



COLBY FREE PRESS

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County gets pro and con on program

By Christina Beringer

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Three county officials talked with Thomas County commissioners at their meeting Monday about the state Neighborhood Revitalization Program, which offers tax rebates for new buildings and renovations that increase property value.

County Treasurer Donita Applebury and Appraiser Mary Cech, along with County Clerk Shelly Harms, described their conversations and feedback from colleagues across the state from counties that have adopted the plan.

"Everyone I've talked to says it's a nightmare of paperwork that we should run away from," said Harms.

She said that a fellow clerk sent her a spreadsheet that has to be filled out which is so long that she didn't even consider printing it for

the commissioners to see.

Applebury agreed, adding that the state has specific requirements and minimums that people have to meet, along with lots of documentation. And, she said, if a person is one day late on just one payment, they can be disqualified from the program.

Cech said she can't decide if the program is worthwhile. She said she thought commissioners should meet with their counterparts from neighboring counties which have adopted the program to see if it has helped their communities, and to see how it has affected their property taxes.

She speculated that the program may only help big businesses that would build new structures whether they get an incentive or not, adding that most families in Colby couldn't afford to build a new home anyway.

"And what happens if the build-

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Meeting probe may take another month

TOPEKA (AP) — A spokesman says a northeast Kansas prosecutor's investigation into private meetings of Republican legislators with Gov. Sam Brownback is likely to continue into next month.

Lee McGowan, chief of staff to Shawnee County District Attorney Chad Taylor, said today that Taylor's staff is still interviewing some of the 90-plus lawmakers invited to seven meetings in January at the governor's residence.

Taylor, a Democrat, launched this investigation in February.

Brownback, a Republican, met with GOP members of 13 legislative committees, but spokeswoman Sherriene Jones-Sontag said Brownback is confident the gatherings didn't violate the Kansas Open Meetings Act.

Many lawmakers who attended the events said they were social gatherings, not business meetings.

The Kansas attorney general's office also confirmed today that it is providing legal representation to lawmakers who request it.



KEVIN BOTTRELL/The Goodland Star-News

Firefighters used a booster hose to wet down parts of a house in Brewster after a fire damaged the interior. Firefighters re-

sponded quickly and were able to get the fire under control, but the house is likely a total loss.

Fire damages Brewster home

By Kevin Bottrell

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A quick response from two Brewster firefighters brought a house fire under control Wednesday afternoon.

Brewster Fire Chief Willard Crumrine said the occupant, Deb Hatfield, was not injured in the fire at 15 Nebraska Ave. — nearly under the Brewster water tower — but several dogs and a cat that had been inside the house were killed.

A neighbor called in the fire about 3:30 p.m. Volunteer firefighter and City Manager Mike Shultz and another firefighter responded to the scene and were able to get the fire under control.

"I was really impressed with those guys," Crumrine said.

The two firefighters contained the fire to the living room and had it mostly out within the hour. Volunteers remained in and around the house wetting down hot spots. Both the city and rural fire trucks responded, as well as a Thomas County ambulance.

The cause of the fire wasn't known for certain yet, but Crumrine said it was probably electrical.

The fire had been smoldering for some time, he said, and only flared up when it broke a window, allowing far more oxygen into the house. If the glass hadn't broken, he said, the fire might not have flared up.

Crumrine said the house appeared to be a total loss.

"Because it's so old, I think it won't be repairable," he said.

Candy strings?



REBEL JAY/Colby Community College

Marty Wendel of Ingalls pretended to play a pinata shaped like a guitar that he made for the Colby Community College Endowment Auction on Saturday, April 14. Wendel and his mates in the Elementary Art Education class all made pinatas for the event. The theme is Mexican Fiesta. They will be sold that night along with items donated by supporters.

Trustees get retention report

The Colby Community College trustees received an update from Doug Johnson, coordinator of the Retention and Academic Advising Committee, about their work since last July to help students attain their goals while at the college.

The group surveyed students last fall about why they chose Colby, he said. Students are being tracked for two consecutive semesters, he said, so they are still collecting data. He did report, however, that the retention rate between the fall 2011 and spring 2012 semesters was 77 percent. He also said "at-risk" students, those who are not adjusting to college, getting low grades or missing classes, are being identified, instructors are monitoring their attendance and a retention plan has been developed.

Johnson said he thinks the college needs an Educational Advising Center. A class in advising is being taught by Linda Nelson, with 16 faculty and staff enrolled.

"We're really excited about the numbers in that class right now," he said.

He said one of the committee's priorities is to get a full-time counselor on campus to meet the immediate needs of students. The Student Affairs office is seeing an increasing number of students with counseling needs, who now are referred to an off-campus professional.

"We're getting to the point," Johnson said, "where our behavior care team is starting to realize that we aren't necessarily equipped to deal with some of the behavioral problems, some of the psychological problems that some

of the students today face."

He then said changes are being made to the Student Success Seminar class, for new full-time students, to make it more relevant.

Also, Johnson said future plans for student retention include a "recovery class" for students falling below a 2.0 grade average, more "peer mentoring" by other students, and establishing learning communities.

He finished his report by talking about the challenges the program still faces. Johnson said he needs to get better at using the computer system to get into the student database. He said his program may need more staff in the future.

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I-70 work to expand

Construction workers expected to close the I-70 passing lanes in several places between Brewster and Edson this week so they can build crossovers for later use in a repaving project. Drivers westbound from Colby need to watch out for the workers.

The Kansas Department of Transportation said the project should be finished by August, but while it's going on, traffic will run head-to-head in a single pair of lanes in places.

Starting April 9, County Road 36 will close under the freeway so workers can do

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Troops kill gunman in France

TOULOUSE, France (AP) — In a dramatic end to a 32-hour standoff, a masked French SWAT team slipped into an Islamic extremist's apartment today, sparking a fire-fight that ended with the man being shot in the head as he jumped out the window, weapon in hand.

The suspect, 23-year-old Mohamed Merah, was wanted in the deaths of three French paratroopers, three Jewish schoolchildren and a rabbi — all killed since March 11 in what Merah reportedly told police was an attempt to "bring France to its knees."

Police had been trying to capture the suspect alive since a nighttime raid on his apartment Wednesday in the southwestern city of Toulouse. The killings he was accused of — and boasted about to police — have shocked France, ignited fear in moderate Muslims about stoking discrimination and may

even affect the country's upcoming presidential election.

The seven slayings, carried out in three motorcycle shooting attacks, are believed to be the first killings inspired by Islamic radical motives in France since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy, speaking in Paris, said an investigation was under way to see if Merah, a French citizen of Algerian descent who claimed links to al-Qaida, had any accomplices. His mother and a brother were detained a day ago by police after the mother's computer became a critical link in tracking Merah down. The brother had already been linked to Iraqi Islamists.

Prosecutor Francois Molins said Merah burst out of his bathroom when police gingerly entered his apartment this morning, wildly firing his gun about 30 times be-

fore jumping out an apartment window.

"(He) launches an assault, charging police through the apartment and firing at them with a Colt .45, continuing to advance, armed and firing, as he jumps from the balcony," Molins said.

Merah fired "until he was hit by a retaliatory shot from the RAID (elite police unit), which felled him with a bullet to the head," Molins said.

The prosecutor said police fired in self-defense after going in cautiously through the front door, using robot cameras to see if there were any boobytraps. Three members of the special squad were wounded today, bringing the total of injured French officers through-out the standoff to five.



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