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Colby Visitors Center turns five

By Vera Sloan

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May 11 marked the fifth anniversary of the Colby Visitors Center, on Willow Street just off the Range Avenue exit from Interstate 70, and the center celebrated with a Chamber coffee hour on Friday.

About 47 people crowded the center, built from galvanized steel grain bins common on the High Plains, for coffee, punch and snacks.

The Colby Convention and Visitors Bureau, which built and runs the center, organized in August 1989, said Colby Convention and Visitors Bureau Director Leilani Thomas, after a suggestion from Chamber of Commerce Manager Susan Nuepothe, who saw a need to promote the town.

It began as a Chamber committee, and has grown into a tax-supported organization with

two paid staff and a 10-member board. By state law, six of the board members must be from the hotel industry, which supports the effort with a “bed tax” on room stays.

Money for the bureau comes from this guest tax, collected by the motels. Figures for last year show that Colby motels took in \$7 million. Travelers pay a 3 percent tax, and the entire amount – more than \$200,000 – goes to the bureau’s budget.

That money is used for billboards, marketing and promotions to draw people to Colby, as well as building up-keep, Thomas said.

To date, more than 50,900 visitors have stopped at the unique center, built from a grain bin to represent the area’s agricultural heritage. They’ve come from all 50 states and 51 foreign countries, said Thomas. A normal year sees an average of 12,000 people stopping at the center for information or just to look at the building.

The center design was a vision of businessman Mike Woofert and architect Glen Strait, who said that the center should represent what and who we are as a community, said Thomas. Travelers are drawn to the center because of its design and landscaping.

Manager Ralph Fischer has been with the center since its opening. He organizes the 18 volunteers who take turns greeting travelers from the Interstate. Some have been donating their time since the opening, he said.

To make the center extra visitor-friendly, the bureau installed free wireless, or WiFi, high-speed internet, a big-screen weather display, and a touch screen information computer, plus comfortable couches and chairs, reading materials, free coffee and clean bathrooms.

“This may be the only impression of Colby some people will get,” Thomas said, “and we

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AUBREY SPENCER/Colby Free Press

Manager Ralph Fisher and Martha Brewer, manger of the Holiday Inn Express and a Colby Convention and Visitors Bureau board member, discussed the history of the Colby Visitors Center at a Chamber of Commerce coffee Friday.

Drain law puts Colby pool off by two weeks

By Vera Sloan

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The opening of Colby’s city swimming pool will be put off a couple of weeks so special drain covers required by a new federal law can be in place to protect children from possibly being sucked to their death.

“We expect the drain covers to be in Colby by May 26, and after installation is completed, the pool should be filled by Friday, May 29,” said City Manager Carolyn Armstrong. “Opening day will be Sunday, June 7, regardless of temperature.”

Stacy Lee, city recreation department director, said the Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act, passed by Congress in 2007 and effective this December,

requires all pools to be fitted with drain covers designed to keep children from being sucked onto the drain and killed or injured. The covers have been on back order, Armstrong said; the pool usually opens Memorial Day weekend.

Lee said pool hours seven days a week would be:

- 1-5 p.m., public swim.
- 5-6 p.m., adult swim.
- 6-9 p.m. family and public swim.

Lee said the first session of swim lessons will be moved to the Colby Community College pool. These will be Monday to Thursday, June 1 to 4, with kids in grades 4-6 from 1:45 p.m. and grades 1-3 from 1:45 to 2:30 p.m.

The pool manager this year is Jill Nech. For information, call Lee at 460-4440.

Board makes activities cuts

By Kevin Bottrell

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The Colby School Board has taken what may be a final look at budget cuts for the 2009-2010 school year, approving several cuts to activities that will provide a buffer in case any more cuts are handed down from the state.

At a board meeting Monday, Superintendent Terrell Harrison said the district has cut about \$500,000 so far, not including the cuts approved at the meeting. The state budget cuts to the district are fixed at about \$460,000 for now, but more cuts may come next year, after the official “head count” is calculated. The exact enrollment figures won’t be known until after the beginning of the school year.

The board determined, on the administrator’s and staff’s recommendation, that several more cuts

would be needed to make sure the district will be prepared.

“Better to cut something now than to do it in the middle of the year,” said board President Tracy Rogers.

At the May 4 meeting, the board had asked Activities Director Larry Gabel to come up with a list of budget recommendations for cuts. His suggestions included:

- No meal money for teams until post season playoffs or meets.
- Coaches would be responsible for overnight expenses until the post season.
- Combine transportation whenever feasible, such as having the cheerleading squad travel on the same bus as a team to an away game.
- Hold off on refinishing the gym floors this summer.
- Limit ordering and requests to

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Emergency medics train to stay ahead

Thomas County emergency medical technicians Tammi Engel (left, above photo) and Todd Unruh simulated giving oxygen to student Kayla Foltz during a training session Tuesday. Foltz was made up as a patient with second-degree burns. Technicians Judi Feldt (left, bottom right photo) and Engel simulated patient care inside the ambulance with students Foltz and Rhonda Miller. Firefighter Scott Hilbrink (left, bottom left photo) and Marty

Rinehart, assistant director of Thomas County Emergency Medical Services, lifted Tyrel Rufenacht onto a stretcher and loaded him into an ambulance. Rufenacht was made up as a patient with more severe third-degree burns on his face and arms. For Emergency Medical Technician Week this week, in addition to their training, the technicians were at Wal-Mart on Wednesday and will be at Dillons Friday doing free vital signs checks.



KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

Briefly

Ball league sign-up due soon

Registration for adult softball leagues is due by Friday, and swim lesson sign up is due by Wednesday. Players and parents should double check their information on summer activities to get kids and teams signed up on time, says Colby Recreation Director Stacy Lee, and pay close attention to late registration policies. For questions, call the Recreation Department at 460-4440.

Groups raise money for Relay

Citizens Medical Center team members will have a Relay for Life fund-raising car wash from 4 to 7 p.m. Friday in the hospital’s front parking lot. Donations will be accepted. For information, call Carla Sharp at 460-4881.

The Colby Community College nursing students’ Relay team will hold a fund raiser at Wal-Mart from 9

a.m. to noon Saturday. The students will be performing vital signs checks, which include blood pressure, heart rate, respiratory and temperature checks. For information, call Ron Redick at 269-7174.

Library book sale this weekend

The Pioneer Memorial Library will hold its Memorable Book Sale from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday and from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday in the basement of the library. For information, call the library at 460-4470.

City, county close for holiday

The Thomas County Landfill will close at noon on Saturday for Memorial Day weekend, and reopen on Tuesday. The Thomas County Courthouse and Health Department will be closed on Monday, and the community transit van will not run.

Colby city offices will be closed, and trash service will not run Monday. Residential customers on Monday’s route will be picked up on Tuesday. Please have your trash and grass out to the curb by 8 a.m. For information, call the Public Works office 460-4420.

Bible school starts Tuesday

Trinity Lutheran Church invites children from age 3 through fifth grade to Vacation Bible School from 9:15 to noon Tuesday through Friday next week. The theme this year is “BUGS – Believe and Understand God’s Son.” The church is at Fifth Street and Country Club Drive in Colby. To register, go to trinity-colby.com. For information, call Melinda Olson at 462-3497.

College to hold fishing derby

Colby Community College and the Kansas De-

partment of Wildlife and Parks will hold a free “Kids Fishing Derby” from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturday, May 30, at Villa High Park in Colby. The lake will be stocked with channel catfish and bluegill. The Colby Community College radio station, KCJC, plans to broadcast live. Wildlife experts will talk to kids about fishing. There will be a food vendor and face painting. For information, contact Barry Kaaz, dean of external affairs, at (785) 460-5429. The park is on the east side of Range Avenue south of the KXXX Radio building.



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