



STEVE HAYNES/Colby Free Press

State crews needed help from contractors and county workers this week as they tried to smooth out rough spots in the west-bound on ramp to Interstate 70 at Country Club Drive. Area

Engineer Eric Oelschlager (on ground, orange shirt) watched as one grader operator bladed out soft spots and another stood by. A county operator (right) stood by to mix the soil.

I-70 on ramp work extended to Thursday

By Steve Haynes

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The more the crew dug Tuesday, it seemed, the more soft dirt they found under the west-bound on ramp to Interstate 70 at Country Club Drive.

That meant a repair job which was supposed to last a couple of days likely will keep the ramp closed until at least noon Thursday, said Eric Oelschlager, area engineer for the Kansas Department of Transportation out of Atwood.

More than two dozen highway workers finished paving on the north side of the ramp Tuesday after fixing a few soft spots. When

they got into the south side of the ramp, built in the early 1980s, however, they found poorly compacted soils with different types in layers — and lots of soft spots.

Oelschlager said the problems likely go back to when the freeway was built, but the six inches of pavement on the ramps is not holding up to recent increases in heavy truck traffic. He said the crew would try rebuilding the road base today, working in a semitrailer load of cement-like fly ash to stiffen the soil and then packing in several loads of dirt mixed with asphalt millings.

New asphalt will be laid over the base for a better surface, he said, and hopefully that'll hold the ramp for a while. He said he called

on Cahoj Earthmoving from Atwood to bring a sheepsfoot packer and the Thomas County road crew for a recycler, basically a big rototiller, to mix and than pack the soil. Both are items the state doesn't have handy, he said. Sporer Land Development out of Oakley promised a truckload of fly ash out of Nebraska, and the pavement material came from a contractor's plant on a job in Gove County. The engineer estimated the job might cost more than \$28,000, not counting labor.

While they worked on the grade Tuesday, the crew spread a little spare asphalt on the intersection of Country Club and Willow Drive, where trucks going east have produced some bumps while turning.

Falling values give county budget woes

By Vera Sloan

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A decline in land valuations, in the face of strong farm land prices, continued to plague the Thomas County commissioners when they met Tuesday morning, forcing them to look at budget cuts to hold taxes down for homeowners.

"The Legislature put a cap on agricultural land in 2000," said Commissioner Paul Steele, "and the values have continued to decline since that time. Most farmers want to pay their fair share, but farm lobbyists have been a little overzealous, and that has made it hard on the home owner."

Steele said lower farm valuations are a problem statewide. While farm land is selling for near-record prices, tax valuations are down quite a bit this year because of the way the state figures them.

"The county appraiser has to follow the rules," he said, "and her office is monitored by the state to make sure she stays within the uniform code."

Steele said when it comes to drawing up the budget, the commissioners want to support programs such as the Fair Board, Extension Council and Conservation

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Crop here avoids damaging stem rust

By Vera Sloan

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A wheat stem rust discovered in 1999 in Uganda, named Ug99, is under study by Kansas State University plant pathologists, even though it's still a long ways from Kansas wheat fields.

The most virulent strain to appear in a century, it is devastating the wheat crops in a few African and Asian countries.

The stem rust has not reached any major wheat producing areas yet, and could be years away from the United States, but more than 80 percent of the world's wheat crops appear to be vulnerable to it.

"Some varieties in this area have shown signs of rust, but it is late enough showing up this year that it not damaging," said Clint Milliman, Thomas County extension agent. "Genetics of the rust are changing, through mutation, and some plants are beginning to be susceptible to the change."

There are signs that where the fungus has taken hold, scientists say, it is overwhelming most of the genetic defenses that have been bred into the plants over decades. It continues to mutate and become more dangerous.

The threat took on new urgency when it crossed into Yemen

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Food, fireworks for Fourth

Colby's big Fourth of July celebration kicks off at 6:30 p.m. Saturday with free food at the Thomas County Fairgrounds, followed by the annual Cointest giveaway about 7 p.m. and then the fireworks show at dusk.

The High Plains Lions Club will have food, games, prizes and entertainment starting at 6:30 p.m. at the 4-H Building. The club will have free hot dogs and watermelon, with a raffle, bingo and other games. The entertainment will be by the Bugbee Sisters and Leonard Hopper.

After everyone has eaten, the Colby Free Press will hold the annual "Cointest." Contestants will have the chance to win \$233 — in honor of the nation's 233rd birthday — in Presidential dollar coins in a coin-toss challenge. The

Area offices close for holiday

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The United States will be celebrating its 233rd birthday on Saturday, and many area businesses and offices will change their work schedule for the

Fourth of July holiday.

Banks: All banks in the county will maintain regular hours Friday. The Farmers and Merchants Branch Bank at Dillons will be closed on Saturday.

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Cointest is free to enter.

After dark, around 10:15 p.m., the Kiwanis Club of Colby/Thomas County will put on a fireworks display. The Colby Fire Department will be shooting off the fireworks from the center of the fairgrounds track. The track will be closed off for people's safety

and the pit area on the east end of the fairgrounds will be open for anyone who wants to watch the display.

The National Weather Service is predicting a cloudy day with scattered thunderstorms in the evening, but temperatures should remain in the upper 80s.

Fireworks allowed until Saturday

By Kevin Bottrell

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Celebrating the Fourth of July by shooting off spinners, Roman candles or fountains is a time-honored tradition, but to make sure your celebration doesn't land you with a fine, there are a few restrictions to

keep in mind.

Colby's City Code says fireworks may only be shot off in the city limits from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday only. Bottle rockets, and similar self-propelled fireworks are not allowed

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Harvest time in Thomas County



KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

The hot, dry days lately allowed area farmers to begin harvest on many fields, such as this one south of Mingo, early this week. Roger Schuster, grain agronomist with Frontier Ag, said yields have been varying from 40-65 bushels per acre, depending on area, the type of wheat being cut and crop damage.

Briefly

Center plans potluck, fireworks

Everyone is invited to the Colby Care Center, 105 E. College Dr., for food, fun and fireworks at 6 p.m. Thursday. Bring a covered dish or your favorite desert. For questions, call Amanda Hillis at (785) 462-6721.

Sheriff can check vehicles

The Thomas County Sheriff's Office is now checking vehicle identification numbers for cars, light trucks and motorcycles. The office is open 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. Call Sheriff Rod Taylor for information or to set up an appointment at 460-4570. Taylor said requests for inspection of trailers still have to go through the Kansas Highway Patrol office in Hays. The inspection fee is \$10.

Singles, couples dance Friday

A Singles and Couples Dance will be from 7:30 to

11:30 p.m. Friday at the Community Building. Entertainment will be provided by Granny Z. For information, call Lue Duffey at (785) 855-2341.

Nursing home plans dog show

The Colby Care Center will hold a doggie fashion show at 2 p.m. Saturday, July 11. Dress up your dogs and bring them by, along with a \$5 donation for the Residents Activity Fund. Veterinarian Tammy Swarts will judge the entries and award prizes, and give some free advice for dog owners. For information, call Amanda Hillis at 462-6721.

KU alums to welcome freshmen

Incoming University of Kansas freshmen and their parents from northwest Kansas will be welcomed into the KU family at a Jayhawk Generations Welcome Picnic at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, July 15, at Fike Park in Colby. Area alumni, new students, students interested in KU and parents are invited. Each new

Jayhawk will receive a free T-shirt. For information or to make reservations, go to www.kualumni.org, call the Alumni Association at (800) 584-2957 or e-mail kualumni@kualumni.org.

Invited guests so far include Erica Huntington, Samantha Leitner and Roy Palmer, Atwood; Megan Allen, Brewster; Kristin Cox, Nicholas Howard, Rebecca Howard, Aubrette Stephens and Robert Weiss, Colby; Courtney Sheldon and Tanner Smith, Goodland; Katelin Neuenschwander, Hoxie; and Edward Machen, Quinter.

Groups offer free shoot

The Colby Trap Hunting Heritage Group and the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks will hold another free shooting program for youths and inexperienced shooters at 1:30 p.m. Sunday, July 19. Shooters will learn weapons handling and range safety. Shotguns and shells will be provided at the Colby

Trap Club at County Road R (West College Drive) and County Road 14, one mile south of U.S. 24 west of Colby. For information, call Wildlife Conservation Officer Benny Young at 462-7602.

College pool open weekdays

The Colby Community College indoor swimming pool is open to the public for lap swimming from 5 to 7 a.m. and 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday through Friday. Open swimming is 4 to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday and 1 to 3 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Cost for general admission is \$3. Monthly and yearly passes are available. Call Kipp Nelson at 460-5476 for information.

