



10 pages

COLBY FREE PRESS

75¢

Friday

July 15, 2011

Volume 122, Number 110
Serving Thomas County since 1888



MARIAN BALLARD/Colby Free Press

Court study reaches its halfway point

By Kevin Bottrell

Colby Free Press
kbottrell@nwkanas.com

While the Blue Ribbon Commission study of the Kansas court system won't be completed until January, Chief Justice Lawton Nuss released what he called a "half time update," on Thursday.

Nuss said the 25-member commission has reached its half way point with its meeting Wednesday in Topeka. The commission is conducting a study – which Nuss named "Pegasus" after the winged horse from Greek mythology – on ways to make the court system more cost-effective. It will submit recommendations to the Kansas

Supreme Court in January.

To accomplish this, the commission has been reviewing the court system and gathering ideas and concerns from the public.

"Over the course of a two-month period, the Commission conducted 19 meetings at 18 locations from Norton to Pittsburg and from Atchison to Garden City," Nuss said. "They drew over 600 invited attendees and members of the general public."

The April 26 meeting in Colby drew commission members Cal Williams, a Colby lawyer; John Wheeler, a Finney County lawyer; and Judge Patrick McAnany, the

See "COURT," Page 2

Meeting planned over redistricting

The Legislative committee that is redrawing the district lines in Kansas will have a public meeting in Colby on Oct. 20.

The time and place of the meeting has not been set, but anyone wishing to present testimony should call Corey Carnahan in the Kansas Legislative Research Department at (785) 296-3181. The meeting is one of 14 being held throughout the state, starting with Wichita and Hutchinson later this month.

With the 2010 census report-

ing a population decline in almost all western Kansas counties, the Legislative districts may be significantly changed by the committee to even out the numbers. Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, whose district includes Thomas County, said earlier this year that his district could increase in size. Ostmeyer's 40th Senate District already includes 18 counties and could pick up several more.

Ostmeyer said the 120th and 121st House Districts could also pick up more territory.



Bluegrass fest gets started with jam session

Colby residents and visitors alike got the music started at the Pickin' on the Plains potluck dinner and jam session Thursday night at the 4-H Building. The concerts begin tonight at the Thomas County Fairgrounds. The Ozark Alliance will be first on stage at 6:30 p.m. with headline band going on at 8:15 p.m. Concerts continue Saturday afternoon and evening and Sunday morning.

Colby Big Brothers Big Sisters creates long-lasting relationships

By Christina Beringer

Colby Free Press
colby.society@nwkanas.com

The Kansas Big Brothers Big Sisters organization recently received a 2011 Quality Award from the national organization on June 14 at their national conference in Dallas.

Only 11 out of the 370 mentoring agencies in the United States received this special recognition.

"Kansas Big Brothers Big Sisters' ongoing commitment to sustaining long-term mentoring matches and providing match support to children and families enables us to provide quality services that have been proven with measurable outcomes," said Big Brothers Big Sisters of America president and chief executive officer Karen J. Mathis. "We hold ourselves accountable for helping our clients achieve educational success, have greater confidence and aspirations, and avoid risky and delinquent behavior."

The award the Kansas organization received recognizes agencies that exceed the national performance average for length of each mentoring match relationship and match retention rates.

Kansas' agency president and chief executive officer, Dan Soli-

day, said, "we are honored by this award and extremely grateful to the dedicated team of employees, board members, donors, community partners and volunteers who serve at-risk children in our community everyday."

The local agency in Thomas County has contributed to the state's success since its office opened in Colby on March 20, 2000. By the end of that year, the agency received 36 youth referrals and made five matches. Today, 27 children are actively matched to an adult who provides one-on-one mentoring.

The longest running match in Thomas County, said executive director Diane Stithem, has been going strong for more than 10 years.

"She was eight when I was matched with her and that would have been in October of 2000," said Kelly Dewey, long-term big sister of the Thomas County agency. "I can't tell you if I got more out of the opportunity or if my little sister did, but it has definitely made an impact on my life."

Dewey was matched with her "little sister" when she was working for the Regional Prevention Center in Colby. At the time, the center was closely associated with the young organization and there

were a lot of "littles" waiting to be paired.

Reminiscing about the early relationship, Dewey said that her little sister was always good at school and more mature than children her own age.

"She grew up as a kind of rock for her family and so our relationship has always been an outlet for her to just have fun like a regular kid," said Dewey. "She was even a bridesmaid in my wedding and now she is just like an aunt to my three- and four-year-old children."

Dewey said that when her little sister was about 11, her family moved to Plainville but they continued to stay in contact through the years even after she aged out of the program when she turned 18.

"I would recommend that everyone at least look into the program," Dewey said. "The kids are so different; they have different interests, personalities and different needs. The program not only helped my little sister but it also had a huge, positive impact on my life as well."

Stithem said that as she's witnessed the many relationships develop through the program, she

See "SISTERS," Page 2

Casting spells



TOMI MILLER/Colby Free Press

Madison Gawith (from left), Sara Martin, Josh Ryan and Gabby Browne cast a spell on the photographer at Thursday's premier of the new film, "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2." The film is the final chapter in the eight-part film saga based on the Harry Potter book series by J.K. Rowling.

Farmland in western states becoming big business for some non-farmers

By Bernard Condon

AP Business Writer

NEW YORK – Braden Janowski has never planted seeds or brought in a harvest. He doesn't even own overalls.

Yet when 430 acres of Michigan cornfields were auctioned last summer, it was Janowski, a brash, 33-year-old software executive, who made the winning bid. It was so high – \$4 million, 25 percent above the next-highest – that some farmers stood, shook their heads and walked out. And Janowski figures he got the land

cheap.

"Corn back then was around \$4," he says from his office in Tulsa, Okla., stealing a glance at prices per bushel on his computer. Corn rose to almost \$8 in June and trades now at about \$7.

A new breed of gentleman farmer is shaking up the American heartland. Rich investors with no ties to farming are confident enough to wager big on a patch of earth – betting that it's a smart investment because food will only get more expensive around the world.

They're buying wheat fields in Kansas,

rows of Iowa corn and acres of soybeans in Indiana. And though farmers still fill most of the seats at auctions, the newcomers are growing in number and variety – a Seattle computer executive, a Kansas City lawyer, a publishing executive from Chicago, a Boston money manager.

The value of Iowa farmland has almost doubled in six years. In Nebraska and Kansas, it's up more than 50 percent. On Monday, Schrader Auction sold 3,754 acres of Kansas farmland, some of which was in Thomas and Sherman counties, for \$9.5 million.

Prices have risen so fast that regulators have begun sounding alarms, and farmers are beginning to voice concerns.

"I never thought prices would get this high," says Robert Huber, 73, who just sold his 500-acre corn and soybean farm in Carmel, Ind., for \$3.8 million, or \$7,600 an acre, triple what he paid for it a decade ago. "At the price we got, it's going to take a long time for him to pay it off – and that's if crop prices stay high."

Buyers say soaring farm values simply reflect fundamentals. Crop prices have risen because demand for food is growing

around the world while the supply of arable land is shrinking.

At the same time, farmers are shifting more of their land to the crops with the fastest-rising prices, which could cause those prices to fall – and take the value of farms with them. When the government reported June 30 that farmers had planted

See "FARMLAND," Page 2

