



COLBY FREE PRESS

Retiring reporter recognized



MICHELLE L. HAWKINS/Colby Free Press

At today's meeting of the Thomas County Commissioners, Ron Evans presented a certificate of retirement to Maxine Nelson for her coverage of the commissioners while working for the Colby Free Press. Nelson has worked for the newspaper for 21 years and has covered the commissioners meeting for many of those years.

Wheat harvest office plans to open this week

By **PATTY DECKER***Free Press Editor*

A program that provides free employment and reporting services to farmers and harvest crews will be opening later this week in Colby, said Roger Hale, coordinator of the service.

The office will be located on the first floor in the southwest corner of the Colby Public Schools Administration Building, 210 S. Range., and will be one of 17 offices operating throughout the state.

"The Kansas Wheat Program is the only free employment service matching farmers and custom cutters in the nation," said Richard E. Beyer, secretary of the Kansas Department of Hu-

man Resources.

Each of the offices operate during the wheat harvest in their specific areas, he said.

For some in south central Kansas, the program was activated during the first few days of June.

Hale said he plans to open the office earlier this year in anticipation of the earlier than usual harvest.

He anticipates having the office open for business by Wednesday or Thursday.

The program has been operating for 37 years and is coordinated from Topeka, Hale said.

"We depend on local public and private sector partnerships to ensure the

service is cost effective to taxpayers," Beyer said. "A local business or government office supplies the space and utilities, while the state provides personnel and telephone service."

Other wheat harvest offices are located in Anthony, Caldwell, Kingman, Wellington, Bucklin, Coldwater, Dodge City, Greensburg, Kinsley, Garden City, Great Bend, Lyons, Pratt, Goodland, Oakley, and Oberlin.

In addition, state's human resources department has a workforce development center staff operating in Hays and Liberal.

For information on the wheat harvest program statewide, call Joyce Heiman in Topeka at 785-296-7435.

Lack of moisture is taking big toll on area wheat crop

By **PATTY DECKER***Free Press Editor*

Despite some recent rain, most of western Kansas continues to need additional moisture. And while wheat harvest has started in some areas, the crop across the state has been rated 32 percent fair, 19 percent good and 1 percent excellent, with the rest of the crop in the poor to very poor category, according to a report from the Kansas Department of Agriculture in Topeka.

During a recent wheat field day at Mike Brown's farm, five miles south of I-70 at the Levant exit, Dr. Roger Stockton, agronomist with the Colby K-State Research and Extension Center, said the test plots looked good for

the year, but are probably a disappointment for farmers based on average crops over the last few years.

"We've had three and a half inches of rain, which is four to five inches behind," Stockton said, "and as for the test plots, to me, there weren't any strong favorites among the different varieties."

The difference in yield, he said, will be in how each variety deals with the heat stress between now and harvest.

Some experts are even predicting that this will be the lowest acreage harvest since 1957 with expected yields averaging 35 bushels, down 2 bushels from what was forecast in May of 2001 and 9 percent below last year.

Stockton said that in Thomas, Sherman, Rawlins, Decatur, Sheridan and Cheyenne counties, he would estimate that 35 to 40 percent of the wheat fields have been destroyed and further east, the number decreases because of the amount of rainfall received.

Dennis Chandler, former Thomas County Extension agent, along with other producers and experts say they believe it will be an earlier than usual wheat harvest by two weeks in some cases. As for other crops in the state last week, sorghum planting was at 73 percent complete; soybeans at 71 percent complete; sunflower planting at 42 percent complete and the first cutting of alfalfa was 92 percent completed.

Forest ranger reporting blaze is charged in Colorado fire

FLORISSANT, Colo. (AP) — A U.S. Forest Service ranger credited with alerting authorities about a fire that has blackened nearly 103,000 acres and destroyed 22 homes was charged with starting the blaze by burning a letter from her estranged husband.

Federal prosecutors said forestry technician Terry Barton, 38, illegally started the fire June 8. If convicted she could be sentenced to 10 years in prison and ordered to pay \$250,000 in fines.

At the time the fire broke out, Barton was assigned to patrol the Pike National Forest in central Colorado to enforce a fire ban imposed because of a drought.

The Forest Service and Barton's friends and family expressed shock that someone they knew and trusted could have set the blaze.

"I'm shocked and with a lot of other people, in a state of disbelief," said Rick Cables, regional forester for the Rocky Mountain Region for the U.S. Forest Service.

Barton said she started burning the letter within a designated campfire ring, where fires normally would be allowed, then tried to put out the blaze.

"She attempted to suppress the fire but it grew," U.S. Attorney Bill Leone said.

Driven by roaring winds, the fire spread to within 10 miles of Denver's

far southwestern suburbs last week. Calmer, cooler weather and higher humidity helped crews dig lines around 47 percent of the blaze Sunday, but about 5,400 people remained out of their homes.

Barton lives in Florissant, about 60 miles southwest of Denver. The city was among the hardest hit by the blaze, and many homes were evacuated.

"We all wanted to believe it was some fool from somewhere else. You can understand that, we don't want to believe it. That it's one of ours makes it real sad," said Jody Penny, 45, who was evacuated from Florissant Heights on Tuesday and has been staying at an inn.

Barton initially told authorities she smelled smoke, discovered an illegal campfire and tried to put it out by throwing dirt on it. Investigators later determined she could not have smelled smoke from the position she reported and investigators confronted her with unspecified forensic evidence.

She was charged with setting fire to timber in the national forest, damaging federal property and making false statements to investigators, said Leone.

A court hearing was scheduled for Monday in federal court in Denver.

Barton has worked for the U.S. Forest Service for 18 years, first as a seasonal employee and then year-round.

She told reporters last week that she wouldn't rest until someone was arrested for starting the illegal campfire.

Although some who know Barton said they were stunned and disappointed, others voiced support.

"She was really liked by everybody, a swell person and hard worker for the Forest Service," said Joan Spigner, who runs a convenience store in Lake George, where Barton shops.

Neighbor Mike Vial told The Gazette of Colorado Springs that Barton is a dedicated firefighter and a good person.

"I think this was a bad situation, and she made a stupid mistake. I don't blame her for anything. It was a stress

thing," Vial said.

About 2,200 people were fighting the fire, which has cost \$6.7 million so far to fight.

Another blaze flared in southwest Colorado and had forced the evacuation of about 280 homes by Sunday night. The latest fire had burned more than 26,000 acres in the San Juan National Forest.

In addition to the evacuations, residents of 450 homes were told to be ready to leave. One cabin was destroyed, and fire managers were trying to determine whether others had burned. More than 900 firefighters battled the blaze, about 10 miles north of Durango.

Sebelius' delivers tough message

OVERLAND PARK (AP) — In their first gathering under the same roof, the state's four leading gubernatorial candidates debated education funding, legalized gambling and abortion.

Insurance Commissioner Kathleen Sebelius, also the top Democratic candidate for governor, told the 120th annual meeting of the Kansas Bar Association on Saturday that the state should stop talking about the need to better fund public schools and tackle the problem.

Sebelius, who has not said whether she would raise taxes to support schools, told the audience that education funding has not kept pace with inflation.

"That's unfair to our children who need to compete in the 21st century," she said. Three Republican candidates also attended: Treasurer Tim Shallenburger, Wichita Mayor Bob Knight and state Senate President Dave Kerr. The only candidate who did not attend was Republican Dan Bloom of Eudora.

The 90-minute forum also featured the four candidates for attorney general. Shallenburger, who is opposed to tax increases, said the state's budget has grown twice the rate of inflation in the last five years.

Raising taxes, as the legislature did this session, is the wrong approach, he said. "I don't think that's good economic development," Shallenburger said. Shallenburger, who lives in

Baxter Springs, said school districts should be allowed to raise taxes on their own. Currently, school funding is funneled through the state and allocated to districts based largely on student enrollment. Knight said the state is rich in potential but is underperforming. Saying the state had grown complacent, Knight pledged to prepare Kansas for the new global economy.

Kerr of Hutchinson said his focus would be on improving schools and the state's business climate.

"Education and economic development ultimately go hand in hand," he said.

The three Republicans also said they generally oppose any expansion of gambling in Kansas.

Investors nervous over bankruptcy

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — Shirley Davis sold her family farm in 1992 and invested the \$60,000 profit in Farmland Industries bonds, betting that the interest payments would help support her in retirement.

But the interest payments stopped after Farmland filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection on May 31. Davis is 73, widowed, in ill health, and unsure what to do next.

"There was never any doubt in anyone's mind that Farmland would go on, and on, and on forever. We had so much faith," Davis said from the Independence home she shares with a daughter. "Now we don't have the

money, and we don't have the farm."

Davis is one of about 20,000 individual investors who hold Farmland subordinated debt certificates. Some individuals hold \$1 million or more in the bonds.

Collectively they are owed \$570 million, almost a third of the liabilities Farmland listed in its bankruptcy filing, the biggest in Kansas City-area history.

Of those who bought Farmland bonds, some are savvy investors whose bonds are part of a diverse portfolio. Others, like Davis, have much of their retirement in the high-yield bonds and face the prospect that Farmland's reorganization could blow much if not all

of those investments away like topsoil in a dust storm.

Farmland founder Howard Cowden began the bond program in 1948, believing it was better to borrow money from farmers for about the same rate as Farmland would have paid a bank, said Harry Cleberg, Farmland chief executive from 1991 until his retirement in 2000.

The bond program operated until sales were suspended in October 2000 because of Farmland's deteriorating finances. Farmland marketed the bonds through its own securities company, and sold them through brokers in 26 states.

Briefly

Back to 'hot'

It looks like the 90s are going to be with us as far as the eye can see. The National Weather Service is calling for temperatures in the Colby region to be in the lower to mid-90s through Sunday, with lows in the 60s and thunderstorms a possibility each day. Winds will generally range from 5-15 up to 20 mph during the period. Colby's high Sunday was 83 and the overnight low this morning was 59. The soil temperature at the 4-inch depth is averaging 74 degrees. Precipitation for the month to date is 1.26 inches. The records for June 17: 103 in 1939 and 44 in 1945. (The temperatures and precipitation are provided by the Northwest Kansas Research-Extension Center, Colby.)

City council meets Tuesday

The Colby City Council will hold its regular meeting at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday in council chambers. Items on the agenda include a resolution and plaque for Bill Keck, who is resigning his council position for health reasons; the swearing-in of Francis Britton to fill Keck's unexpired term; presentation of 2002 audits; request for building and sign on soccer field; and amended zoning ordinances. For information, call 462-4410.

One-vehicle rollover Friday

A one-vehicle rollover accident occurred at milepost marker 65 on Interstate 70 just east of Colby at 3 p.m., Fri-

day, a Kansas Highway Patrol official said today. The vehicle, a 2002 Chevrolet, was westbound on Interstate 70 when it lost control and rolled into the median. The driver, Caylia S. Shandrick of Ellis, 42, and two passengers, Madeline Shandrick, 12, and Frank Shandrick, 11, were also taken by ambulance to Citizens Medical Center where they were treated and released.

It was also reported that all three people were wearing seatbelts.

Taxes due June 20

The second half of the 2001 real estate and personal property taxes are due by Thursday, June 20, in the Thomas

County Treasurer's office, said Donita Applebury, treasurer. For questions or information, call 462-4520.

Brewster board meets tonight

The Brewster Board of Education will hold its regular meeting at 7 p.m., today, in the school cafeteria. Items of new business include preschool; activity admission prices; appointment to the 2002-03 Northwest Kansas Technical College area board; student assurance; math textbooks; industrial arts requisition; award PDC plan points; schedule year-end meeting; Sandhill Orthopedic contract; and executive sessions, if needed. Prior to the regular meeting, there will be a budget hearing at 6:45 p.m.

