



COLBY FREE PRESS

Search continues

Couple eludes authorities for a second day

By JAY KELLEY

Colby Free Press

A man and woman in a stolen pickup fled from a sheriff's deputy on I-70 Wednesday, starting a chase which ended when they drove off the highway, through a fence and into a corn field.

The pair then accosted a Colby teenager at knifepoint, stealing her car and prompting one of the most intensive manhunts the area has seen in years. The couple slipped through the net, however, apparently doubling back to near Hoxie, where they left the car stolen in Colby and took a red Jeep Cherokee.

The chase started on the ground and took to the air within minutes as officers from the Thomas County Sheriff, Colby Police and Kansas Highway Patrol were assisted by a private plane and a highway patrol plane out of Quinter in searching for the pair.

Officers from Logan and Sherman counties joined the search Wednesday, closing off U.S. 40 and I-70 within an hour after the chase began. Agents from the Kansas Bureau of Investigation responded from Hays, Liberal and Great Bend.

The fugitives apparently heading east and are probably still running, said Thomas County Sheriff Tom Jones.

"We've got a lot of people working on the case," said Jones, praising the quick response of other agencies in the case.

The couple, originally wanted for a gasoline skip in Grinnell, are also suspected of tying up a rural Thomas County teen-ager and stealing her black 1998 Ford Escort. Jones said the car was found near Hoxie early this morning, and the Hoxie Police Department had received a report of a stolen 1991 red Jeep Cherokee.

"It's pretty obvious it's the same two in the pickup," Jones said.

The sheriff said dispatchers received the gas skip report on Wednesday morning, describing the vehicle as a teal Mazda extended cab pickup. At 11:38 a.m., Deputy Ken Patton stopped a pickup matching the description on the westbound on-ramp at I-70 and K-25.

The driver denied involvement in the theft, but when Patton asked for identification, he drove away. When Patton pursued, the driver crossed the median, heading east before entering the south ditch and crashing through the barbed-wire fencing.

Jones said he arrived shortly after



The man wanted in a string of car thefts is described as about 5 foot, 6 inches tall, 135-150 pounds, with medium blond-brown hair. He has several tattoos around his neck, described as oriental writing.



The woman is described as small built, weighing about 120 pounds, with red hair and a noticeably freckled face.

that and saw the car traveling south through a plowed field.

"We couldn't get through (following the suspect) without damaging some cars," Jones said. Officers instead elected to try to cut the suspect off on the main roads by following the dust cloud.

After driving about half a mile, however, the suspect vehicle drove into a corn circle.

By this time, Colby police officers



Thomas County Sheriff's investigator C.D. Hopper began an initial search of a stolen Mazda pickup that was being driven by the two suspects in a gas skip in Grinnell when they were stopped by deputy Ken Patton near

and state troopers were starting to cord off the area. Officers drafted Mark Ostmeyer, manager of Shalz Airfield in Colby, who flew Colby officer Kevin Diercks over the area a little after noon.

About 1 p.m., Colby dispatch received a call from the teen-ager, who told dispatchers she had returned to her home in the area and discovered the pair in the house.

They threatened her with a knife, tied her up and stole her car. Officers arrived within a few minutes, Jones

said, and the search started for the Escort.

"She handled the situation very well," said Jones, who declined to release the girl's name. "She was very frightened, but she kept her head."

Jones said the girl was tied up for only a short time before getting free and calling police.

An aerial search of the area around the rural farmstead located the pickup and a document found inside the vehicle may lead police to the name of the woman. Jones said the Kansas Bureau

of Investigation had sent several agents to assist. Highway patrol officials also requested information about anyone checking into hospitals for a spider bite.

"The Colby police, KBI and highway patrol have been a lot of help," he said. Colby police and troopers were among the first to respond to Patton's original call for help and stayed to help secure the area well into the afternoon. Jones said a nationwide alert has

been put out for the couple, described as being in their mid-20s. The man is about 5 feet, 6 inches tall, 135-140 pounds, with medium length brown-blond hair. He has several tattoos around his neck, described as resembling oriental writing.

The woman has a small build, about 120 pounds, with long red hair and a noticeably freckled face.

Anyone seeing a couple matching this description should call 911 immediately, but Jones said they should not try to capture them or go near them.

JAY KELLEY/Colby Free Press

City's 2002 budget sees increases

By JAY KELLEY

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The Colby City Council finished what city manager Carolyn Armstrong called, "the most difficult budget I have worked with in 20 years," on Tuesday night, approving over \$10.5 million in expenses.

The 2002 budget is \$10,586,511, an increase of \$820,711.37 over 2001's approved budget of \$9,765,800.33.

In the hearing notice, published by the city in the *Free Press* on July 27, the 2001 figure of \$8,946,419 is an estimate of expenditures, not the approved budget, according to Armstrong.

"We can't spend everything we budget," she said. For example, the approved budget for 2000 was \$9,684,388.30, but expenditures were actually \$8,496,868.

The largest increases were in benefits and fuel costs. The electric utility saw an increase of \$751,965, with most of the increase due to the increase of fuel costs from \$3.44 per unit to \$5.25, the second large increase in as many years.

The sanitation department also saw an increase, from \$526,166 to \$616,740 in expectation of increased landfill costs.

Armstrong said the utilities were

supported by their customers, not city taxes. Many city departments were able to cut their overall budgets, including the library and recreation. In addition, the city council was able to take advantage of almost \$30,000 in savings from lowered interest with the pay-off of bonds.

Employee benefits were up, reflecting the increase in insurance costs, according to Armstrong.

Other city departments seeing an increase in spending were the special fire/police fund, special street fund, convention and tourism bureau and both municipal equipment fund and capital improvement reserve fund.

Natural gas relief may await settlement

TOPEKA (AP) — Thousands of Kansas residents seeking money from a legal settlement to help pay their gas bills may not have access to the funds for months or years, if ever, officials say.

State regulators ordered the distri-

bution of more than \$29 million as relief to poor Kansans, on top of \$8.6 million it already had approved for distribution.

But legal questions still surround the Kansas Corporation Commission's decision. The money represents a re-

fund from natural gas producers who passed property taxes on to customers in the 1970s and 1980s

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission ruled four years ago that the practice amounted to overcharging customers.

Little homestead on display



MAXINE NELSON/Colby Free Press

Pete Morrison of Colby puts a miniature car into the garage at the model farmstead on display at Fairview Estates Retirement Community. The farmstead was created by Wayne Joy of McCook, Neb., who is retired and built the farmstead as a pastime. Karen Hodson, administrator, invites everyone to stop by the facility and see the farmstead. Hanging above the farmstead is a needlepoint picture by Hugh Pursel, also a resident of the facility.

Briefly

Weather: More relief

Temperatures are expected to stay cooler for at least the next few days, according to weather forecasters in Goodland. Tonight will be mostly cloudy with lows 50-55 and light winds from the north. There is also a chance of thunderstorms through Friday night. Friday is calling for highs around 80 with southeast winds at 10 to 20 mph under mostly partly sunny skies. Friday night mostly clear with lows 55-60. (The daily temperatures, precipitation and records are provided by the Northwest Kansas Research-Extension Center, Colby.)

Relay for Life begins Friday

Anyone who wants to purchase luminaries for the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life on Friday, can call Bob Coleman at 462-2724. The relay is the cancer society's biggest fundraiser and luminaries are meant to honor loved ones who have lost their battle with cancer, he said. The relay starts at 7 p.m., at Dennen Field in Colby, with a victory lap for cancer survivors. The luminary service will be 9:30-10 p.m. with speaker Julie Brush, of Downs, relay coordinator for northwest Kansas. The relay will continue until 10 a.m. Saturday, with music, food and a demonstra-

tion by Colby Police officer Scott Sitton and his new K-9 partner, Capone.

Iguana found in area

Colby Animal Clinic has an iguana which has apparently lost its owner. The owner should stop by and identify and claim the iguana as soon as possible, or it may not survive, clinic officials said earlier today.

Retirement coffee planned

A retirement coffee is planned from 3 to 5 p.m., Tues-

day, Aug. 28, for Darrell Witzel, who is retiring from the City of Colby. The coffee is open to everyone. For information, call Colby City Hall, 462-4410.

Sidewalk sale continues until 8 p.m.

The Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce is holding a free watermelon feed as part of the Krazy Daze promotion from 4-8 p.m. today on Franklin Avenue. Local merchants will be conducting a sidewalk sale, also.

For more information, or to reserve booth space, call the chamber at 462-3401.

