



# COLBY FREE PRESS

6 pages

## Warning is issued by chief

By PATTY DECKER

Free Press Editor

A Friday grass fire in the county has prompted Colby Fire Chief Bob McLemore to remind everyone to take precautions when planning controlled burns.

"We are getting into the time of year when grass fires are prevalent," he said, "and everyone needs to practice safe procedures and also call before doing a controlled burn."

There was a grass fire on Friday at 12:17 p.m., just west of Mingo on County Road K and County Road 23, he said. Although the fire wasn't a result of a controlled burn, McLemore said it happened when work was being done on a sprinkler system and the torch caught the grass on fire.

"Even with workers watching the torch carefully, he said, the fire still managed to get away from them temporarily."

However, before Colby firefighters even arrived at the scene, the fire was back under control. Dry conditions throughout the county is also a major contributing factor to these types of fires, McLemore said.

For questions about controlled burns, call 462-4454.

## Five students die in house fire

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — A suspicious fire broke out in a three-story house early Sunday as a college student's 21st birthday party was breaking up, killing five students and injuring three others, authorities said.

Arson and homicide investigators were at the student-rented house near Ohio State University, and police were investigating reports that a fight had started before the fast-moving fire ignited, said police Sgt. Dana Norman.

"The cause has been ruled suspicious," Fire Department spokeswoman Kelly McGuire said.

The house is about a block from campus in a neighborhood of older homes popular with students. About 80 people had been at the party, and 10 to 20 were still inside when the fire started around 4 a.m. in the front of the house.



## Thunderstorms

Tonight...partly cloudy and warm. Lows near 50. Southwest winds around 10 mph. Tuesday...partly sunny. Scattered thunderstorms in the afternoon. Highs in the upper 70s. Light south winds increasing early in the afternoon to 10 to 15 mph. Chance of rain 30 percent. Tuesday night...mostly cloudy with scattered thunderstorms. Breezy. Lows in the upper 30s. Chance of rain 40 percent. Wednesday...cloudy. A chance of rain in the morning. Cooler and windy. Highs in the 60s. Chance of rain 30 percent. Wednesday night...mostly cloudy. Lows in the lower 30s. Slight chance for showers.

**The numbers**  
Sunday's high, 87 (ties old record for the date of 87 set in 1936)

Low this morning, 43  
Year ago, 88 and 48  
24-hour precipitation, 0.00  
Month's precipitation, 0.30  
Month's snowfall, 2 inches  
Records, 86 in 1940 and 13 in 1893

## 'Look, Mommy!'



MICHELLE L. HAWKINS/Colby Free Press

Morgan Fortkamp proudly shows the eggs he found on Saturday morning at Fike Park while taking part in the Kiwanis Club's annual Easter egg hunt. Also participating was his twin, Matthew. They are the sons of Mike and Jeanette Fortkamp of Colby. The park was filled with parents and children of all ages from birth to nine-years-old.

## POWs certain of death

KUWAIT CITY (AP) — Captured after a bloody ambush and the downing of a helicopter, seven American POWs were hustled from place to place, their Iraqi captors unsure what to do with them as U.S. forces closed in fast.

"We were a hot potato," said Army Spc. Shoshana Johnson, a 30-year-old cook from Fort Bliss, Texas. "It was getting to the point where I believed they were going to kill us."

Instead, after three weeks in captivity, the seven were rescued Sunday from a house south of Tikrit by Marines who kicked in a door and shouted: "If you're an American, stand up!"

"We stood up and they hustled us out of there," said Pfc. Patrick Miller, 23, of Park City, Kan.

Grungy and bedraggled in their blue- or yellow-striped prison paja-

mas, they did not know that Baghdad had fallen, that their comrade Pfc. Jessica Lynch had been rescued or that U.S. commandos had been trying to find them for weeks.

There were conflicting reports on how the Marines learned of the prisoners' whereabouts; by some accounts their location was revealed by Iraqi soldiers whose leaders had abandoned them. Some Marines, though, said townspeople tipped them to the house.

The rescued POWs told their story to reporters for *The Washington Post* and *The Miami Herald* aboard a plane as they were flown to Kuwait for a medical checkup and a debriefing.

They said they were kicked and beaten when they were captured, and were taunted and interrogated by their captors. But they were given

medical treatment and did not complain of torture. Nevertheless, some were certain they were going to die.

A sobbing Chief Warrant Officer David S. Williams, 30, of Orlando, Fla., said: "I thought I would never see my wife again."

At one point during their captivity, American bombs smashed the bricks of their prison, and one of the POWs reached through a crack and unlatched his cell door. But their guards prevented them escaping.

Five of those rescued were members of the 507th Ordnance Maintenance Company who were captured along with Lynch when they made a wrong turn near the Iraqi city Nasiriyah and drove into an ambush March 23. Nine other Americans were killed.

The two other rescued POWs were the crewmen of an Apache attack helicopter that was downed.

## Senior group to observe 30th year

Members of the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) will celebrate their 30th anniversary on Wednesday starting at 5 p.m. at the American Legion in Colby with the annual recognition banquet, said Laura Withington, director.

Following the banquet, there will be a dance with Ramblin' Andy

from Hill City.

Although the banquet is for RSVP members and their guests, the dance is open to all area senior citizens from 7 to 9 p.m. Tickets can be purchased at the door.

Anyone needing more information can call Withington at 462-6744.

## After Tuesday, it'll be too late

By TOM (TD) DREILING

Free Press Publisher

It's no secret that the count-down is in its final hours.

April 15 is the deadline for taxpayers to mail in their paperwork to the Internal Revenue Service in order to extract a refund or dish out more money.

Your postmark must be no later than midnight, Tuesday, April 15.

The Colby Post Office won't be open extended hours Tuesday night, said Postmaster James McDonald. "The window will

close at its regular time — 5:30 p.m.," he said. However, McDonald said, the collection boxes, inside the post office and in the alley, will be monitored up until midnight.

"But if you're two minutes late, your late," he said.

Many post offices around the country traditionally report that the last filing day is one of their busiest days of the year.

Some forms are still available in the post office lobby for those who wait until the last minute.

## Safe drinking water becoming big worry

HUTCHINSON (AP) — While the flow of the Arkansas River through southwest Kansas drops, the sulfate level in the water continues to rise.

The salinity of the water could cause some small towns like Deerfield — population 900 — to make an investment in quality drinking water.

"It's a problem up and down the river," Deerfield City Administrator Wayne West said. "When you put it on a graph, the trend is upward."

More than 70 percent of Kansans' drinking water comes from groundwater, and nearly all southwest Kansans depend on the Ogallala Aquifer for their water supply. As salinity rises, water could become a problem for more and more residents.

Sulfate has been traveling down the river from Colorado for years, but the drought and an irrigation-depleted aquifer has left less water to dilute the salt.

Although the Arkansas runs only intermittently through towns like Deerfield, the sulfates — from soils and bedrock in Colorado — seep into the river's alluvial aquifer, then spread into the Ogallala, said Don Whittemore, a senior scientist with Kansas Geological Survey.

The river's salinity has continued to increase since it was first measured in 1963.

"If (water levels) were up, there wouldn't be this problem," Whittemore said. "Things have changed since the 1950s, when groundwater began to be pumped in large amounts. Now we have this situation where groundwater is below the river-water level."

Whittemore, who has been studying sulfate levels for several years, said the Arkansas River in southeast Colorado and southwest Kansas is one of the most saline rivers in the United States.

Whittemore said the sulfate concentration is "increasing at a rate of concern."

Sulfate's federal secondary standard alone is 250 milligrams per liter, Whittemore said. Sulfate concentrations in the Arkansas average between 1,900 and 2,400 milligrams per liter and dissolved solids can reach nearly twice that when entering the state, Whittemore said.

But as a secondary standard, the concentration limits aren't enforceable, Whittemore said.

Garden City's two northernmost wells have already been affected by salinity, but it is high nitrate and chloride levels that have prompted the city to begin using a reverse osmosis system by mid-July.

While nitrates aren't as much of an issue in southwest Kansas, they have become a problem in west-central parts of the state.

Margaret Townsend, a researcher with Kansas Geological Survey, said USGS nitrate studies in the aquifer system show nitrates at much higher concentrations today than 30 years ago.

Of 30 water samples collected near irrigation pumps in the central High Plains — which includes the Texas Panhandle, Oklahoma, Colorado and western Kansas — 10 samples exceeded the Environmental Protection Agency's maximum contaminant level for nitrates. In other areas tested, where water tables were deeper, nitrate levels were lower.

## Angry Bush warns Syria

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Bush administration, increasingly angry with Syria, wants to ensure that Damascus gets the message sent by Saddam Hussein's collapse and stops harboring leaders of Iraq's toppled government.

President Bush was careful to stop short of threatening war against Syria, though he warned the country not to take in Iraqi leaders.

He also charged that Syria has chemical weapons.

"They just need to cooperate," Bush said Sunday.

Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld said the majority of foreign fighters in Iraq were from Syria, brought in by the "busloads."

On one bus, military authorities found leaflets that offered rewards for killing Americans.

## Briefly

### Area Citizens change meeting date

The Area Citizens for Health Care meeting, which was scheduled for Thursday, has been changed to Tuesday at 7 p.m. in the Colby Community Building gymnasium. The reason for rescheduling was due to Holy Thursday.

For questions, call John Kern at 462-2969.

### KU stars coming to town

Tickets are on sale for Kansas University Barnstorming Tour planned for Saturday, April 26, with tip off at 8 p.m. The tour is being sponsored by the Colby High School "All-Sports Booster Club" for the purpose of raising money for the Dennen Field Track-Stadium Project. The basketball game will feature Nick Collison, Jeff Boschee, Kirk Hinrich and others playing against Northwest Kansas All-Stars with 3 of the 10 from Colby. Tickets can be purchased at The Sports Shoppe, Colby Recreation Department, Donelan Jewelry, Colby High School, Palace Drug Store or First National Bank until Thursday, April 24. Tickets will also be sold at the door.

### Event seeks local teams

Teams are now forming for the Western Kansas Great Strides 2003 event to raise money in the fight and cure of cystic fibrosis, said Doris Reed, co-chair in Monument. This is the first time the Great Strides walk will be held in Colby, she said, with the event planned for May 31, with check-in at 8 a.m. and the walk beginning at 9 a.m. at Fike Park.

For questions, call 465-7907.

### Health department to close early

The Thomas County Health Department will be closed on Wednesday from 1 to 5 p.m. for staff in-service. For questions or other information, call (785) 462-4596 or stop by the office at 350 S. Range Ave., Suite 2, Colby.

### Barbershop Chorus to hold concert

The Tumbleweed Chorus will hold their annual concert on Saturday, April 26. The choir will present "Dixieland Harmony" at both 3 and 7:30 p.m. at the Colby Community

College Cultural Arts Center. Tickets may be purchased at the door for \$8 or in advance for \$7. For tickets or information call 462-6552 or 460-8640. The concert will also feature guest appearances by Very Light Opera Company and Patent Pending.

### Jennings scholarship offered

Anyone who has ever graduated from a Thomas County high school to include Golden Plains, Brewster and Colby and, and wants to further their education for a career in rural medicine, are encouraged to apply for the Dr. Jeff Jennings scholarship, being made available through Citizens Foundation, the fund raising arm of Citizens Medical Center, Inc. The scholarship will be in the amount of \$1,000 and awarded in May.

For questions, qualifications or to receive an application, call (785) 462-1215 or write: Citizens Foundation, 100 E. College Dr., Colby, Kan. 67701. Applications must be received by 3 p.m., Wednesday, April 30.

