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School board learns to do job better

By Sam Dieter

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Members of the Colby School Board had a training session on how to be better board members at their meeting last Monday by Doug Moeckel, deputy director of the Kansas Association of School Boards. Superintendent Terrel Harrison said she asked Moeckel to come in part to help new member Kristina Lemman, but

the entire board took part in the session. Moeckel said it had been several years since he trained board members here.

One thing he talked about was the different roles of board members and administrators.

"The key job of a building leader (principal)," Moeckel said, "is to make sure that they have a low variability with a great teacher teaching the classroom."

He added that it's the board's job to make sure the district has a great teacher

in every classroom.

He divided the board members into groups and asked them questions about how a board can achieve its goals and improve its district. The board joined in an exercise with Moeckel where he showed them a chart of how a board will function with different levels of trust and communication. They watched several videos of a fictional bad school board member named Andy.

"I don't want you to be mad at Andy,"

Moeckel said. "I want you to learn from Andy."

School boards decide policy, he said, which becomes the law of the school district, and should be in line with state and national laws.

A district can get in trouble if its handbook goes against policy, he said, and the board should be careful to keep its policy consistent and not make exceptions. He added that when parents give their opinion on a policy, they bring emotion with

it, since they're talking about their kids.

"They want to bring you into the trees and skew you from the forest, and your job is to stay in the forest," he said. "It's not the strangers who confront you that's tough; it's when its your friends."

Harrison said that the association's lawyers make recommendations on policy to the district, and she goes over them with district attorney John Gatz before

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Farm in study raising yields

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A Hoxie farmer got a visit Tuesday from agribusiness professionals trying to help him improve his corn yield.

Mitchell Baalman was selected by fertilizer supplier Mosaic as part of its "Pursuit 300" farm program, trying to get him closer to producing 300 bushels an acre. That's something which Mara Ryan, brand manager for Mosaic, calls the "holy grail" of corn production.

"It's been a great experience," Baalman said. "Met a lot of great people."

He said he lives in Hoxie with his wife Lola and their sons, Adin, 11; Miles, 9; and Tucker, 8; and daughter Kendall, 4. Other family members, including his parents, Howard and Carol Baalman, and sister Keena were with him when he met representatives from Mosaic on Tuesday morning. He employs eight

people in Hoxie, and some of them tagged along.

Mosaic picked six farmers nationwide for the program. Clay Scanlan, who works at Crop Production Services in Hoxie, nominated Baalman for the program. Mosaic agronomist Curt Woolfolk said the company was looking for farmers willing to innovate.

"Mitchell's a perfect example of a guy who looks at his kids and looks at his dad and he values the importance of making sure the land and the water and the yield are sustained," Woolfolk said.

He said he has spent about a year working with Scanlan, Baalman and his employees on a 120-acre circle of corn, trying to improve the yield on the northern half of that field.

Baalman said they raised the seeding rate on the north half from 32,000 to 36,000 seeds per acre, slowed the planter from 5 to 4.2 mph to improve the spacing of seeds and

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Curt Woolfolk (top) stood in one of Mitchell Baalman's cornfields with a chart made by aerial imaging showing the healthiness of the field. Baalman's employees and family, including his son Miles Baalman, 9, (above) and his uncle Gary Baalman (left) watched Woolfolk talk about the field. He works with Mosaic, a fertilizer supply company which is helping Baalman get closer to getting 300 bushels an acre out of the field as part of the company's "Pursuit 300" program.

SAM DIETER/Colby Free Press

Accused man held for trial

William A. Shank was bound over for trial today on charges of first degree murder, aggravated arson and aggravated burglary.

The charges stem from the death of Terri Morris on Feb. 9, 2013, at the Colby home she shared with her boyfriend, Russell Rodenbeck.

The coroner's report indicates Morris was stabbed 27 times, and the house was set on fire as she lay dying.

Shank later called police from his sister's home in Logan where he had gone with the couple's 8-month-old daughter, Addy. The couple had been involved in a custody dispute.

Investigators found bloody gloves at the home that later tested positive for both Shank's and

Morris' DNA.

At today's preliminary hearing, prosecution attorneys called four witnesses: Rodenbeck, an investigator from the State Fire Marshal's Office, the Kansas Bureau of Investigation lead investigator and Carolyn States, Shank's sister.

Defense attorney Jerry Fairbanks called no witnesses but argued there was not enough evidence of pre-meditation, burglary or arson to hold Shank for trial.

At arraignment, held by Judge Glen Schifferer immediately after the preliminary hearing results were announced, Shank pled not guilty to all three charges.

Full coverage of this story will be available in Wednesday's edition of the *Colby Free Press*.

College cash forecast down

By Heather Alwin

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Colby Community College is running short of money again this year and likely will delay paying its bills and ask for early tax distributions from the county to maintain its operations.

Alan Waites, the college's outgoing chief financial officer and vice president of business affairs, presented a troubling cash flow forecast to the college trustees at their meeting last Monday.

The full-year forecast indicates the college will lose at least \$430,000 this year, taking that shortfall from its cash reserves, which are already below recommended levels.

As in the past several years, the college will also have a difficult time paying its bills toward the end of both the fall and spring semesters. The shortfall could be as much as \$900,000 in December, Waites said.

To help resolve the cash-flow problem, Waites suggested delaying supplier payments and requesting an early distribution of property-tax payments.

The shortfall is, in part, due to

decreases in enrollment, he said. The college estimates enrollment is down at least 6 percent this year, and perhaps as much as 8 or 9 percent.

Each 1 percent, or 350 credit hours of enrollment, lost costs the school \$40,000 in revenue.

Waites recommended the board reduce discretionary expenditures, but said there is not enough discretionary spending left to make up the shortfall.

Instead, the board should try to find financial sponsors for some programs, Waites suggested.

He also recommended the board reduce "people costs," 85 percent of the budget. This could mean pay reductions or reduced staffing.

"Timely response and corrective action is mandatory," Waites wrote in the cash flow forecast he submitted to the trustees.

"We need to be prepared for the worst-case scenario," said President Stephen Vacik told the board.

"The only long-term solution to move the needle is through enrollment," said board Chair Arlen Leiker.

Vacik said the college's new, targeted recruiting efforts will not see results for at least a year.

Accident victim dies in Wichita

A Grinnell man died Sunday night of injuries he suffered in a crash a week ago.

The Kansas Highway Patrol reported that Robert Allen Nelson, 60, was taken to Via Christi St. Francis Medical Center in Wichita last Monday morning after the semi-trailer rig he was driving went into a ditch on U.S. 24 in Sheridan County.

Nelson was westbound on U.S. 24 in a 2004 Freightliner pulling a trailer about 9:45 a.m. on Monday, Aug. 19. At milepost 96.8, about eight miles east of Hoxie, the

rig went into the north ditch. It spun around after the driver overcorrected, sliding sideways down the road, then flipped over into the south ditch. It came to rest facing southeast.

Nelson, who was not wearing a seat belt, was taken to the Sheridan County Hospital in Hoxie, before he was flown to Via Christi St. Francis Medical Center in Wichita.



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