



12 pages

COLBY FREE PRESS

75¢

Friday

September 27, 2013
Volume 124, Number 152
Serving Thomas County since 1888

Colby College ranked 10th in nation

Colby Community College was chosen as one of the top community colleges in the country by Bankrate Inc., a company that publishes information about the financial industry.

"It's rewarding, I mean I think it shows that we're doing what we think it is we're doing," said Dr. Stephen Vacik, the president of the college. "Anytime we get good news, it's exciting."

The company rated Colby Community College 10th out of its top 10 colleges in a recent survey. Vacik said he was interviewed several months ago by the company, mainly about the programs offered at the college. The survey ranked over 900 two-year colleges across the country, using information from the National Center for Education Statistics.

Public Information Director Debbie Schwanke pointed out that the survey has made headlines across the country. The news has been picked up by news outlets like ABC news and the *Boston Globe*.

Bankrate cited the college's low student-faculty ratio and in-state tuition as the main reasons for the number 10 ranking. Colby Community College has just 10 students for each teacher. In-state tuition is \$1,824 per year, or \$2,944 after student fees, and 97 percent of full-time, first-time students get grant or scholarship money.

The company also credited the college



MARIAN BALLARD/Colby Free Press

An outdoor barbecue at the Block Party was just one of the activities Colby Community College students enjoyed as classes convened at the end of August. The college was recently named among the top schools in the nation.

for its 24 locations across 14 counties in northwest Kansas, and the 60-acre college farm east of town.

Rankings were based on a school's graduation rate; student retention rate; the student-faculty ratio; in-state tuition and fees; the percentage of full-time first-time students getting financial aid; and the average amount of grant aid students received from federal, state and private sources combined. The company's data covers full-time students who started school in the fall of 2008. Private schools, schools with fewer than 100 full-time students and schools that did not report in-

formation on all six criteria to the center for education statistics.

Those 14 other locations helped create the low student-faculty ratio when students would be in bigger classes, Vacik said. Also, he said, the college has a relatively high number of full-time faculty, as opposed to adjuncts. There are some specialized programs that students can major in here, such as the veterinary technology, massage therapy, equestrian and dental hygiene programs.

As for the tuition, Vacik simply said the college has tried to keep it competitive with other schools. There are plenty of scholarship programs, so the large majority of students get financial aid.

"I think we've been able to help a lot of students go to school without taking on a lot of debt," he said.

Kansas did well on the survey. North Central Kansas Technical College in Beloit took seventh place, and Flint Hills Technical College in Emporia came in fourth. The company said that almost half of the country's undergraduate college students go to community colleges.

"I really think this Bankrate (survey), it was about quality, it was about affordability, and it was about accessibility," Vacik said "And in those areas I think we come out very strong."



Passing the baton

Stacy Jasper (above, right), the former city recreation director, spoke with Rich Epp at her farewell open house Wednesday afternoon at the Thomas County Office Complex. Jasper is passing the responsibility on to Dane Olofson (right) who was recognized as the new director at the open house and brought his daughter Everleigh along for the occasion. Jasper will move to Concordia, where her husband Brady was hired as an assistant women's basketball coach for Cloud County Community College.

SAM DIETER/Colby Free Press



Nurse practitioner boosts hospital staff

Citizens Medical Center and the Family Center for Health Care have added a nurse practitioner, Brandon Bailey, to help staff the hospital's emergency room.

"We are excited that Brandon will be serving our community through his weekend coverage of the ER," said Scott Focke, clinic manager. "Emergency medicine and critical care have been Brandon's focus early in his career, and he has gained valuable experience and education that he will be bringing to the position."

Bailey attended the University of Kansas School of Nursing in Kansas City and took graduate training in family medicine. He said he has spent the majority of his career caring for critically ill patients.

"I've worked in environments that range from critical care, emergency departments and pre-hospital settings," said Bailey. "It was from these experiences, coupled with my passion to care for patients and families in times of need, that brought me to rural emergency medicine."



B. Bailey

Kevan Trenkle, the hospital's chief executive officer, said, "Having Brandon available to cover the ER on weekends will also help relieve other providers who continue to grow and expand their private practices. Our busy emergency department is covered 24 hours a day by an exceptional ER staff and experienced medical providers."

Bailey said his wife and two dogs are relocating to Colby to join him.

"I enjoy the outdoors," he said, "and I'm a big KU fan. Rock Chalk!"

Oakley man recognized as employee of the year

An Oakley man was almost surprised with an award last week for his longtime service to a gas station there.

"They kind of set it up as a surprise," Ed Skeers said, "but the owner kind of let the cat out of the bag."

Skeers, the son of Susie and the late Don Skeers of Oakley, has been the maintenance supervisor for JJ Oil Company for the last 37 years. The Petroleum Marketers and Convenience Store Association of Kansas gave him its 2013 employee of the year award at its conference Sept. 16 in Overland Park.

JJ Oil Vice President Patrick Lingg nominated Skeers for the award. Lingg was also the announcer for the conference when the employee of the year award was presented, and was supposed to surprise Skeers with the announcement that he won the award. But he had already been called the night before by Gene Westhusing, the owner of the Oakley station, to congratulate him.

"It was still a lot of fun, though," Skeers said. He had never been to a conference before and spend almost two days in Overland Park with his wife Roxy. During the ceremony Lingg praised Skeers's performance and dedication and said he always put the customers' needs first.

The award was given to him within a month of his anniversary working for JJ Oil company. Skeers started working there at the start of September in 1976 – his senior year in high school – as part of a co-op program, going to school in the day and working at night. Eventually, he worked on gas pumps and took over different maintenance tasks that other people would not do. Now he gets calls at home from the gas station when something breaks down.

"I think I've probably worked just about every shift out here," he said of his career at the 24-hour station. "I do just about everything out here that they ask me to do."

The Petroleum Marketers and Convenience Store Association of Kansas is a statewide organization, and includes 300 member companies, including licensed petroleum distributors, petroleum retailers and convenience store owners and operators. Skeers is the 18th winner of its employee of the year award.



Ed Skeers

Budget battle not over yet

By Alan Fram
Associated Press

WASHINGTON – A potential government shutdown hurtling ever closer, the Democratic-led Senate moved today toward passing legislation keeping the government open, but disputes with and among Republicans ensured that the fight likely would spill into the weekend and possibly longer.

The result: a high-stakes showdown that is playing out in a climate of chaos, infighting and unpredictability that is extraordinary even by congressional standards. Reflecting the building drama, Senate Chaplain Barry Black opened today's session with a prayer that included, "Lord, deliver us from governing by crisis."

With the current budget year ending Monday and at least a partial shutdown threatened in the absence of legislation, the Senate was poised for critical votes later today. Lawmakers were expected to pass the legislation after defeating a conservative effort to block the bill, and after removing

See "BUDGET," Page 2



8 10499 02034 8