



COLBY FREE PRESS

It's in the millions City and county officials explain use of drug money

By JAY KELLEY

Colby Free Press

Colby and Thomas County have received a dubious windfall in recent years with the seizure of literally millions of dollars in drug money.

The most famous stop occurred on Jan. 15, 2000, when Colby Police Officer Scott Sitton stopped a car for making an illegal U-turn on the east-bound on-ramp to I-70 and Range Avenue and netted \$3.7 million in drug money.

After a brief conversation with the driver, Sitton obtained permission to search the car and found a suspicious duffel bag, the contents of which "felt like bricks" used to package drugs.

Sitton asked the driver and passenger to exit the car. As Sitton approached the passenger, 43-year-old Robert Golding, Golding turned and made a rapid motion toward his waist. Sitton pushed him against the car and was trying to gain control when he heard a shot and Golding went limp after shooting himself to death with his own gun.

The bag contained cash, which was distributed after an agreement was reached with all involved law enforcement agencies.

The Colby Police Department's share was just over \$2 million, while the Thomas County Sheriff got 10 percent, or \$370,000 and the Thomas County Attorney's office got 5 percent, or \$185,000.

That's not all the money, however. Sheriff Tom Jones said he has one part-time deputy, whose job is interdiction.

"He worked 151 days last year," Jones said. "During that time, he worked 29 drug related cases, arrested 36 people, received three National Crime Information Computer hits on wanted fugitives and recovered seven vehicles." The deputy also seized seven vehicles, 1,201 pounds of marijuana, 21 pounds of cocaine and \$523,018. Other deputies also made seizures totaling \$29,575 last year.

Jones said the Sheriff's office has a total of \$812,239.54 under its control, but they can't use it for just anything.

"First, we have \$245,000 in a pending forfeiture account," he said. Jones explained that the procedure for confiscating cash includes the county attorney filing a notice to seek forfeiture

and sending the notice to interested parties via registered mail with 30 days to reply.

"The clock doesn't start ticking until we get the green card back," he said. The money is put in a bank account until the 30 days expires, then the district judge makes the decision on forfeiture. Jones said there are rules for the use of the money. It may be used for unbudgeted law enforcement items.

"We've bought some cars, guns and other equipment," he said. The money can also be used for prevention and community services projects.

"We've donated to the boy and girl scouts, as well as Big Brothers/Big Sisters," said Jones. "If a program will keep kids off the streets and help them learn values, it's worthwhile."

Jones doesn't make the decisions himself anymore. "In the early days, I was giving a few dollars away, now it's thousands," he said, adding, "there is a committee, which was actually my wife's idea," he said.

The committee is Bob Luck, Tracey King, Jeannie Sheen, Paul Bange and Roger Hale. Jones said he tried to get a cross-section of the county involved and it has worked pretty well.

"We helped Golden Plains buy some new speakers and a sound system for their football field," he said.

Jones added that since Jan. 1, deputies had seized another \$210,000.

Colby Police Chief Randy Jones has a similar problem, with more than \$2 million, but the city took a little different tack. "We decided to use the interest on the money," Jones said. The city's committee, Jones, Mayor Warren Hixson, City Manager Carolyn Armstrong and councilman Eugene Wieland, was able to give \$150,000 to the Thomas County Community Foundation this year. Jones said the committee is changing the way they operate, too. They are working with the community foundation to find good projects. "We bought computers for ADAC and gave money to Big Brothers/Big Sisters and the recreation commission," Jones said.

Jones added that interest rates had a lot to do with how much the committee was able to do. With interest rates falling, he doesn't expect to have as much money as last year.



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

More than 350 people attended the annual Pheasants Forever banquet held at the Comfort Inn Convention Center in Colby on Friday night.

Pheasants Forever banquet attracts hundreds

By PATTY DECKER

Free Press Editor

Hundreds of items, hundreds of people and thousands of dollars were raised this year at the annual Kansas Pioneer Chapter of Pheasants Forever banquet in Colby on Friday night at the Comfort Inn Convention Center. While the exact amount of money raised was not yet available, officials said they were pleased with the turnout of more than 350 people.

"The return from the auction was down a little bit, but we felt that with the wonderful donations the business people and individuals contributed to it that our profit available, after paying bills, will be in the same ballpark as last year," said Mike Grover, secretary/treasurer. Each year the annual event supports the efforts of the group with funding to preserve the future of pheasant and wildlife habitat development and maintenance, he said. "It's our primary source of membership and revenue for programs," he said, "and we appreciate all those who help make this happen."

In addition to the auction items donated by various businesses and individuals around the area, young people also had an opportunity to win prizes in the special raffle.

This year's winner of a lifetime membership in the organization went to Breck Arnberger, son of Blake and Kathy Arnberger of Colby. The membership is valued at \$300 and was donated by Office Works and the local Pheasants Forever Chapter.

Businesses that donated \$250 in cash or merchandise this year were Hajoca, Buffalo Creek, C K Lumber, Colby Implement, JD Baker Seeds, Pioneer Hybrids, Peoples State Bank, Service Oil, Hi Plains Co-op, Colby Canvas, Van's Body and Frame, Colby Lumber, Beaver Creek Gamebirds, Beaver Creek Outfitters, C&M Gun and Pawn, Golden Hardware, Spring Creek Castings, Hoxie Feedyard, Southwind Plaza and Cal Williams.

Among the many auction items this year, some included sculptures, weathervane, clocks, gun case, binoculars, artwork, quilts and many articles of clothing and hunting equipment.



The banquet has become quite a family affair with many children involved in the activities. Pictured (left to right) are Doug Muderloh, Sam Muderloh and R.J. Ladenburger watching and listening as Steve Bugbee, auctioneer (not pictured) kept the auction moving.

Routine traffic stop near Colby on Interstate 70 is not so routine

By PATTY DECKER

Free Press Editor

A 41-year-old man from Arizona was taken into custody Saturday night after setting fire to a rental car and running away from a Kansas Highway patrolman during what started out as a routine stop earlier that afternoon.

Ygnacio Zabalza of Superior, Ariz.

was first stopped at 1:16 p.m. on Interstate 70 at milepost marker 47 in the eastbound lane when a trooper noticed he was driving off the shoulder of the road, said a spokesperson at the Kansas Highway Patrol on Monday.

After stopping the car, according to the report, the trooper became suspicious and asked for a consent to search

the 2002 Mercury that Zabalza was driving.

The man gave his consent, officials said, and as the trooper proceeded to look in the trunk of the vehicle, Zabalza set the car on fire by lighting a newspaper that was laying on the passenger seat and then covering it up with a coat and the lighter. As the trooper tried to

extinguish the blaze, the man fled on foot south. In the search, 225 lbs. of marijuana was discovered.

For the next several hours law enforcement officials from the Colby Police Department, Thomas County Sheriff's office and highway patrol searched for the man, who had hid in the fields until dark and then worked

his way back to the rest area seven miles west of Colby.

Police got a break when a motorist at the rest area called in a suspicious-looking person, who was wearing a trash bag as a coat and acting odd, the Kansas Highway Patrol said.

Zabalza is currently in custody at the Thomas County jail with charges

pending of possession of marijuana with intent to sell, conspiracy to distribute and aggravated arson. More charges could follow to include eluding and fleeing, according to the booking report.

The highway patrol also wanted to thank the motorist who called in, saying that this type of help is appreciated.

Giggles and more promised as Harlem Nights test locals

Colby High School faculty and band parents will be in action tonight at the Colby Community Building when they face off with the Harlem Nights, who have a similar style to the Harlem Globetrotters, but with many of their own skits and comical methods of shooting a basketball.

The 'Nights' have been together for five years and say they have something for the entire family.

Proceeds from this fund-raising event, said Julie Groom, high school band instructor, will benefit the high

school's band program.

Local talent includes Kevin Cox as the coach with his team to include Doug Finley, Dewey Augustine, Donna Kulhanek, Don Balluch, Robb Ross, Mike Sprenkel, Steve Juenemann, Liz Gottsch, Bill Miller, Norm Behring, Randy Decker, Leslie Wagner, and Bill Weber.

The game begins at 7:30 p.m. and tickets are \$7 for adults, \$5 children.

The referees for tonight's game will be Colby Community College Trojan basketball players.

Tax increase possible if cutting school aid sought

By JOHN HANNA

Associated Press Writer

TOPEKA (AP)—Reluctance to cut education spending is pushing the Legislature toward raising taxes.

Two weeks ago, when the 2002 session convened, opposition to tax increases appeared all but insurmountable. When Gov. Bill Graves outlined his package of tax increases, his proposal for a 65-cent-a-pack rise in the cigarette tax elicited few audible gasps.

Republicans seemed ready to ram a budget plan through the Senate Ways and Means Committee drafted by Chairman Steve Morris and Senate President Dave Kerr. It avoids a tax increase by tapping into rainy day

funds and cutting spending.

But Kerr, R-Hutchinson, and Morris, R-Hugoton, now support a bill for increasing tobacco and alcohol taxes to raise \$87 million during the state's budget year that begins July 1. It's not the \$228 million Graves wants, but it shows more willingness to consider a tax increase than was evident two weeks ago.

And the Ways and Means Committee abandoned a key portion of the Kerr-Morris plan—an immediate cut in aid to public schools of \$39 per student, to \$3,831, to save the state \$23.7 million.

"As much as they'd like to say that tax increases are bad politics, cutting

critical programs that people have come to depend on is pretty bad politics as well," Graves said.

The state faces a \$426 million gap between expected revenues and spending commitments for fiscal 2003. Much of the problem stems from higher-than-expected costs for social services and 1999 laws requiring the state to set aside extra money for higher education and highway construction.

In any budget discussion, funding education is a big issue. Of the \$4.5 billion legislators appropriated for fiscal 2002, about half goes to public schools.

With the budget gap as large as it is, it would be difficult for legislators who

want to avoid a tax increase to avoid cutting aid to public schools.

Kerr and Morris gave public schools favored status in their budget plan.

Their proposed cut in state aid per pupil was just 1 percent, compared to 1.2 percent for higher education and 2 percent for most state agencies.

But school officials still weren't pleased.

Most saw last year's \$50-per-student increase as inadequate, and talk of a cut this year led superintendents to contemplate reductions in staffs and programs.

Even opponents of a tax increase concede the difficulties involved in cutting spending.

Briefly

Weather: Might snow

Snow appears in the Colby area forecast, although the chances are no better than 30 percent. Tonight, cloudy, lows 15-20 and east winds 10-15 mph. Tuesday, cloudy, highs only in the mid-20s and east winds up to 10 mph. Tuesday night, cloudy, a 30 percent chance for snow, lows around +10. Wednesday, cloudy, a 30 percent chance for snow and highs dropping into the upper teens. Thursday, partly cloudy, nighttime lows +5-10 and highs in the middle 20s. Colby's high Sunday was 62 and the overnight low this morning was very cold +6. Precipitation remains at 0.10

inches for the month. The soil temperature at the four-inch depth is averaging 35 degrees. The records for Jan. 28: 67 in 1986 and —14 in 1948. (*The daily temperatures, precipitation and records are provided by the Northwest Kansas Research-Extension Center, Colby.*)

Refund assistance planned Tuesday

Rosalie Seemann will be at the Meadowlark Manor from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Tuesday to assist with Food Sales and Homestead Refunds. She will also assist with the LEIAP applications, Low Energy Income Assistance Program.

Those needing assistance should bring all their necessary papers with them.

Dismissal procedures noted

With colder temperatures now occurring and snow possible, it could become necessary to dismiss school early or cancel it due to inclement weather, Colby Public School officials are reminding parents to listen for media announcements. In the case of early dismissals, said Kirk Nielsen, superintendent, every effort will be made to make radio and television stations in the area aware of the situa-

tion. "We will do our best to have the announcement made at least one hour prior to the scheduled dismissal time," he said. When school is canceled, a media announcement will run no later than 7 a.m. on radio and television networks.

Girl Scout cookies on sale

Girls Scouts have started taking orders for Girl Scout cookies and will continue through Feb. 1. Delivery dates are Feb. 19 to March 8. Money will be collected upon delivery. To order cookies, contact any Girl Scout, or Shannon Koon, cookie chairman, 462-6662.

