



COLBY FREE PRESS

8 pages

Christmas business overall is 'pretty good'

By JAY KELLEY

Colby Free Press

Reactions to Christmas sales by Colby businesses ranged from average to "very happy" as the last weekend before the holiday looms.

Phyllis Janousek said Amy's Fashions had a 54 percent increase over last year. She attributed the increase to more people shopping at home.

"We have a lot of local people coming to check out our store this year," she said. Janousek also said gift certificate sales were good this year.

Sales at the Sports Shoppe are also good this year. Manager Tess Smith said the hot items were college apparel, especially Nebraska items. "We are selling a couple of gift certificates a day," she added.

Bill Keck said True Value sales were about the same as last season.

"Most items are in the \$20-25 range," he said, adding that gift certificates weren't too popular among customers, but that credit card sales were up.

CK Lumber also doesn't have any items everyone has to have, but sales are "pretty good" this season, according to Gary Jackson. The store also offers gift certificates, which Jackson said were selling at about "1-2 a day."

Steve Wolf at Great Western Tire said sales had been about the same as in previous years.

"Appliances are pretty good," he said, but Wolf said they hadn't sold any gift certificates.

Sales have been "fair" at Stan's Automotive this year. Verda Wancura said most of the sales have been tools for handymen in the family and "stuff for the kids" like automotive dress-up items.

The new Sears outlet doesn't have a history to look back on, but manager Allen Nichols said sales are exceeding their expectations.

"High definition televisions are a big item," he said, but added that sales of some items have gone up after infomercials. Also popular are gift certificates, with the store selling 4-5 daily.

Mark Beringer, of Beringer Hardware said sales of high definition digital big screen televisions were phenomenal. Another big seller was surround sound systems.

"We had our open house the second weekend of December," he said, "and we haven't been able to keep up."

Golden Hardware manager Brian Gustin said he was "very satisfied" with sales this year.

"We're a lot happier than we were last Christmas," he said. Tools were the big sellers. Gift certificates are available, but Gustin said they didn't sell a lot.

T.O. Haas is selling a lot of tires and oil changes, said Jim Wallin. "I think a lot of people are getting ready to travel," he added. He said gift certificate sales were steady, also.

Eugene Wieland, from Office Works, said sales were "wonderful."

"We're selling a lot of bedroom sets," he said. Wieland said many of the customers were buying big ticket items as 'Christmas presents to themselves.' Although they do offer gift certificates, Wieland said sales were slow.

Local implement dealers also have a good year on Christmas items for the most part.

Bill Biel from Colby Implement said he thinks people have discovered they can buy toys and collectibles and like the prices.

"I'd say sales are up," he said, adding that many of the collectibles are a good value.

John Dougherty said toy tractors "like dad's or grandpa's" were always popular at Dougherty Implement and sales were "about the same" every year on those items.

Colby Ag Center deals in motorcycles and related items along with toys and collectibles. Larry Ummel said sales on the larger items were slow, but toys were "about on pace."

"We also have a lot of helmets and motorcycle gear," he said.

Someplace Special is also having a very good year, said Jackie Wiens. "Every week is different with us," she said, adding that sales from decorations to gifts had been up and they were busy right now with flowers.

Colby Photo has also been busy. Although they don't have a lot of retail sales, Ardath Beringer said processing of photos was way up from previous years.

Report card pleases Colby mayor

By PATTY DECKER

Free Press Editor

Colby Mayor Warren Hixson congratulated everyone involved for their part in improving the county's health and safety during a special meeting held Tuesday at Colby Community College.

The celebration was prompted following news from the Kansas Action for Children organization noting that Thomas County had made considerable strides to ensure the well-being of its children, Hixson said.

The special event was hosted by the Community Awareness Team and Regional Prevention Center with representatives from various groups discussing their role in the overall improvement.

The report card included five areas based on data categorized into 17 benchmarks that are regarded as sound indicators of child health and well-being, Janet Worthy of the Prevention Center said.

Those included safety and security, which is based on violent crime, child abuse, neglect, and childhood poverty; health based on early prenatal care, low birth weight, infant mortality and immunizations; education to mean high school completion, achievement scores and school readiness; teen years, which relates to teen birth rate, substance abuse and teen violent deaths; and child care to include quality, affordability, capacity, along with resource and referral.

Worthy recognized this year's theme, "It doesn't take a rocket scientist to respond to our children's needs — it just takes you," posed a question to the group.

"What is it that children need from adults to grow up healthy and safe?," she said.

According to surveys, Worthy said children responded by saying they



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

Taylor Miller (left), Travis Siebert and Becky Shuman, all Colby High School students, looked over information on the Kansas children's report card provided at a special meeting on Tuesday at Colby College.

needed adults to spend time and listen to them, provide guidance and discipline, set boundaries and support appropriate risk-taking.

"Another outcome from the report card," Worthy said, "was that children say they want unconditional love, acceptance and respect."

Another presenter, Kathy Ryan, Thomas County health nurse, said she would like to see improvements in the county's teen birth rate, which although better than the national and state averages, shows a worsening trend for the county. On the positive side, Ryan has documented excellent immunization rates for children under two.

Among the many presenters at the meeting, eight young people provided a glimpse of the work they do to make the county a better place.

Kelsey Strickler, a junior at Colby High, said she commends the high school for its support of youth activi-

ties that were developed by the awareness team and Students Against Destructive Decisions.

"We've been able to carry out so many activities and accomplish so many projects because our school has been so supportive of our work," Strickler said.

"Maybe not all our plans work out perfect — we know that young people still drink and that some still do drugs, but we feel like we're making a difference — especially for the students who are part of our group," she said.

Last year's overall grade was a B+, Worthy said, and this year the county scored an A-.

"The report card provides important information for the county," Evans said. Additionally, she said the state's Action for Children is an independent, nonpartisan, citizen-based group that does not enter into contracts with or receive funding from government agencies.



MAXINE NELSON/Colby Free Press

Mason and Merle Wolf speculate about what is in a Christmas present. Between them, they have 140 years of memories, some of which they share with Free Press readers today.

Colby couple looks back on childhood Christmases

By MAXINE NELSON

Colby Free Press

With Christmas 2001 just a matter of days away, a Colby couple sat down to recall what Christmas was like when they were kids.

Practically every gift today is store-purchased. When Merle and Mason Wolf were growing up, that wasn't the case. Homemade items were pretty much the norm.

Merle grew up on a farm in Rawlins County. "I was born during the '30s so we didn't have a lot of boughten things," she said. "My parents made everything. I got, like dolls, doll dresses, and doll beds, whatever they could make."

She said it was the same for her brothers, and that her parents even made a little wagon for her youngest brother one Christmas. "In our stockings, we had an apple, an orange, a little bit of candy and a few peanuts," she said.

"There was a timber claim not too far from my parents' house and we went over there and either cut a Christmas tree or cut a limb off a tree and used it as a Christmas tree," she said.

She recalled that one year they were unable to get over there, so they just used a limb. "We put cotton on

it, and added candles. We lit them on Christmas eve, and always had a couple of buckets of water sitting nearby. I never remember having a fire," she said.

She said they had mostly homemade decorations, such as stars and chains made out of colored paper or brown paper sacks.

"We did have ice skates — my dad bought them at an auction — and my younger brother and I skated a lot," she said. She recalled being 16 when she got her first bicycle.

"My grandparents usually had a family dinner for Christmas," she said. "They lived about a mile from us." Merle mentioned having a tablecloth that her grandmother made for her parents one year, "and that was a big thing." She said she uses it once in a while, although "it has holes, but they are love holes."

Merle recalled going to Atwood to see Santa Claus. She said her dad drove Santa Claus in a specially constructed sled.

"The sled has been taken out of storage and used in Atwood the last couple of years. It has wheels so it will go without snow, and also has a circle coming up in front so it looks like Santa's sleigh," she said.

Mason's father was a hardware mer-

chant in Almena. His gifts and decorations mostly came from the store, although some were homemade, too.

"We usually went to my grandmother for Christmas breakfast," he said. "Every plate would be turned over because Granddad would put a silver dollar under every plate. That was back in the hard years. I don't know where he got the silver dollars," he said.

They opened their gifts on Christmas morning, he recalled.

"We had a Christmas tree at home. It was usually a cut tree, bought from the store. We brought the lights, and silver tinsel as I remember, from the hardware store," he said.

Mason said he remembers one Christmas when he and his brother wanted a football.

"We got up real early Christmas day and under the tree was a football. It was the sorriest looking football you ever saw. Then dad came in, laughing; he had a nice one for us."

Wolf attended school in Almena, and recalled one Christmas program when he played Santa Claus. "I had a pillow stuffed in my pants and the string broke. I had quite a time holding that pillow in during the program."

Census shows rural areas the poorest

TOPEKA (AP) — Throughout the 1990s, the Kansas counties with the highest percentage of poor people were in rural areas, Census figures released Wednesday show.

The percentage of Kansas residents below the poverty level was 10.5 percent in 1998, less than the national average, which was 12.7 percent. But the 12 counties in the southeast corner of the state had percentages above the national average.

Although the new numbers are

nearly four years old, the Census Bureau says they provide the most comprehensive look at poverty and income on the county level. But experts say it's unclear how the recently rocky economy and the Sept. 11 attacks will affect gains made during the previous decade.

Analysis of the data by The Associated Press focused solely upon middle estimates of poverty and income provided by the Census Bureau. Because those estimates are built from survey

data and statistical models, large margins of error may affect comparisons between different areas or comparisons of a single area's numbers over time. The Kansas county with the greatest percentage of poor residents was Chautauqua, where 19.8 percent of the 4,300 people lived below the poverty level. Next was Elk County with 19.1 percent of its 3,200 residents below the poverty level, then Bourbon County with 17.9 percent of its 15,370 residents.

Briefly

Weather: White Christmas?

Chances for a White Christmas for the Colby region aren't all that good, if the forecast holds out. Here's how the National Weather Service sees things. Tonight, partly cloudy, lows near 30 and south winds 10-20 mph. Friday, partly sunny, highs 60-65, strong winds 20-30 mph out of the southwest, and a 20 percent chance for thunderstorms — yes, thunderstorms. Friday night, cloudy, lows in the mid-20s, a 50 percent chance for some snow, and breezy. Saturday, cloudy, highs near 30 and a 40 percent for some snow. Saturday night and Sunday, partly cloudy, cold, lows +5 to +10 and highs in the middle to upper 20s. Sunday night and Monday, partly cloudy, lows around +10 and highs in

the middle 30s. Christmas Day, partly sunny, highs in the middle 40s. Colby's high Wednesday was 53 and the overnight low this morning was 13. The soil temperature at the 4-inch depth is averaging 33 degrees. Precipitation remains at 0.07 inches for the month. The records for Dec. 20: 73 in 1894 and -13 in 1924. (The daily temperatures, precipitation and records are provided by the Northwest Kansas Research-Extension Center, Colby.)

Commodities distribution set

USDA Commodities will be distributed to all eligible recipients from 10 a.m. until noon on Wednesday, Jan. 2, at the RSVP Office in the Senior Progress Center, Colby. Con-

tact the office at 462-6744 if you have questions.

School dismisses early Friday

Colby Public Schools will dismiss at 1:30 p.m., Friday for the holiday break. Busses will run accordingly with school resuming on Wednesday, Jan. 2, 2002.

Landfill closings announced

The Thomas County landfill will be closed Monday and Tuesday, Dec. 24 and 25, for the Christmas holiday. Landfill information number is 462-8139. The landfill will be closed Tuesday, Jan. 1, for the New Year's Day holiday, said Larry Jumper, landfill supervisor.

Courthouse to shut down

The Thomas County Courthouse will be closed Monday and Tuesday, Dec. 24 and 25, for the Christmas holiday, and Tuesday, Jan. 1, for the New Year's Day holiday, said Tracey Perkins, Thomas County Clerk.

Most places will close down

Chances are that business places you would generally frequent on any given Tuesday of any given week, won't be open come next Tuesday — Christmas Day.

And joining the closures will be your Colby Free Press. But we and they will be back on a regular basis on Wednesday, Dec. 26.

