



COLBY FREE PRESS

Sending letters to Santa



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

From left to right: Sarah Jo Zahradka, Gracelynn Oard, Chandler Horney, Dante Whitfield, Mark Alan Faber, Carrie Myers, and Stephanie Roberts deposited letters to Santa during a recent visit to the *Colby Free Press*. Not pictured, but also visiting

were William Enfield and Emily Corbett. Children in Thomas County are asked to mail their letter to Santa to the newspaper office, 155 W. 5th St., or bring them anytime between 8 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Three businesses here vandalized by Californian

By PATTY DECKER

Free Press Editor

Three businesses in Southwind Plaza were burglarized during the early morning hours Monday allegedly by a 67-year-old California man with medical problems.

The suspect, Raymond Orville Brown of Sacramento, Calif., was arrested at about 2:51 a.m., Monday, after police officers went to a nearby motel and questioned him about his recent whereabouts, said Gary Shull, Colby Police Department investigator.

Before being booked into the Thomas County Jail on Monday afternoon, Brown was first admitted to Citizens Medical Center for medical reasons and later that day was taken to jail.

Late Tuesday afternoon, Shull said, Brown was charged with two counts of burglary, three felony criminal damage, one count each of misdemeanor damage and criminal trespassing. Bond was set at \$50,000 with his first appearance held today.

The incident was first discovered by Colby Police Officer Ron Alexander who noticed the back door of Fotogirl Photography located in Southwind Plaza was open at about 2 a.m. In looking around, Alexander saw that in addition to glass front door at the photography business being shattered, the glass front door at the western store was also broken out.

Alexander then called for assistance from the K-9 Unit, other Colby police officers and deputies with the Thomas County Sheriff's office who then discovered Taylor Motors was also burglarized in the same manner with the front door glass shattered.

In looking for a suspect, Shull said that prior to the break-ins, Colby police were alerted that a man traveling by Greyhound had not gotten back on the bus when it had stopped in Colby.

The circumstances as to why he did not continue traveling on the bus were unclear, according to information from the police department.

It was a place to begin with respect to the vandalism and burglaries, Shull said, since police had recovered a bag at the bus depot belonging to Brown and were already trying to locate him.



R. Brown

The investigation led police officers to a Colby motel where they saw Brown coming out of a room. While questioning Brown as to whether or not he knew anything about the break-ins, he told authorities he did it.

Although Shull could not talk about Brown's medical condition, he did say that officers took the suspect to Citizens Medical Center just before 3 a.m. Monday, where he was treated and released later that afternoon. Shull did say that while at the hospital, Brown was under guard for a pre-existing medical condition.

Following his release from the hospital, Brown was booked and was still in custody today.

Store owners at Southwind Plaza talked about the experience, adding that it could have been a lot worse.

Vaughn Nash, owner of Out West, said he had about \$1,400 damage, but also felt fortunate that nobody was hurt.

"There were saddle stands and Sante Fe dinnerware, crystal, glass cases and CD cases knocked over," he said, "and this was the first time something like this (vandalism) has ever happened to me."

Fotogirl Photography owners, Michelle and Daniel Morris said it took them more than a combined six hours to clean up broken glass and tidy up the store.

"Our losses and damages totaled about \$700," Michelle said Tuesday. "Fortunately nothing of real value was stolen and we feel blessed that other than a huge mess, nothing else was harmed."

Her biggest concern was with her customers and damage to their pictures. "Sometimes photographs cannot be replaced," she said.

Tuffy Taylor, who is co-owner of Southwind Plaza and Taylor Motors, said the vandalism at the dealership was scattered. He said damage to all three glass doors and clean-up at his location was estimated at \$1,000.

For Taylor the best thing that came out of this incident was the response from local authorities.

"I told Randy Jones (chief of police) that his officers did a super good job," Taylor said Tuesday. "I don't think I knew how much to appreciate those people until we needed them — and they fulfilled their obligation more than imagined," he said.

As for the suspect, Taylor said it was his understanding that the man had "misfortunate" problems.

"I sure hope he gets squared away."

Holiday rush at Colby's post office starts

By TISHA COX

Colby Free Press

The clock is ticking for getting holiday packages and greetings in the mail on time. Postmaster Kenton Krehbiel said the post office is already experiencing more activity than usual.

He said Monday was busy and expects business to pick up in the days leading up to Christmas.

Krehbiel expects a steady volume of packages until the holiday but said first class mail, or letters and cards, is down. He said there is less volume all the time because of e-mail and businesses going paperless but he hopes that aspect picks up. "That cuts into first class mail,"

Krehbiel said.

Krehbiel said the middle of next week should be busy, as well as possibly Monday, Dec. 13 and Dec. 20 as people come in to mail their parcels.

He said people can expect to get packages up to Christmas Eve because there will be mail delivery on Friday, Dec. 24.

As Christmas gets closer, Krehbiel said people should be aware of the mailing deadlines to get presents and cards to people on time.

The deadline to get packages and first-class mail to military APO/FPO addresses by Christmas is Saturday, Dec. 11 and for foreign countries, Monday, Dec. 13.

Packages headed overseas need a customs form and Krehbiel said they can be picked up and filled out ahead of time.

"It saves a wait in line," he said.

Postal patrons have until Tuesday, Dec. 21 to get packages to their destinations in the continental U.S. by Christmas and until Wednesday, Dec. 22 to get mail delivered in-state before the holiday.

Krehbiel said there are ways to help ensure letters and packages get to where they're going.

For packages, he advised using the sturdiest box possible, preferably with no writing.

No wrapping paper or string is needed and Krehbiel recommends

using wide Scotch tape for sealing.

He also said writing the address legibly outside the box as well as a return address and correct zip code. Krehbiel also suggested writing the address inside the box as well in case something happens to the package.

Krehbiel said people shouldn't mail cash and should instead get a money order, which is available in amounts up to \$1,000 and only costs about \$1.

He also said priority mail is the best way to send parcels because delivery is usually within two to four days because packages are flown instead of sent by ground transport.

Storage units in Colby burglarized on Tuesday

By TISHA COX

Colby Free Press

The Colby Police Department is investigating a break-in at UPAC Storage, 1130 S. Court Ave.

Investigator Gary Shull said at

least five units were broken into and items were stolen between 11 a.m. and noon on Tuesday.

He said it looks like someone "ransacked" units to see what they could find.

"So far the loss seems minimal," he said.

Shull said the person or people responsible got into the storage units through an empty unit that is under construction. They went over the

tops to get to the other units.

He said if anyone has information or saw anyone on foot, bicycle or a vehicle at the units at the time the break-in took place, they should call the police department at 462-4460.

Natural gas prices are going up 35-45 percent

From staff reports

The cost of staying warm this winter will be 35 to 45 percent higher than last year, said officials with Midwest Energy today.

"Customers have been hearing about it for months, and now customers will be seeing it in their December bills," said Bob Helm, with the Midwest Energy office in Hays.

The reason for the increase was based on the dramatic increase in the wholesale cost of gas over the last several months, he said.

"The cost to buy the natural gas

itself is the culprit, said Earnie Lehman, president and manager of Midwest Energy. "Natural gas follows the price of oil and compared with last year, those energy costs are simply higher."

For those wanting to know why wholesale gas prices are rising, Lehman said there are many reasons.

Cold weather in most sections of the country, a strengthening economy in the U.S. and around the world, and flat production in some areas all contribute to the increase

are some of the factors.

"This is the coldest time of the year and customers will use more natural gas to keep warm, so bills will normally be higher, even before factoring in the price increase," Lehman said.

There is some good news, though, he said. As one way to deal with the higher wholesale price increases, gas purchases for December, January and February will dampen that effect in the event higher costs should continue.

As a way to manage the higher

costs, Midwest Energy customers should consider budget billing, Helm said. With budget billing, bills are average over 12 months to level out the highs and lows of seasonal costs.

Another way to manage the costs would be in working out a payment plan with Midwest Energy in the event high seasonal bills cause a hardship and winterizing homes is always a benefit to lowering bills.

For questions on winterizing tips or other information, call the Hays office at (785) 625-1463.

Briefly

Fair board to meet

The Thomas County Fair Board will meet at 8 p.m. Thursday at the 4-H Building at the fairgrounds. Items on the agenda include: Thomas County extension agent report, financial report and bills; committee reports on the building and grounds, carnival, rodeo, parade, demolition derby, races, fair book and advertising; blue grass festival payment and committee sign-up. The meeting is open to the public.

USDA program cutoff looming

The cutoff date for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) applications to be considered for fiscal year 2005 funding is Jan. 21, 2005. Stop by the local United States Department of Agriculture Ser-

vice Center and visit with the Natural Resources Conservation Service or local conservation district staff to get more information about helping address your resource concerns. In Colby, stop by 915 E. Walnut or call (785) 462-7671 Ext. 300.

Santa Helpers Shop to open soon

The Santa Helpers Shop will once again be open to give infants and young children through fifth grade the opportunity to buy wrapped gifts for their moms and dads, said Julie Harlow, one of the coordinators. The event is sponsored by the Blue Jean Ladies (formerly Mu Epsilon) and will be open from 9 to 11 a.m., Saturday, Dec. 11, at Pioneer Memorial Library. All gifts are \$3 and there will be a four-gift limit. For questions, call Harlow at (785) 460-8649.

Colby
Hoxie
Oakley



Wind could be a problem

Tonight...Mostly clear in the evening then becoming partly cloudy. Lows in the lower 30s. Southwest winds 5 to 15 mph. **Thursday...**Mostly sunny. Windy. Highs in the lower 50s. Northwest winds 20 to 30 mph. with higher gusts **Thursday night...**Mostly clear. Lows in the upper 20s. Northwest winds 10 to 20 mph. **Friday...**Mostly sunny in the morning then becoming partly cloudy. Highs in the lower 50s. Northwest winds 5 to 15 mph. **Friday night...**Partly cloudy. Lows in the lower 30s. **Saturday...**Partly cloudy. Warmer. Highs in the upper 60s. **Sunday...**Partly cloudy in the morning then becoming mostly cloudy. Much colder. Highs in the lower 40s.

The numbers

Tuesday's high, 55
Low this morning, 24
Year ago today, 47 and 22
Records for this date, 70 in 1940 and -12 in 1917
Precipitation past 24 hours to 8 a.m. today, 0.00
December, 0.00
Snowfall, 0.00
Soil temperature, 35

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.

