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TOM BETZ/Goodland Star News

Colby firefighters, above, took part in a live fire training exercise at a house scheduled for demolition in Goodland. The firefighters, below, prepared to extinguish the flames in a back bedroom of the house.

Area firemen train in Goodland

By Tom Betz
Goodland Star News
ntbetz@nwkanas.com

Tuesday evening fire trucks from Sherman County and Goodland blocked 10th Street between Clark and Caldwell where firemen from Goodland, Sherman County and Colby fire departments participated in live fire training exercises at an abandoned house scheduled for demolition.

City Fire Chief Brian James said he was pleased with the joint mutual-aid training and felt it was a good way for members of both departments to get the live fire experience. He said five firemen and J.L. Ellis from Colby had come to the training event. He said seven firemen from the Sherman County Rural Fire Department and nine from the Goodland Fire Department took part.

This was the second training exercise held at the house at 317 E. 10th, and James said he hopes to do one more training exercise before the house is torn down. He said it will depend on whether the holes can be patched up inside where the ceiling had to be pulled down to get at an attic fire on Tuesday.



James said he appreciates Tony and Debbie Martin, who own the house, for allowing the firemen to use the house for the training.

Small groups of firemen carried hoses into the house to watch and douse special fires set using old mattresses and wood pallets.

James told the first group they

would watch the fire build up along the walls and move across the ceiling as the temperature rose in the room. He said he would have them douse the fire, but not put it out to allow them to watch the fire grow several times as each fireman got to handle the hose and watch a thermal readout showing

how the fire temperature raises.

Fires were set in a back bedroom, the kitchen area and the corners of the front room to allow different firemen to participate in the exercise. While a group was inside other firemen were at the ready with hoses outside the house in case support was needed.

One of the city firemen said it was interesting to watch the temperature rise and that it was at a critical flash over point when the temperature reached the 1,000 degree point. That is when the firemen would douse the flames to cut it back down.

This was the first time the city and county fire departments have participated in a joint live fire training exercise in recent months, and with the bunker gear and oxygen masks in place it was difficult to tell which firemen were from the city department and which were county firemen.

The exercise lasted about two hours and Chief James said they had to go back into the house to extinguish a small fire that had started in the attic.

County Fire Chief Alan David said he was pleased with the training experience.

Healthcare business looks at Colby

By Jan Katz Ackerman
Free Press Reporter
jkackerman@gmail.com

Downtown Colby will have a new healthcare business later this year if plans go as expected.

Embark Healthcare, Inc., owned by Michael Brouthers of Denver, will make its debut in a downtown building yet to be determined, Colby City Manager Carolyn Armstrong said this morning.

"Embark Healthcare will be an electronic repository of patient information and documents," Armstrong said. "The documents will hold information about what patients want for end-of-life procedures."

A public meeting about Embark Healthcare, Inc. will take place at 7 p.m. Tuesday at the Colby Community Building. More information about the start-up company will be offered at that time.

"What Embark will do," Armstrong said, "Is it will record your desires and any final directives in case of serious illness or final death."

Gerry Fulwider, director of the Thomas County Economic Developmental Alliance is excited about the new company. Fulwider is working with Brouthers to help make Embark Healthcare, Inc. a reality.

"I think this is a great opportunity for Colby and I think Mr. Brouthers is a genuine entrepreneur," Fulwider said. "We are fortunate to have him consider Colby."

Fulwider said when he first heard Brouthers' proposal for Embark Healthcare, the names of four or five people immediately came to mind that he had talked to about advance directives.

"I know it's on a lot of people's minds for themselves," Fulwider said. "But they don't want to talk about it."

Fulwider said he did not see "any down side" to the new company.

"Embark will be a market to women for good paying jobs,"

he said.

The round-the-clock staffed company will share patient information with medical providers over the internet. Armstrong said insurance companies will help their customers purchase a link to Embark Healthcare, Inc.

"It will be sold through the insurance companies," she said. "There won't be a door to door campaign."

Brouthers made a presentation before the Colby City Council two weeks ago. The council approved up to \$400,000 from the pool of money that has accumulated over the years from a 1/4 percent sales tax.

"Right now there is \$1,080,000 in that account," Armstrong said. "After the \$400,000 for Embark, there will be more than \$600,000 left in the account."

Armstrong said the Colby City Council authorized Brouthers to locate the building he wants to buy and renovate to house Embark Healthcare. Brouthers is to then bring his idea back to the council for final approval.

"People need to realize this is a start-up business," Armstrong said. "But (Brouthers) is adamant that he wants to preserve and restore downtown Colby, so it will be downtown."

Brouthers will lease the building he picks out for a period of four years before the final purchase will go to Embark Healthcare, Inc. During those first four years, Brouthers plans to employ 130 people on a full-time basis.

"There will be 30 jobs the first year," Armstrong said. "Thirty jobs the second year, 32 jobs the third year and 38 jobs the fourth year. Salaries will range from \$17 dollars an hour to \$24 dollars an hours."

Armstrong said Brouthers plans two locations for Embark Healthcare, Inc. One of the company offices will be in Daytona Beach, Fl. and the other in Colby.

"People might ask why Colby," Armstrong said. "It's because Michael Brouthers married a Colby girl. He married Jim and Sandra Kriss' daughter, Carla."

Thomas County taxpayers will pay slightly more in 2009

By Jan Katz Ackerman
Free Press Reporter
jkackerman@gmail.com

Thomas County Commissioners on Monday approved the 2009 budget which outlines how various amounts of money will be collected and spent.

"The governor has proposed a 2 percent budget recision for 2008," Commissioner Paul Steele said. "I hope we can get through 2009 without a budget recision."

Steele said a recision is when the amount of projected revenue is not enough to cover the amount of actual expenses. In the event a recision is found necessary, the county can adjust its budget downward, but can not change it upward to cover more expenses.

During the budget hearing which started at 9 a.m. and lasted 30 minutes, Thomas County resident Lonnie Wilson asked Commissioners Ken Christiansen, Byron Sowers and Steele what accounts are covered by the county's general fund.

The commissioners deferred the question to Thomas County Clerk Shelly Harms.

"The general fund covers line items for the county clerk, register of deeds, treasurer, appraiser, county attorney, sheriff, the jail and the commissioners," Harms said.

The county mill levy will increase by just over 1 mill, going from 33.368 mills in 2008 to 34.374 mills in 2009. A mill equals 1 dollar for every 1,000 in valuation. The amount of ad valorem taxes, a tax based on the value of

real estate or personal property, levied in 2009 is being projected as \$2,797,015. The final figure will not be set until later this year when valuations are released from the state. Ad valorem taxes are collected and spent within the same year. In 2008, the amount of ad valorem tax for Thomas County was \$2,689,747. Other money for the county to pay expenses comes in from vehicle taxes, sales tax, grants, state and federal highway money, and fees collected by various departments such as public health, road and bridge and the county landfill.

The county expects to have about \$6,089,808 dollars in expenses in 2009. In 2008, expenses ran at \$5,938,453.

Following the budget hearing,

Wilson asked the commissioners why county bank statements have not been reconciled for some time.

"The statements have all been reconciled and we are waiting on journal entries," Steele said. "That's being taken care of by the county treasurer and she works directly for you. All elected officials work directly for the voters."

Since 2006, County Treasurer Donita Applebury has not been able to get statements for the county reconciled.

Due to the lag in reconciliation, the accounting firm of Adams, Brown, Beran & Ball of Colby has not officially released the county audit report for 2007.

"We are distressed about the situation," Steele said. "We put a little pressure on the county treasurer

and she has reported to us that the banks are reconciled."

The commissioners over the past few months have prompted Applebury to finish the reconciliation process as quickly as possible. Applebury on Monday said she is done with it and journal entries would become part of the official county paperwork on Monday and Tuesday. Stephen Shull, a resident of Rovohl Township, wanted to know whether the county budgeted for someone to work full-time to maintain roads in his township.

"It seems any time someone is out maintaining roads he gets pulled off to go work somewhere else," Shull said.

Steele said while the road and bridge department has money set aside to hire someone else full-

time, no one has been hired specifically for Rovohl Township.

"If there's an open position," Shull said. "Why aren't you hiring someone?"

Steele said the road and bridge department was consolidated with the weed department so whoever took care of weeds could work on roads as needed.

"There's sometimes that there are not weeds or prairie dogs, so we keep him busy," Steele said.

Christiansen said the position is "dual purpose."

He told Shull he needed to visit with Road and Bridge Director Clair Schrock to find out about having Dawn Nichols, the person currently maintaining Rovohl Township roads, spend more time working in the township.

Annual hog roast set

The Gem Lions Club is hosting its annual Hog Roast from 5 to 8 p.m., Wednesday at the Gem Community Building in Gem. Bluegrass, folk and country music provided by the Jeff Wagoner Family and many other regulars are featured entertainment. The dinner is free-will donations with net proceeds going toward community projects. Organizers are also asking visitors to donate any used eyeglasses or hearing aids. For questions,

call Ken Poland, publicity chair, 462-7809.

New group forming

A new group for people ages 50 and over is forming called "More Fun Together." The group is open to widowers, divorcees, people never married, or anyone who is alone. The first meeting is a potluck at 5:30 p.m., Saturday, Sept. 13, in the basement of the First Presbyterian Church, 515 W. Fourth St. For questions, call 462-6342.

Boot block Saturday

The Colby Fire Department is sponsoring its an-

nual Muscular Dystrophy Association Boot Block for the Jerry Lewis Telethon starting at 9 a.m. Saturday. Collection sites will be at Fourth and Franklin in downtown Colby, Wal-Mart and Dillons. Firefighters, said Sean Hankin, assistant fire chief, will be collecting money to benefit research, education and a cure with proceeds staying in the area.

College volleyball Monday

The first home match for the Colby College women's volleyball team against McCook starts at 7 p.m. Monday in the Colby Community Building. Colby

sportscaster Rich Epp will give a play-by-play on KTCC (91.9) beginning at 6:45 p.m.

Square dance Saturday

A square dance is planned from 8 to 10 p.m. Saturday at the Colby Community Building.

Potluck Saturday

The Colby Music Boosters will have a potluck at noon Saturday in Fike Park. The event is open to everyone. Bring a side dish, table service and lawn chairs. Drinks will be provided.

