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District plans to explain budget woes

By Kevin Bottrell

Colby Free Press
kbottrell@nwkanas.com

The Colby School District is waiting with bated breath to see what kind of budget comes out of the state Legislature.

The latest estimate, Superintendent Terrell Harrison said at a school board meeting Monday night, is that the state has a \$400 million budget deficit for the coming year. Whatever comes out of the Legislature will have to address that ei-

ther by raising more money – or making more cuts. And if the state makes more cuts, Harrison said, the Colby district could have to trim as much as \$300,000.

The district plans a community meeting to go over budget issues and possible cuts at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday in the Colby High School Commons to talk about cuts they have made and cuts they may have to make in the future. Harrison said she will give a brief overview of the current budget crisis and then take questions and suggestions from community members.

Harrison said she has been meeting with teachers and high school students, and that produced a lot of good ideas.

“I particularly liked the one about naps,” she said. “If everyone took a nap, we could save money by turning all the lights off.”

The full list of recommendations, she said, will be posted on the school’s web site before the meeting. Harrison said she will bring all recommendations to the board in March after the state budget is done.

Although they are waiting on decisions from the state, she said, the district has not been idle. One cost-saving measure the district has been using the past few years is tweaking the schedule. The board approved a new schedule for the 2010-2011 school year at the meeting.

Classes will start on Aug. 25 and end May 20. First semester will end Dec. 22 and second semester will begin Jan. 3. The school day will be 15 minutes longer, starting at 8 a.m. and ending at 3:30 p.m. The new schedule has one less teaching

day, 172 compared to 173 this year.

Harrison said the district staff looked at utility payments in May and August to see if it would save money to cut days from either month. They found that utility payments, while different every year, averaged out about the same for both months.

Harrison said she polled all the teachers and asked for comments. About 40 percent favored this schedule, more than favored the other proposals. One teacher

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KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press



Youth group helps out Haiti

The Colby United Methodist Church middle-school youth group, along with a few adult volunteers, put together hundreds of “survival kit” aid packages last Wednesday, Feb. 10, to be sent to Haiti. The packages included a towel, washcloth, comb, fingernail clippers, tooth paste, toothbrush, soap bar and band aids. They were sent to the United Methodist Committee on Relief, which will in turn send them on to Haiti. With all the help, it took less than two hours to put all the packages together, said Doug Finley, one of the sponsors.

Candidate hopes to win district by spending less

By Kevin Bottrell

Colby Free Press
kbottrell@nwkanas.com

The only woman running for Jerry Moran’s seat in the U.S. House of Representatives stopped in Colby on Monday to talk with students interested in Fort Hays State University.

Sue Boldra said she was in town for the Student Recognition Program, an event for high school and community college students planning to transfer to Fort Hays. Boldra, now an instructor in teacher education at the university, taught government at Hays High for 35 years.

Her campaign is an experiment, she said, to see if someone could win a congressional race without raising the most money.

“Could a grassroots campaign win?” she asked. “Or do you have to buy an office even in Kansas?”

She still has to raise some money, she said, to cover campaign expenses such as travel, fliers and

websites, but said she’d much rather have \$10 or \$20 from ordinary citizens than thousands from political groups. Federal Election Commission reports list \$14,740 individual donations to Boldra’s campaign in 2009 and no donations from political action committees. She is also listed as loaning her campaign \$10,000.

Jim Barnett and Timothy Huelskamp, often cited as the front runners in the crowded race, both have almost as much in donations from political action committees as Boldra does in individual contributions. Barnett had \$12,250 donations from committees in 2009 and Huelskamp had \$10,750. However, both are far ahead of her in individual fundraising. Barnett reported \$382,007 individual donations in 2009 and Huelskamp had \$470,689. Barnett has loaned his campaign \$100,000 while Huelskamp has not loaned any money to his.

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County corrects business tax error

By Vera Sloan

Colby Free Press
vsloan@nwkanas.com

Economic Development Director Rick Patrick met with Thomas County commissioners Tuesday to discuss getting a piece of property near Interstate 70 back on the tax rolls after the owners were not billed for 2009 taxes.

County Treasurer Donita Applebury and County Appraiser Mary Cech came to the meeting with Patrick to discuss the Rosen property, a tract where the owner was given a tax abatement incentive for a new business. A tax schedule was provided to the owners, Patrick said, but through a miscommunication among the county, economic development and the business, no tax statement wasn’t generated, leaving the 2009 taxes unpaid. Although the Rosens has a tax schedule, he said, they did not receive a tax bill.

Patrick said the property is

at 60 Stephens Drive, east of Bosselman’s Truck Stop and near the freeway. The tax incentive brought a new business, a wholesale distribution center for farm chemicals, to Colby in 2007, the director said.

The tax exemption is on a graduated scale, changing every two years, with 100 percent exemption for the first two, 80 percent the next two, 60 percent the following two years, and so on, the director said.

The first two years, 2007 and 2008, fell under 100 percent abatement, so 20 percent of the tax on the property should have been paid for 2009, Mr. Patrick said, but that didn’t happen.

“The agreement for the wholesale center went through the economic development office, and was written in lieu of taxes,” said Patrick, “so we had to meet and decide how we were going to get it

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Food bank saw more need and donations in 2009

By Marian Ballard

Colby Free Press
mballard@nwkanas.com

The news was generally good at the annual meeting of Genesis-Thomas County food bank Monday night, in spite of the increase in need in the past two years.

A total of 1,672 people from 663 families used the food bank in 2009, according to reports handed out at the meeting, down slightly from 2008, when the agency served 1,699.

In 2007, by comparison, Genesis served 1,317 and in 2006 1,137. The organization’s budget has increased steadily as well, from \$28,100 in 2008 to \$31,655 for 2010.

Fifteen to 20 people attended the meeting at the Pioneer Memorial Library.

Board members noted that the community has really come through for the food bank. They especially noted that the donations during the Alan Shawn Feinstein Foundation \$1 Million Giveaway to Fight Hunger drive in March totaled, in food and cash, \$11,468. A grant received from the foundation added \$282.

The Christmas basket project distributed food to 210 families. Along with food baskets, the Kiwanis gave toys and the Colby Fire Department gave refurbished bicycles to many children, while the Colby Wesleyan Church provided hats and gloves for the kids. Board member Virgil Jones said the agency had money to buy all the food for the baskets, which simplified the process.

Board members elected for the year are Colleen Bixenman, Shirley Bremenkamp, Marla

Crumrine, Wynn Duffey, Steve Friesen, Norm Hansen, Jones, Sheila Krehbiel, Bonnie Lewis, Jane McDougal, Gene Rothfuss, Kathy Ryan, Anita Thiel and Carol Thiel. Lewis and McDougal are just joining the board.

Duffey will continue as president this year, Crumrine becomes vice president, and Ryan continues as secretary and Bixenman as treasurer.

The food bank was founded in 1993 as a private nonprofit corporation. The bylaws say that the membership consists of all residents of Thomas County, and the meeting was open to anyone who wanted to come.

The food bank is in Suite 13 of the Thomas County Office Complex. For help or eligibility guidelines, call (785) 460-7930. Hours are 10 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m. on Wednesdays.

Briefly

Foundation to hold open house

The Thomas County Community Foundation will hold an open house for Random Acts of Kindness Week from 10 a.m. to noon Friday at the Thomas County Office Complex, 350 S. Range. The foundation plans to recognize some of the acts of kindness reported this week and present awards for the best ones. For information, call public relations coordinator Christina Schmid at 460-9152.

Gaithers concerts set for Sunday

The Colby Berean Church will offer a free Gaither Homecoming video concert at 6 p.m. Sunday at the church. Everyone is invited; refreshments will be served. For information, call the church at 460-2763.

Schools to explain budget cuts

The Colby School District plans a community

meeting on budget issues at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday in the Colby High School commons. District administrators will discuss past and future budget cuts. A list of the possible upcoming cuts is posted at www.colbyeagles.org. For information, call the district office at 460-5000.

Brown Bag session next week

The Thomas County Ministerial Association will sponsor the *Lenten Brown Bags and Bibles* program at noon each Wednesday throughout Lent. The theme is The Prodigal Son. Speakers will be Wednesday, Carol Rahn, First Presbyterian Church; March 3, Jarrod Spencer, Church of Christ; March 10, Steve Todd, College Drive Assembly of God. Come to the Fellowship Hall of the First Presbyterian Church, 545 W. Fourth St. Bring your own lunch; beverage and dessert will be provided. Call 462-6342 for information.

Food for Thought coming up

“Notable Events and People in Northwest Kansas” will be the topic for the next *Food for Thought* program at the Prairie Museum of Art and History. Evelyn Hoyt Ward, a Brewster native who retired to northwest Kansas, will talk at noon next Thursday. The program is free, including a light lunch. For questions, call the museum at 460-4590.

Sacred Heart carnival Feb. 28

Sacred Heart Catholic School’s annual carnival will be from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 28, featuring food, games and a raffle drawing at 3. Sacred Heart students are out selling raffle tickets right now, and the top sellers in each grade get prizes. For information, call the school at 460-2813.

Orchestra to play next weekend

The Pride of the Prairie Orchestra will hold a

“Jeans and T-shirts” concert at 3:30 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 28, in the Frahm Theater at Colby Community College. Admission is \$7 for adults and \$3 for seniors and children. For information, call Carol McGuire at (785) 672-2380.

Youth soccer looking for players

Signups for the American Youth Soccer Organization’s spring season are open until Friday, Feb. 26. The cost is \$40; kids must be around 6 to participate. The organization is also looking for parents to coach or referee. For information or to sign up, call Emily Griffin at 460-0647.



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