



# COLBY FREE PRESS

8 pages

## Sandy situation



CRYSTAL RUCKER/Colby Free Press

Raven Sporing, Brayden Scott and Shay Perry spent Tuesday afternoon making sand volcanoes beside the Oakley City Library. The

children said they were busy trying to get in as much playing as possible before school starts.

## Accident scene takes strange twists and turns

By **PATTY DECKER**

*Free Press Editor*

It's a case of all's well that ends well. Hopefully.

A semi driver was struck by lightning in a freak situation late last week after stopping to help victims of a rollover accident on Interstate 70 near Colby.

The unusual circumstances surrounding the incident last Thursday happened when a pickup, driven by Robert L. Hapke, 40, of Boulder, Colo., lost control of his vehicle in the westbound lane at milepost marker 44 on Interstate 70. The accident was due in large part to the windy and rainy conditions, said Jim Engel, Thomas County Sheriff's deputy.

As Hapke tried to stabilize the pickup and camper, Engel said, he veered into the median and off the roadway, resulting in the vehicle turning on its side. Along with the driver, two other passengers, Cody Hapke, 13, and Logan Hapke, 10, escaped injuries. However, the family's dog was trapped briefly under the camper following the accident, Engel said.

"About the time that we (Engel and Todd Voss, another deputy) arrived at the accident location around 4:30 p.m., a U.S. mail driver also stopped to help," Engel said.

For the next several minutes as authorities made sure the passengers were safe, Engel said that everyone had gotten soaked from the rain.

"By the time the U.S. mail driver had decided everything was okay, it had stopped raining and Voss and I were completing some paperwork on a large metal clipboard," he said.

Before anyone knew what was happening, the driver who was getting ready to climb back in his rig and leave, was all of sudden walking back toward the deputies.

"The man (who has remained unidentified) wondered over to us and looked like he was in a state of shock," Engel said. "He couldn't talk right away and was hyperventilating."

A couple of minutes later, after the driver regained his composure, he told Voss and Engel that as he was getting in the truck he felt a strong current through his body, which affected his left arm and chest — that he thought he had been hit by lightning.

"He told us everything in his body felt tight," Engel said, "and after checking his pulse and under recommendation of the Thomas County EMS to go to the hospital, the man refused."

Since the driver refused treatment or transport, Engel said there really was nothing more they could do for him, adding that the man said he was fine.

"I will say that I was worried about this guy because he was struck by lightning and still had a long way to travel on the Interstate," he said.

Engel admitted that it was an unusual situation, but hopefully ended happily for the good samaritan.

As for the three people involved in the mishap that prompted the driver to stop in the first place, they were okay. Also, and with the help of the Colby Fire Department's rescue squad, the dog was saved.

"When we got to the scene, we discovered the dog's tail was trapped under the camper," Engel said, "but he was rescued too."

## WeatherWatch Colby-Oakley areas

**The numbers**  
Tuesday's high, 77  
Low this morning, 52  
Year ago today, 91 and 61  
Temperature at 12 noon today, 83

Colby's overnight rainfall, 0.00  
Oakley's overnight rainfall, 0.00

Soil temp at the 4-inch depth, 72  
Records for Aug. 14, 103 in 1937 and 44 in 1920

### The forecast

Today, highs in the lower to middle 90s. Tonight, clear, lows near 60, south winds 10-15 mph. Thursday, sunny, highs in the upper 80s, north winds around 15 mph. Thursday night, clear, lows in the lower 60s. Friday, sunny, highs in the lower 90s. Saturday, sunny, highs in the middle 90s. (*Temperatures and precipitation are from the Northwest Research-Extension Center, unless otherwise noted. Forecast is from the National Weather Service.*)

### Colby Water Usage

• Aug. 13 = 1.848 million gallons

### Levels of Concern

**Watch** Level 3.5 million gallons

**Warning** Level 4.0 million gallons

**Emergency** Level 4.5 million gallons

(Three consecutive days)

## Thomas, Logan Counties share in fire relief funds

By **PATTY DECKER**

*Free Press Editor*

Fire departments throughout the state have once again received financial assistance through the Firefighters Relief Fund, which is distributed annually by the state's insurance commission.

The total amount of money disbursed in northwest Kansas was more than \$380,000, with Thomas County's share at \$47,763 and Logan County's at \$11,933.

Of that money, the Colby Fire Department received about \$41,000, said

Rick Dickman, assistant fire chief.

"This fund was established quite a while back to help pay for benefits to volunteer firefighters injured or killed in the line of duty," Dickman said.

Along with Colby's fire department, Rexford and Brewster District #5 also shared in the county's disbursement.

Other areas receiving assistance from the relief fund included Sheridan County \$7,562; Cheyenne County \$9,486; Decatur County \$14,875 and Rawlins County \$14,130.

The money is generated from insurance premiums for fire and lightning

coverage and the state's insurance commission then collects two percent of those premiums and places it in a fund for firefighters, said an official for Insurance Commissioner Kathleen Sebelius.

The total disbursement across the state this year was more than \$6 million to fire departments with three percent of that total going to the Kansas State Firefighters Association to help fire districts with training.

Without this assistance, Dickman said, it would be difficult, if not impossible, for many fire departments to

send people to training schools.

In light of the past year's events, we are all so much more aware of the dangers firefighters face every day," Sebelius said.

"For me, providing a piece of financial security to the thousands of active and retired Kansas firefighters and their families is an honor and I am proud that I can have a part in providing these well-deserved benefits to Firefighters Relief Fund."

Dickman said there are probably between 500 and 600 departments eligible to receive money from the fund

with each getting a minimum of \$1,500.

In addition, he said that two years ago, the Colby Fire Department applied for a redetermination of benefits resulting in an increase from \$13,000 to now \$41,000. The reason for the major increase, he said, was due to an oversight in the city's evaluation for benefits.

"This increase in benefits has been quite nice for our firefighters," he said, adding that in Colby, a volunteer firefighter is otherwise paid only \$8 per run.

## Budget picture puts the state's bond rating in jeopardy

TOPEKA (AP) — Kansas has been informed that its bond rating could be downgraded if state revenues and expenditures do not improve.

"We've been told we're on a watch list," State Budget Director Duane Goossen said Tuesday. "We're in danger of being lowered."

Kansas has a Standard & Poor's bond rating of AA+. However, last week Standard & Poor's changed the state's financial outlook from stable to negative. That means further deterioration of the state's budget could force the bond rating to be downgraded to AA. Kansas' rating is in the second tier of ratings, with AAA being the highest.

Standard & Poor's has lowered the

outlook for Arizona, Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio and Washington, as the effects of the national recession continues to take its toll. Washington, like Kansas, is reliant on the aviation industry which has witnessed numerous layoffs as the demand for new planes has slumped.

Approximately 19 percent of states hold the highest rating, AAA; another 19 percent are rated AA+, and about a third are rated AA. A change in the state's bond rating would apply only to new bonds that are issued, Goossen said, and not any outstanding debt.

Goossen said the notification was a preliminary step toward lowering the rating and was prompted by the state's declining cash reserves.

Legislators ended the 2002 session with a budget reserve of nearly 5 percent. However, continued declines in revenue collections took that balance down to less than 1 percent on July 31, the end of fiscal year 2002.

"That makes us financially vulnerable," Goossen said, adding that the state continues to borrow from other internal funds to meet daily demands for revenue.

James Breeding, a credit analyst with Standard & Poor's, said the road to financial health could prove challenging because the state has relied on one-time measures to fund part of the recent shortfalls.

He noted the reduction in the state's cash reserves to help cover the gap in

the state's \$4.4 billion budget.

In addition, Standard & Poor's director Jim Wiemken said Kansas began experiencing revenue shortfalls in 1999, a year after several hundred million in tax cuts were approved.

"Then, the economy slowed on top of that. So they got hit from both sides," he said.

Because of that double hit, Gov. Bill Graves is preparing to reduce spending through an allotment process. All agencies, except for the judicial and legislative branches, will be notified within the next week of their cuts, Goossen said.

How deep those cuts will be is not known, but is widely expected to include substantial cuts in education and

social services. The last allotment process was carried out by Gov. John Carlin in the 1980s. However, the process was halted after legislators imposed the severance tax on oil and mineral production.

Sen. Steve Morris, R-Hugoton and chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, said it would behoove legislators to begin work on the 2004 budget before the start of the legislative session on Jan. 13.

He said that Kansas routinely dropped below its mandated 7.5 percent reserve account in recent years. Ten percent would be ideal to meet all cash-flow demands, but 5 percent is workable, though it does strain resources, Morris added.

## Briefly

### Fair board meeting Thursday

The Thomas County Fair Board will meet Thursday at 8 p.m. at the 4-H Building at the fairgrounds. Items on the agenda include: guest Kerry Wark with the Thomas County Amusement Association; guest Shawn Stephens; a premium check report from the Thomas County Extension Agent; drug forfeiture money; budget comparisons; and the replacement of the grounds keeper.

### Freshmen retreat planned Friday

There will be a freshman retreat on Friday, Aug. 16, from 12:15 until 8 p.m. sponsored by the Thomas County Community Foundation and Dillons. The day, school officials said, is designed to be a fun day that will involve individual and group games and activities that will assist students in

the transition into high school. Registration will begin in the Colby High School Commons area at 12:15 p.m. followed by group activities at the high school until 5 p.m. There will be a swim time from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Colby Municipal Swimming Pool, followed by a free barbecue at Fike Park. Parent are welcome to attend the barbecue with their student. For information contact Joni Clark-Leiker or Doug Finley at 465-5300.

### Commodities distribution set

Commodity distribution is scheduled in Colby for Monday, Aug. 19, from 11 a.m.-1 p.m. at the RSVP Office at the Senior Progress Center. Expected commodities are tomato sauce, salmon, applesauce, peaches, potato flakes, cranapple juice, corn, and great northern beans. Please bring a sack or box to carry your commodities. For questions call

Laura Withington, RSVP director at (785) 462-6744.

### Freshmen orientation Thursday

Parents and students are being reminded by school officials of the Freshman and New Student Orientation planned for Thursday, Aug. 15, at 7 p.m. in the Colby High School Commons area. Students and parents will have the opportunity to attend various breakout sessions. These sessions are short in nature and are designed to provide important and helpful information about Colby High School, officials said. Students are asked to bring their schedules to the orientation to be able to do a walk-through of their classes.

### Hunter education course slated

The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, Colby volunteer instructors and the Colby Recreation Department

are sponsoring a hunter education course. The course will be held at the Colby Community Building on Tuesday, Aug. 27, and Thursday, Aug. 29, from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m., and Saturday, Aug. 31, from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. "Students must attend all sessions," said Benny Young, with the Wildlife and Parks Department. In addition, anyone born on or after July 1, 1957, must take and pass a hunter education course before they can hunt in Kansas. For information, call 462-6631, 462-7602 or 462-3367.

### Mosquito spraying to begin

The City of Colby crews are preparing to spray for mosquitoes for the remainder of the summer and anyone who would like to be notified when crews will be in their area can call Jo Strange, executive secretary to the city manager, at 462-4410.

