

Opinion



Letter Drop

- Our Readers Sound Off

Hospice auction Fall event

To The Free Press:

Hospice Services, Inc., serving Thomas, Rawlins and Logan counties has scheduled its annual fund-raising auction for Oct. 26 at the City Limits Conference Center in Colby.

The auction, which raises funds to ensure that Hospice support is available to terminally ill individuals and their family members, has historically been in February.

"We decided to make the auction a fall event to get it away from the Pheasants Forever and college endowment auctions that are held in the spring," Annette Kasselmann, Hospice Advisory Board President, said. "We had the feeling that by March, residents here were feeling auctioned out."

Kasselmann added that the organization hopes the October date will boost attendance by providing a unique opportunity to Christmas shop and help a worthy cause at the same time.

"We also think that the venue will attract supporters who may not have attended our auction before," Kasselmann said. "The conference center ambiance and food are always a class act. This should be our best auction ever."

According to Kasselmann, the quality of this year's program will give auction item contributors an excellent platform to show their support for Hospice.

"I can't think of a better cause to have your name linked to," Kasselmann added. "People know how important Hospice is and what it does for people in our community. The public appreciates what our contributors do for Hospice."

"Right now, we'd like to ask people to do two things," Kasselmann said. "If you're contacted to donate to the auction, please be generous. And please buy your tickets for the auction early."

Hospice helps terminally ill persons live out their last days with dignity and comfort by providing trained healthcare professionals who help with issues such as pain management and counsel on death and dying. It also provides counseling to family members on dealing with a loved one with a terminal illness.

Persons who are not contacted by a Hospice Advisory Board member and would like to contribute to the auction or would like tickets can contact the organization by telephone at 785-462-6710 or 1-800-315-5122 (toll free).

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(Letter #128)

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COLBY FREE PRESS

155 W. Fifth (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963 Colby, Kan. 67701

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State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout Excellence, Column Writing, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography.

Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

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THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published daily, every Monday through Friday, except the day observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Haynes Publishing Co., 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE is paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701.

THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday.

MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news credited to it or not otherwise herein. Member Kansas Press Association, Inland Press Association and National Newspaper Association.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: In Colby by carrier: 4 months \$32, 8 months \$47, 12 months \$64. By mail with in Colby and the nine-county region of Thomas, Sheridan, Decatur, Rawlins, Cheyenne, Sherman, Wallace, Logan and Gove counties: 4 months \$44, 8 months \$56, 12 months \$72. Other Kansas counties and surrounding states: 4 months \$51, 8 months \$61, 12 months \$75. All other states, \$75, 12 months.

Nor'West Newspapers

Haynes Publishing Company



Here's your invitation

This is an invitation to all interested persons to a post polio support meeting Sunday, Sept. 22, at 3 p.m. at Pioneer Memorial Library. A video, *Recent Advances in Treating Post Polio Syndrome* by Dr. Susan Perlman, UCLS Post Polio Clinic, will be shown. The video is of Dr. Perlman's presentation at the Post Polio Symposium in San Diego on June 23. The program is free and open to the public. Everyone is invited who has had polio, or even what was diagnosed as a bad case of flu, and who is experiencing fatigue, unexplained weakness, or depression.

Many people who were diagnosed as having polio, before the vaccine was invented, are now experiencing symptoms which have been diagnosed in various ways, and are not suspected to be connected with polio, since the people who had polio had hoped to be done with it, and may not even have mentioned it to their doctor.

Not all the problems associated with aging are due to polio; however the treatment may be different, because overuse will further weaken muscles already weakened by polio, not strengthen them. Sometimes a simple lifestyle adjustment can help forestall problems and that is one of the things that will be discussed at the meeting.

Three of us got together to purchase the videos. There are two videos, and they are one and a half hours long each, so I don't foresee playing both of them at the Sept. 22 meeting. I would expect to have



Maxine Nelson

• Random Thoughts

a short time of introductions and sharing, view one of the videos, and then decide if the group wants to meet again for sharing and/or the other video.

The library closes at 4 p.m. but the director, JoAnne Sunderman, tells me we can stay as long as we like and then let ourselves out, leaving the door locked.

A book that I find fascinating is *FDR's Splendid Deception* by Hugh Gregory Gallagher. It tells about President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's efforts to hide the fact that he could not walk, while leading the most powerful nation in the world. Roosevelt ran for and was elected president from a wheelchair, and before the days of television, I think many of his constituents didn't even know he had a handicap.

I don't think my parents knew it, but since I was born the day he was voted into office in November, 1932, and he served until 1945. I might have not known what they knew. I know we collected money when I was in grade school for the March of Dimes

and polio treatment at Warm Springs, Ga. My husband said they had a benefit dance for Roosevelt's birthday in his hometown in eastern Nebraska each January to benefit the March of Dimes.

Punkin is turning into a mighty hunter. He loves to go out in the yard and watch the cicada bugs crawl out of their holes in the ground, burst their shells and emerge as flying insects. I'd prefer he didn't bring them in for our admiration. Baby even got into the hunting mode and brought home a sluggish grasshopper the other day. At 15 years of age, that is probably the best she can manage to catch.

I'm slowly getting used to being retired. I was sitting on my bath stool taking a shower the other day, and after I turned off the water, I realized I could hear the water trickling off my body. I have my own little water fountain and hadn't even realized it until that moment. While I was working, I was always rushing around to do this or that, and didn't take time to listen. Which reminds me, I'd better stop by Pioneer Memorial Library and admire the fountain there before they turn it off for the winter.

Maxine is a retired Free Press editor/reporter. She keeps busy, but still finds time to occasionally communicate with the following she generated while serving for more than 20 years at the paper.

When the rains stay away

You know it's bad when the folks who live there, call it a desert. That's exactly how some western Kansas farmers and ranchers are describing their parched landscape.

Winter snow didn't fall and the spring and summer rains never came. Dry-land corn stands burnt and stunted, less than waist tall. Summer fallow soil lies sifting in the wind like brown flour. Grass has been grubbed to the ground and gray cow pias tower above the tabletop-flat land.

Gray County farmer Joe Jury can't remember a drier period of time since he's been farming. He's 45.

"This is the driest 14-month period ever," Jury says. "We've received less moisture than Dodge City where they've received 2 inches from July 2001 through August 2002. We're 17 inches short of normal precipitation."

While Jury can talk about the drought, he'd rather show you. During the first week of September he took a Farm Bureau group looking at the drought to one of his summer fallow fields.

As he stepped into the field, dust billowed up around his boots. A few steps into the field, he took his four-foot steel probe and tried to check for moisture. Jury strained every muscle in his body to push the probe into the soil. It wouldn't budge.

He walked another few paces and tried again. Same result — the steel shaft bent but could not penetrate the rock-hard soil. "This should be slipping all the way into the handle," Jury says, a frown on his face. "It's too dry."

It's so dry in Gray County the weeds won't even grow. Looking across Jury's quarter section there isn't a weed in sight. This year he's relied on conventional tillage because he says there's not enough moisture for the weeds to take the chemicals into the plant and kill them.

There is no moisture in the soil profiles on his summer fallow land. There is no moisture to help the wheat emerge for the fall planted crop. Unless it rains, it will not pay to put the seed in the soil and gamble

John Schlageck

• Insight

on rain.

Seventy miles to the northeast in Ness County, it's been a dry two years also. Most consider the dry-land corn a total loss. For several years, plenty of moisture accounted for an abundance of dry-land corn. Not so the last two years, according to Earl Stoecklein, Ness County farmer.

Stoecklein took the Farm Bureau group on a tour that included a dry-land cornfield. Throughout the field the corn stood knee to waist high. The few ears that could be found were less than four inches long and looked like the "baby" corn found in a salad bar buffet — only with fewer kernels.

This corn will not be harvested, Stoecklein says. Instead, it will be used for ensilage.

"There's very little good dry land corn in the county," Stoecklein says. "A lot of guys got weaned on corn last year when little moisture and hot temperatures burned it up. There were a lot less acres of dry-land corn planted this year."

In northwestern Kansas (Sheridan County) the wind was blowing out of the south at 40 miles per hour. The morning of Sept. 7 marked the fourth day in a row the wind had blown this hard.

The early morning sun peaked over the eastern horizon to greet a bright morning sky. To the west the horizon already looked dark. By noon you could hardly see the Menlo elevator eight miles west of my parents home in Seguin.

The dirt was moving in northwestern Kansas. It looked strikingly similar to some of the dust storms

of the '30s, according to my 84-year old father. The howling wind reminded him of those Dust Bowl Days. Dad says he hopes the brown dirt hanging from the western horizon isn't the beginning of another year of dry conditions.

In this part of Kansas, dry-land corn will also be a total loss. Some of the irrigated corn has stunted ears and has been abandoned due to lack of rainfall and the ability to pump adequate moisture to the crop. The pastures were smooth as a table and looked like someone had taken a giant pair of shears and scalped the grass.

South of Hays in Rush County, conditions may be a little better, but not much. Farmers label some dry-land milo in this part of the state as "pretty good," depending on whether the crops received moisture in August.

Cattlemen haven't been as lucky. Lukes Thielenhaus is one of these livestock producers. He's also one of the youngsters on the Rush County Farm Bureau board. He's 27.

Thielenhaus supplemented his cattle on pasture for nearly two months. Dry weather has forced him to haul water to his cattle every other day for more than a month. He hauls 4,800 gallons each trip.

"The crop and livestock situation is bad," Thielenhaus says. "If we don't harvest crops it will be hard to stay out here. If this doesn't turn around, I'll be done and gone by the time I'm 30."

Rush County farmer Joel Ficken says that without disaster relief, a lot more farmers will become casualties of the drought. "It's an issue we're going to have to fix now," Ficken says. "We're passed the 'finger in the dike' out here. The hole is big enough to stick your head in."

John Schlageck has been writing about farming and ranching in Kansas for 25 years. He is the managing editor of "Kansas Living," a quarterly magazine dedicated to agriculture and rural life in Kansas.

Doonesbury

- Gary Trudeau

