

Sheridan County holds Winter Fest

By Jan Katz Ackerman
Colby Free Press

HOXIE — Seasonably cool weather helped raise the spirits of those attending the Sheridan County Health Complex Winter Fest earlier this week.

“Winter Fest is a way to provide an evening of entertainment for the residents so they can eat with their family and a guest.

“It’s also for doctor recruitment costs. It is fun with a purpose,” organizer Leanna Sloan said.

Winter Fest took place at the health complex from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. Monday evening.

Residents of the long-term care facility and assisted living center were treated to a homemade soup bar, homemade pies and live entertainment.

Evening entertainment for the Winter Fest included area youth, 5-year-old Mercedes Kennedy, performing a tap dance and Hoxie High School senior Karl Pratt, who sang a solo.

Others performing included Carol Kliewer, playing piano; Huny Kim, playing violin; and the professional belly-dancing team called Dreamweavers, which includes Jan McKee, Susan Bieker, Jackie Rose, Renee Mullins, and Mindi Getz. Bieker is activity director at the long-term care facility and Rose is secretary and billing officer in the business department.

Sloan said the event was “very successful,” and 250 people were

served a meal and dessert, which included 60 pies which were donated by staff and community members.

“If you’d seen the smiles on the faces of those elderly people you’d have known they loved those pies and that entertainment,” Sloan said.

Guests who visited their friends and loved ones were asked to contribute a freewill donation, with all the proceeds going toward Sheridan County Health Complex’s doctor recruitment effort.

The facility has been without a full-time, on-site physician since last fall.

Local physician John Rand Neuen-schwander, M.D., along with Dr. Brewster Kellogg, Colby, Nurse Practitioner Kaylee Watkins, and temporary doctors from Olathe-based Docs Who Care are servicing the complex.

Negotiations between the complex trustees and Dr. Margarite Hammeke, Fort Worth, Texas continue.

Hammeke was offered a contract to practice medicine in Sheridan County and has been in the area on more than one occasion looking at the facility, the town, and surrounding area.

In addition, the doctor’s husband, Paul, is on the list of people to be interviewed for the administrator job. Interim administrator Jim Turnbull replaced Kyle Hahn late last month when he left to become administrator at Logan County Hospital and Logan County Manor in Oakley.



JAN KATZ ACKERMAN/Colby Free Press

Mercedes Kennedy, 5, daughter of Brad and Amy Kennedy, performed a dance routine “Barbie Girl” for residents and their guests as part of the Sheridan County Health Complex Winter Fest Monday evening in Hoxie.

State wants feds to take slain sheriff case

EUREKA (AP)—The state will step aside from prosecuting the man accused of killing the Greenwood County sheriff if federal prosecutors can seek the death penalty against him, Kansas Attorney General Phill Kline reiterated this weekend.

Kline and U.S. Attorney Eric Melgren both attended a weekend town meeting in Eureka as about 100 people gathered to discuss the county’s problems with methamphetamine.

Sheriff Matt Samuels was shot and killed Jan. 19 while attempting to serve a search warrant on a suspected meth lab. Scott Cheever, 23, whose mother says he has struggled with addiction to meth since he graduated from high school, is charged with capital murder and other charges, including manufacturing the illegal drug.

Kline said in January that federal prosecutors want to charge Cheever, potentially removing the uncertainty of whether a state jury could sentence him to death if convicted.

A recent Kansas Supreme Court ruling striking down the state’s death penalty law as unconstitutional makes it possible a conviction in state court might not yield a death sentence. Kline is appealing that decision to the U.S. Supreme Court.

“If I do not win that appeal, Kansas does not have the death penalty ... and Mr. Cheever could not face death,” Kline said at Saturday’s meeting.

Melgren said a federal grand jury is considering the Cheever case, and that if it returns an indictment he will ask U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzalez to let him seek the death penalty.

Kline said he and Melgren will go to Washington and present the facts of the case to a committee in the attorney general’s office.

“Our commitment ... is to get the most severe penalty under the law to send a strong message: We do not tolerate those who would take the lives of those who are trying to protect us,” Kline said.

People attending Saturday’s meeting complained about continuing problems with methamphetamine production. Debra Crisswell, county coordinator of Services Offending Safety, said meth abuse was involved in 105 of the 107 domestic violence cases she has handled.

The new sheriff, Mark Kenneson, a former state trooper, said his department recently broke up a meth lab just a block from the sheriff’s office. Farmer Kenneth Thomas, who lives just outside the county, said that in the last few months drug dealers tore up his fencing and shot two horses in a neighbor’s barnyard.

“It’s all related to the same people,” Thomas said. “We know who all the people are and we know where they’re living. We’ve got a major problem if they arrest somebody and take them in and then they get back out.”

State Wrap

Sebelius higher ed proposals under attack in house

TOPEKA (AP)—Gov. Kathleen Sebelius’ proposals to increase higher education spending are under attack as some House Republicans hunt for dollars to divert to elementary and secondary schools.

House GOP leaders hope to boost aid to K-12 programs — and meet a Kansas Supreme Court mandate — without raising taxes. House Speaker Doug Mays, of Topeka, has said he and fellow Republicans expect to trim \$100 million from parts of Sebelius’ proposed budget to provide new dollars for public schools.

A House Appropriations subcommittee proposed deleting \$10 million of the \$23 million increase that Sebelius is seeking for universities, community colleges and vocational-technical colleges. The full committee backed away Monday, voting to postpone any decision until legislators wrap up their budget work in late April or early May.

Some Republicans argued that K-12 spending should be the Legislature’s highest priority. The Supreme Court gave legislators until April 12 to add to the current \$2.7 billion in aid to public schools and distribute the money more fairly.

Local media cooperated with police on BTK case

WICHITA (AP) — When the BTK serial killer emerged after more than two decades of silence, he did so with a letter to The Wichita Eagle, placing the newspaper in the delicate position of deciding what to tell police — and what to tell its readers.

The letter was certainly newsworthy: Not only did it mark the return of a killer who terrorized Wichita throughout the 1970s, but it also included a copy of a driver’s license belonging to a Wichita woman whose death police hadn’t previously linked to BTK. Detectives asked the newspaper to withhold the victim’s license — some-

thing The Eagle refused to do.

But the newspaper did withhold from the public, at the request of police, some other information included in that letter, which arrived last March.

The two television stations that received subsequent communications from the killer also held back some details.

And that has left some wondering whether police might have arrested Dennis Rader, the Park City man charged with 10 counts of first-degree murder in killings blamed on BTK, sooner if the public had all the facts.

Among them is Bob Beattie, a Wichita attorney and author of an upcoming book on the BTK killings.

Since Rader’s arrest last month, he has compared some of the BTK letters to papers written by Rader in his capacity as a compliance officer in Park City.

Rader’s papers contained similar, if not identical, spelling and grammatical errors as those contained in BTK’s writings, Beattie said.

Board of Education to hold hearings over evolution

TOPEKA (AP) — Eighty years after the Scopes Monkey Trial, State Board of Education members plan to hear arguments over whether they should add criticism of evolution to Kansas’ science standards.

The board’s subcommittee on science standards agreed Monday to have six days of hearings in May in Topeka.

The subcommittee, concerned that the hearings might be compared to the 1925 trial of high school science teacher John Scopes in Dayton, Tenn., said they aren’t putting evolution on trial. Scopes was convicted of giving lessons on the theory.

“That was a trial, these are hearings,” said Board Chairman Steve Abrams, of Arkansas City. “I hope we have a greater understanding of each other’s positions.”

The subcommittee members are Abrams, Kathy Martin, of Clay Center, and Connie Morris, of St. Francis, all Republicans, and half of six conservatives holding a majority on the 10-member board.

Later this year, the board expects to consider changes in the science standards, which currently describe evolution as a key concept for students to learn.

The three board members tentatively set their hearings for May 5-7 and 12-14, with the exact times and place to be determined. During the hearings, only scientists will testify, according to the subcommittee.

The scientists will include experts on evolution and proponents of other ideas about the origins of life.

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