



Jail project, jail study both to wait

By Heather Alwin
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Thomas County may not be going forward with its plans for a new administrative and jail complex without further analysis, but the analysis may have to wait a while.

The Thomas County Commissioners, at their meeting Monday, decided to delay signing a contract for a structural assessment of the currently used courthouse. They also delayed a decision on hiring a consulting firm to provide a needs assessment for the jail portion of the complex.

The structural assessment was approved at the commission's July 8 session, but County Attorney Kevin Berens had some concerns with the proposed contract's terms. Based on his advice, the commissioners tabled the issue for now.

They asked Berens to negotiate with the structural engineering firm, Walter P. Moore, to resolve some issues with the contract,

including ownership of the documents produced by the firm's analysis. As the firm proposed the contract for structural analysis, the firm keeps ownership of their reports and other documents they produce. Berens recommended the county obtain clarification on this and other issues before signing the contract.

"We want to be able to use their product for any future work we want to do," said Commissioner Paul Steele.

Berens agreed to discuss this issue and others with Walter P. Moore before the commissioners sign the contract. The commissioners tabled the issue, and they plan to bring it up at a future commissioners meeting after Berens has had a chance to talk to the engineering firm's attorneys.

Steele said, "I'm not really sure when we'll take it up again because I'm not sure how long this will take."

The commissioners also postponed decision on a needs assess-

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Teams needed for fair event

A new event is coming to the Thomas County Fair this year.

Calf dressing, previously unknown at fair time here, involves chasing a calf that has a rope tied to it. When you catch that rope, you and your teammates have to drag the calf to the group and put socks, underwear and a bra on the

animal. The event is done when the animal is put back in its pen.

Rodeo Director Clair Schrock said he is looking for six teams of three people each. And, although some groups of co-workers have already expressed an interest, he still has some spots open.

Call him at 443-2605 to sign up.

Pickin' festival teaches music

Pickin' on the Plains is more than a place to watch bands perform on stage. It's also a place where musicians and music lovers can learn about their instruments and improve their musicianship.

Each year, the festival holds workshops on Saturday morning in the air-conditioned 4-H building. These interactive sessions are included in the price of a festival pass, and all attendees are welcome.

Musicians are welcome to bring their instruments to try new techniques while non-musicians can listen in and see the bands in a more personal setting.

This year, the vocal workshop will be taught by the members of Blue Highway, named the 2013 Vocal Group of the Year by the International Bluegrass Music

Association. Hailing from the Tennessee and Carolina area, the group is known for its exquisite song-writing abilities, showy arrangements and powerful lead and harmony singing, according to festival organizer and performer Susan McLemore.

Kathy Leitner, a teacher from Atwood, will offer a beginning guitar workshop. She will teach beginning chords and picking styles, allowing attendees to leave with a grasp of reading tablature (guitar sheet music) and able to play some songs.

David Bonham, of Oklahoma's Bonham Revue, will lead a more advanced guitar workshop, while Virgil Bonham and Jim Paul Blair, also of Bonham Revue, will lead mandolin and banjo workshops.

Rollover injures man

A car accident Tuesday evening near Rexford sent a Colby man to the hospital.

The Kansas Highway Patrol worked the accident, and reported that Joshua James Niemi, 22, was going east on U.S. 83 when he came up on a car that had stopped to turn onto County Road 35 about a mile west of Rexford. Niemi

swerved to avoid hitting the other car from behind, and the 2005 Dodge Ram 1500 he was driving went off the south side of the road. He overcorrected the truck, causing it to swerve back across the road, and roll into the ditch on the north side.

Niemi, who was not wearing a seatbelt, was sent to Citizen's Medical Center. His condition was not known at press time.



SAM DIETER/Colby Free Press

Shaelyn Akers of Cheyenne Wells, Colo., eyeballed her competition (above) as she as raced in the Mud Bog Saturday evening. The vast majority of the trucks powered through the man-made ruts at the Thomas County Fairgrounds, and if they were not the first one through, they could still get a

consolation hose-off, courtesy of Scott Hilbrink (right, with hose) and Lance Bolyard of the Colby Fire Department. Trucks went against each other, two by two (below), but were judged according to their time against all others with the same-sized tires.

Mud tops Saturday night

By Sam Dieter

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Colby was reintroduced to the Mud Bog on Saturday night.

The contest involves digging two ditches into the inside part of the race track at the Thomas County Fairgrounds, each of them about two and a half feet deep and filled with about a foot of mud.

Close to 30 people drove their vehicles - everything from old trucks to race cars mounted on new chassis - went through the ditches Saturday, two at a time.

The object: get through the ditch as fast as possible, or at least make it all the way. Nathan Armbruster a contestant in

the event, helped organize it.

"A lot of people helped out," Armbruster said, "I can't take credit for myself."

The contest used to be held about four miles west of town near Cranston Cattle Company several years ago, he said. Jeff and Cassie Carney, who own the racetrack, suggested they have the event here, and he called people in town with an interest in the sport.

"And I said, 'we'll stand back and watch it fly' and we did it in about two and a half weeks."

Several friends from Cheyenne Wells, Colo., brought laser cameras that were

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Groundwater transfer allowed

ALMA, Neb. (AP) - The Lower Republican Natural Resources District will let farmers transfer some of their water allotment from one field to another.

The district board held an emergency meeting Tuesday in Alma because so many farmers had appealed to the district to let them pump more water, Hastings television station KHAS said (http://bit.ly/110hFcm ). The National Drought Mitigation Center says the river basin remains in extreme or exceptional drought.

The district has limited farmers to 10.5 inches of water per field from one center pivot

irrigation system this growing season. At the meeting the board approved letting famers transfer 2 inches of that allotment from one field to another.

But the board was wary about doing so, given that the restrictions were placed to help keep the state in compliance with the Republican River Compact.

"Our main concern is our future, our children's future," said board member Matt Harrison. "This year we're dry and we started out dry, so we really have to watch what we're doing."

The 1943 Republican River Compact dictates that Nebraska gets 49 percent of the Republican River's water, Kansas gets 40 percent and Colorado gets 11 percent. Disputes over the Republican River's water have led to two lawsuits between Kansas and Nebraska.

Nebraska imposed limits on river usage in January to make sure enough water flows downstream. The decision restricted what surface water users and irrigation districts can keep in storage. The state also required natural resources districts in the basin to take certain other measures to increase the river's flow.

NSA spying comes under fire

By Pete Yost

Associated Press

WASHINGTON - In a heated confrontation over domestic spying, members of Congress said Wednesday they never intended to allow the National Security Agency to build a database of every phone call in America. And they threatened to curtail the government's surveillance authority.

Top Obama administration officials countered that the oncesecret program was legal and necessary to keep America safe. And

they left open the possibility that they could build similar databases of people's credit card transactions, hotel records and Internet searches.

The clash on Capitol Hill undercut President Barack Obama's assurances that Congress had fully understood the dramatic expansion of government power it authorized repeatedly over the past decade.

The House Judiciary Committee hearing also represented perhaps the most public, substantive

congressional debate on surveillance powers since the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Previous debates have been largely theoretical and legalistic, with officials in the Bush and Obama administrations keeping the details hidden behind the cloak of classified information.

That changed last month when former government contractor Edward Snowden leaked documents to the Guardian newspaper revealing that the NSA collects every American's phone records, knowing that the majority of people

have no ties to terrorism.

Civil rights groups have warned for years that the government would use the USA Patriot Act to conduct such wholesale data collection. The government denied it.

The Obama administration says it needs a library of everyone's phone records so that when it finds a suspected terrorist, it can search its archives for the suspect's calling habits. The administration says the database was authorized under a provision in the Patriot Act Congress passed after 9/11.

