



COLBY FREE PRESS

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Santa's open for visits

Reid Ryan, 5, (right) signed the guest book at Santa City when he visited Friday with his mom Stephanie Ryan. Eli Alwin (below) stopped to take a look at a train in the toy shop on the day Santa City opened for the season at the Scout Hut by Fike Park. Mrs. Claus (Below right) showed everyone she can handle high tech just fine when a family of visitors got her to take their picture with Santa.



HEATHER ALWIN
and SAM DIETER
Colby Free Press



Auto store is collecting Toys for Tots

A Colby auto supply store is collecting toys for needy children for the second year.

S&W Supply will be collecting donations for the Toys for Tots program, affiliated with the Marine Corps, until next Wednesday. The toys must be in their original packaging, but there is no specific age range.

Ryan Bickle, vice president of sales for the family-owned, Hays-based company, said this is the second year S&W has been collecting toys.

"We thought it was an awesome program," Bickle said. "It's so easy to get behind."

Last year, Bickle said, S&W and other stores supplied by Warehouse Inc., collected well over 1,000 toys. About 30 locations participated, including the eight S&W stores in northwest Kansas. With more Warehouse Inc. affiliates joining in, 74 locations are participating this year in Kansas,

Colorado, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas, he said.

S&W and Warehouse Inc. are both members of Federated Auto Parts, which decided to become a corporate sponsor of Toys for Tots last year, Bickle said.

You can drop off toys at S&W downtown at 185 W. Fifth St. from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Friday or from 8 a.m. to noon on Saturday.

Other S&W stores participating are in Hays, Hill City, Lacrosse, Ness City, Osborne, Plainville and Russell.

Warehouse Inc. affiliates joining include Dave's Auto Supply in Rexford, Great Plains Auto and Taylor Implement Co. in Hoxie, Republican Valley Auto and St. Francis Auto Parts in St. Francis, Sharon Springs Auto Parts and Big D's, Five Star Auto Repair, G&L Tire and Automotive and Sicoir in Hays.

Rural housing issue for 2014

TOPEKA (AP) — Gov. Sam Brownback said creating a new rural housing program may be on Kansas legislators' agenda next year because communities see it as important to attracting new workers.

Brownback said during a meeting of economic advisers that as he's traveled across the state, housing shortages stood out as an issue that needs to be addressed to help stabilize the region and encourage growth.

"I've been telling rural legislators they ought to go together and say, 'Look, this is what we want to do. This is our big problem.' And lean in to it," Brownback said Wednesday.

The Topeka Capital-Journal reports (bit.ly/IP5sli) that the meeting of the economic advisers focused on rural housing needs, including options for increasing the development of single-family homes and rental properties. The group heard multiple cases of rural communities having housing shortages.

Cohen-Esrey Real Estate Service head Lee Harris called the

state's \$2.3 million low-income housing program "paltry." The program awarded grants ranging between \$100,000 and \$400,000 to eight communities in 2012.

Harris suggested that the state use some of the \$162 million taxes paid by insurance companies on the value of premiums for tax breaks for rural housing developers. He gave the example of using revenues above \$150 million in a fund that would help developers get projects by helping with construction costs and help lower rental rates.

Insurance companies would be able to earn tax credits for their contributions to the program, he said, providing an incentive for the investment.

"The program provides a significant renewable funding source to produce affordable housing that can boost economic development activity in rural communities," Harris said. "It makes Kansas a friendlier environment for insurance companies."

The economic advisers heard

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Accounting change to shift retirement debt

TOPEKA (AP) — About \$10 billion in projected pension debts will move from the state of Kansas to the balance sheets of local governments after a change in national accounting standards is implemented next year, according to a state official.

Alan Conroy, executive director of the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System, told the Legislative Post Audit committee Tuesday about the Governmental Accounting Standards Board's changes, *The Topeka Capital-Journal* reported (bit.ly/1k6I9yL).

KPERS serves state employees as well as public workers from about 1,500 cities, counties,

school districts and other forms of local government such as water districts. Starting next year, those entities will need to carry the KPERS "unfunded actuarial liability" for their employees on their own balance sheets rather than having the state carry it all, as it currently does. The unfunded actuarial liability is the amount the system has promised above what it is projected to produce.

"So our balance sheet will actually look better and the locals will look worse," said Sen. Jeff Longbine, R-Emporia.

Longbine said the change could make it more difficult for local governments to borrow money for building projects.

"It could affect the bond ability or bond cost of some of our municipalities," Longbine said.

Conroy said his office was working on a breakdown for each entity based on the number of public employees, their terms of service and other factors.

"We'll provide them information that will tell them their share of the unfunded pension liability," Conroy said.

The KPERS debt ballooned because of a number of factors, including unfunded liability in the school district system that the state absorbed, underfunding by the state and the market downturn of the recession.

The 2012 Legislature passed a bill to transition new KPERS employees to a cash balance plan starting in 2015. Conroy told the committee that the plan is still projected to extinguish the KPERS debt by 2033.

Selden Winterfest launches holiday season

Selden held its annual Winterfest on Friday to kick off the holiday season, featuring sales, food, contests and a drawing and a movie for kids.

Businesses were open from 5 to 6:45 p.m. allowing visitors to enjoy treats, browse the stores and register for the drawing later in the evening. Those opening their doors included Selden Lumber, Steve's Body Shop, the C-Bar Co., Lisa Stoll/Avon, Linda and Carrie's Doll Clothes, Southwind Steakhouse, Pauls Furniture, the Selden post office and library, Midway Café/Midway Chiropractic, Karl's Cash Store and The Bank.

The Selden Catholic Youth Organization had a movie for children in the Parish Hall downtown. Dallas Koerperich and Camron Spesser roasted marshmallows for s'mores on Main Street. The Selden Community Foundation provided hot dogs, chili dogs, coffee and cocoa at the Community Building.

At 7 p.m., a drawing was held for \$600 in Selden Greenbucks provided by the city and the foundation. The Greenbucks are certificates that

can be used at any Selden business.

Judy Rogers won the \$100 prize, with \$50 in Greenbucks going to winners Matt Schmidtberger, Robert Ritter, Kaylie Schaben, Bernard Ritter, Marsha Rogers, Kacie Evans, Tayler Lobato, Dan Rogers, Gary Hunziker and Joe Lobato. A gift basket donated by Cressler Creations of Hoxie went to Amanda Cheney.

Following the drawing and a brief fireworks display, Santa arrived to hear the children's Christmas wishes and distribute bags of treats provided by the Selden Senior Citizens.

"We appreciate all the businesses that participate in Winterfest each year," said Judy Rogers, a foundation board member. "We would also like to thank the city for providing Greenbucks for the drawing and the senior citizens for providing the Santa treats for the children."

"I would encourage everyone to thank the businesses that were open for Winterfest and to take advantage of the services provided by their local businesses during this holiday season."

