



City agrees to close street for event

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The Colby City Council approved a request last Tuesday to close Franklin Avenue between Fourth and Fifth streets downtown from 11 a.m. to midnight on Sunday, July 29, for a free Todd Becker Foundation concert and barbecue.

Chris McClemens, church partnership coordinator for the foundation, spoke to the council about the event.

According to its website, the foundation was created to tell high school students about "the tragic and life-changing choices that ultimately led to the death of Todd Becker," who died in an alcohol-related car accident when he was a senior in high school.

The group was at Colby High last year to tell the story in an assembly and has been to other area schools, including Goodland, Brewster and Golden Plains, he said.

McClemens said that after they visit

a school, they have a followup event in the summer where they block off a street and hold a barbecue and a concert by the band that travels with them, "Chye." McClemens said the foundation works with churches to put on the event. He said Keith Becker, older brother of Todd Becker, will tell more of his story, which he shared with students at the assembly.

"We're working with the Thomas County Ministerial Alliance for this," McClemens said, "and it really works good to block off a downtown street.

That's just how we've always done it in the summertime."

McClemens said he has already contacted the downtown businesses and said they are all OK with the request, mainly because the event is going to be held on a Sunday when most of them are closed anyway.

City Manager Carolyn Armstrong said Jarrod Spencer, minister of the Church of Christ in Colby and a member of the Ministerial Alliance, called her to say that he and the alliance are supporting the event.

Mayor Gary Adrian asked if the Sunday event is set for is before the county fair or after. McClemens said it actually will be during the fair and the foundation is working with Audrey Hines, fair board treasurer, to make it a featured event.

The council then unanimously approved the request.

In other business, the council:
• Awarded a bid for the 2012 power line distribution improvement project to L&S

See "CITY," Page 2

Art Walk set for next week

Colby Community College art instructor Rebel Jay and her students will put on the 2012 Art Walk from 6 to 9 p.m. Friday, April 20, at locations around Colby.

Professional art work will be on view at offices and businesses downtown, including the Scale House, Duffey's Chiropractic, North American Insurance Agency, Mabel's Diner, Smoffee's, Personal Touch, Colby Furniture and Home Furnishings, Farmers and Merchants Bank, Movement Connection, the 420 North Company, Horlacher Jewelers, Stramel Law Office, Thomas County Insurance, Donelan Jewelry, Inlow Interiors, Goulash, Plum Creek, Sunflower Bank and the Franklin Office Complex.

College students, faculty and staff members' art will be displayed in the Cultural Arts Center Gallery and in the Becker Memo-

rial Complex on campus.

Younger students' artwork will be on display in the Colby High School commons, including pieces by students at Colby Elementary, Colby Middle School, Colby High School, Heartland Christian School and Sacred Heart School.

"Artists will be working in the Scale House, caricature artists on the sidewalk and musicians will be playing at various locations," said Jay. "The CCC 15-passenger bus will be providing transportation to all three locations for a park-and-ride option, and the Thomas County Coalition will be distributing water and healthy snacks in the downtown area. In addition, several college departments will have activities for the children attending the event."

There is no admission fee.

For information, call Jay at (785) 269-7065.

Two crew members killed in I-70 crash

Two Tyler, Texas, men were killed Monday when the sport-utility vehicle they were in went out of control, crossed the median on Interstate 70 about three miles east of Oakley and slammed broadside into an eastbound semi-trailer rig.

The Kansas Highway Patrol reported that Brandon Ljuann Gordon, 25, Tyler, was driving west on the freeway about 3:50 p.m. when the vehicle went out of control. He was killed, even though he was wearing a seat belt.

The other fatality was Marvin Ray Jones, 49, a passenger. It wasn't known whether he had a seat belt on. The semi hit the men's vehicle on the driver's side, the report said. All the men were members of a sandblasting crew returning from a job site in Wyoming.

Listed as injured were Princeton L. Hudson, 26; Burrell B. Taylor, 37; and Willie D. Jackson, 26. All were taken by ambulance to the Logan County Hospital with what the patrol said were disabling injuries. None of the injured was wearing a seat belt, troopers said.

The driver of the truck was identified as Allen Lee Gerstner, 63, Collyer. He was wearing his seat harness. He was taken to the hospital, treated, then released.

The patrol said the survivors called home, and their families informed the relatives of the two fatality victims of their deaths.

Both vehicles wound up in the ditch north of the Interstate, the sport utility on it's top facing west and the truck upright facing north-northwest. Kennedy-Koster Funeral Home of Oakley handled initial arrangements for the dead.



Drive 1 tops out

Colby High School sophomore Walter Vacik (above) was in his element Saturday as he encouraged people to sign-up for Drive One 4 UR School at Tubbs and Sons Ford, which raised the maximum \$6,000 for the fourth time with 476 drivers. Coach Jerad Johnson (right) visited with National Honor Society members (from left) seniors Paige Gawith and Rachel Juenemann and junior Tomi Miller as they raised about \$1,500 for the Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation, which supports research and treatment for childhood cancers. Go to www.facebook.com/midwestforddealers, where you can vote for your favorite dealer, who can win another \$6,000 for the schools.



KATHRYN BALLARD/Colby Free Press

Rains soften Kansas drought, boost state's wheat potential

WICHITA (AP) — Steady rain over the past few months has eased the drought in parched sections of Kansas, but the threat still lingers.

Larry Ruthi, meteorologist for the National Weather Service in Dodge City, said the recent rain in southwest Kansas has lessened the drought considerably.

"The long-term drought is still there," Ruthi said. "It wouldn't take a whole lot of hot, dry weather to get us back into significant drought."

Improved conditions have been recorded around the state, however. Less than one-half of 1 percent of Kansas — the southwest corner — remains in extreme drought, compared to more than 28 percent of the state in late September, the Wichita Eagle reported Wednesday. About 11 percent remains in the three worst drought categories, but that compares to nearly half of the state last fall.

Dodge City recorded 7.39 inches of rain since Dec. 1, the third-highest total over that stretch since records began more than 100 years ago. Medicine Lodge logged 10.37 inches and Cimarron had 8.44 inches.

"It's quite amazing," Ruthi said. "There has been significant rainfall in southwest Kansas recently, and the agricultural drought has been eased considerably. Everything is much greener this year than usual."

Much of western and southern Kansas should see more rain this week, he said. Long-range forecasts suggest this summer won't be too hot and could bring above-normal rain.

But farmers aren't getting carried away about the rainfall, said Bryan Boroughs, a Servi-Tech crop consultant who lives in Cimarron.

"The word is 'encouraging,'" Boroughs said. "They have a sense of hope now."

The rain has been good for the state's wheat crop, but agriculture officials say they're still concerned that a late freeze could hurt the harvest.

The lack of rain in Kansas last year was rough on the state's wheat crop. But this year, thanks to spring rains the crop has potential.

John Holman, an Extension agronomist based in Garden City, said the crop is so ahead of schedule it's vulnerable to a spring freeze and to rust.

County questions ferret plan

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An ongoing battle between the Logan County commissioners and landowners and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was the subject of a coordination meeting last Tuesday at the Logan County Courthouse in Oakley.

The battle stems from whether and how to control black-tailed prairie dogs in an area near where endangered black-footed ferrets were released five years ago. The experiment is scheduled to end Dec. 31, but federal officials said at the meeting it likely will be extended.

The fifth meeting between the two groups, Tuesday's session was an update for information only from the federal agency in reference to poor ferret numbers, use of the chemical Rozol for poisoning prairie dogs and plans for re-evaluation of the experiment.

The service is required by law to make its plans consistent with state and local law and coordinate with state and local officials.

Officials from the Kansas and South Dakota field offices of the federal agency, as well as the assistant director of the Mountain-Prairie Region out of Denver, were present.

Steven Howe from the office of U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp, state Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, state Rep. Larry Powell and Farm Bureau representatives attended, as well as the manager for the Kansas Department of Agriculture's pesticide and fertilizer programs, Gary Meyers.

An Idaho lawyer, Fred Kelly Grant, who specializes in private property rights, also attended.

Adjoining landowners say they are frustrated with having to spend thousands of dollars on 7,000 to 10,000 acres of Logan County land they say are infested by prairie dog. Landowners say not only

are the rodents interfering with normal use and production of their land, but they're causing devaluation of the property.

They estimate there are 100 prairie dog holes per acre, but the number of dogs per acre is actually less, maybe 5.6 for every acre. It still adds up to thousands of prairie dogs.

Measures to control the rodent have been inhibited by at least two landowners who have allowed introduction of the endangered black-footed ferret onto their land. The county has a lawsuit against those landowners, and an appeal may be heard May 15 at the Pawnee County Court House in Larned. It will be the second case on the docket that morning.

The case involves a law that has been on the Kansas books

See "COUNTY," Page 3

