



ANDY HEINTZ/Colby Free Press

Leilani Thomas, director of the Colby Convention and Visitors Bureau, and her husband, Chuck Thomas, (above) knelt down to work by some of the animated creatures at Santa City in

Fike Park. Thomas (below) gave directions to her fellow workers this morning. The crew is rushing to have the holiday display ready for Santa's first visit the day after Thanksgiving.

Magic shapes display

Volunteers shape holiday display

By Andy Heintz

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It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas Santa City.

Walk into the room in the Cub Scout building at Fike Park, and you can't help but be filled with Christmas cheer. Christmas trees are everywhere, and animated creatures abound.

It's all part of this year's theme for Santa City, "Western Winter Wonderland," said Leilani Thomas, director of the Colby Convention and Visitors Bureau.

The Colby Boy Scouts agreed to lend the Chamber of Commerce their house in the park as this year's Christmas house, she said. Chamber volunteers are turning it into a symbol of the Christmas spirit. Most of the work on the house has already been done, Thomas said.

Thomas and her husband and long time volunteer Chuck; Holly Stephens, executive director of the Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce; and Lottie McLemore, administrative assistant at the Chamber, were hard at work today trying to get the city ready for the public. When you walk into the room, it's clear that a lot has already been done.

Brown bears hang from trees decorated with miniature cowboy hats and sheriff's



stars and strung with Christmas lights. Animated carolers sing Christmas songs in the corner. A bear adorned with a cowboy hat and a guitar plays music by a campfire, while a raccoon and a bear listen in sleeping bags by the fire.

You will also see a spotted dalmatian in a carriage, a bear driving a car emblazoned with the Coca Cola label, another bear eating popcorn and watching a John Wayne movie, and a polar bear singing a song to a microphone while two penguins dance to the beat.

The display will open to the public from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Friday, Nov. 28, and run

through Sunday, Nov. 30. It will be open the same times every weekend through Christmas. Beginning on Dec. 16, Stephens said, it also will be open weekdays from 6 to 8 p.m.

Once Santa City is open to the public, she said, Santa Claus stop in to hear the wish lists of the children of Thomas County. Mrs. Claus will also be there, handing out sugar cookies to visitors. The cookies are baked by the Retired Senior Volunteer Program.

Stephens said somewhere between two to three thousand people visited Santa City last fall. The Chamber is accepting donations to help maintain the display, she said, but visiting the city is free of charge.

School board gives notice to principal

By Steve Haynes

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The Colby School Board agreed to fire the high school principal after a special, closed-door meeting this morning, putting the activities director in charge of the school.

The board had announced a special meeting at 7 a.m. today on Tuesday, with a closed discussion of "nonelected personnel" as the only item on the agenda.

After about an hour of discussion, said Superintendent Terrel Harrison, the board voted to accept the resignation of a clerical worker, Kylie Cersovsky. It then adopted a resolution of intent to terminate the contract of principal Rocky Robbins.

Harrison said Larry Gabel, the high school activities director and assistant principal, would be the acting principal, effective today. He'll probably get some help with his other duties, she said, but it hasn't been decided who from.

He said Cersovsky was a "paraprofessional," or teacher aide, at the intermediate building and worked in the office copy center.

The board's resolution noted that Robbins is entitled to a hearing before the board if he files notice within 15 days. It says Harrison had placed him on paid leave Monday, and the suspension would continue until further action of the board.

As reasons for the termination,

the board cited:

- "Unprofessional conduct, including engaging in acts of moral turpitude."

- "Conduct unbecoming a school administrator, including dishonesty with the superintendent and board...."

- "Mr. Robbins has betrayed the trust and confidence of the board, engaged in unprofessional conduct and is not an appropriate role model."

Robbins had been with the district since July 1, 2005. In a statement to the *Free Press* today, he apologized to the town:

"I would like to take the opportunity to publicly apologize for my actions to the citizens of Colby, including (school) employees and patrons. I am deeply sorry that I did not uphold the standards of character needed to continue as the high school principal.

"I am grateful for the opportunity to I had to serve the community of Colby.... I would hope that my tenure here would not be defined by this alone, but also that the positive contributions over the past four years are also remembered, and I pray for your forgiveness."

Harrison said school officials had talked with the staff and the students, but the district did not plan on sending any notice home.

The acting principal, Gabel, joined the district two years ago at the high school after a long career as the wrestling coach and elementary principal in St. Francis.

Democrat gains may not survive

By John Hanna

AP Political Writer

TOPEKA — Gov. Kathleen Sebelius and fellow Democrats have been fond in recent years of arguing that if Kansas hasn't turned from Republican red to Democratic blue in its politics, it's at least becoming purple.

But election results this year undercut that claim.

Come January, Democrats will return to holding only one of the state's four seats in the U.S. House, and Republicans will remain as much in control of the Legislature as before. A spirited Democratic challenge to Republican Sen. Pat Roberts ended as so many such races have in the past, with a big GOP victory.

The main evidence of a shift toward purple always has been Sebelius' victories in the 2002 and 2006 governor's races.

But last week's election results suggest that Sebelius' strong political skills — and her ability to raise boodles of campaign money — are the main reason Kansas

politics seemed to shift away from its traditional crimson hue. That's a sobering thought for the Kansas Democratic Party as it faces a near-term future in which she doesn't hold elective office.

"I think this Kansas-going-purple thing has been a little overblown, and obviously the results demonstrate that," said Sen. Chris Steineger, a Kansas City Democrat.

Kansas has leaned toward the GOP since statehood, a lasting legacy from just before the Civil War when pro- and anti-slavery guerillas battled. No Democratic presidential nominee has carried it since Lyndon Johnson in 1964, and no Democrat has won a U.S. Senate race since 1932.

Democrats have most often prospered when Republicans have been consumed with fighting themselves. The split between conservatives and Bull Moose progressives in 1912 allowed Democrats to elect a governor and capture majorities in both legisla-

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Briefly

High school offers play tonight

The annual Colby High all-school play, "Iphigenia," will be performed at 7 p.m. tonight and Friday at the high school auditorium. A Greek pasta dinner will be served from 5:30 to 6:45 p.m. before the Friday performance. Tickets for the play only are \$5 for adults and \$4 for Colby School District students and children. Tickets for the dinner theater are \$10 and \$8. For information, call Nancy Rundel at (785) 460-5300.

Fair board to meet at 8 p.m.

The Thomas County Fair Board will be meeting at 8 p.m. tonight at the 4-H Building on Range Avenue. The agenda includes reports on buildings and grounds work, options for a rodeo and a concert next summer, a demolition derby and open class changes.

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Turkey, ham on menu Sunday

Sacred Heart Catholic Church will be tempting people with its annual old-fashioned Thanksgiving dinner from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Sunday in the church basement. The menu includes turkey, ham, dressing, mashed potatoes and gravy, corn, rolls, salads and homemade pie, with iced tea or coffee. For delivery, call 460-7167 or 462-2179. Donations will be accepted.

Clinic to have coffee hour

Swartz Veterinary Hospital will hold a Colby Chamber of Commerce coffee hour at 10 a.m. Friday at 1775 W. Fourth St. There will be coffee and cookies and a chance for Chamber members

to get a look at the hospital's new addition.

Street crew trimming trees

The Colby city crew is trimming trees over streets and sidewalks as the weather allows. Trees will be trimmed to 13 feet, 6 inches above streets and to 8 feet above sidewalks, said City Manager Carolyn Armstrong. For questions, call the city at 460-4410.

Author to speak at Heartland

Christian author Sean McDowell will speak at the Heartland Christian School's "Partners for the Future" Endowment Banquet at 6 p.m. Friday at the school. Tickets, \$15 each, may be purchased until Wednesday at the school or by calling (785) 460-6419.

City looking for referees

The city Recreation Department needs officials for

Mens Basketball League, which runs on Sunday afternoons through February. Call (785) 460-4440 to sign up.

Turkey Trot 5K set for Saturday

The Colby Recreation Department plans the second annual Turkey Trot 5K at 9 a.m. Saturday. Late registration will be at 8:30 a.m. race day at the Community Building. Call (785) 460-4440 for information.

Red Cross offers class

The Thomas County chapter of the American Red Cross will be offering a first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation class from 6 to 10 p.m. Tuesday at the Thomas County Office. Pre-registration and prepayment are required. The cost is \$45, which includes all materials. For information, call Sherry White at (785) 462-7161.