



COLBY FREE PRESS

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Agency director named

Environmental Protection group selects Colbyite

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

The new director at the Northwest Local Environmental Protection Group will be a familiar face to many.

Shirley Weber took over as director Jan. 13, but has worked with the agency since 1990.

"I started as a secretary, then worked up to an office manager in 2001," she said. "I've done everything, including testing water samples at the office's lab."

She enjoys working with the public and said the group has a good rapport and support from contractors.

The agency is funded by grants through the state of and serves 16 northwest Kansas counties, covering 14,000 square miles.

They also work with area health departments, county commissioners and extension agents.

In 1990, the agency wrote the sanitary code for each of the 16 counties it covers.

"We license septic system contractors to install septic systems," Weber said.

The office helps design systems and test private water wells.

"Our main goal is to protect ground water," Weber said.

Cess pools are not allowed and they help people upgrade to approved septic systems.

Any environmental issues dealing with septic systems or water are addressed through the group's office.

They also educate people on protecting ground water.

"We take any environmental complaints and refer them to the correct entities," she said.

Weber has always had an interest, and enjoys her work.

Weber is one of three employees at the office, but she said they will be hiring a third soon.

Weber has lived in Colby since 1985.

She and her husband Omar have two children, Adam, 13, and Kayla, 12.



S. Weber



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press



Fun and games!

ABOVE: Landon Skolout, 6, had a lot of determination when he pounded a mallet in order to send a rubber chicken flying into a bucket during the annual Sacred Heart School Carnival held Sunday. Standing behind Landon was his father, Gery, offering some moral support. LEFT: Abby Kummer, 6, was not going to give up climbing a ladder with the object to make it to the wall and ring the bells. More than 800 people attended the four-hour long event with an estimated \$23,000 raised at the event.

Health care key to rural economies

By Jan Katz Ackerman
Colby Free Press

A good healthcare system is being called a prescription for maintaining a healthy rural economy.

"That was the bottom line," said Logan County Development Director Fred Jones said Thursday.

Jones talked about a study of the economic impact and economic potential of the Quad-County Area produced by researchers at K-State Research and Extension and the Oakley Health Area Steering Committee.

The study is part of a state-wide initiative called the Kansas Rural Health Works program sponsored by the Kansas Rural Health Options Project.

The initiative has generated a county-level analysis of the economic impacts and potential of the local health care sector on the economy of Logan, Thomas, Sheridan and Gove counties.

Jones said according to the report, the health care sector accounted for an estimated 6.3 percent of total county employment, or about 188 jobs, in 2002, the most recent year for which information was available.

Further, the study's authors calculated economic multipliers for four health care sectors and estimated that health care directly and indirectly accounted for 281 jobs throughout the area economy.

"They go on to estimate that these same sectors accounted for more than \$7.9 million in total area

income, about \$2.2 million in area retail sales," Jones said

Jones hopes the report will illustrate to those reading it there is a "need to sustain local health services."

A copy of the report is on file at Jones' office at 216 Center Ave. in Oakley.

"We must be vigilant to provide quality health care locally," Jones said.

"Healthcare consumers should understand how important health care is to the county's economic wellbeing."

Jones said lead author of the report, Dr. Aaron Lusby, agricultural economist at K-State's Office of Local Government, points out that access to affordable quality local health care services is essential to attracting and retaining local businesses and retirees.

The report was done at no cost to the county or healthcare facilities located in the four counties, Jones said.

"The Kansas Rural Health Options Project will also work with the Oakley Health Area Steering Committee to provide a comprehensive directory of healthcare services available locally and conduct a telephone survey to obtain opinions from local citizens on healthcare services," Jones said.



Fred Jones

Cocaine valued at \$2.9 million seized

By Jan Katz Ackerman
Colby Free Press

A traffic stop near Colby resulted in \$2.9 million dollars worth of cocaine being seized.

Thomas County Sheriff Mike Baughn on Friday said two California women were stopped for speeding about two miles west of Colby Tuesday.

During the stop, 62.7 pounds of cocaine was found in the car driven by Georgia M. Watson, 54, of

Rialto, Calif. Watson and a passenger, Tiffany Christine Myricks, 21 of Fontana, Calif., consented to a search of the vehicle.

Both Watson and Myricks were booked into Thomas County Jail and charged with possession of a narcotic drug with intent to sell.

Thomas County Undersheriff Jason Moses said today the \$2,859,120 worth of cocaine is not the largest amount of the drug seized by the county.

Woman makes unusual adoption

WICHITA (AP) — When Kat Boyd walked into Fire Station No. 17 in west Wichita three years ago, she was pretty sure the firefighters might think she was crazy.

"I asked them if I could adopt them," she said. "They looked like I was some crazy old woman, and one finally said 'What do you mean you want to adopt us?' I told them, 'I just want to bring food to you and do little special things.'"

OK, the firefighters said. Boyd brought the firefighters thick prime-cut steaks and decadent desserts.

Before long, she had become like family.

Before long, buying groceries for Station No. 17 had progressed to buying furniture and major appliances.

Last year, Boyd, who works as an intensive care unit nurse at Wesley Medical Center, donated \$9,000 worth of items to the station. Her most recent donations: a big-screen TV with surround sound, a DVD player, and homemade blankets for each of the firefighters.

Her reasons for giving are in her roots.

"I grew up in Texas, and down there private citizens adopt fire stations," she said. "For firefighters,

“They looked like I was some crazy old woman, and one finally said 'What do you mean you want to adopt us?'”

Kat Boyd,
intensive care unit nurse

this is their second home. They are taken completely away from their family three days a week for 24 hours a day."

When Boyd was 13, her favorite uncle and cousin were killed in an Oklahoma City explosion.

"My uncle was driving a truck that had bad gas," she said. "He had pulled into a station and was draining it when a pilot light in the station exploded with the fumes."

The firefighters who responded made an impression.

"They were so nice to our family," she said. "That has always stuck in my mind. I thought if I ever get to the point where I could do it, I was going to try and give back to a fire station some of that compassion."

She brings in something for all the station's three shifts to make

each firefighter feel special, said Capt. Gregg Myrtle.

"She's a great friend," Myrtle said. "I think that Kat, when her husband passed away, didn't have a lot of family anywhere close. We are her adopted family."

As she got to know the firefighters of Station 17, Boyd said she became concerned by their lack of creature comforts.

"They had this little bitty TV, and the chairs they had to sit on were just horrible," she said. "I thought they need some recliners."

She bought them five La-Z-Boy recliners.

When the firefighters at Fire Station No. 16 heard, she bought them five recliners as well.

Myrtle said most firefighters have old household furnishings at their stations.

State champion!



DENNIS SAINT/Goodland Star News

Colby's Cole Garcia, left, faced off with his opponent from Santa Fe Trail to win the 119 pound weight class at the state high school wrestling tournament Saturday at Salina. Garcia finished the season with a school record 40 wins. He finished his career with two state championships and three state tournament appearances. More sports can be found on page 8.