Sunday, Oct. 13-14, handing out tootsie rolls while seeking donations for people with mental retardation,” said Dick Parnell, one of the coordinators. Of the proceeds donated, he said, 80 percent will be returned to the local Knights of Columbus. Those donations will go to the Prairie Developmental Center in Atwood. The remaining 20 percent will be used by the state council to

sponsor the Special Olympics Basketball Tournament held at Fort Hays State University March 13-15 and for religious education of people with mental retardation. For those wanting to donate and receive tootsie rolls, call Parnell, 460-6125.

Health clinics begin

The Thomas County Health Department is offering blood pressure and senior health education clinics started this month and will continue through the winter months. The schedule includes visits to Meadow Lark Manor, 8:30-9 a.m., the first Tuesday; Colby Senior Progress Center, 10 a.m. to noon, first Wednesdays; Rexford Red Barn, 1:30 to 2 p.m., second Mondays; Brewster Senior Center, 10 to 11 a.m., second Tuesdays; and Fairview Estates in Colby, 11:30 a.m. to noon, second Tuesdays. For questions, call 460-4596.