



COLBY FREE PRESS

8 pages

Doing their part



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

Lily Thieler and Eldon Vancampen teamed up again this year to make Christmas a little brighter for children in town. Thieler said for the past five years she has made crocheted blankets for Vancampen's cradles, but this year decided to do small quilts. Vancampen has been making and donating cradles to the Christmas basket project since 1986. Kay

Weston, who is in charge of the Colby Kiwanis Club toy drive, said there are about 90 children needing toys this year. The cradles, quilts and other items in the annual Christmas basket project will be ready for distribution on Saturday. Volunteers are still being sought to help the Genesis Food Bank fill baskets on Wednesday.

County gives 'moral support' to foundation

By MAXINE NELSON
Colby Free Press

The Thomas County Community Foundation has raised \$130,000 and needs another \$170,000 by the end of 2001 to match a challenge grant, Cindy Black, a member of the foundation's board, told the Thomas County Commissioners at their Monday meeting. She said the \$300,000 will be invested and the interest used for operating expenses. Meeting this grant will make Thomas County eligible for future funding opportunities from the Kansas Health Foundation, she said.

Black, Becky Donelan, executive director of the foundation and Cathy Harrison, a board member, approached the commissioners to ask for whatever support they could give.

Black said she learned about the opportunity for the foundation while participating in the New Leadership Initiative Program. "We received \$100,000 to endow by participating in the Leadership Initiative program, and had nowhere to house it," she said.

She said the matching grant could be for \$50,000 to \$300,000 and they decided to go for the highest amount. They felt they would be selling Thomas County short if they didn't go for \$300,000. However, fund-raising has been difficult since the Sept. 11 tragedy. "It's a different world than when we made the commitment in January," Donelan said.

Black said what they need now is either donations or commitments or pledges to raise the additional \$170,000. She said the money can be paid in one year, two years or three years. They will accept any amount. After the \$300,000 is reached, any subsequent donations will be used however the donor specifies, she explained.

Black said New York City had a foundation in place to administer funds to rebuild, and Thomas County does not, but it would be useful to have in case of a disaster.

She said they have \$100,000 endowed to help build the foundation, but this does not apply to the challenge. Half of the interest on the \$100,000 is to be used for youth and half for leadership.

"If we reach our goal, we will receive an additional \$10,000 for health and well-being of children," Black said. "This is an all or nothing challenge grant. If we do not reach our goal, we will not receive the \$300,000 matching, but will continue on with the funds we did raise to run this foundation," she said. Commission chair Ron Evans told her the county has no money to give, but "you have our moral support."

In other business:
• The commissioners approved amending the budget of the Road and Bridge Department in the amount of \$15,000. Chris Bieker, road and bridge

superintendent, said the landfill had paid him for the loader. The money, however, was not in the budget and he could not spend it unless the budget was amended, which it was. The payments will continue for five years.

• Undersheriff Mike Baughn said the sheriff's department, in conjunction with the State Highway Patrol, will be conducting spot checks in the near future to enforce Thomas County Resolution 6, which deals with overweight trucks not having a destination or origin within the county.

He brought a request to spend \$1,030, plus \$272.58 for ammunition to shoot at the range. The money is in the budget, but he wanted the commissioners to be informed. He said only law enforcement officers practice at the range, which is located at the landfill.

Baughn brought a request for three new lavatory faucets and one kitchen sink faucet for the law enforcement center. The old ones are original equipment and worn out. They are for the two public restrooms, and the restroom and kitchen for officers. The commissioners voted to purchase them from CK Lumber for \$400 total.

Baughn told the commissioners he needs to replace a combination lavatory/stool unit in the jail. The one being replaced is original equipment, and worn out. Larry Heier Plumbing wants \$3,300 to replace it with a new stainless steel unit. He said he called another plumber for prices, but they never called back.

He wanted to encumber the money from this year's budget and pay for it next year. The commissioners approved.

• The Thomas County Highway Department gave the following November Work Report: 7,062 cubic yards of mix sand were produced and stockpiled at Fulwider Pit, the conveyor belts were repaired and the harp wire cleaned. Frontage Road, Country Club Drive, County Road 415 (west of Colby), County Road 407 (south of Levant), and old highway 24 were hand patched; 900 yards of gravel were hauled and scattered on 17 miles of County Road 412 east and west (in the south part of the county), County Road 465 south of Rexford, and County Road 388 (south of Colby).

Other work included finishing cutting trees and hauling concrete on Country Club Drive for the viaduct detour; hauled concrete at the landfill; repaired a field entrance on County Road 407 south of Levant; replaced the driveway in front of the truck bays; bladed sand from shoulders of asphalt roads; and cut weeds at guardrails.

They also moved equipment to the fairgrounds for winter storage; removed tires from ditches; inspected vehicles and equipment; and bladed roads.

School districts squeezed by insurance costs

TOPEKA (AP) — In Wathena, a teacher, bus driver or custodian who wants to join the local school district's health insurance plan pays \$684 a month for family coverage, on top of the \$200 the district contributes.

The monthly premiums could have been another \$200 higher, but the district agreed to require its employees to pay more out of their own pockets for medical care and prescriptions.

And, even with more restricted coverage, Superintendent Kay Schultz doesn't expect the rates to last.

She and some other superintendents across the state, particularly small districts like hers, feel squeezed by the high cost of health insurance coverage. They argue they can't afford to provide good coverage at a reasonable cost to their workers, making it more difficult to recruit and retain teachers and other personnel.

Several superintendents took their

concerns Monday to the Legislative Educational Planning Committee.

"I'm sure by the end of the school year, we will be shopping for new coverage," Schultz said. "We are very soon coming to the point where we have no options."

With health care costs rising, insurance coverage has become a bigger issue in some districts.

The State Board of Education included a proposal to address health insurance in its plan to increase the annual spending on public schools by \$1.16 billion, or nearly 50 percent. Nearly \$117 million of the annual increase would go to employee health insurance plans.

"I have some people driving buses who are using virtually their entire salaries, frankly, to buy health insurance," said Goddard Superintendent Charles Edmonds.

Many districts facing problems are

small. Wathena has 425 students and three dozen employees in its health plan. With such a small group, Schultz said, a major illness for one employee makes insurance too expensive for the others. Officials told the committee that the problem is made worse because healthy employees often opt out of the school district's plan, to find more affordable insurance through a spouse or in the open market.

Fred Meier, business manager for the Independence school district, said the state needs to create a health insurance plan for school districts, so that risk is spread over a large group of people.

The state does allow districts to join the plan for state employees, but a district must pay the same costs for 70 percent of its employees. The state picks up 95 percent of the premiums for individuals and 35 percent for each dependent. Those conditions make the

state plan even more expensive for some districts. For example, the Oxford district in south-central Kansas, would have to spend between \$150,000 and \$175,000 to join the state plan, Superintendent Gary Mavity said. Sen. Christine Downey, D-Newton, said: "We've got to have some solutions to fix this problem."

But Kyle Wendt, state health benefits administrator, said the conditions for school districts to join were imposed by the state Health Care Commission to avoid increasing costs for state employees.

Members of the committee noted that they didn't want those costs to increase when they agreed several years ago that school districts would be allowed to join the state plan.

"We must operate this as an insurance company would," Wendt said. "It makes sense from a plan management point of view."

Precinct committee wants O'Connor to resign

LENEXA (AP) — A local Republican committee wants state Sen. Kay O'Connor of Olathe to resign because of her remarks about women's suffrage. At a meeting Monday night, with O'Connor in attendance and saying she's in favor of women having the vote, the Lenexa Republican Central Committee voted 17-11 to call for her

resignation. Committee member Steve Cloud, a member of the state GOP executive committee and a former state legislator, said it was important for Lenexa Republicans to make their stance known.

"I, for one, have some very real concerns about the effect on the Republican party by Senator O'Connor's com-

ments," said Cloud. But another precinct committee member, Becky Floyd, disagreed, saying, "I'm ashamed of our city. This is a ridiculous thing."

O'Connor accused her political opponents of trying to manufacture controversy to harm her.

"I think the 17 led by Steve Cloud

have demonstrated their intolerance for freedom of thought," said O'Connor, whose 9th District Senate seat covers a large chunk of northern and western Johnson County, including most Lenexa precincts.

O'Connor has denied making the comments and said she supports women's voting rights.

Surrender deadline issued to terrorist network; some are ready to give up

TORABORA, Afghanistan (AP) — Afghan tribal fighters, backed by devastating U.S. airstrikes and nighttime raids by American special forces, overran al-Qaida's Tora Bora cave hideouts on Tuesday and set a deadline for the surrender of fleeing members of Osama bin Laden's terrorist network.

In radio contacts, some of the foreign fighters said they were ready to give

up. Mohammed Zaman, defense chief for the tribal eastern alliance, declared a cease-fire and demanded that the al-Qaida force walk out of the Tora Bora and Milawa valleys in eastern Afghanistan by 8 a.m. Wednesday or face a new attack. He said they must submit to international prosecution.

Although al-Qaida has all but collapsed, bin Laden's whereabouts re-

mained unclear. Another tribal commander claimed local intelligence officers spotted the Saudi-born dissident with al-Qaida troops in the area Monday, but no independent verification was possible. U.S. Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz said the best indications point to the area, although admitted the reports are "not very reliable." The U.S. government accuses

bin Laden of masterminding the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in the United States and has posted a \$25 million reward for him.

Zaman agreed to the truce during a two-way radio conversation with Arab al-Qaida forces who pleaded for a pause. The al-Qaida fighters came under heavy shelling as they tried to descend the mountain and flee into neigh-

boring Pakistan, just one hill away.

However, it was far from certain whether all al-Qaida forces around Tora Bora would take part in any truce or were willing to commit to a total surrender. In the past, forces loyal to bin Laden have vowed to fight to the death. The radio discussions were monitored by an Associated Press reporter who was on the front line near

Zaman's position.

The contact came after Hazrat Ali, a senior commander with the tribal eastern alliance, said his forces had taken one of two peaks on Enzeri Zur mountain. Hundreds of al-Qaida fighters had made a stand there after being flushed from their cave shelters overnight by massive U.S. bombing and raids by U.S. troops.

Briefly

Weather: White stuff likely

The ground just may be covered with some white stuff come morning, if the National Weather Service forecast holds out. Tonight, cloudy, cold, lows 15-20, southwest winds 15-20 mph, turning to the northwest late, and a 50 percent chance for snow. Wednesday, cloudy, cold, highs only in the mid-30s, strong northwest winds 15-25 mph, and a 40 percent chance for snow into late morning. Wednesday night, cloudy early, then becoming partly cloudy and cold with lows right around 15 degrees. Thursday and Friday, cloudy, highs Thursday near 40, and lows Friday in the 20s and highs in the lower 40s. Colby's high Monday was 45 and the overnight lows this morning was 23.

Precipitation for the month is still a no-show. The soil temperature at the four-inch depth is averaging 34 degrees. The records for Dec. 11: 79 in 1939 and -15 in 1932. (The daily temperatures, precipitation and records are provided by the Northwest Kansas Research-Extension Center, Colby.)

Santa letters wanted

The Colby Free Press has a special mail box for kids to send their letters to Santa. It is located in the front office and letters placed in the box may also find their way into print in the paper. Moms and Dads are encouraged to have their kids write Santa and to bring their letters to the office. Santa is waiting to hear from Thomas County's youngsters.

'All you can eat' event set

The Gem Lions Club is sponsoring 'all you can eat' sausage and eggs, and pie from 11 a.m.-7 p.m. on Wednesday at the Gem Community Building. A free will donation will be accepted. Net proceeds will go to community betterment, sight conservation and education. The club also recycles used eyeglasses and hearing aids. Everyone is welcome.

Genesis soliciting assistance

The Genesis Thomas County Food Bank board will be working to get ready for baskets on Wednesday at 4 p.m. at the Jaycee building. On Friday at 6 p.m. they will fill baskets and will need help from any interested person. Baskets will be available on Saturday.

Recycling center takes phone books

The Thomas County Recycling Center is taking old telephone books in the magazine bin at its collection site, 720 E. College Dr. in Colby. In addition, the center will also take Christmas wrapping paper in chipboard bins.

Special concert scheduled

Tom Laskey, a contemporary Christian singer/songwriter will present a special Christmas concert at 7 p.m. on Wednesday at Trinity Lutheran Church in Colby. There is no charge for admission. A free-will offering will be gathered. Laskey is from Divide, Colo., and has released a solo, and three recording projects.

