



COLBY FREE PRESS

Housing rehab grant awarded to city of Rexford

By MAXINE NELSON

Colby Free Press

Lt. Gov. Gary Sherrer, who also serves as Commerce and Housing Secretary, has announced that the city of Rexford is one of seven communities to receive either Housing Rehabilitation or Neighborhood Development Grants.

Rexford will receive a \$400,000 Housing Rehabilitation Grant, and plans to use it to rehabilitate 18 homes.

Laura Hefner, of Topeka, Linda Hunziker, Morland, and Corina Cox, Hill City, along with Thomas County Commissioner Duane Dawes, did a walk through of the city in April.

They studied the exteriors of all the houses in the target area, which is north of the railroad tracks and west of Main Street.

According to Kathi Hapke, who is helping with the grant, "we have about 20 houses that we are considering." She said that the owners or renters undergo an application process.

"These awards create partnerships with communities that understand the link-age between economic development and safe and suitable housing," said Sherrer.

"In addition," he said, "the community investments are important to the cities' economic development efforts."

Freedom to Farm is raising questions

By ROXANA HEGEMAN

Associated Press Writer

WICHITA (AP) — Kansas farmers once embraced the 1996 farm bill with its tantalizing promise of planting flexibility.

At last, growers figured they would be able to put in the crops best suited for the markets and their own land rather than farm the government programs with the same old commodities.

They bought into the premise that declining government subsidies would be replaced by greater profits in the marketplace.

As lawmakers begin drafting a new farm bill, that farm policy — popularly known as Freedom To Farm — is under intense scrutiny after years of emergency government bailouts to keep family farms and rural economies afloat.

But the beleaguered farm program has changed the rural landscape in Kansas. Fields that once grew wheat in eastern Kansas now grow a rotation of corn, sorghum and soybeans. A fledgling cotton industry has emerged in southern Kansas.

Farmers planted less wheat. Bountiful harvests of corn and sorghum overflowed grain elevators, dotting western Kansas each fall with huge mounds of grain piled on the ground.

But market prices collapsed in a nation awash in surplus grain. And the political parties, as well as farmers themselves, are deeply divided on whether to scrap the concept of free-

dom to farm.

The average Kansas farm last year would not have broken even except for federal subsidies. Kansas Farm Management Association reported that the typical farm received \$45,614 in government payments in 2000 — or 116 percent of its net farm income.

A year earlier, the average government payment was \$47,056. In 1997, government payments averaged \$14,980 per farm.

Fred Ditrixhe raises wheat, milo, soybeans, sunflowers and calves on a farm east of Concordia. He said if he had not gotten the additional government payments he would have had to sell out.

He works the land his father and grandfather once tilled, but most of the 2,000 acres he farms is rented ground. To make up for low commodity prices, he has planted all his acres. Sometimes he longs for the old farm programs where the government paid farmers not to plant all their acres.

"When we used to have set-asides, it wasn't so bad. Now we are trying to grow a crop on every bit of those acres," he said. "For me, it has gotten more stressful."

Ditrixhe also tried different ways to add value to his crops. He got into raising calves to better use the cheap milo he grows. He grows the new hard white winter wheat in the hopes he can get a better price for his wheat crop. He has even tried raising confectionary sunflowers.



JAY KELLEY/Colby Free Press

Captain Jeff Unger and firefighters Lynn Marker and Susan McMahon evaluate their "patient," scoutmaster Ken Erickson at an emergency

services disaster drill on Tuesday at the high school. Those involved said they learned a lot with the practical training.

Readiness tested

Disaster drill in Colby goes well

By JAY KELLEY

Colby Free Press

Local emergency and hospital workers tested their readiness against a mass casualty incident Tuesday night at Colby High School.

Boy Scouts from Rexford and Colby were the patients in a tornado scenario. They were scattered over the high school campus with a variety of simulated injuries, some minor and some critical.

According to Thomas County Emergency Management Coordinator John Lygeros, the drill was primarily designed to test a new mass casualty plan at Citizens Medical Center.

Floyd Moore, safety director at the hospital said, "It was a very suc-

cessful drill." According to Moore, the hospital received their first notice at 6:17 p.m. and initiated a call back.

They were able to get 46 employees back and ready to work before the first patients began to arrive at 6:45.

"We processed 26 patients through the ER," said Moore. The hospital had hoped for at least 40 patients, but some of the volunteers had to cancel at the last minute.

The Colby Fire Department and Thomas County Emergency Medical Services were also involved, as well as city street crews and police officers.

Martin Rinehart, assistant EMS director, agreed with Moore. "Some of the physicians I talked to said it was a little sluggish, but it sounded like we did what we had to do when we had to do it." Rinehart was in the Emergency

Operations Center at City Hall during the drill.

Kathi Wright, an emergency medical technician who was on scene, said the scene went very well. "We had a few things to correct, but they have been taken care of."

Lygeros said he was also in the Emergency Operations Center. "It sounded like we had a good turnout from the fire department and EMS," he said. "We were able to fine tune a few things we needed to look at."

Colby Fire Chief Bob McLemore, also in the operations center for the drill, agreed. "We have some improvements to make in communications equipment."

McLemore also said the incident command system worked very well. The system is designed to work like a

pyramid, with expansion for larger emergencies made easy by just adding another side to the system, according to McLemore.

Colby City Manager Carolyn Armstrong was also on the scene, as an observer. She said the drill was an "excellent exercise," although all of the agencies that would be present at a real emergency were not able to participate.

"I believe it is critical to work with other agencies and be better prepared," she said. Armstrong also said that, since the last drill had been around 1994, it was important for new people to practice their duties.

Lygeros also praised the scouts and Colby school system for their willingness to help. "They were pleased to help," he said.

Paleo-detectives hope to show picture of area nine million years ago

By RACHEL MISCALL

The Goodland Daily News

Danielle Deemer calls herself a "paleo-detective." She'll take clues she and five other students have dug up in Rawlins County and piece together a picture of northwest Kansas nine million years ago.

She says that picture will include a river running through now-dry, dusty land and herds of rhinoceroses and camels roaming the High Plains.

"I'm taking all that we have found here and making sense of it," said the 25-year-old University of Pittsburgh graduate student. "Hopefully, it will tell me what this area looked like nine million years ago. It's kind of like detective work, but really, really old detective work."

Deemer, a geology student who will put it all down in her master's thesis, is one of many students from New York and Pittsburgh who have traveled to northwest Kansas for three summers to unearth fossils that they say are the key to figuring out the past.



Jen Castle used a hammer and chisel to chip away at ground on the west edge of Rawlins County this weekend, hoping to unearth remains of animals that lived millions of year ago.

The undergraduate and graduate students, studying subjects ranging from earth science to art, are led each year by Dr. Bill Korth, a geology professor at Buffalo State College in New York, who has been finding fossils in the

Midwest for over 25 years.

This year's group arrived in rural Decatur County, where a couple lets them stay rent-free in an old farm house, in mid-May and plans to leave on Sunday in two trucks filled with old jaws, hips, teeth, ribs and skulls sealed in plaster shells. After they're cleaned and repaired, the fossils, mostly rhino remains, will join others the professor and students have uncovered at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh.

Dr. Korth says he doesn't get the most excited about finding remnants of ancient rhinos, but of rodents, his main field of study. He said he plans to make the trip again next year, continuing the westward search along 120 miles of the Sappa Creek that winds through Decatur and Rawlins Counties. He said the students have already found several outcroppings, where the earth is exposed and fossils are easier to find, to dig into on the next expedition.

They've scoured 75 miles of the creek's south fork, the professor said,

and plan to devote more time to the other two forks in coming summers.

Over three years, Korth said, he and his students have unearthed parts of old elephants, camels, rodents and rhinos.

"It's one little piece in the big puzzle of what went on in the development of the earth," he said.

While the first trip wasn't as fruitful, last year the diggers removed over 140 fossils — mainly the jaws, teeth, hips and pelvises of adult and baby rhinos — from a quarry on the west edge of rural Rawlins County.

The students uncovered more of the same this year at a spot just to the north, but the professor said the bones they found look to be from a different species of rhino. That doesn't make much of a difference to Deemer, who said she's interested in taphonomy, or determining when, why and where the rhinos were in northwest Kansas and how their remains ended up on what she believes was a flood plain.

Deemer said she will analyze the dirt and rocks in the area and the animals'

bones to find the time period the rhinos lived and how they died — whether it was by natural causes or a predator. She said she believes the bulky creatures were roaming around during the Miocene Era, about nine million years ago.

"It's like a big sandbox to her," said Jen Castle, a 21-year-old geology major at Geneseo State University in New York, as she used a hammer and chisel to break off a piece of earth at the site.

It's not as much fun for Castle, who said she plans to identify the different rhino species for a class project.

"The actual digging part isn't exciting," she said, "but finding the bones is exciting."

The undergraduate said she's decided that she doesn't want to spend her days in the hot sun, getting sweaty and dirty.

While over a dozen students have made the trip with Korth, he says most aren't aspiring vertebrate paleontologists. Some come just for the experience.

Briefly

Weather: Brief relief

Enjoy the brief relief from the heat, because the National Weather Service sees a return to hot weather again by Friday. But until then.... Tonight, partly cloudy with a 60 percent chance for thunderstorms, some might be severe, low 45-50 and north winds 15-25 mph.

Thursday, partly sunny, north winds 10-20 mph and the high in the middle 70s. Thursday night, clear, the low 45-50. Friday, dry, sunny, the high in the 80s. Saturday through

Monday, the low 55-65 and the high in the upper 80s to the middle 90s. Tuesday's high in Colby was 94 and the overnight low this morning was 59.

There was no additional precipitation. The soil temperature at the 4-inch depth is averaging 80 degrees. The records for June 13: 103 in 1952 and 37 in 1947.

(The daily temperatures, precipitation and records are provided by the Northwest Kansas Research-Extension Center, Colby.)

Giggles await children

Thad Beach, children's musician and songwriter, will present *From Kalamazoo to Catfish County...* at 9:30 a.m. Friday, at Pioneer Memorial Library in Colby.

Children of all ages are invited to "come and fill your tank with gallons of giggles as you travel with Thad Beach all the way from Kalamazoo to Catfish County with a stop at the Polka-Dot Cafe. Sing-along, hear tall tales from Catfish County and play homemade folk instruments." The

program is sponsored by The Friends of Pioneer Memorial Library.

Fair board meets Thursday

The Thomas County Free Fair Board will meet at 8 p.m. Thursday at the 4-H building.

Fair plans and any other business matters needing attention will be taken up. The fair will be July 30-Aug. 3. The meeting is open to the public.

