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COLBY FREE PRESS

50¢

Wednesday

April 29, 2009
Volume 120, Number 67
Serving Thomas County since 1888



TERESA MORGAN/Thomas County Academy

Programing the brain of a robot seemed like child's play for Jory Koon, a seventh grader at the Thomas County Academy, and son of Van and Lynette Koon of Colby. He was among the students who entered a robot competition at Fort Hays State University. The academy took second place out of 19 schools.

Academy students learn through projects, technology

By Vera Sloan

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Fifteen kids going 15 different ways, baking cookies, programing the brain of a robot, preparing a report on the aurora borealis what causes it. That's just some of what's going on in the classroom of the Thomas County Academy at Colby Middle School.

This school of "choice" is set up as a charter school under Kansas law, an alternative to regular public-school classes. The district says the academy should have the vision to unlock the potential of a each child and to encourage self-motivation. It's set up as separate school, with it's own principal and teacher.

"We follow the district curriculum and are governed by the same policies and procedures as all the other students in the district," said teacher Teresa Morgan. "We also involve the parents to participate in each student's individual learning plan."

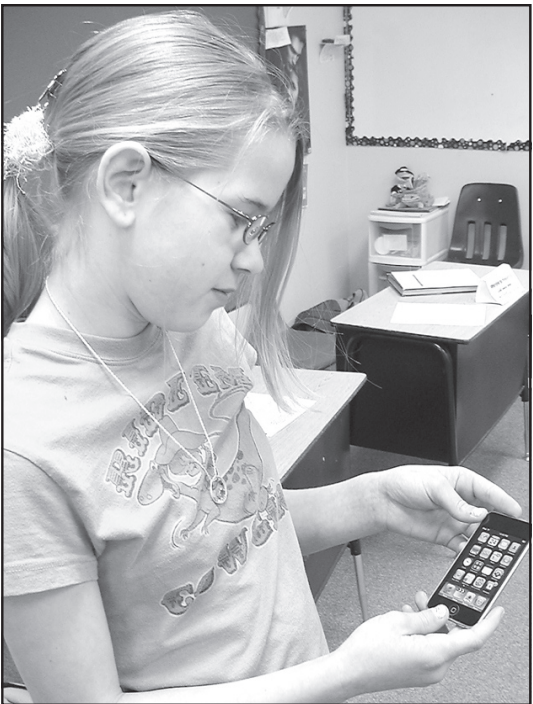
The students take the Kansas State Assessments along with other students in the school district.

Curriculum Director Diana Wieland serves as principal and supervises the academy. The program opened in 2005 serving grades 7 to 8 with "project-based" learning, with future plans to expand programs through grade 12.

"At the present time, the school board has made no decisions concerning future plans for the Academy," said Terrell Harrison, superintendent.

Morgan said she was pretty excited when she learned recently her classroom had been chosen for a \$2,000 social networking grant from Best Buy, a national electronics retailer, through their store in Lawrence.

"Those kinds of grants are very hard to come by," Morgan said, "and I couldn't wait to go shop-



VERA SLOAN/Colby Free Press

Kaili Guy, a seventh grader at the Thomas County Academy, demonstrated the versatility of the new iTouch hand-held computer, which she used to get information to help program a robot's brain.

ping for new learning tools."

With the grant, Morgan said, she bought several new iTouch hand-held devices, which are more powerful than the Apple iPod.

"The iTouch, is an extremely small electronic tool, and is like having a computer in your pocket," Morgan said. "Its capabilities are practically

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Swine flu scare hits central Kansas

By Kevin Bottrell

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The outbreak of a rare swine flu virus that has claimed at least seven lives in Mexico made its way to Kansas last weekend, apparently flying home with a tourist returning from a spring visit down south.

Connie Walden, a registered nurse and director of the Thomas County Health Department, said the state Department of Health and Environment has declared a health emergency concerning the flu.

"This does not mean it is time to panic," Walden said. "It means that we are concerned."

The department has reported two connected cases in central Kansas, both in Dickinson County. One case involved a person reporting symptoms after returning from a trip to Mexico. The other involved a person who reported symptoms after household contact with the first case, the department said. Both adults are being treated, but neither has been hospitalized.

The two cases were reported on Friday, with samples sent to the federal Centers for Disease Control laboratories in Atlanta for confirmation. So far, most of the reported cases in the United States have been mild, the department said, with one fatality reported early today. Seven deaths have been confirmed and many more are suspected in Mexico, mostly in Mexico City.

Walden said there are no restrictions on travel so far, but she is advising people to be careful.

"We have been preparing for this for years," she said. "The public needs to be aware that good hygiene and staying away from crowds are the best ways to avoid flu symptoms."

Swine influenza is a respiratory disease in pigs caused by Type A influenza viruses. Human cases are most often caused by prolonged proximity to pigs, but the virus can also be spread from human to human. The Centers for Disease Control said no one knows exactly how contagious this version is among humans.

The World Health Organization is defining the outbreak as Phase 4 on the pandemic scale, indicating verified human-to-human transmission. Phase 4 also indicates that a pandemic, or widespread infection, (Phase 6) is likely, but not inevitable.

Symptoms include a fever of more than 100 degrees, body aches, coughing, sore throat with respiratory congestion, with diarrhea and vomiting in some cases. The department is recommending that anyone with these symptoms contact their doctor immediately.

While no vaccine is available for this strain of flu, the virus can be treated with antiviral drugs. These lessen the symptoms and may help prevent complications.

To reduce the spread of the infection, experts recommend:

- Washing hands with soap or alcohol-based sanitizers to avoid infection.
- Staying home if sick to avoid infecting others.
- Coughing only into an elbow

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New governor sworn in

By Kevin Bottrell

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Kansas welcomed its new governor, former Lt. Gov. Mark Parkinson, Tuesday evening.

Parkinson, 52, a lawyer, businessman and former state legislator from Johnson County, will be taking over for Kathleen Sebelius, who was confirmed Tuesday by

the United States Senate for the post of secretary of health and human services. Sebelius will be taking charge of the department in the midst of a swine flu outbreak.

Parkinson is a native of Wichita and a graduate of Wichita State University and the University of Kansas School of Law. He practiced law in Johnson County and developed several assisted-living facilities. He was elected to the

Kansas House of Representatives in 1990 and elected chairman of the Kansas Republican Party in 2001. He switched parties when Sebelius named him as her running mate during the 2006 election.

Parkinson will remain governor until after the 2010 general election. Though he would be eligible, he has said he will not run for reelection.

'World's Largest' convoy set to roll here on Sept. 12

By Andy Heintz

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Truckers, riders, friends and family are invited to roll along with the third annual northwest Kansas World's Largest Truck Convoy, starting at 10 a.m. Friday, Sept. 12, at the Mittens TA Travel Plaza in Oakley and ending with lunch at Truck Town in Colby.

The convoy is a nationwide event, held in 34 states and seven Canadian provinces, to raise money and awareness for Special Olympics.

Joe Mentlick, founder and organizer of the convoy in Colby, said he encourages everyone to join in as the convoy rolls up I-70, earning money for Special Olympics programs which serve the developmentally disabled.

"People should come out and see the enjoyment of the convoy and how happy it makes Special Olympics athletes, no matter what their age or gender," said Mentlick. "They should come see the joy on their faces. There are a lot of people who don't understand how happy little things can make people."

The entry fee for a trucker who wants to drive in the convoy is \$100, said Mentlick. He said truckers must sign a waiver, have a valid drivers license and proof of insurance and their vehicle must be of 10,000 pounds gross vehicle weight or larger.

The convoy was not always the nationwide event it is today, Mentlick said. It started as a single event in Orlando, Fla. with 97 trucks. While that drive only raised \$17,000 for Special Olympics, it succeeded

Sports editor gets award

Andy Heintz, sports editor for the *Colby Free Press*, received a Special Olympics "Hero" plaque for articles he wrote about the organization's events in the Colby area April 12 at a meeting of area supporters of the program at Montana Mikes.

The articles that earned Heintz the award included his coverage of the second annual World's Largest Truck Convoy printed in the *Free Press* on Sept. 22 and a column about taking pictures at a Special Olympics event the Colby Bowl and Fun Center that ran Oct. 17.

Heintz said the award meant a lot to him. He thanked Joe Mentlick, an organizer of the convoy for this area, for the work he did to get the articles recognized.

in planting the seeds that would sprout into a huge movement transcending state borders and involving two nations. The convoy raised \$736,000 nationwide last year.

For anyone wanting to help plan the convoy this year, Mentlick said, a meeting will be held at 6 p.m. Sunday at Montana Mike's.

Briefly

City to pick up grass clippings

City crews began picking up grass clippings Monday. Clippings must be at curbside by 8 a.m. on your regular trash day in a separate tipper can from household trash. Put clippings in the tipper loose, not in plastic bags. For questions, call the Public Works office at 460-4420.

Open house at kindergarten

Colby Grade School plans a kindergarten visitation night for incoming students and their parents from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. Thursday in the school auditorium. A slide show will outline the kindergarten program, followed by a tour of all three classrooms. Teachers and staff will talk and answer questions. The office will be open. For questions, call the school at 460-5100.

Barbershop on tap at college

The quartet Realtime, the 2005 international cham-

pions of Barbershop, will headline the program for "Back to the Roots of Barbershop," sponsored by the Colby Area Barbershoppers on Saturday. Shows will be at 2:30 p.m. and 8 p.m. in the Frahm Theater of the Colby Community College Cultural Arts Center. Tickets, \$10 each in advance or \$12 at the door, can be purchased from any member or by calling (800) 269-7059 or (785) 462-2474. People who have tickets for the April date may use them. Will-call orders can be held at the ticket window.

Child safety fair Saturday

A child safety fair will be held from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday on the Wal-Mart parking lot, and sponsored by Wal-Mart. Certified child passenger safety seat technicians from Smart Start, the Kansas Highway Patrol and organizations that deal with child safety laws, will be available to inspect and give information on car seats. The Child Identification Program will be providing voice, DNA, and photo identifica-

tion kits for parents. The Colby Fire Department and the Regional Prevention Center will be available. All services are free. For information, call 465-9103 or 443-3715.

College offers self-defense

Colby Community College is offering a self-defense class from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday. The class, taught by Christine Zejda, will be held in the Student Union, room 108. A self-defense mini baton is included in the \$50 fee. Call the college Admissions Office at 460-4690 to enroll.

Mission session set in Rexford

The Rexford Community Church will hold its annual mission conference starting at 8 a.m. Saturday and continuing Sunday. Jerry Latimer will give a video presentation on a recent trip to Mongolia. Saturday night, there will be pizza for the youth and a program by Dan Wahlgren of Laramie, Wyo. Sunday

worship will feature both speakers, followed by a dinner. The theme is "Be Not Ashamed." For information, call (785) 687-4361.

Baptist women plan craft day

The women of the First Baptist Church plan a crafting get-together from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday at the church fellowship hall. Come get together with others for fellowship, work on projects or learn how to do some new crafts. There will be a demonstration on card embroidery and iris paper folding, with supplies available. Samples are on display in the windows at Colby Photo. Snacks and refreshments provided. For information, call 462-2967 or 462-2336.



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