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Miss Rodeo America honored



A reception was held Tuesday in the Fireside Room inside the student union at Colby Community College for 19 year-old Colby native Amy Wilson, left, who was recently crowned Miss Rodeo

America 2008. Wilson visited with supporters such as Rita Kirkham of Wallace for over an hour.

JOEY FALKOFF/Colby Free Press

Boards sets candidate schedule

By Joey Falkoff

Free Press Reporter
jfalckoff@nwkansas.com

A grueling two hours of back and forth between Colby school board members regarding the superintendent search produced many moments of confusion and trepidation, but late Monday night the board was finally able to hammer out a plan of action going forward.

In addition to finalizing their list of interview questions, the board also set interview dates and came up with an itinerary for each candidate's interview.

The first week of January promises to be a busy one for board members with a special board meeting scheduled for Jan. 3 and candidate interviews to take place Jan. 5, 7, 8 and 9.

"Boy, that is going to get ugly," said board member Kevan Taylor.

Kansas Association of School Boards (KASB) Field Service Specialist Max Heim and his associates are currently reviewing applications, and will again at 6:30 p.m. Jan. 3 at the special board meeting, Heim will come to Colby with a list of three or four names to recommend to the board.

Concern was raised by board vice president Janice Frahm as to the control the board would have over who those candidates would be, but Taylor and board member Stan Molstad silenced those concerns.

"That is their job," said Taylor. "If we have one person from the board screening candidates out, you're going to leave out qualified people. I don't know if that's right."

"He and the two others know everyone," said Molstad. "They'll know the flakes right off the bat."

The list of final candidates they receive from KASB will all be external.

The two internal candidates, Colby High athletic director Larry Gabel and Colby Elementary School principal Terrel Harrison, have been guaranteed an interview and will automatically be included in the final group of candidates.

That announcement by board president Tracy Rogers initially surprised board members who weren't informed of that decision prior to the meeting.

"I didn't realize it," said Taylor.

The board then argued whether Gabel and Harrison would even be screened by Heim, which Rogers didn't think would occur, but after further discussion the board

decided Gabel and Harrison should have to go through the same process as everyone else.

"They need to jump through the same hoops," said board member Gerry Fulwider.

"That will equalize the playing field to ensure they're going through the same screening process," said Colby Middle School principal Robb Ross.

"You'll get in less trouble by doing that."

The board agreed and decided Harrison and Gable would be screened, but would still make the final cut barring any significant flaws Heim finds in his background checks.

Gabel and Harrison's interviews are scheduled for Jan. 5, and each is scheduled to last two-and-half hours. As part of the interview process, the board is also hosting a reception at the administration building for each candidate that day, which is open to the public. The first reception will begin at 3 p.m., while the second will start at 3:45 p.m.

Planning Gabel and Harrison's schedule was the easy part.

When it came to planning the day for candidates outside Colby, who will interview Jan. 7, 8, and 9, the board ended up completely reworking the preliminary schedule they originally had due mostly to concerns over travel and lodging arrangements.

Instead of starting the day at 9 a.m., external candidates will arrive at the administration building at 11:30 a.m. to meet with the clerk, Janel Andrews, and superintendent Kirk Nielsen.

Candidates are also scheduled to have lunch with principals and other key administrators, take a community tour and building tours before each holds their public reception from 4:45-5:15 p.m. at the administration building.

Interviews will begin about 7 p.m. and last two-and-a-half hours, following a meal with the board scheduled to start at 6:30 p.m.

The board took the time to go through all 48 interview questions on their list and paired it down to 37 they will ask each candidate.

They were also supposed to appoint an on-site visiting team to go to the hometown of each finalist, but with 10 p.m. quickly approaching, they decided to table that for next time.

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Center's future site announced

By Kevin Johnson

Free Press Reporter
kjohnson@nwkansas.com

The location for the long awaited Multipurpose Activity Center, which will also be known as MAC, was announced Tuesday afternoon, and efforts to bring a youth center to Colby have taken a giant step forward towards making the dream a reality.

The future site of the center will be south on Franklin Avenue by Amber Waves Apartments, east of Colby High School, on acreage donated by Ben and Elsie Keller, who have owned the property since 1983.

The Kellers currently reside in Logan County but were residents of Thomas County for 45 years.

"We felt it would benefit the town and surrounding area for years to come," Elsie Keller said, "and something that will benefit for kids of all ages." "I thought it would be a nice asset to the town. We lived in Thomas County for a long time." Ben Keller said.

Designs for the center are currently being undertaken by SCH2 Architects out of Denver, Colo. and within the next 30 to 60 days the firm will produce a schematic drawing and the project will go out to bid.

"We would like to start breaking ground in early 2009," said Jada Tubbs, center board member and granddaughter of Ben and Elsie

"We would like to start breaking ground in early 2009."

Jada Tubbs, Center board member

Keller. "This is a project of three phases, hopefully phase one will be done in 2009, and phase two will follow shortly after."

According to Tubbs the phases are: Phase 1, the actual building of the center itself and indoor activities; Phase 2, outdoor activities; Phase 3, potential addition of another building and more indoor activities.

"Once we get the schematics we will know a little bit more about how it will all be laid out," Tubbs said.

Funding for the multipurpose activity center will be in part by the state and part by private and business donations. How it works is should the center receive \$314,286 in donations, the state will contribute \$220,000 to the center.

For each \$1 donated, donors will receive 70 cents in tax credits. The credit is 70 percent of total contributions, a mark provided by Colby's rural location, as more urban area tax credit proposals receive anywhere from 30 to 50 percent. The tax credit for the center is good through July 1, 2007, through Dec. 31, 2008. "This makes fundraising a lot easier," said

Brian Staats, a center board member and accountant who helped write the application for the credits.

The center already has a 501-C3 charitable status. Donors can also claim charitable donation on their federal tax return.

"We were awarded \$220,000 in tax credits and right now we have around \$20,000 to \$30,000 left to sell," Tubbs said. "We have different projects, like the laser tag area and other areas where people can bid for and pay for a certain area of the project, or if people just want to donate money towards the center... we would love to have the help."

Colby's center was one of the 22 projects across the state awarded a tax credit. Staats said about 61 applications were submitted. The most that could be applied for was \$250,000. "This project had to fall in certain guidelines," Staats said. The state awards tax credits to projects that fall under certain categories: community service, crime prevention and health care. The center fell under crime prevention. "We applied under community service," Staats said, "but the support showed

it fit under crime prevention."

Proposed activities and features for the center include: laser tag, paintball, golf simulator, recording studio, rock climbing, batting cages, miniature golf, coffee shop, multipurpose activities room, play-ground equipment, basketball, sand volleyball, indoor walking track, dog park, arcade, dance pad, roller skating rink and a skate park.

A concern for the future center is what level of religion and spirituality to infuse into the youth center. A mission statement for the new center emphasized a safe place for the youth of Thomas County to assemble to be entertained under a Christian atmosphere.

Todd Stramel, who has organized the efforts for opening the youth center, said the committee is in consensus that the center should have some level and display of spirituality. It was decided that the center should take a passive approach to spirituality with the youth. Although there may be Christian symbols in the center, it does not mean the volunteers or employees of the center will lecture to the youth about their spirituality.

"Just because the bylaws may be very doctrinal," Stramel said, "that doesn't mean that the physical facility itself will be overly religious."

"There have been youth centers before," Stramel said. "But not like what we anticipate to build. This will be much more substantial."

Cost estimates for fire station between \$2 and \$2.5 million

By John Van Nostrand

Free Press Publisher
jvannostrand@nwkansas.com

If plans work out, Colby's Fire Department will be finishing a roof almost two years after the roof was finished at the former fire department building.

Department Chief Bob McLemore informed Colby Rotary Tuesday about the city and fire department's proposal of a new firehouse along South Country Club Drive.

Officials are considering a 17,000 square-foot building at an estimated cost of \$2 million to \$2.5 million. Colby City Council is expected to review building bids in late January.

"There's no fluff in the design," McLemore said.

Ice and fluffy, white snow accumulated on the roof of the former Colby Fire Department adjacent to Colby City Hall Dec. 31, 2006, and collapsed a portion of the roof. All the fire trucks that were still accessible were then moved to the National Guard Armory in Colby.

City and fire officials then moved to developing the 1991 idea of a new firehouse.

"What we have now is revised to meet our needs," McLemore said.

McLemore, who has been with the department since 1985, said the department's operation has changed over his 22 years. What used to be just responding to fires and occasional car accidents, the department has since added hazardous-material response, various other rescue operations and educational projects for the area.

"The education takes a lot of time, but you

hope it reduces fire losses. It's hard to say the fires you didn't have," he said.

Colby Fire Department's territory is 535 square-miles including Colby. The department has seven vehicles and two trailers. The new station will be able to house all the equipment, which was not feasible at the former station. Colby has 27 firefighters, six full-time employees and 21 volunteers. One person is always at the station, round the clock. Should the proposed station be approved as is, McLemore said the city will use a 20-year bond to pay for it. The bond will be funded by property taxes. City of Colby Manager Carolyn Armstrong, who was at the meeting, estimated the property tax increase for a house assessed at \$100,000 will be \$55 a year. The issue will not be determined by a vote of the public.

Armstrong emphasized those costs are

only estimates. She said it is possible the plans, and cost, of the building may change, depending upon the bids.

"The council is not thrilled about spending 2 to 2.5 million," she said.

The proposed building includes room to house and perform maintenance to all the trucks inside. A training room is included, plus sleeping rooms for men and women. The former station did not have two separate rooms, which may have been an inconvenience should a female have joined the fire department.

If approved as proposed, construction will start in spring and be finished in late 2008. McLemore said the fire department and the city is appreciative of the relationship they have with the National Guard Armory to house the firetrucks, but that offering can't last forever. McLemore said

if Colby's National Guard's status would be changed to active, the firetrucks must leave immediately. Having the trucks in the Armory has slowed the department's response, McLemore said. When firetrucks are driven out of the Armory, the firefighters must stop and then lock the Armory doors, part of the agreement. The proposed station should increase the response time, McLemore said. He said the response to calls near Colby's interstate exits would improve because of the station's location.

Currently, Colby has a four on the rating scale fire departments receive through insurance companies. A 10 is the best score. The higher the score, the lower house insurance premiums usually are. Ratings are based on a combination of water supply, fire department setup, response time and other factors.

Charity ball planned

The first-ever American Cancer Society Charity Ball will be held on Saturday, Feb. 23, 2008, at the City Limits Convention Center in Colby. Highlights will include dinner, dance and auction.

Tickets are available at Homeland Real Estate. For

questions, call Jennifer Van Eaton with the American Cancer Society at 462-2183.

Donations sought

By giving to the Thomas County Community Foundation or any other local charitable organization, you

can support the county and save money on taxes at the same time — and a gift to the foundation in someone else's name can be a perfect gift for the person who seems to have everything.

The foundation encourages all businesses or individuals interested in making tax-deductible contributions to contact the foundation at 785-460-9152 or

tccf@st-tel.net

Dance team plans supper

The Colby High School Dance Team is sponsoring a soup supper beginning at 5:30 p.m., Thursday, at the Colby Community Building. Proceeds will go to help defray camp costs.

