



Percussion section



KATHRYN BALLARD/Colby Free Press

The Colby High School band's percussion section played at the combined concert Tuesday at the Colby Community Building. Bands and choirs from the middle and high schools performed individually and then together in combined songs at the end.

Committee meeting draws small audience

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KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

Committee Co-Chairmen Tim Owens and Mike O'Neal conducted the meeting Thursday at Colby Community College.

Only about a dozen people came to see the State House and Senate Redistricting Committees on Thursday at Colby Community College.

The committees are holding public meetings throughout the state to answer questions and take comments from the public. The House and Senate committees are conducting these meetings jointly. Fifteen members of the 36-member committee were present.

Rep. Mike O'Neal, chairman of the House committee, said he wanted to emphasize that the committee hasn't officially drafted any maps yet, even though several are circulating online and in the press. The committee is holding the public meetings first, he said, before coming up with a plan.

Sen. Tim Owens, chairman of the Senate committee, went over

the guidelines that the committee has agreed upon, which include not reducing minority voting strength, preserve the core areas of existing districts and keep counties intact whenever possible. Owens said the committee is also looking to keep districts as compact as possible while remaining contiguous.

Districts have to be within 5 percent of the target population.

The basic unit considered is voting precincts, rather than counties, which means some counties may be split between districts.

Corey Carnahan with the Legislative Research Department said any Kansan can set up an appointment to come to the department's office at 300 S.W. 10th St. in Topeka and draw up a district map

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State: find alternatives to tearing down old pool

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The Kansas Historical Society has thrown up a road block in front of the city's plans to demolish the old pool and bath house.

At the city council's meeting Tuesday, City Manager Carolyn Armstrong said she received a reply to the city's notice of intent to demolish the pool and bath house. The society has determined that the proposal will "encroach upon, damage or destroy" the historic swimming pool and bath house, so the city must discuss alternative uses and send another letter to the State Historic Preservation Office.

Armstrong said that, since the council has already decided there aren't any other uses, all she needed was another statement of determination that she

could send to the state. The council agreed unanimously except for Fred Taylor, Mark Beringer and Mike Hake, who were not present.

In other business, the council:

- Established a speed limit of 35 mph on Willow Drive from Country Club Drive to Stephens Drive. The project engineer and Police Chief Randy Jones both recommended that speed.

- Gave the owner of a property at 480 N. Country Club 60 more days to keep working on the house there. Armstrong said the owner has made a lot of progress, and is now hoping to sell the property.

- Discussed drainage at the Thomas County Fairgrounds. During and after heavy rain storms, like the one on Oct. 7, mud from the arena washes onto Range Avenue and sometimes into the surrounding

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Colby Community College to pursue two new online programs

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The Colby Community College board approved staff to develop two new online programs at its meeting Monday; an online medical coding program and a virtual assistant program.

Joyce Washburn, dean of academic affairs, said the medical coding program would be completely online and it can be taken for an Associate of Arts degree or for a certificate.

She said she wants to get the application for this program in by Nov. 11, but first she needs to get approval from the

academic council among others. She is trying to get support from administrators from the area so that the college can have the program by itself without having to partner with Seward County Community College. Washburn has also set up a committee to develop this program and she needs to contact all the schools with the program already to make sure there is no conflict with them.

The virtual assistant program would be another online certificate under the business program. It would train students to do business work such as bookkeeping out of their homes. Diane Williams, business instructor, said the program was already presented to the academic council

and it was approved. Williams' goal is to start offering classes for the program next fall.

Board President Kenton Krehbiel asked Organ where someone might work if they obtained this certificate. Organ said he or she would work from home.

College President Stephen Vacik then asked how many such programs there are in Kansas, and Williams said there are none. The closest states with the program are California and Illinois. Shields asked what kind of pay people with this certificate would get. Williams said it's anywhere from \$15 to \$100 an hour. Krehbiel asked the last question, which was how long does it take to obtain the certifi-

cate. Williams said it could be completed in one semester, but it can definitely be completed in less than a year.

In other business, the board:

- Heard from Washburn who mentioned that art instructor Rebel Jay and her students will host the Friday Nite Fall Art Festival on Oct. 28 from 6 to 8 p.m. Washburn also said that the professional development activities are going over well, that there are now two Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) on campus, and there is advising training going on this month. She also explained why the college is promoting the community enrichment classes by providing the board with a scenario: 20 students take one of

these classes where each pays \$140.

"That's about \$5,000 extra a year. That's why we're promoting these," Washburn said.

Leiker asked Washburn if there has been any advertising for the Education to Go (Ed to Go) program yet. Washburn said that Debbie Schwanke, director of public information, is getting the advertisements ready and that they should go out next week.

Washburn also reported that library usage is up more than ever before and said Ceena Owens, director of the massage therapy program, is developing continu-

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Gem woman represents area at Silver Haired Legislature

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Virginia Hopper of Gem is helping to pave the way for many issues important to Kansans, especially those over 60.

Hopper is the elected delegate for Thomas County to the 29th annual Kansas Silver Haired Legislature in Topeka where she helped develop bills and resolutions to be submitted to the state legislature.

The 2011 group, made up of at least one representative from each of the 105 Kansas counties, met on Sept. 29 to work on six items they hope will get passed through Congress.

"There are four committees that you can get assigned to," explained Hopper. "I am part of the

health and welfare committee and right now we are working hard to bring awareness to two issues in particular.

"The first is a resolution that will hopefully change how insurance companies cover the treatment of dementia. The other will help combat predatory payday lending practices."

Hopper explained that in many cases, insurance companies deny an elderly person's insurance because they have been diagnosed by a primary care physician rather than a mental health professional. This preliminary diagnosis can lead to the disease being labeled as a preexisting condition and grounds for insurance denial.

"The bill is in its infancy and right now we are skeptical about its passing because it costs money," she said. "Anything that costs money won't get passed for awhile. So we are trying to bring awareness to the issue."

Hopper said one major goal of the bill is to require insurance companies to cover the costs of having a patient see an adequately trained mental health specialist for dementia diagnosis.

Being presented to state legislature right now is resolution number 2812 concerning payday lending. Hopper said it has been an important issue for at least two years and will hopefully be passed during the 2012 regular session.

Hopper said there are many payday lending businesses who give cash advances which adversely affect all Kansas residents, not just the elderly. The loans are generally low-risk for loss but renew quickly with additional interest and other fees.

"It is not unusual to charge a 400 percent annual percentage rate or higher," she said. "We just want them to charge simple interest."

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Virginia Hopper of Gem, Thomas County's delegate to the Kansas Silver Haired Legislature, learned about important issues with other members of the health and welfare committee at their bi-annual meeting in Topeka on Sept. 28.

