



# COLBY FREE PRESS

8 pages

## Thomas County Red Cross chapter needs volunteers

By TISHA COX  
*Colby Free Press*

The Thomas County Chapter of the American Red Cross is looking for a few good volunteers.

Maybe you could be one of them. Mary Smith, chapter manager, said the Colby Red Cross office needs volunteers who can drive the Emergency Response Vehicle and respond to national disasters.

"We have classes scheduled next month," she said. The classes will be every Thursday for about five weeks and are specifically geared toward human resources system training. Several people are already signed up for the training and there is still room for more.

Colby's emergency response vehicle is one of only seven in the state of Kansas but the community only has two volunteers who are trained to drive the vehicle and qualified to respond to national disasters.

"These people can only go once a year," Smith said. If more volunteers aren't found, she said, the chapter could have its vehicle reassigned elsewhere.

The vehicle is used to serve meals, snacks and water to people who are displaced by disaster and to relief workers. It has the capacity to

serve two meals a day to up to 600 people. Smith said there are benefits to having the vehicle here, mainly being ready for disasters. "We hope we never have a large-scale disaster," she said. "But we have the resources right here to respond."

The training is free and when volunteers go out on assignment, they don't have to pay for anything out of pocket. Lodging and transportation are paid for by the Red Cross. She said the only real cost to volunteers is the loss of time or pay if they're employed.

Volunteers must be able to commit to three weeks for a national disaster and be reasonably fit.

They also need to meet other criteria, like being reasonably fit and have health insurance and Internet access. "Right now this is the biggest thing," she said.

The emergency response vehicle has been used by other chapters in times of need. Smith said this past spring, the vehicle was transferred to drivers from another chapter to help with relief efforts.

Volunteers respond when needed and there's no limit on how many they go out on. She said it's mainly up to volunteers, but once a year is the minimum. Call (785)462-7161.

## Santa ponders request



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Blais Vrbas of Colby took his turn to visit with Santa Claus at Colby's Santa City. Anyone wanting to tell Santa their Christmas wishes still has plenty of time. Santa City will be open late

from 6 to 8 p.m. on Friday, from 1 to 5 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday, and from 1-3 p.m. on Christmas Eve. Santa City is located adjacent to Fike Park and he's in the Scout Hut there.

## Lions mobile screening unit to be part of this year's wellness fair

By PATTY DECKER  
*Free Press Editor*

Among the many activities planned for the Wellness Fair, organizers wanted to remind everyone that on the day of the fair, Saturday, Jan. 17, the Lions mobile screening unit will be available.

Screenings will include visual acuity, tonometry (glaucoma pres-

sure), blood pressure, non-fasting blood sugar, hearing booth screen, and vision fields screen, said Tracey King, one of the wellness coordinators.

"The Kansas Lions Sight Foundation's mobile screen unit is a self-contained bus that travels statewide," King said. "This is a great opportunity for people to re-

ceive many screenings and will be part of the regular Wellness Fair registration."

Along with the screening unit, Colby optometrists, Larry Washburn and Jeff Morrison will be assisting with the vision screens. Lions club members will provide hearing screenings and the Thomas County Emergency Medical Ser-

VICES personnel will do blood work. "We certainly appreciate the Lions for making the mobile unit available for the fair," King said today.

Other dates associated with the Wellness Fair include lab work on Thursday, Jan. 8; Saturday, Jan. 10; Monday, Jan. 12; and Tuesday, Jan. 13. All lab work will be done from

6 to 9 a.m. at Citizens Medical Center in Colby. Those planning to take advantage of the lab work are asked to go to the front lobby, King said.

Costs for blood work will require paying the fair registration fee of \$5 with complete blood count, lipid profile and glucose at \$15; TSH (thyroid) at \$12; and PSA (prostate) at \$18.

Results from the lab work will be available on the day of the fair from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Colby Community College student union.

Attending the fair is a great way to start the new year, she said, and offers participants healthy lifestyle choices.

Those planning to take part in the wellness fair should note the dates.

## No more walking for these guys

# Meter readers are bitten by the technology bug



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

Mike Albers, technology director for the City of Colby, read electric and water meters using a vehicle radio reader unit that replaces the traditional walking routes. More than 40 percent of the city has been converted to the reader system, saving the city money in manhours and errors, he said.

By PATTY DECKER  
*Free Press Editor*

Technology has made reading city meters more efficient for customers and less time-consuming for employees, said Mike Albers, technology director for the City of Colby.

For many years, reading electric and water meters was a five-day process for the line crew and public works department, he said.

With the vehicle radio reader unit, the time has been cut more than half in the number of days it takes to read the meters and manpower hours.

Albers said the city is about 40 percent converted to the reader unit and requires the help of two employees walking the remaining meter route not yet converted.

This is a big improvement, he said, because less people are needed to be pulled away from other work

in the electric and public works departments.

The radio unit can "read" more than 1,900 meters in less than five hours, he said, adding that the same amount of meters would have taken over three days for one person to do walking.

"One person could read about 500 to 600 meters in a day — but that's about the maximum," Albers said.

When the reader unit was first purchased about four years ago, he said, the city concentrated its efforts on getting the meters updated in "hard to read" places, such as locked gates or where larger animals made it difficult to get to the equipment.

The way the unit works from a vehicle, Albers said, is that he "zig-zags" through the city and the antennae locates the meters and transmits the information by serial num-

bers into the computer.

"The reader unit can sort out 20 to 30 meters at a time," he said. "Once the information is collected, the program at Colby City Hall can match transmissions to serial numbers."

The system also allows no room for error, since everything is done electronically and void of human error, which could happen when numbers are transposed accidentally, he said.

The city continues to work on upgrading the remaining meters with an electronic device that is compatible to the reader unit. In most cases, the only upgrade necessary will be to add a radio transmitter or MXU into the water pit, he said. Some meters will need to be changed out completely, which will be done as time allows, he said, but there aren't too many older meters left in the city.

## Briefly

### Commodities still available

Commodities are still available for eligible persons who missed the Dec. 15 distribution. Contact the RSVP office at 462-6744 to make arrangements for pick up.

### 'Thank You' concert scheduled

As a "thank you" to the community for its support of Pickin' on the Plains Bluegrass and Folk Festival, the McLemore Family and Larry Booth will present a seasonal concert for the public on Sunday at Fairview Estates. The concert will begin at 7:30 p.m. in the dining hall. Fairview Estates is located just east of Dillons. Everyone in the community is invited and admission is free; however, canned food donations will be accepted for Thomas County Genesis.

### Students' recital is Saturday

Piano students of Sharon Kriss are having a recital on Sat-

urday at 10 a.m. at the Colby United Methodist Church. They will be playing songs interwoven with "The Christmas Story" and "Twas the Night Before Christmas." The public is encouraged and welcome to come.

### Christmas piano recital set

Piano students of Pat Ziegelmeier will perform in a Christmas recital on Saturday at 2 p.m. in the sanctuary of Colby United Methodist Church. The program will be a combination of solos and ensembles. Everyone is invited.

### Community choir to perform

The Thomas County Ministerial Alliance is sponsoring a program featuring the community choir at 7:30 p.m., Saturday, in the Colby High School auditorium. The event will feature more than 30 singers from the area.

### Quilt giveaway rescheduled

The Cooperating Collection Site RC&D quilt giveaway

that was to have taken place on Monday, Dec. 15 has been rescheduled for 1 p.m. Monday, Dec. 22 due to the weather earlier this week. The event will take place at Pioneer Memorial Library.

### Landfill holiday hours noted

The Thomas County Landfill will close at 3 p.m. on Wednesday, Dec. 24 and will not reopen until Saturday, Dec. 27. The landfill will be open regular hours from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on the 27th and 1 to 4 p.m. on the 28th. The landfill will be closed Thursday, Jan. 1 for the New Year's Day holiday.

### Senior party is Friday

Prairie Senior Living Complex will host a Christmas party for its residents on Friday from 2-4 p.m. Family and friends of residents as well as the public are invited. Colby Grade School fifth grade choir will be on hand to perform and at 3 p.m. Mr. and Mrs. Claus will be present to hand out gifts to residents.



### Pleasant outlook

Colby, Oakley, Hoxie  
forecast

**Tonight...**Mostly clear. Lows in the lower 20s. Northwest winds 10-20 miles per hour. **Friday...**Mostly sunny. Highs in the upper 50s. West wind 5-15 mph. **Friday night...**Mostly clear. Low in the mid-20s. West wind 5-15 mph. **Saturday...**Mostly sunny. Highs in the low 60s. West wind 10-15 mph. **Saturday night...**Partly cloudy. Lows in the mid 20s. **Sunday...**Partly cloudy. Highs in the low 50s. **Sunday night...**Partly cloudy. 20 percent chance of rain or snow. Lows around 20.

**By the numbers:**  
Wednesday's high, 58  
Low this morning, 22  
Records for Dec. 18, 76 in 1980 and -11 in 1983  
Year ago today, 50 and 19  
Precipitation past 24 hours, 0.00  
Month's precipitation, 0.09  
Month's snowfall, 3 inches  
Year's precipitation to date, 14.53  
2002's precipitation to date, 12.60  
Soil temperature, 34  
**The sources:**  
The forecast is from the National Weather Service, and other numbers are from the Northwest Research-Extension Center, Colby. A recorded forecast updated throughout the day is available by calling (785) 899-7119. Current temperatures are available by calling 460-TEMP.

