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Doctor, administrator at Hoxie hospital fired

By Jan Katz Ackerman

Colby Free Press

HOXIE — After being in Hoxie only one month, the new doctor and administrator have been fired.

Following a special meeting Tuesday morning, Dr. Margarita Hammeke and her husband, Paul Hammeke, administrator, were told their services were no longer needed.

Randy Farber, Sheridan County Health Complex vice chairman, said last week the board contacted its attorney, Steve Schwarm, Topeka, about how to get out from its contact with the doctor and administrator. He had little to say about the firings.

"Kansas is primarily an at-will state to fire someone."

"Our attorney said we're better off not making a statement than to accuse anyone of anything," Farber said.

The Hammekes joined the facility at the end of May. Last week problems came to a head when 15 employees met behind closed doors for over an hour.

Following that meeting, allegations the administrator was favoring the doctor in the work place surfaced. Last Thursday, the doctor

met in open session with the trustees.

She denied being given preferential treatment and said she wasn't getting the cooperation she needed from staff members in the clinic and long term care unit.

Farber said neither Dr. Hammeke nor administrator Paul Hammeke was allowed to work any part of the day after being told they were fired. Due to the fact both contracts have a 90-day termination clause in them, the board is required to pay the Hammekes for the next three months.

According to ReChelle Kennedy, chief financial officer, Dr. Hammeke's annual salary of \$162,000 will give her a severance package of \$40,500 plus health insurance. Paul Hammeke's severance package of \$17,500 comes out of his \$70,000 salary.

It cost Sheridan County taxpayers nearly \$35,000 to bring the doctor to the complex. The doctor received a \$10,000 sign on bonus, \$5,000 in moving expenses, and the balance was for recruitment fees. The cost of bringing the administrator to Hoxie was encapsulated in the doctor's costs, Farber said.

Kennedy, who has been named

interim administrator, said she was "a little taken back" when she arrived at work Tuesday and learned of the firings. She said the search for a new doctor and administrator is underway.

"We start over. We are going to go back to the resumes we had for the administrator," she said.

Kennedy said she did not know whether the trustees would rely on the Wichita-based physician recruiting firm, Medova, to find another doctor. She said the complex will continue to be staffed by doctors from Olathe-based Docs Who Care, and temporary doctors from Kansas Locum Tenens, a third-year residency program out of the University of Kansas. Dr. Bruce Kellogg, Colby and Kaylee Watkins, a nurse practitioner from Hoxie will also staff the clinic and see patients in the hospital and long term care unit.

Kennedy is optimistic the board action Tuesday will not hinder the operation of the complex. She said the trustees have scheduled another special board meeting for 7 p.m. on June 8.

"It didn't work out with the Hammekes and we'll move forward," Kennedy said.



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Jim Engel, the county's new emergency management director, did a radio check from the emergency management office in the courthouse basement. Engel spent more than nine years as a deputy with the Thomas County Sheriff's Office. He assumed his new duties this morning.

Changing careers Thomas County deputy new emergency manager

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

Thomas County's new emergency management director started work this morning. And to many, he's already a familiar face.

Jim Engel took over the job from John Lygeros, and it's now a full-time position. Engel spent more than nine years as a deputy at the Thomas County Sheriff's Office.

Engel said he enjoyed working as a deputy and had the blessing of the sheriff's office to pursue the emergency management job.

He said he gave it a lot of thought before applying, and he also thought it was a job that needed to be full time.

"I think it's something that's needed," Engel said.

He will be running the Thomas County Emergency Management Office as well as working as the E-

911 director and later risk management.

However, his focus right now and in the coming months will be the emergency management aspect of his job.

Engel said the county's disaster plans need updated and he needs to work on his certification. Once he does that, state and federal money could be available for the office.

He has to earn his certification within the next two years and will have to take several classes to do it.

He said the emergency management part of his job deals with everything from natural disasters and chemical spills to terrorism.

"Emergency management has been in the background especially here because we don't have natural disasters," he said. "It's a job that's behind the scenes."

As an example of what his duties

would be during a disaster like a tornado hitting town, his job would be to help coordinate efforts between agencies like law enforcement and the fire department. If they would need anything, he would help them get it.

Engel said he would work more like a liaison than anything else.

On E-911, he will oversee the budget and will take care of all the grant work on the county's new 911 system.

He will also be helping with the addressing and in time, the county will also have photographic mapping capability to locate people when they make emergency calls on their cell phone out in the county.

Eventually, he'll also tackle risk management and possibly safety for county departments but he's not sure yet what all of his duties will be in that capacity.

Commissioners approve bid on new sprinkler system

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

Bid openings were part of the Thomas County commissioners' meeting Tuesday.

They opened bids for a new sprinkler system for the Thomas County Office Complex and for emergency lighting at the courthouse.

Three sprinkler bids were received from J&M Lawn Service, Earth Works and Four Seasons Landscaping.

The commissioners approved the low bid of \$5,000 from Earth Works. J&M Lawn Service had the high bid of \$6,500 and the Four Seasons bid was \$5,640.

On the emergency lights, County Clerk Shelly Harms said they were looking into it because recently the lights had gone out in the courthouse and someone slipped and fell going down the stairs.

She said they thought it would be

a good idea to get emergency lighting placed in the courthouse and solicited bids. Two were received, one from Jim's Electric in the amount of \$800, which was approved, and one from Bickner Electric for \$1,926.36



S. Harms

Also on the agenda was a discussion on the air conditioning units at the courthouse and office complex.

Floyd Highland of Midwest Energy gave an update on the status of the units and future work that might be needed.

He said he's completed repairs on one unit at the courthouse and another may soon need some work because it's leaking oil. At the office complex, he said he'll probably

have to replace a pump on one unit and wanted them to know.

Also, Highland said Cheyenne County has available six or seven air conditioning units like what is already at the Thomas County building. He said they could be used as whole replacement units or parts.

The commissioners gave the go-ahead to get the units and store them until needed.

Highland said having the air conditioners on hand would drastically reduce the cost of repair and replacement.

He said if a total replacement at the courthouse had to be done, it could cost \$35,000-\$40,000 and new units at the office complex would run \$14,000-\$16,000.

In other business, the commissioners: Signed the fair board's contract with Colby Community College for use of the fairgrounds arena for rodeo practice next year.

Colby kindergartner wins state contest

By Patty Decker

Free Press Editor

A 2006 state calendar will have a local touch, thanks to a Colby Grade School student who won top honors in a recent contest sponsored by the governor and the state's highest health and environmental office.

Lauren Dempewolf, a kindergartner, was one of about 400 students at her grade level to participate in the calendar competition for the 2006 Kansas "Don't Spoil It."

Gov. Kathleen Sebelius and Roderick L. Bremby, Kansas Department of Health and Environment secretary, presented an award to Dempewolf along with 12 other children across the state representing kindergarten through twelfth grade, said Sharon Watson, communications director.

In total, 13 winners were selected out of more than 4,000 pieces of original artwork, Sebelius said about the event.

For Lauren and her parents, Steve and LaDonna Dempewolf, they were "ecstatic."

LaDonna said the project was done in the fall of 2004.

"Mr. Dave Evert (principal at Colby Sacred Heart School) received packets and distributed them to the teachers," she said.

"It's a once in a lifetime opportunity for a kindergartner to meet the governor."

Steve Dempewolf,
Lauren's father

It was the teacher's choice as to whether or not to do the project and for Lauren's teacher, Alice Ziegler, the choice was to let the students participate.

After the artwork was finished, Sharon Shirley, Sacred Heart's kindergarten teacher, gathered all the pictures — 20 of them — and sent them to Topeka.

Then in the latter part of April and, after a two-month process, Rodney Ferguson, public service administrator with the Bureau of Waste Management in Topeka, telephoned the Dempewolf family with good news.

"Rodney congratulated Lauren for being the winner in the calendar contest (at the kindergarten-level) and invited all of us to a special ceremony in Topeka," Steve said.

The family went to Topeka on Friday, May 20, to meet with Sebelius, Ferguson, Bremby and others who won first place in the

contest too.

"This was quite a process," LaDonna said, "and we really had no idea of how big this was until we arrived in Topeka."

In addition to Lauren's artwork being the best of 400 entries in her age group, Watson said, more than 20,000 copies of the 2006 calendar will be printed and distributed to schools, local government and businesses throughout the state with Lauren's artwork appearing for the month of January.

"Personally," Steve said, "I think it is a great thing the state of Kansas does."

"It's a once in a lifetime opportunity for a kindergartner to meet the governor."

As for Lauren, she said she liked visiting Topeka and seeing the governor.

"I like to draw," Lauren said, "and stay in the lines." Her favorite coloring is with markers and crayons.



Lauren Dempewolf, a student at Colby Sacred Heart School, and Gov. Kathleen Sebelius talked with other winners in the state's "Don't Spoil It!" calendar contest. Dempewolf and her parents were among the artists honored in Topeka at a special ceremony recently.

