



Brielle Bange's beautiful beat

Baby's heart gets needed attention, prognosis good

By **PATTY DECKER**
Free Press Editor

A lot of big hearts have been going out to help a tiny heart in many ways. And so far things are looking favorable.

It's been a tough year for one Colby family, but with the help of the community reaching out to them, they say things are looking up.

Paul and Tawnia Bange recently returned from Presbyterian St. Luke's in Denver where their daughter, Brielle, underwent open heart surgery.

"Our daughter had a hole in the center of her heart and it affected all four chambers," Tawnia said. "The prognosis looks good and we are very hopeful that everything will be okay."

Brielle was born with the heart problem, she said, adding that she

and her family were grateful to Dr. Raymond Ketting, a pediatrician at the Colby Medical and Surgical Center, for spotting the condition so quickly.

"At two weeks old, I took Brielle to Dr. Ketting because our daughter's left hand was cold and turning purple," she said. "After doing some checking and listening to her heart, it turned out that she had what's called a washing machine murmur. He could hear the blood sloshing back and forth from the left to the right side of the ventricles."

Less than two months old, Brielle was taken to Denver for the first time and hospitalized for two weeks with congestive heart failure and eating problems, Tawnia said. "At the end of May, she was back in Denver for the surgery to make one of the heart valves into two and doing well."

Not only is the family grateful to Ketting and the other physicians who

saved their daughter's life, but to people here as well.

When asked about the community's support, Tawnia said, "Oh my gosh, it was overwhelming how children and others reached out to us." Tawnia, who is a third grade teacher at Colby Elementary School, said students and teachers alike organized so many activities to raise money to help them.

"There were ice cream socials, spaghetti feeds, bake sales, a basketball game and kids at all grade levels contributed whatever they could," she said. "Students in grades kindergarten through twelfth emptied their piggy banks — it was so much caring and it meant so much to our family."

Along with Brielle, the Banges have two other children: Brittany, 9, and Brooklyn, 4.

Our
people



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

Brielle Bange gets an affectionate touch from her older sister, Brittany, 9, as Tawnia Bange, mother, watched.

Waters in flooded Texas city slowly recede; victims survey damage

By **ANGELA K. BROWN**
Associated Press Writer

BROWNWOOD, Texas (AP) — As murky water lapped against sandbags piled in front of restaurants, motels and gas stations, residents hoped desperately it wouldn't rise.

A 2-square-mile swath of downtown was already under 3 to 4 feet of water Sunday afternoon. Lake Brownwood was rising to a record 7.7 feet above the spillway, and it was expected to crest Monday at 9 feet.

Then the unexpected happened.

The lake that feeds Pecan Bayou, which runs through the town's business district, slowly started receding. It was at 7 feet above spillway by Sunday night.

It was a bit of good news for this community of 20,000 people bracing for a repeat of floods that devastated the town more than a decade ago.

"This will be bad, but I sure hope not like we saw back in '90," said Mel Robertson, who

tried to get a glimpse of the saturated roads downtown but was turned away at a roadblock, along with dozens of other drivers. "I never thought I'd see this much flooding again. And I never wanted to."

More than 30 inches of rain fell in parts of south-central Texas during the week, causing tens of millions of dollars in property damage. Eight people have died.

Some 150 miles to the south in flood-ravaged New Braunfels, residents returned to their homes to survey the devastation left by the Guadalupe River. Soggy carpets were piled on driveways in one neighborhood.

Fred Maxwell's home, the only one left standing from a 1998 flood, withstood the latest flooding as well. At the height of the flooding, it had 3 feet of water on its second floor.

"We're going to stay, I'm sure," Maxwell said, then hesitated. "I'm at least going to rebuild. I can't sell it like this."

Preliminary damage assessments show at

least 48,000 houses have been affected statewide — double the number of cases reported after Tropical Storm Allison last year, according to the American Red Cross. In some places, rivers have crested as high as 28 feet above flood stage.

Thirteen Texas counties have been declared federal disaster areas by President Bush. Gov. Rick Perry, who took a helicopter tour of the swollen Guadalupe River, asked for declarations Sunday for a total of 17 counties.

The Guadalupe and other rivers originating in Texas' Hill Country were flooding cities and croplands downstream along a low-lying coastal plain leading to the Gulf of Mexico.

Flooding was reported at Gonzales on the Guadalupe and was expected Monday at Cuero. Some residents in San Patricio were out of their homes because of high waters from the Nueces River.

Flood waters started receding Sunday in Abilene, Buffalo Gap and other West Texas

towns hit by a thunderstorm early Saturday. More than 1,500 people had been evacuated.

B.J. Flynn, 70, waited Sunday at a temporary shelter at the Abilene Civic Center for word on whether her street had reopened. She said she didn't care about the condition of her home because her 7-year-old poodle, Chris, was at her side.

"I told them, 'Wherever I go, that dog goes,'" Flynn said. "Do you think I'd abandon that little thing? Not on your life. He's been the best dog here."

Brownwood didn't get much rain, but the Saturday morning downpour in the hills south of Abilene flowed south into Lake Coleman and then into Jim Ned Creek, which feeds Lake Brownwood.

The water started spilling onto city roads about daybreak Sunday, authorities said.

Some business owners had time to pile sandbags in front of doors and remove merchandise. Brown County Courthouse officials moved

files and documents to higher floors. Some car dealership lots were empty Sunday.

The flooding likely won't completely recede for several days, said Brownwood City Manager Gary Butts.

Brownwood's worst flood was in April 1990, when storms quickly dumped 17 inches. Dozens of businesses were damaged and costs exceeded \$1 million.

In December 1991, a flood caused by the overflowing watershed from rains in nearby towns cost Brownwood about \$700,000 in damage, officials said.

The city then worked with state engineers to widen and deepen Adams Branch creek, a \$4.6 million project that officials say has prevented several floods since it was finished in 1994.

"We simply made the bathtub bigger, and it holds more water," Butts said. "There's nothing we can do with flooding of this magnitude. It's supposed to happen once every 100 years. This is simply an act of God."

Arizona speeders spending a little time in jail at Colby

By **DARREL PATTILLO**
Colby Free Press

A Tucson, Ariz., couple were stopped for speeding last Wednesday on I-70 near Colby and ended up in custody for transporting 115 pounds of marijuana, county officials said today.

John and Esperanza Stewart, 26 and 23 years of age, respectively, were eastbound near mile marker 57 when they were stopped by the Tho-

mas County Sheriff's department.

They were driving a 2002 Mercury Marquis rental that appeared to be overloaded.

After a search of the vehicle by the K-9 officers, the marijuana was discovered in three large bundles wrapped in plastic inside of a green duffel bag.

The couple is in custody at the Thomas County jail pending charges.

Issues about Westar's finances impact many

By **JOHN HANNA**

Associated Press Writer

TOPEKA (AP) — Families with high credit card balances or other big debts can struggle to meet household expenses, and financial disaster can loom only one big misfortune away.

Some critics of Westar Energy Inc. say likening the state's largest electric company to a debt-burdened family is a good way to get a handle on Westar's problems.

Last week, the Kansas Corporation Commission opened hearings into Westar's finances. So far, those hearings have dealt with arcane accounting

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and financial issues. But ordinary Kansans have a stake in the discussions because the issues lead directly into their wallets.

"If you have a utility that is financially unstable and unable to get capital to maintain its operations, then the only source of capital is a rate increase," said Walker Hendrix, consumer counsel for the Citizens' Utility Ratepayers Board. "This is big stuff."

Westar disputes that it is financially

troubled. In testimony filed with the KCC, Westar executives said the company continues to provide safe and reliable service.

"And no party has provided any evidence to the contrary," said Richard Dixon, a senior vice president.

Also, KCC spokeswoman Rosemary Foreman said the agency's concern is more about the future.

"We don't want to put fear into the general public that their utility is going to collapse," she said. "It's not."

Yet even company officials appear to understand that Westar's \$3.25 billion debt is too much for the company.

It reported \$6.59 billion in assets in the last quarterly report filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission, for the first three months of this year.

Much of the debt is from Westar's unregulated, non-utility operations, particularly its 85 percent ownership in the Protection One monitored security business. Though Westar says Protection One has a positive cash flow, others like Hendrix see it as a money loser dragging on Westar.

And Foreman said: "Ratepayers should not be burdened by any negative activities associated with Westar's unregulated entities."

Briefly

Colby-Oakley: More heat

Hang in there, it'll cool off in the fall. But until then... The National Weather Service sees nothing but heat for the Colby-Oakley areas through mid-week, with outside chances, slim but chances nonetheless, for thunderstorms.

Today's high was expected to top out at around 96. Tonight, clear, lows in the mid-60s, south winds around 10 mph.

Tuesday, all sun, highs near 100 and southeast winds around 10 mph. Tuesday night, a 30 percent chance for thunderstorms, lows in the mid-60s.

Wednesday, partly sunny, another 30 percent chance for thunderstorms, highs in the lower 90s. Wednesday night, another 30 percent chance for thunderstorms, lows in the lower 60s. Colby's high Sunday was 95 and the overnight low this morning was 61. Colby received a trace of precipitation on Friday afternoon, while Willie Engelhardt at Mingo reported 0.26 inches. The records for July 8: 106 in 1957 and 46 in 1952. td.

(Temperatures and precipitation are provided by the Northwest Kansas Research-Extension Center, Colby.)

Home-owned carnival group meets

The Thomas County Amusement Association will be meeting tonight at 8 p.m. at the Thomas County Office Complex. At the meeting, discussion will be held to take further action in starting the ground work to establish a home-owned carnival. All are welcome to attend since many volunteers are needed for the project. For questions, call Dick Parnell at (785) 462-6125 or Kerry Wark at (785) 462-6403.

Golf tourney scheduled

The second annual Drive for Sobriety golf tournament will be held Saturday, Sept. 14 at the Sugar Hills Country Club in Goodland. The event, sponsored by the Thomas County Alcohol and Drug Abuse Council is seeking teams to participate in the four person scramble with all proceeds from the event going to support council activities and programs.

The \$60 per person entry fee will include a golf cart and lunch. Entry forms are available at the Thomas County

ADAC office, P.O. Box 100, Colby, Kan. 67701 or by calling (785) 462-6111.

Water garden tour scheduled

Citizens Medical Center Hospital Auxiliary is sponsoring a *water garden tour* on Sunday, July 21, from 2 to 5 p.m., said Bev Biel, one of the coordinators. Tickets and tour booklets are \$6 and can be purchased at Goodheart Landscaping, Citizens Medical Center Gift Shop or any Colby bank, she said. All proceeds will benefit the auxiliary in its efforts to help purchase items for Citizens Medical Center. For information or questions, call Biel at 462-2311.

Household waste site to open

The Thomas County Household Hazardous Waste Facility will be open on from 8 a.m. to noon, Saturday, July 13, said Sandy Swob, director. "This is a great time to bring old paints, stains, varnish, thinners, cleaning products, lawn and garden chemicals, automotive parts, batteries and other acceptable items for disposal," she said. The facility is free

and open to all Thomas County households, she said. No business waste will be accepted and used motor oil should be taken to the county landfill for recycling. For questions, call Swob at 462-4525.

Free fans available

The Thomas County Chapter of the American Red Cross has allotted money to purchase fans for those in need, said Molly Oliver, disaster chair. The fans are free and need not be returned, she said. For those interested, call the Red Cross office at (785) 462-7161 or call board members Dave Evert (785) 694-2633 or Duane Unger (785) 462-6177. In the event that no one is available at the office, Oliver said to leave a message and a representative will be in contact.

Recycling center takes phone books

The Thomas County Recycling Center is taking old telephone books at its collection site, 720 E. College Dr. in Colby. Those wanting to drop off the books should use the magazine bins, coordinators said.

