



COLBY FREE PRESS

Familiar voice calling action at rodeo here

By PATTY DECKER

Free Press Editor

There's a new voice behind the "mike." Richard Homm, familiar with a lot of folks here in Colby, is taking his turn calling the action at the PRCA rodeo, which continues tonight at the Thomas County Fairgrounds.



Richard Homm

Homm, who has been in and around rodeos for more than 30 years, recently earned the elite status of announcer with the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association.

What makes the position even better, he said, is that Colby's rodeo is his first contract as a professional announcer.

Homm was born and raised in Burlington, Colo., and his first exposure to rodeoing was when he was going to college in Sterling and Lamar, Colo., participating in steer wrestling and calf roping events.

Being a rodeo announcer was not something he had planned to ever pursue. In fact, Homm said, it happened by accident while serving on the Little Britches Rodeo committee in Burlington during the late 1970s.

"The announcer that was lined up for the event, canceled at the last minute and the committee needed to find somebody quick," he said. "I was asked if I would consider it and I said, 'heck, I'll try.'"

Homm said it was a bit nerve-racking that first time with two arenas having events going on simultaneously. Yet once he got into it, he said it was a lot of fun and he continued announcing the Little Britches event for the next five years.

Then about ten years ago, he said he moved to Colby and continued to expand on his announcing jobs. His voice has been heard announcing at a multitude of fairs and special events in Rawlins, Logan and Wichita counties, Park, Russell Springs and Fort Wallace Days Rodeo.

Homm said he has announced at the Little Britches National Rodeo contest in Colorado Springs, Colo., worked with the Kansas State Rodeo Association

and Kansas Professional Rodeo Association up until he received his approval as an official announcer with the PRCA in December of 2000.

His love for announcing has even extended to the Thomas County Fair parade for the past four years and he continues to announce at the high school rodeo held here, too.

One of the biggest accomplishments thus far, he said, was announcing the season-ending National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas, Nev. last December.

"It's the Superbowl of rodeos," he said, "and for 10 days I was on the radio for two and half hours each day — it was quite exciting."

Homm also said there is a lot to the rodeo and he would be glad to talk with anyone about what he does or the PRCA.

"Not many people really understand the sport and I would love to answer any questions to help," he said. There are more than 700 sanctioned PRCA rodeos each year that extend from New York and Maine to California and Texas with everything in between, he said.

"It's a great sport with a lot of people involved," he said. In addition to the cowboys and the animals, who are the obvious stars of the show, he said there are also announcers, like himself, stock contractors, rodeo secretaries, timers, pickup men, chute laborers, specialty-act personnel and producers.

During the summer months, Homm said, it's not unusual for more than 100 rodeos to be scheduled in a month with cowboys and the supporting cast moving constantly after shows. For example, he said, many of the cowboys that performed at the Thomas County Fair Monday night and tonight, had just finished up in Cheyenne, Wyo. on Sunday and after they finish here will go to Hill City, Burlington, Colo., Phillipsburg and Dodge City the remainder of the week.

"And that's just one small area of the country," he said. "These events are going on all over the United States."

The Thomas County Fair has been a special for him, though, because it was his first official contract with the PRCA as co-announcer at this year's rodeo.

"It's a great feeling for me to be announcing right here where I live," he said.

'The envelope, please ...'



PATTIE STEVENS/Colby Free Press

Crowning ceremonies for this year's queen and princess were held Monday night during the Thomas County PRCA Rodeo. **ABOVE:** Lisa Jones, left, daughter of Leland and Sally Jones of Colby, was crowned Thomas County Rodeo Princess and Stephanie Sanderson, right, daughter of Robert Sanderson, Hays, and LuAnn Sanderson, Lawrence, won the title of this year's Thomas County Rodeo Queen. Other participants in the competition vying for the title of princess included Jami Shaw, Selden, and Amy Anderson, Goodland, with Amber Staats of Menlo competing in the queen category. **RIGHT:** Keagan Strange of Colby was one of many young people to try his luck in the mutton busting competition on Monday night prior to the rodeo. Tonight the rodeo will continue at 8 p.m. at the Thomas County Fairgrounds.



Hard white wheat

Egypt's interest topic of Mingo meeting

By JAY KELLEY

Colby Free Press

Dick Prior, regional vice-president for U.S. Wheat Associates in the Cairo, Egypt office will be in Mingo on Friday from 12 noon-2 p.m. to discuss Egypt's strong interest in hard white wheat and how Kansas producers fit into a global market.

He will be speaking in the church basement and the public is invited to

attend. The visit is part of a two-day tour arranged by the Kansas Wheat commission.

Egypt is currently the largest importer of red wheat. Per capita wheat consumption in Egypt is among the highest in the world at 400 pounds, according to the wheat commission.

Prior has been in Egypt for 20 years and has first-hand knowledge of dryland wheat and livestock operations as

a farmer in Washington for eight years. Joe Martin, Kansas State University wheat breeder will also be at the meeting.

He has been with the wheat breeding program for more than 20 years and deals primarily with hard white wheat at the Hays research station.

The tour includes stops in Wright, Plains and Hugoton on Thursday and Garden City, Mingo and Dighton on

Friday. The Kansas Wheat Commission is funded by the wheat producers of the state. According to project coordinator Justin Gilpin, the commission has the duty, authority and powers "to conduct a campaign of grain commodity promotion and market development through research, education and information."

For more information, call Gilpin at 785-539-0255.

Teaching vacancies cause problems for many school districts

WICHITA (AP) — With a new school year starting in less than a month, school districts across the state are scrambling to find qualified teachers to fill vacancies.

The openings are especially critical in special education, math, science and foreign language. The problem has been building for years because of a decrease in the number of people studying to become teachers.

"It's bad — in fact, it's beyond bad," said Wichita Superintendent Winston Brooks. "Every indication in our district is that this isn't just talk anymore. It's happening."

Before the 2000-01 school year, Kansas school districts reported about 530 teacher vacancies, compared to 196 during the 1999-2000 school year. The state expects as many or more vacancies this fall. The state has about 34,500 teachers.

The Wichita School District has 120 vacancies for full-time teachers and only a handful of qualified applicants.

About half of the vacancies are in special education and, as of last week, no one had applied for any of those jobs. In response, the district says it will have to shuffle certified teachers, increase class sizes or hire full-time

substitutes to fill vacancies. And the schools also may not be able to offer certain courses.

The vacancies also are a financial drain because a district's special-education funding from the state is tied to the number of special-education teachers on its staff. For every special-education teaching vacancy that goes unfilled, Wichita will lose up to \$20,000 in state funding. Districts around Wichita, such as Derby and Andover, say they don't have vacancies, but it's taking longer and getting harder to fill spots.

"It was much tougher this year," said

Andy Koenigs, assistant superintendent for curriculum and personnel in Andover. His district is close to filling its last vacancy, but had to increase class sizes in high school Spanish because it couldn't find a Spanish teacher. "We go to career fairs, and this year was the first time there were more school districts than kids," he said.

The career fair at Fort Hays State University, for instance, used to draw more than 500 students looking for teaching jobs.

"This year they just dribbled in," Koenigs said. Most educators agree that salary and benefit packages are a

major hindrance to attracting teachers. Businesses are able to offer much better pay and benefits than most school districts. The average salary for professions requiring a bachelor's degree is almost \$48,000, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The average teacher salary in Kansas is \$33,021.

Dale Dennis, the state's deputy commissioner of education, said he recently heard from one Baker University graduate who took a job with Sprint Corp. in Kansas City, Kan.

The company offered a hefty starting salary, a \$4,000 signing bonus and benefits that included eye and dental

care. "It's hard to say no to that," Dennis said. "You really can't blame them."

Working conditions also frustrate teachers. "You've got a classroom with too many students with too many varying needs, with little or no parental support, with more paperwork demands, more time," said Peg Dunlap, director of instructional advocacy for the Kansas National Education Association.

"You've got all these additional burdens that people put on our schools to solve all sorts of societal problems. And all of that together causes folks to say, 'Why would I do that?'"

Briefly

Weather: Heat relief near

The temperature will drop into the 80s in the Colby area on Wednesday and Thursday, providing a little relief from the heat, says the National Weather Service forecast center. Thunderstorms are also included in the forecast. Lows will generally be in the lower 60s, with winds variable at 10-20 mph. Colby's high Monday was 99 and the overnight low this morning was 72, the warmest night of the month. There was no additional precipitation, leaving the month's total at 3.08 inches. The soil temperature at the four-inch depth is averaging 85 degrees. The records for July 31: 108 in 1935 and 44 in 1925. (The daily temperatures, precipitation and records are provided by the Northwest Kansas Research-Extension Center, Colby.)

Preschool plans open house

An open house enrollment is planned at Puddle Duck

Preschool, 520 W. 5th, from 4 to 7 p.m., Wednesday, Aug. 8. According to Amy Jennings, director, there are class openings for children in the 3- and 4-year-old age groups. For information or questions, call Jennings at 462-2603 or 462-8388.

Final enrollment next week

Sacred Heart School is having its final enrollment on Tuesday, Aug. 14, said Dave Evert, principal. Times for enrollment and the walk-through will be from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m. For information, call the school office at 462-2813.

Nine-Run-Run discounts continue

Now in its sixth year, the Thomas County Emergency Medical Services is again sponsoring its Nine-Run-Run beginning at 8 a.m. on Saturday, Aug. 4 in Colby. There are openings in all age groups for the 10K and 5K run, 2K

fun run and 2K walk. Registration costs are \$12 for walkers and \$15 for runners, said Kathy Wright, one of the organizers.

All proceeds go to benefit the local service. To register, stop by the facility at 1245 S. Franklin or call any EMS member.

Office closed this week

The Thomas County Extension Office is closed this week during the fair, so employees can help with the activities.

Childhood testing offered

Northwest Kansas Educational Service Center, Oakley is offering early childhood intervention testing, including eyesight, hearing and learning disability testing. All test are free. For more information or an appointment, call 785-672-3125.

Thomas County Fair 2001 Schedule of Events

- **Wednesday - August 1** — 8 a.m. 4-H Swine Show followed by Sheep Show
- 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Antique Tractor Show and Shine and Stationary Engine Display; Noon-5 p.m. Antique Tractor Pull Weigh-In
- **Farm Bureau Insurance Pedal Tractor Pull** 4 p.m. Registration; 5-6:45 p.m. Pull; 5:30 pm.
- **Free Barbecue**
- 7 p.m. Antique Tractor Show and Shine Awards
- 7-11:30 p.m. **Antique Tractor Pull**
- **Thursday - August 2** — 8:30 a.m. 4-H Dairy, Bucket Calf, Breeding Livestock Show
- 8:00 p.m. **Demolition Derby**

