



COLBY FREE PRESS

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Courthouse contract tabled again

By Heather Alwin

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At their meeting last Wednesday, the Thomas County Commissioners again discussed proposals for analysis of the county's jail plans, but they did not award any contracts.

The commissioners tabled discussion of their anticipated contract with Walter P. Moore for a structural analysis of the Thomas County Courthouse pending an update from County Attorney Kevin Berens.

Berens had previously expressed concerns about some of the contract's terms, and the commissioners asked him to try to negotiate a more favorable contract before they sign it.

The commissioners approved the agreement with the engineering firm at a previous meeting, but postponed signing the contract until Berens had a chance to review it.

Under the terms of the contract,

the firm would inspect the current courthouse, making recommendations for repairs to keep it in a safe, useable condition. Commissioners Mike Baughn and Byron Sowers are reluctant to move forward with plans to replace the courthouse until they have a better idea of the structural condition of the building.

The commissioners also read a letter from a former custodian of the building, outlining possible problems with the existing courthouse such as dustiness that requires frequent filter changes in the heating and air conditioning units.

Baughn again suggested getting proposals for analysis of the jail portion of the proposed jail and administrative complex.

"What we need I guess are proposals to, number one, study our jail design," said Commissioner Paul Steele. "They may want to suggest fewer or more cells. We don't know that yet."

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SAM DIETER/Colby Free Press

Randy Jones, (left), talked to Fire Chief Bob McLemore at his retirement party Wednesday at the Law Enforcement Training Center just after greeting Ken Bieber, owner of the B-Hive and former mayor.

Retired chief started in Navy

By Sam Dieter

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Colby's longtime police chief has retired after 27 years in his position and over 37 years on the force.

Randy Jones left his spot the first of this month. A reception at the Law Enforcement Training Center last Wednesday marked his departure. He was replaced by Ron Alexander who has been on the force 15 years.

Originally from Goodland, Jones joined the force in 1976. The year before, he left the Navy, and enrolled in Colby Community College, getting an associate degree in criminal justice.

"While I was in the service I was the drug abuse program adviser for my ship," he said, "I went through various trainings on drug abuse and how to help people."

While doing that job, Jones met many people who had worked in law enforcement, which inspired

him to pursue a career as a policeman.

"I was in the right place at the right time, I guess. I was interested in investigations," Jones said.

In fact he was put in charge of investigations at the department, working under the last chief, Mark Spray. He worked his way up to become the acting police chief in August of 1986, and the full-time chief in November of the same year.

"Oh gosh, I just can't mention them all," Jones said of the cases he has worked on over the years.

These included the death earlier this year of Teri Morris, allegedly killed by her ex-husband, William Shank, as well as the 1997 killing of Phoebe Harkins by her fiancé, Tod Pabst.

There were much older cases

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Circle garden grows for years

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Tucked behind Mentlick Drive in Colby is a paved alleyway, officially called Prairie View, that holds an unexpected surprise.

Richard Cox' garden sits right in the middle of the turnaround at the north edge of the dead-end street. Set off by curbs and, during the growing season, a small wire fence, the garden holds a bounty of flowers, corn, cantaloupe, watermelons and black-eyed peas.

Cox, who retired 25 years ago, spends much of his summer tending the garden he has planted there for decades. He lives just to the west of the alleyway in a home on Mentlick Drive that he purchased once, sold, then purchased again years later because his wife liked it so much.

Cox said the alley used to be unpaved, but Wayne Horlacher, who at the time owned the property east of the alley, approached him to ask whether Cox would object to paving the alley since Horlacher wanted to sell some of

his property to create home sites.

Cox said he told Horlacher he was okay with paving the alley as long as he could have a garden there, and he said Horlacher agreed as long as no one complained about it.

Decades later, Cox' garden provides produce for the neighbors around him. "I give most of it away," he said.

His favorite thing to grow is corn. If he could only plant one thing, he said, it would be corn.

He also has an apricot tree in his backyard, and neighborhood children benefit from its bounty most years, though the tree did not produce this year due to late frosts.

Cox is originally from Dallas, but moved to Colby in 1946, just days after being discharged from the military. Over his years here, he has owned several businesses, including a filling station, ice cream shop, produce company and trucking contractor for local lumberyards.

Cox has seven children, four with his current wife, Elsie, to whom he has been married for 60 years.

Richard Cox inspected the cantaloupe (top) and corn plants (above left) in his island garden — the island in the paved road behind his house, that is (left). Cox grows flowers, melons, beans and corn, which he stores for his family and gives away to neighbors. He has been cultivating this spot for 25 years.

HEATHER ALWIN/Colby Free Press



Forecast raises fears of more floods

By Roxana Hegeman

Associated Press

WICHITA — More wet weather is on the way for drenched counties in central Kansas, where swollen rivers are raising new fears of flooding.

Heavy rains that began last week have already caused flash flooding and swamped some homes, but people are now more concerned about the next wave of storms expected to begin Wednesday and stretch into the weekend. It could include severe thunderstorms, flooding, tornadoes, microbursts and large hail throughout the state.

Among the places seeing the worst of the flash flooding is Hutchinson, where the National Weather Service reported seven inches of rain fell from Saturday through Monday.

"My real concern is that it is going to continue to rain — and it seems like I should be

building an ark, but don't have the plans," Reno County Emergency Management Director Bill Guy said. "We have been in a drought for the last couple of years and I think we are trying to make up for it in a week."

About 75 nursing home residents remain at a local hospital Tuesday after being relocated to the facility Sunday when a couple of inches of water covered the floor of the Elmwood Care Facility, Guy said. And about 200 residents who were evacuated Sunday from a mobile home park in Reno County were allowed back to their homes on Monday.

An as-yet-undetermined number of homes in Reno County have also flooded, he said.

Several dozen roads in Reno County remain closed and two bridges, one over the Little Arkansas River and the other over the Ninnescah River, were damaged and will remain closed until the river recedes enough so they can be

inspected and repaired.

KWCH reported that the floodwaters also poured into city hall in Newton. Storms also damaged automated systems at the wastewater treatment plant and the city's water system, requiring staff to manually run the systems and check water levels in towers for Newton, Halstead and Sedgwick.

It has been raining off and on in Kansas since July 21, with Wichita getting 13.4 inches from that date through Monday — the second highest amount of rain for the period since 1888, Weather Service meteorologist Vanessa Pearce said.

"It was not until we got to the last week of the month that many locations saw day after day of significant rainfall and then as you got into the first part of August it is like, 'All right

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