



22 pages

# COLBY FREE PRESS



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## Governor to sign law here Monday

By Kevin Bottrell

Colby Free Press  
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Gov. Sam Brownback will make his first visit to Colby since being elected to sign a new law aimed at helping rural towns grow.

Brownback will stop off briefly at 10:30 a.m. Monday at the Colby Municipal Airport for one of four public signing ceremonies the Rural Opportunity Zones Bill. The Colby-Thomas County Cham-

ber of Commerce hopes to get a crowd and is urging people to be at the airport north of town by 10:15.

The governor's visit is part of a tour that includes stops in Belleville, Yates Center and at Wichita State University.

The bill establishes a tax credit for those who move from out of state to Kansas counties that have been hit hard by population declines, and establishes a program to help them pay down student loans.

The bill designates 50 counties as part of a "rural opportunity zone." The zone

covers the entire northwest corner of Kansas, including Thomas, Cheyenne, Decatur, Gove, Logan, Norton, Rawlins, Sheridan, Sherman and Wallace counties.

Anyone who has lived outside the state for five or more years and comes to live in one of the 50 counties after July 1 gets a tax credit equal to their Kansas income tax. The person must have earned less than \$10,000 in Kansas prior to moving here and must live in the county for an entire tax year.

Newcomers who qualify must file tax

returns on time.

Anyone who earned a bachelor's or master's degree and moves from out of state to one of the counties can enroll in the loan repayment program. The state and the counties repay an equal share of student loans up to \$15,000.

Each county's commissioners have to approve a resolution to participate in the program, which will last for five years.

Sen. Ralph Ostmeier, whose district includes 18 of the 50 counties in the bill, said he will be on hand for the signing

Monday. Both Ostmeier and Rep. Rick Billinger voted in favor of the bill.

"I am extremely gratified that this important legislation is being signed out here where it will have such a positive impact," Ostmeier said in a statement Wednesday. "This bill has great potential to help Kansas' rural communities by increasing our population, broadening our tax base and enhancing our opportunities for economic growth."

## Brownback places county in drought watch

By Kevin Bottrell

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Responding to out-of-control wildfires and below-average rainfall, Gov. Sam Brownback has put much of western Kansas, including Thomas County, under drought watches and warnings.

The governor signed an executive order Thursday declaring Haskell and Stevens counties a disaster area. A large grass fire there seared about 9,600 acres of grassland and burned several buildings, including one home. Only minor injuries were reported, but the fire forced evacuation of Satanta, a town of about 1,100.

Firefighters fought the blaze through the weekend, finally extinguishing it Monday, though crews were out wetting down hot spots throughout the week. Officials say they did not know what caused the fire.

Brownback's order also placed 20 counties under a drought warning — including Gove, Logan and Wallace — and 27 under a drought watch. These include Thomas,

Cheyenne, Decatur, Norton, Rawlins, Sherman and Sheridan.

The K-State Experiment Station in Colby said the county has had just 99 hundredths of an inch of precipitation so far this year. That includes melted snow. The normal amount is 2.11 inches by the end of March and 3.98 inches by the end of April.

"Low rainfall has led to depleted soil moisture, which not only hurts agriculture, but also greatly increases the likelihood of grass fires," Brownback said in a statement Thursday. "These declarations will help counties defray some of the burdens incurred from the parched conditions and from battling the fires last weekend."

The drought watch and disaster declaration mean local agencies will coordinate relief efforts with the adjutant general's office, the state says. The watch will remain in effect until rescinded by Brownback.

Thomas County is still under a "red flag" warning, which means fire danger is high. The National

See "DROUGHT," Page 3

### Getting rid of the old road



STEVE HAYNES/Colby Free Press

Crews started up road paving operations on U.S. 83 just west of Selden at midmorning today, setting up a milling machine to remove 1 1/2 inches of old asphalt. As that work advances, another crew from contractor APAC Shears Construction will follow with an inch and a half of new paving, using part of

the millings in the mix. Drivers were seeing delays of 5 to 15 minutes as a pilot car led people through the one-lane section around the work. Shears has a contract to redo the road from the Decatur County line to near Rexford for the Kansas Department of Transportation.

## Music in Our Schools

Inside this edition of the Colby Free Press

### Music in our Schools

Friday, April 8, 2011



## College groups plan art walk Friday, April 22

By Kevin Bottrell

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See some art and get some exercise, too. That's the idea behind the Community Art Walk, where downtown business, Colby Community College and the Colby schools will have art on display for people to walk around and talk about.

College art instructor Rebel Jay said the walk, from 6 to 9 p.m. Friday, April 22, is sponsored by the college Art Department and Art Club, the Thomas County Coalition and the Colby-Thomas County Chamber of Commerce.

Jay said the idea is for people to walk or ride their bikes to the businesses showing art. The coalition will have water and snacks, as well as pedometers for people to measure their steps while visiting the different locations along the walk. If it works out, she said, the groups hope to put on an art walk every year.

During the event, downtown businesses

will be showing professional artwork. The businesses include Horlacher Jewelry, the Sports Shoppe, Donelan Jewelry, Inlow Interiors, Smoffee's, Famers and Merchants Bank, Personal Touch, Thomas County Insurance, Uptown Style, Sunflower Bank and the Stramel Law Office.

Artists contributing work include Amy Bertrand, Fritz Ostmeier, Mike McGaughlin, Marlene Carpenter, Doyle and Sarah Saddler, Tom Peyton, Margaret Denneler, Alyssa Mohr and Jay herself, as well as other members of the High Plains Art Club and the college ceramics class.

Jay said some of the works will be for sale.

Art made by college students will be shown on campus in the Bedker Memorial Complex, the Cultural Arts Center and the art room, 502 Ferguson Hall. Work by public school, Sacred Heart and Heartland Christian students will be on display at Colby High School. Jay said maps will be

See "ART WALK," Page 3

## Legislators begin redistricting fight

By John Milburn

The Associated Press

TOPEKA — Kansas legislators have begun the thorny task of redrawing the state's political maps to account for the continued shift of population from west to east.

Kansas retained its four U.S. House districts following the 2010 census, but the boundaries will look vastly different for the 2012 elections.

The census showed the 3rd Congressional District in the Kansas City metro area has roughly 55,000 people more than it should, and that the sprawling, 69-county 1st District is about 58,000 residents short and must be expanded to make up the difference.

Changing boundaries has po-

litical implications, as Republicans look to solidify gains made in the 2010 election and representatives hope to make contact with new constituents before the next campaign cycle.

"There is a never a good time to do redistricting," said Senate Majority Leader Jay Emler, a Lindsborg Republican. "I think it'll be a little prickly."

The job of drawing the congressional boundaries, as well as those for the state House and Senate, falls to legislators, who will finish the new maps next year. A committee has already discussed holding meetings this summer in each congressional district.

Kansas last lost a congressional seat following the 1990

See "LEGISLATORS," Page 3

## Briefly

### Museum offers spear tossing

Try your hand at tossing a spear with an atlatl, see Paleolithic tools, learn how to excavate an archeological site and more at the first Archeology Day offered by the High Plains Chapter of the Kansas Anthropological Association, from 2 to 4:30 p.m. Saturday at the Prairie Museum of Art and History at 1905 S. Franklin Ave. For information, contact Ann Miner at the museum, 460-4590 or museumed@stetel.net.

### Biscuits and sausage in Brewster

The Brewster United Methodist Church will have a biscuit, sausage and gravy feed from 5:30 and 7 p.m. Sunday at the church. Donations will be accepted for youth activities. For information, call Nadine Kammer at (785) 694-2456.

### Come on out for Baptist revival

The Colby Independent Baptist Church will hold

revival services Sunday through Wednesday at the church. Sunday services begin at 10:30 a.m. and 6 p.m. and the weeknight services at 7 p.m. For information, call Pastor Bernard Heinz at 460-0313.

### City crew plans to fill cracks

The city street crew will start filling cracks on Monday, weather permitting. The work should take two to three days. Public Works Director Chris Bieker asks that people move vehicles off these streets: Ninth Street from Thompson Avenue to Lane Drive, 10th Street from Thompson Drive to Country Club Drive, Lynn Avenue from Ninth Street to Lue Drive and Thompson Avenue from Brookside to Ninth Street. For information, call the Public Works office at (785) 460-4420.

### Kindergarten screening soon

Colby Grade School and the Northwest Kansas Education Service Center will have kindergarten

screenings from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday and 8 a.m. to noon Tuesday at the Colby United Methodist Church. The screenings test children's hearing, language skills and cognitive development to check readiness for school. To make an appointment, call school nurse Amy Hutfles at 460-5111.

### Senior dinner, dance coming up

The Retired and Senior Volunteer Program will hold its annual banquet and dance at 4:45 p.m. Wednesday, April 20, at the City Limits Convention Center. Doors open at 4 p.m., with the dance from 7 to 9 p.m. Make reservations to the office at 462-6744 by Tuesday.

### Treasurer's office to close

The Thomas County Treasurer's office will close Tuesday and Wednesday so the staff can do motor vehicle training. The office will also close from noon to 1 p.m. Thursday and next Friday. For information,

call the treasurer at 460-4520.

### Churches offer Lenten series

Soup and Scripture, sponsored by the Thomas County Ministerial Alliance, starts at noon each Wednesday through Easter at Smoffee's in downtown Colby. Speaker for next week on "Who is This Jesus?" will be Tim Griffiths, director of the Shepherd's Staff in Rexford. Cost for lunch is \$5. For information, call Jarrod Spencer at (785) 443-2403 or your pastor.

