



8 pages

COLBY FREE PRESS

75¢
Thursday
January 20, 2011
Volume 122, Number 11
Serving Thomas County since 1888

County board hears requests for pay hikes

By Vera Sloan
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Only 15 days after Thomas County commissioners approved an across-the-board 3 percent pay increase for county employees, the appraisers office and road and bridge department came in Monday asking for more.

Appraiser Mary Cech said she was coming back to the board because of a change in responsibility and workload for full-time employees Kathy Cunningham and Ray Schindler.

Cech asked for Cunningham's pay to be increased from \$12.52 to \$14.36 an hour and Schindler's from \$11.38 to \$13.08. She also asked for part-timer Mary Burleigh to be moved up to \$9.50 per hour from her starting wage of \$9. She said Burleigh has passed her probation period and is due for the 50-cent raise.

Cech said she feels Cunningham and Schindler should be compensated for taking on the duties of George Overton, who retired. He had been with the department 15 years. She said appraisal and mapping can't be learned in a short time, and she wants Cunningham

and Schindler to stay with the department. She said she feels the increase would show the employees they are valued.

After a lengthy discussion among the commissioners, the pay increase passed on a split vote, with Commissioner Byron Sowers against. Commissioners Paul Steele and Ken Christiansen voted yes.

Road Supervisor Clair Shrock asked that his employees at the bottom of the pay scale be given an additional 2 percent.

"It's only been two weeks since we set the 2011 salaries," said Christiansen, commission chairman, "and here we are, already asking for an increase! We just had a 34 percent increase in health insurance, and then a 3 percent cost-of-living raise and now a request for another 2 percent. It just isn't too palatable right now."

"It's not easy being the head cheerleader," Shrock said. "My department is always called on to help out when the county wants to save money, and I'd like to bring my employees whose pay is at the very bottom to where they are more in line with the others."

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Pulling it back out



KATHRYN BALLARD/Colby Free Press

A tow truck and a bulldozer had their work cut out for them Wednesday as they tried to pull this semitrailer rig upright after it rolled off the side of the icy eastbound I-70 off ramp at

Country Club Drive. The driver said the rig just went over slow and gentle.

Teachers report on national session

By Kevin Bottrell
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Three Colby social studies teachers returned from a national conference with confidence that their class projects are just as good as those in schools across the country.

Rick Williams and Camille Giersch, Colby High School, and Andrea Schuette, Colby Middle School each made a presentation

to the Colby School Board on their time at the Social Studies National Conference in Denver last fall. Giersch showed the board the C-SPAN web site, which includes resources for teachers such as videos, lesson plans and student-created video contests. She said she didn't know much about the site until she saw it at the conference, but now she uses it and other resources to take the place of traditional lectures.

"The kids don't want to just lis-

ten to me talk," she said. "They want to listen to things and then discuss them."

Schuette said she has been working with "tiered" web sites, which provide a lot or a little information on a subject depending on what the students want or need. While studying world religions, Schuette said, she created a site on Jewish holidays, and students could choose to look at a short explanation of each day or a long one.

Williams said it was the first such conference he had been to, and he found a lot of valuable things to bring back to his classroom. He said he made good contacts for his student group, the Young Humanitarians, such as the Covenant House, a national nonprofit they group did a "pajama day" fund raiser for.

"Sometimes the best things at a conference is the stuff that doesn't

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City may annex mobile homes

By Andy Heintz
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The Colby City Council agreed Tuesday to consider annexing a portion of a mobile home park south of East Fourth Street if the park's owner meets city requirements.

Council members said they would consider the annexation if owner Shawn Shryock would improve the street that runs through the park to meet city specifications, including curb and gutter.

Mayor Ken Bieber said some of the park already is in the city, but Shryock wants them to annex the rest of it so he can get sewer and water service. The owner also wants the city to build an approach link-

ing the street in the park with Fourth Street.

City Manager Carolyn Armstrong said the council would need to see a design done by an engineer for the street and the approach before the work gets started. Bieber said the council needs to make sure the project met city requirements, such as curbs and gutters, and how much the project would cost.

Shryock said he is willing to hook the trailers up to individual water meters, provide city sewers and meet city specifications. In return, the owner asked the council to "grandfather" the trailer park and not require a paved patio and storage locker for each mobile home, as required by city zoning codes.

In other business, the council:

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Ice delayed Wednesday newspaper

With roads and sidewalks icy and dangerous Wednesday evening, the *Colby Free Press* did not send out newspaper carriers, either driving or walking. Wednesday's paper was available at

vending machines and newsstands around town and will be delivered along with today's paper.

The *Free Press* regrets the delay and thanks you for your understanding.

Government officials planning 'permanent reset' of state programs

By John Hanna
AP Political Writer

TOPEKA — Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback and top legislative leaders announced Wednesday that they will work this year to overhaul Medicaid, the state's financing for public schools and the pension system for teachers and other public employees.

Brownback said the state must tackle the three major projects to solve its financial problems. Kansas faces a projected a \$550 million shortfall for the fiscal year beginning July 1, and the governor said gaps will keep appearing in the next few years unless the three can be brought into line.

He discussed the initiatives Wednesday with fellow Republicans in the Kansas House. Then, he had a news conference with Lt. Gov. Jeff Colyer, Senate President Steve Morris and House Speaker Mike O'Neal.

"We are staring at a budget structural problem that doesn't go away," Brownback said at the news conference. "I think it imprudent for us not to take these on. I think we have to."

Brownback, who took office last week, already had announced that Colyer, a surgeon and former legislator, will lead his administration's efforts to overhaul Medicaid, the program that covers health care for the poor and disabled.

He's also called on legislators to start work on rewriting the state's education-funding formula and to bolster the long-term health of the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System.

But on Wednesday, Brownback formally tied all three together, with different GOP leaders heading up each one. The House will take the lead on school finance and the Senate on retirement, as his administration tackles Medicaid.

"We've got a year, a year and a half," he said. "We need to have a good legislative session and work closely together to get these items addressed."

"I am convinced we can do this, but we're going to have to really get at it."

Legislators in both parties gave Brownback credit for being ambitious in moving aggressively to address the state's long-standing

and difficult budget issues. But Democrats questioned how quickly such persistent problems can be solved.

"These are issues that don't have a simple solution," said House Minority Leader Paul Davis, a Lawrence Democrat. "We need to take however much time it takes to make sure that we get it right and not do something quickly for the sake of expediency."

Brownback is working with Republican majorities of 32-8 in the Senate and 92-33 in the House, and last year's elections left the Legislature more conservative. Many GOP lawmakers are anticipating what O'Neal has called "a permanent reset" of state government.

O'Neal said he believes the Legislature can define what constitutes a suitable education this year. It's an important issue because the Kansas Constitution requires the Legislature to make "suitable provision" for the financing of public schools.

In 2005 and 2006, that led the state Supreme Court to order

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Frozen wonderland



KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

Wednesday's fog left a bright, icy sheen on trees, bushes and grass which sparkled in the morning sun today.

Briefly

Commodities available Monday

The U.S. Department of Agriculture will distribute commodities from 1 to 2 p.m. Monday at the Retired Senior Volunteer Program office at the Senior Progress Center in Fike Park. Commodities are given out first come, first served according to income guidelines. Don't arrive before 12:30 p.m. Items include canned pork, peanut butter, rice cereal, mixed vegetables, corn, juice, rotini, milk and fig pieces. For information, call the program office at 462-6744.

Conservation group to meet

The Local Work Group, experts who provide guidance to Kansas Technical Committee of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, will meet at 10 a.m. next Thursday at the U.S. Department of Agriculture Service Center, 915 W. Walnut St. For information,

call Debbie Potter at the Thomas County Conservation District at 462-7482.

Heartland plans annual barbecue

Heartland Christian School will hold its annual barbecue from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 30, at the school. The meal will include barbecue pork, corn, salad, baked potatoes and dessert. Donations will be accepted. For information, call the school at 460-6419.

Exercise class will help arthritics

An Arthritis Foundation exercise classes will be offered from 5:15 to 6:15 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday evenings from Feb. 1 to March 10 at the Sacred Heart School gym. There is no sign-up deadline; members can start anytime. For information, call Brenda Mazanec at 443-4010.

Scrapbook day Feb. 5 at school

Heartland Christian School will hold a scrapbooking party from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 5, at the school. The cost is \$30 for adults and \$15 for students for a full day, and \$15 for adults and \$8 for students for half a day. Meals are included. To make a reservation, call Lucy Wood at (785) 460 2721 or the school at 460-6419. To preorder supplies, please call Sally Runnalls in the evenings at (785) 672 4910.

Hospital offers blood-sugar class

Because of the snow Jan. 11, Citizens Medical Center has postponed Journey for Control, a free class on monitoring blood sugar for diabetics until Tuesday, Feb. 8, at the hospital. For information or to register, call dietitian Courtney McCarty at (785) 460-4849 or education co-ordinator Jeanene Brown at (785) 460-4850.

Wesleyan offers regular study

Colby Wesleyan Church will hold a weekly ladies Bible study, "Discerning the Voice of God," by Priscilla Shirer, each Wednesday beginning Feb. 9. Two sessions are available, 9 to 11 a.m. at the church, 320 W. Pine, and 6:45 to 8:15 p.m. at the Pioneer Memorial Library. The six-week study is designed to help participants know the voice of God: his language, character and tone. For information or to register, call Joy Rothfuss at 462-8391 or e-mail at wesleyan@st-tel.net.



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