



COLBY FREE PRESS

8 pages

Arrives in Colby on Saturday

First load of wheat here is a good one

By PATTY DECKER

Free Press Editor

The first wheat in Thomas County arrived at the Hi-Plains Coop elevator in Colby Saturday night, according to John Strecker, manager.

The first load came from Dr. William White's land located nine miles northwest of Colby, said Drew Barnes, manager of White Farms. White, who lives in Phoenix, Ariz., is the son of Lloyd and Lucille White of Colby.

"We cut about 90 acres with an average yield in the upper range of 50 per bushel per acre,"

Barnes said. "It seems like the Jagger seed is producing higher yields than the 107 TAM seed, but I'm predicting it will be in the mid to upper 40 range in average yields per bushel."

Barnes said crews will begin cutting again today, adding that he is "tickled" to be getting such high yields on this year's crop. Moisture content for the first few loads was at 13.2, he said. Jim Foltz, facility manager at Cornerstone Ag, said today that he's heard harvest has started in some areas south of Colby, and WaKeeney reported getting its first 50 loads on

Sunday. "I think we are running close to schedule," Foltz said regarding harvest. Some producers, he said, thought harvest might be later than usual, but with the hot winds and warmer weather, the wheat's drying out quicker than expected.

"Wheat harvest usually wraps up around the Fourth of July and it looks like we'll be close to that," Foltz said. Cornerstone Ag's main terminal is located one mile south and one mile east on County Road Q in Colby.

Strecker agreed saying that Dodge City's

wheat is about half cut and typically producers here start cutting right before farmers get done there.

"We have just hit the beginning," Strecker said. "By Wednesday, and closer to the end of the week, we will start seeing a lot of activity."

Both Strecker and Foltz said harvest should be at "full bore" by the end of this week.

Roger Hale, who is the director of the Wheat Harvest Office in Colby, said custom cutters have started arriving in the area.

"We have combines here today and they are

looking for work," he said.

Hale said he has had reports of some farmers cutting in the Menlo area last Friday and others cutting south of Goodland.

"I am hearing moisture contents of 12.5 and yields at 30 to 35 bushels per acre," he said.

Many of the custom cutters who have arrived today, he said, have come from the Great Bend area where harvest is for the most part done.

"If farmers need help, they need to give me a call at the harvest office, 462-6453 or stop by 210 S. Range," Hale said.

Foster care provider files for bankruptcy

WICHITA (AP)—United Methodist Youthville, one of the state's major providers of foster-care services, has filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection.

Youthville, which filed for bankruptcy on Friday, had been awarded the foster-care contract for Sedgwick County and a 53-county region in western Kansas after the state's foster-care system was privatized in 1997.

But the social service agency has struggled since it lost the western Kansas contract to St. Francis Academy of Salina last year. The number of chil-

dren Youthville served shrank to 1,800 from 5,300 children. Sedgwick County remained with Youthville.

The loss of the contract left Youthville without any way to recoup millions invested in equipment, personnel and office space.

When the contract lapsed, Youthville was unable to collect between \$8 million and \$10 million in payments it had expected from the state.

In the past four years, Alleve said, Youthville has eaten \$20 million in losses tied to the contract.

Protection One losses hover in Western suit

By JOHN HANNA

Associated Press Writer

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP)—Under state law, Protection One Inc. doesn't answer to the Kansas Corporation Commission. The company provides home and business security services; the KCC regulates utilities.

But Protection One's majority owner is Western Resources Inc., the state's largest electric company.

And that makes Protection One and its financial problems a concern of the state regulators as they review both Western's proposal for a \$150 million rate increase and its plans to reorganize itself.

Critics of both the rate proposal and the reorganization contend Western has used its electric operations to prop up its unregulated activities — most notably Protection One. Western officials say that isn't so, but they can't deny that the security firm has acted as a drag on Western's finances.

The KCC has to worry about Protection One because of its regulatory oversight. One of its duties is to see that consumers receive reliable electric service at reasonable rates.

"One of the things the commission has said on a regular basis is that ratepayers should not have to bear the burden of losses from an unregulated entity," said KCC spokeswoman Rosemary Foreman.

The KCC has scheduled a hearing for Tuesday and Friday on Western's proposed restructuring plan, which would split its electric operations from its other business interests, so that the utilities can be merged with the Public

Service Company of New Mexico, known as PNM.

The commissioners have until July 25 to decide on Western's rate proposal. It has scheduled a July 3 administrative meeting to begin writing an order.

Western officials aren't talking publicly. David Wittig, the company's chairman, president and chief executive officer, turned down a request for an interview, and the company declined to discuss Protection One in detail.

"They just want to keep the focus on what they're doing to prepare information for the KCC," spokeswoman Kim Groninger said.

Western provides electricity to more than half of the state's households and 636,000 Kansas customers overall through its KPL division and KGE subsidiary.

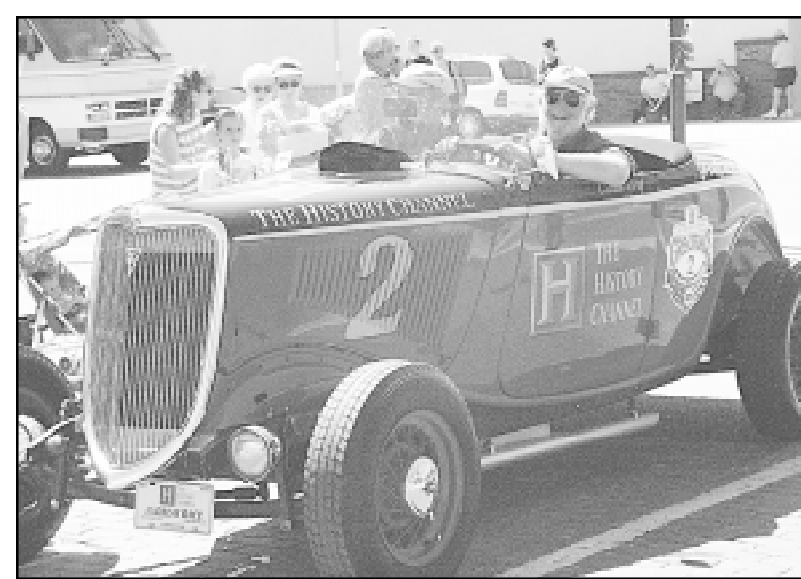
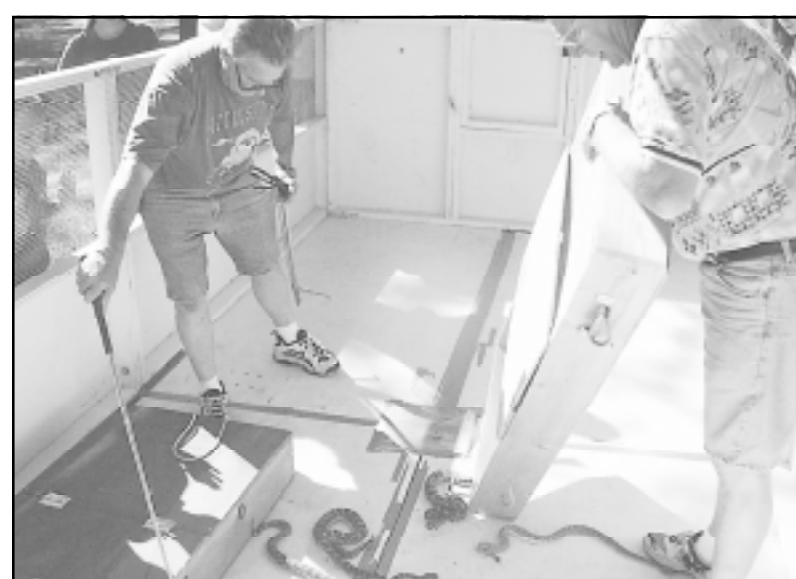
Another subsidiary, Westar Industries, holds its unregulated business interests, including its stake in Protection One. Western acquired an 85 percent stake in Protection One in November 1997. Western gave Protection One its own monitored security operations and \$367 million in cash. At the time, officials in both companies said the new, \$1 billion company would be well positioned in the competitive security industry. Critics have plenty of suggestions about what, in their minds, went wrong next. They have said that the security market remained too fragmented; Western overestimated customer goodwill and loyalty; the utility tried to become a national player too quick.



JAY KELLEY/Colby Free Press

Something for everyone seemed to be the order of the day at the Prairie Heritage Festival in Colby on Saturday. **TOP:** The U.S. Navy Ceremonial Band was on hand to entertain visitors. **BOTTOM LEFT:** The

Sharon Springs Snake Club demonstrated handling of different varieties of snakes. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** The Great Race featured antique cars and trucks in a precision race across the country.



Great Race highlights Saturday events

By JAY KELLEY

Colby Free Press

The Prairie Heritage Festival seemed to offer something for everyone in downtown Colby on Saturday.

In addition to the annual Prairie Heritage Festival activities, the History Channel Great Race came to Colby around noon.

Several hundred people lined Franklin Avenue between Fourth and Fifth streets to welcome not only racers, but the U.S. Navy Ceremonial

Band, who arrived at about 11:15 a.m.

"I was very pleased with the local attendance," said economic development coordinator Gerry Fulwider. "We also had a good attendance from out of town."

The crowd was animated, in spite of warm temperatures, as the band played a selection of marches, including a rendition of God Bless America in which members of the public were invited to join in.

The first cars began to arrive around

noon and were treated to a luncheon catered by Dillons.

"The drivers were impressed by our community and their sponsors," said Fulwider, "and Dillons did an excellent job."

Racers left Colby about 2:30 and pressed on west, reaching their overnight stop, Littleton, Colo. in time for a "torrential downpour," according to race spokesman Michael Coats.

The arts and crafts show, antique tractor displays and entertainment drew people into Fike Park, but it was

the snake show, courtesy of the Sharon Springs club, that got the most attention, at least from a safe distance.

Snake wranglers Andy Stewart, Liberal and Gary Bliss, Osborne, showed their techniques with several poisonous varieties, including timber rattlers and copperheads.

Some nonpoisonous varieties were also on hand, with their handlers explaining the snakes' role in nature. Fulwider summed the annual event up, "I think it was great!"

FDA says it will inspect thousands of plants for allergenic ingredients

NEW ORLEANS (AP)—The Food and Drug Administration plans to inspect thousands of candy makers, bakeries and other processors over the next two years to make sure ingredients that cause common allergic reactions aren't getting into food and candy accidentally.

The FDA decided on the inspections, which could involve as many as 6,000 plants, after recently testing several plants in Minnesota and Wisconsin. One-fourth of the cookie, ice cream and candy makers tested had ingredients such as peanuts that weren't disclosed on product labels.

"We'd like to go out and see if that is true in the rest of the nation," said Kenneth Falci, an FDA official who briefed industry officials on the agency's plans at the Institute of Food Technologists annual conference over the weekend.

Foods are supposed to disclose all ingredients except for flavorings, col-

orings and spices, but allergenic ingredients sometimes slip into foods undetected because machinery hasn't been cleaned properly between different products, industry officials say.

Training for the 2,500 inspectors will take up to a year, Falci said.

The agency also has asked food

makers and their ingredient suppliers to study all of the thousands of flavorings, colorings and spices that are in use to identify those that are made from common allergens, Falci said.

Under federal law, companies are not required to disclose the composition of flavorings, colorings and spices

on food labels.

Some 7 million Americans who suffer from food allergies rely on ingredient labels to tell which processed foods are safe for them to consume. Some food allergies, particularly peanut allergies, can be fatal, claiming an estimated 150 lives a year.

Briefly

Weather: Warm

Warm, breezy and thunderstorms pretty much tell the weather tale for the Colby region through all of this week, says the National Weather Service. Lows in the 60s and highs at or above 90 can be expected each day. The weekend temperatures for Colby: highs, 98 on Sunday, 97 on Saturday and 91 on Friday; lows, 67 this morning, 64 Sunday morning and 59 Friday morning. There was no additional precipitation, leaving the month's total to date at 0.41 inches. The soil temperature at the 4-inch depth is averag-

ing 83 degrees. The records for June 25: 110 in 1971 (which is the highest June reading ever for Colby) and 44 in 1958. (The daily temperatures, precipitation and records are provided by the Northwest Kansas Research-Extension Center, Colby.)

Household collection Saturday

The Thomas County Household Hazardous Waste Committee is sponsoring a collection day Saturday, June 30, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. According to Sandy Swob, director

of the facility, this service is available to all residents of the county. Acceptable items, she said, include old paints, stains, varnish, thinners, cleaning products, swimming pool chemicals and batteries. "Used motor oil," she said, "should be taken to the county landfill for recycling." For information, call Swob at 462-4525.

No paper next Wednesday

The Free Press will not publish a newspaper next Wednesday, July 4, in observance of Independence Day.

'Big for a Day' deadline nears

Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Thomas County will sponsor *Big for a Day*, Saturday, June 30, at the Prairie Museum of Art and History. Activities will include bobbing for apples, sack race, 3-legged race, cow crafts, cow milking and feeding the animals. There will be a picnic meal at 5:30 with checkout from 6-6:30 p.m. This is an opportunity to 'test drive' the Big/Little friendship according to organizers. There are 17 boys and five girls waiting who need volunteers for the day. RSVP by June 26 to 465-9125.

