



# COLBY FREE PRESS

8 pages

## Record still stands

By Tisha Cox  
Colby Free Press

Unseasonably warm weather is getting attention but temperatures in the area haven't broken any records yet.

Meteorologist Dave Floyd with the National Weather Service in Goodland, said the temperature of 70 on Tuesday was notable, but not record-breaking.

Mary Knapp, a weather data librarian with K-State Extension in Manhattan, said the record for that date was a temperature of 71 set in 1997. Also, on Jan. 2, 1997, a record of 72 degrees was the record high.

"That was a warm year," she said. Floyd said the warm weather the past few weeks can be attributed to a change in the wind.

"It really is dependent on which way the upper wind is blowing," he said.

He explained this time of year, the winds in the upper atmosphere normally come out of the north-northwest, as they did during the unusually cold snap in December.

That week, there was a "persistent northerly flow of air" that pulled down Arctic air from Canada.

The upper winds have been pulling the mild, warmer air of the Pacific and American Southwest.

The warm air has been sitting over the region, and Floyd said it's all a matter of chance during the winter.

"Someone somewhere else is paying for it," he said.

And, the warmth has persisted because the snow from November and December has all melted off.

With no snow to reflect back the sunlight, the ground has been able to warm up, and it's made it easier for the weather to stay warmer.

"It can be a self-feeding pattern," Floyd said. Over the short-term, temperatures will stay in the low 50s, and continue to be above normal. Lately, temperatures have been 25 to 30 degrees above normal.

"That's pretty significant," he said. "No doubt about it."

There will be "inevitable" cold pushes, so people can expect normal winter weather to resume over the next two months, but Floyd said patterns predict the weather will be more mild than cold.

He also addressed precipitation. Floyd said for Goodland specifically, precipitation over the 2000-2005 period is down 25 inches.

## Sack o' sweets



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Left to right: Courtney Ress, Rachel Lamm, and Curtis Fulwider, members of the Colby High School Technology Student Association, bagged desserts during their soup supper Tuesday at the Colby Community Building. Money from the fund-raiser will be used to pay for trips to the state and national competitions, said sponsor Lamoreaux Fulwider. The students will be traveling to Overland Park March 19-21 for state and to Dallas in June for their national competition.

## County gives approval for TV tower

By Jan Katz Ackerman  
Colby Free Press

Thomas County Commissioners during their Tuesday meeting gave the green light to construction of a public television tower south of Brewster.

Commissioners Ron Evans, Paul Steele and Ken Christiansen said they support Bunker Hill-based Smoky Hills Public Television station's effort to build a 1,200 foot tall tower about 9 miles south of Brewster. The actual site is 3/4-mile west of County Road No. 2.

"The \$3 million dollar grant for the tower is from the Department of Agriculture and National Public Radio," Steele said. "National Public Radio can also put an antenna on the tower making available National Public Radio closer to western Kansas and Colorado."

Smoky Hills Public Television Director of Engineering Terry Cutler said the State of Kansas is also involved in the grant project. He said having a tower near Brewster would allow the station to reduce the number of translators located atop elevators.

"The advantage to the current coverage area is with translators and when we put this (tower) on we'll be able to turn then off and have this one big translator," Cutler said.

While the proposed tower won't change the station's reception for satellite or cable television viewers, Cutler said it will improve those having air signal.

"It will enhance air signal and it will be digital," he said. "Any of our

cable translators that use us now will get cleaner service to them all than what we can provide now."

In order to assist Smoky Hills with moving forward with the project, Thomas County Commissioners provided the station with two letters of support.

One of the letters Evans signed states the proposed construction site was not in a zoned area of the county and that white strobe lights were already in use in the area by farmers. Evans told Cutler the lights, according to agronomists, are "less likely to attract insect pests to the growing crops."

Evans signed a second letter saying the proposed construction site was not part of a national park, historical land site, or on Indian tribal land.

"If they can say these things it's a few less hoops for us to jump through," Cutler said about the grant process.

Steele said the commission board has asked Thomas County Economic Development Director Gerry Fulwider to send Cutler a third letter in support as a way to promote Thomas County's overall support of the project. Fulwider Tuesday afternoon said his letter was "going out today."

Still waiting on certification for the proposed tower, Cutler said he could not say when construction will begin.

"We are waiting on the Federal Communications Commission for certification, but we don't know when that will be issued," he said.

Cutler expects a groundbreaking ceremony to take place at the site.

## New Thomas County health official starts work

By Jan Katz Ackerman  
Colby Free Press

Thomas County's new county health nurse and county health administrator were sworn into office Tuesday during the county commissioners meeting.

Thomas County Clerk Shelly Harms administered Juanitz Gatz the oath of office in front of commissioners Ron Evans, Paul Steele and Ken Christiansen.

Gatz, replaces Juanita Dewey who resigned in November, and will be paid \$45,000 per year for oversight of both positions.

The board re-elected Ron Evans

to the position of chairman. Evans is starting his 12th year as commissioner.

Commissioners approved a 2 percent pay increase for all county employees.

The amount equates to \$30,000 of the county's \$5.3 million dollar budget for 2006.

The across-the-board increase includes an increase in the same amount approved Dec. 29 for the Thomas County Sheriff's Office employees.

Sheriff Mike Baughn met with the commissioners last week and said since he would not be filling the position left open by the death of

Deputy Cory Wang he wanted to allocate a portion of Wang's salary to the remainder of his employees.

The amount will mean Baughn's 14 employees, not including himself and Under-sheriff Jason Moses, will receive 50 cents per hour in addition to the 2 percent pay raise.

Baughn's approved 2006 budget

of \$260,000 will redirect \$7,474 of Wang's salary to the other employees, leaving \$15,406 for janitorial or other sheriff's office needs.

Thomas County Clerk Shelly Harms was appointed freedom of information officer.

Commissioners signed resolutions to waive a state requirement in how accounts and reports are filed allowing them to operate on a cash basis for financial statements.

Other resolutions signed included those naming of banks as depository institutions for Thomas County and the Colby Free Press as the county's official newspaper for legal publications.

The cereal malt beverage license was approved for the Colonial Steakhouse located near Oakley.

Also approved were the premium for the workman's compensation plan and the county official's surety bond certified with the state insurance pool.

Commissioners discussed the possibility of an official county Web site, but the topic was tabled until more information can be obtained.

At the Monday, Jan. 16 meeting of the board, the commissioners will discuss about gasoline and diesel purchase options for county vehicles.

## Firefighters battling grass fires fear weather

RINGGOLD, Texas (AP) — Firefighters faced a threat of windier, warmer weather Tuesday as they battled fast-moving blazes that have virtually destroyed some small towns and charred hundreds of thousands of acres of drought-stricken Texas, Oklahoma and New Mexico.

Since Dec. 27, flames racing across grassland and farmland have destroyed more than 250 buildings. Four deaths were reported last week in Texas and Oklahoma.

On Monday, authorities went house to house in a search for victims in burned-out Texas towns including Ringgold.

A weekend blaze destroyed most of the ranch-and-cattle community of about 100 people near the Oklahoma line. Fifty other homes and 40,000 acres were torched as wind swept the fire 13 miles from Ringgold to Nocona.

Coylee Grimsley and her two sons watched their home burn just hours after she had cooked a large meal to celebrate the new year.

"We was enjoying it, and here come the flames," she said. "If you'd been there, you'd have thought the world was going to end."

Two major fires still active Tuesday had covered about 90,000 acres in a sparsely populated area near San Angelo in West Texas. One had destroyed 15 buildings in Sterling County, just north of San Angelo, said Mary Leathers, a Texas Forest Service spokeswoman.

A 35,000-acre blaze near the small towns of Carbon, Gorman and Desdemona had been beaten back by late Monday to just a few hundred acres of mostly open ranch land, said Mark Pipkin of the Eastland Fire Department.

All major wildfires in Oklahoma were declared under control late Monday thanks to calmer wind and higher humidity, but crews were preparing for the worst. Highs up to 80 were possible Tuesday with only 10 to 20 percent humidity and wind up to 25 mph, the National Weather Service said.

Go  
Eagles  
Go!

Alli Franz and Olivia Herbel listened to the Colby High School pep band perform before the start of the varsity boys basketball game Tuesday at the Colby Community Building. See page 8 for all the sports action. The boys and girls will be back in action Friday at Goodland.



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press