



# COLBY FREE PRESS

8 pages

## Crash on I-70 kills Gem man

By RACHEL MISCALL  
*The Goodland Daily News*

GOODLAND — A 26-year-old Gem man died Tuesday after the car he was driving rear ended a semi rig on I-70 about 13 miles east of Goodland in a dust storm that reduced driving visibility to almost zero.

A report from the Kansas Highway Patrol says Jeffery Hopper was headed east in a 1996 Chevrolet about 3:45 p.m., when his car hit the back of an eastbound 1998 Kenworth semi tractor trailer driven by Jay Johnson, a 40-year-old from Daytona Beach, Fla.

The report says the semi had slowed down because of blowing dust before the accident happened. Hopper was taken to the Goodland Regional Medical Center, where he died. Johnson was not injured and the report says he drove his truck to Colby.

Scott Mentzer, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service office in Goodland, said a thunderstorm that developed in north Sherman County and a cold front combined to produce high winds. He said up to 60 mph wind gusts were reported around 3:30 p.m. in Sherman and surrounding counties.

The winds kicked up dust, he said, because fields are dry from lack of rain and warm weather and many farmers have recently plowed their fields.

Dennis Roemer, a farmer from Gove County, witnessed the accident.

He said he was in Goodland to umpire a softball game between the Goodland Cowgirls and a team from Hays High School. Roemer said

Dick Liess, Goodland High School's athletic director, decided to cancel the game because of high winds.

"The wind was blowing pretty hard at the field," he said. "You couldn't see anything."

Roemer said as he drove east on I-70 in his Ford Ranger he noticed traffic was heavy and the wind was blowing hard. Because of the wind, he said, he was driving about 10 mph under the 70 mph speed limit.

He said he could see what looked like a wall of dirt a few miles in front of him. Roemer said he decided to follow a bright orange truck driving in front of him because he could see it. The highway patrol said the truck was owned by North American Van Lines in Fort Wayne, Ind.

He said he turned on his lights before heading into the dust cloud. The truck slowed down and moved over into the passing lane, he said, and he followed. Roemer said driving visibility was less than 1/8 of a mile and it was hard to see anything.

Out of the corner of his eye, he said, he could see a blue car coming up fast in the right-hand lane. As the car pulled over behind the orange truck, he said, it hit the rear driver's side.

"That car was going way too fast," he said. "I don't know why he didn't slow down."

Roemer said he swerved to miss the blue car, which had stopped in the right-hand lane. He said he pulled over and had to swerve again to miss a white van parked on the side of the freeway.

The orange truck stopped and the driver got out, Roemer said. He said there were four people at the scene and they tried to direct traffic around the accident.



RACHEL MISCALL/Goodland Daily News

Sherman County emergency personnel worked the scene of a fatal car crash Tuesday about 13 miles east of Goodland on I-70. The driver,

Jeffery Hopper, 26, of Gem later died at the Goodland Regional Medical Center.

While the report says Hopper died at the hospital, Roemer said a man who said he was a first responder checked the young man's pulse and said he was dead.

"He said, 'There's nothing we can do for him,'" he said.

Roemer said the car's motor was pushed into Hopper and the steering column was smashed against his chest. He said it looked like the air bag deployed, but may have been punctured by the steering column.

As law officers started arriving,

Roemer said Johnson asked him, "Where you the one driving behind me?" When he said "yes," he said Johnson told him to stick around to give his report to police.

With the wind blowing around dust, emergency medical volunteers worked frantically to free Hopper from the vehicle, that had a Kansas licence plate reading, "Nevrmore." They used a hydraulic cutter to cut off the doors and top of the car, smashing the windows in the process.

The front of Hopper's car was

smashed and a medical volunteer held his head while others took apart his car.

At the scene, Johnson said he was worried about the young man. He and others had dirt stuck between their teeth. Troy Smith, the highway patrol trooper who handled the accident, said officers worked to clean up the accident until about 9 p.m.

The first accident apparently caused a second accident, in which a driver was taken to the hospital in Goodland.

A highway patrol report says about 8:30 p.m. David Savage, 19, Diamond

Valley, Utah, was driving east on I-70 in a 1989 Jaguar when the lights from cars at the first accident startled him. Savage reportedly stopped abruptly and a 1998 Ford driven by Gerald Hatt, 48, New Baden, Ill., ran into the back of his car.

Savage's condition was not available today and the report says a passenger in Hatt's car, 17-year-old Matthen Hatt, refused to be taken to the hospital. There were three other passengers in Hatt's car who were uninjured.

## Regents air budget concerns during stop in Colby

By DARREL PATTILLO

*Colby Free Press*

Five members of the Kansas Board of Regents, the governing body for higher education in the state, were in Colby Tuesday for a press conference dealing with possible cuts to education being proposed by the Kansas Legislature. Despite the informal tone of the visit, the alarm felt by the board members was apparent.

"This is an all-out battle," said Lew Ferguson, board member from Topeka. "We are going to be fighting just to maintain what we have."

"Just to maintain our current level of services," Ferguson added, "we need an additional \$80 million."

"That's not including the \$45 million promised to community colleges to provide property tax relief on a local level. Those institutions are not going to get that money this year."

Colby Community College President Mikel Ary reported that the college has already taken steps to meet the projected deficit.

"Our Board of Trustees has approved a \$5 per hour tuition increase," said Ary

"In addition, all departments have been instructed to cut next year's bud-



DARREL PATTILLO/Colby Free Press

Some of the members of the Kansas Board of Regents were at a press conference in Colby Tuesday to talk about budget cuts and the effects it could have on the state's universities. Left to right are: Steve Clark of Wichita, Lew Ferguson of Topeka, Kim Wilcox, Topeka, and Floris Jean Hampton of Dodge City. Debbie Schwanke, director of public information for the college, was on hand as well.

get requests by 10 percent. The board may also be required to consider an increase in the mill levy.

Floris Jean Hampton, Regent from Dodge City, said clearly the state is retreating from its long-term commitment to higher education.

"Kansans have always valued edu-

cation over the years," said Hampton. "The long-term implications of this shortfall are frightening. Education is not an expense. Education is a great investment."

Regent Bill Docking, from Arkansas City, addressed the issue of increasing state taxes.

"When people are asked if they are in favor of increasing taxes, they will invariably say 'no.'

"However, if you ask those same people if they are willing to have less services and less educational opportunities, they also say 'no.' At the very least, the Legislature must maintain the current level of funding."

"They must hold education harmless as they complete the budgeting process," Docking said.

Ferguson summarized the situation. "Citizens need to contact their state legislators immediately. Ask them to hold higher education harmless when they return to Topeka."

"This is a survival issue," added board member Steve Clark of Wichita. "Legislators must consider the long-term implications of these proposed budget cuts."

Kansas higher education is built on quality instruction, quality programs and accessibility.

Current budget proposals put this foundation at risk. Kansans deserve better."

In addition to their stop in Colby, the regents were holding similar press conferences in Hutchinson, Dodge City, Hays, Salina and Topeka.

## Legislature, budget worry Kansans more than Stovall

WESTMORELAND (AP) — To some residents of northeast Kansas, Attorney General Carla Stovall's political future is old news. Tax increases and the Legislature are bigger issues, they say.

As she ended her campaign for the Republican nomination for governor on Monday, Stovall said most people would not be affected by her decision.

"Good luck to her with her new boyfriend," said Terry Newman, referring to Stovall's relationship with broadcast network owner and personality Larry Steckline. "If you can have a life outside politics, I say good for it. It doesn't affect me."

Newman, 42, receives disability benefits for a bad back and helps his brother occasionally at Newman's Grocery. The governor's race is important to him, he said, because he doesn't want anyone elected who would cut off his benefits.

"That's why it means something to me," he said. "What they do will directly affect me. I'm more worried about the Legislature right now."

Betty Hamilton, 54, said she doesn't have time to pay attention to the governor's race between her cashier's job at Newman's Grocery and her night classes toward a degree in wildlife management and conservation.

"I'll vote, but I haven't been able to keep up with things lately," she said. As he waited at the front of the store for his wife, Dwight Nelson, 68, a retired mill worker, said Stovall's decision wouldn't affect him at all. The couple leave Westmoreland for south Texas every winter.

"I'm not that familiar with them anyway," Nelson said of the political players. "Besides, I probably won't be around to vote in November." At Harrington's Liquor Store in Frankfort, 21 miles to the north, owner Charlie Harrington wanted to talk about the legislative session rather than Stovall and the governor's race.

"Her dropping out of the race isn't going to affect my life one way or the other," he said. "I think people are concerned about this Legislature."

## Briefly

### Rain or snow...or both

The National Weather Service isn't quite sure if it's going to rain or snow, or provide a mixture of both, in its Colby area forecast for the next few days. Here's how it stacks up at this time: Tonight, clear and breezy, lows near 50, south winds 15-25 mph with gusts to 35, becoming west late and decreasing to 5-10 mph; Thursday, sunny, highs 65-70, north west winds 10-15, becoming northeast early in the afternoon; Thursday night, cloudy, lows in the uppers 30s, slim chance for rain showers; Friday, cloudy, highs only in the upper 40s, 30 percent chance for moisture; and Friday night, cloudy, snow or rain in the evening, then scattered rain showers, or snow, or rain, late, lows in the lower 30s. Colby's high Tuesday was 86 (missed the record by 2 degrees), and the overnight low this morning was 29. Precipitation remains at 0.13 inches. The soil temperature at the 4-inch depth is averaging 65 degrees. The records for April 17: 88 in 1946 and 17 in 1907. (The temperatures and precipitation are provided by the Northwest Kansas Research-Extension Center, Colby.)

### Parent/student meeting Friday

Parents and students are invited to a short, informational

program from 4 to 6 p.m., Friday, in the Colby High School auditorium. The title of the program is "Talking With Your Parents/Children About Alcohol and Drugs." The event is being co-sponsored by the Colby School District's Safe and Drug Free Schools, Thomas County Alcohol and Drug Abuse Council and the Colby Parent-Teacher-Student Association. Organizers noted that this program is separate from the "Smackdown," which will be held from 7 to 9:30 p.m., Monday, April 22, and focuses on parent/youth communication. Both programs are; however, open to everyone.

### Colby graduate to appear on air

As part of her internship at the University of Kansas, Chanda Brown, the daughter of Mike and Jeanene Brown of Colby, will be anchoring part of the KSNK news broadcast at 5 and 6 p.m. on cable channel 9, Friday, April 19.

### Parking regulations revisited

With the warmer weather and as people begin turning their attention to recreational activities, the City of Colby is reminding its citizens that no truck, motor vehicle, camper, trailer, machinery or equipment can be parked on

any street or alley within the city in excess of 48 hours, officials said. The police department is authorized to remove and impound any of these types of vehicles that would be in violation of this regulation, said Carolyn Armstrong, city manager.

### Banquet, dance is tonight

The RSVP Recognition Banquet is tonight at the American Legion in Colby. The banquet is by reservation. However, the dance, from 7-9 p.m., is open to the public.

### Golden Plains plans enrollment

Golden Plains School will conduct kindergarten enrollment and screenings for next year's kindergarten students on Thursday, April 25, from 1 to 3 p.m. Parents of children who will be five years old on or before Sept. 1, 2002, should call the school at (785) 386-4560 for an appointment.

### School assembly topic announced

The Kansas Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom will be presenting a new school assembly, *Connecting Kansas Kids, Crops and Critters* at area schools Monday and Tuesday, April 22-23. It will be presented at 2 p.m.

Tuesday at the Colby Elementary School auditorium. Other presentations will be at 9 a.m. next Monday at St. Francis Grade School cafeteria, and at 2:30 p.m. at the Goodland Central Elementary gym. Everyone is welcome to attend, said Barbara Oplinger, administrator, and if there are questions contact her at 785-532-7946.

### Free physicals offered in May

Colby Medical and Surgical Center, 175 S. Range, is once again offering free physicals on Tuesday, May 14, for middle school and high school students in Thomas County. Physicals are needed if a student plans to participate in sporting activities during the 2002-03 school year and the surgical center provides this service as a way of giving back to the communities it serves. Colby Middle School students will need to arrive at the center by 5 p.m.; Colby High School students by 5:45 p.m.; and Brewster and Golden Plains students at 6:30 p.m. Students will be required to bring with them the Kansas High School Activities Association physical forms the day of the exam; however, the forms are not yet available at the schools, said Jeff Quenzer, activities director and assistant principal at Colby High School. More details will appear in future editions regarding physical exam requirements.

