



COLBY FREE PRESS

One Colby woman has license to retire

By **Patty Decker**
Free Press Editor

Tens of thousands of people around Colby have Janet Harper's work in their back pocket.

As supervisor of the Kansas Drivers License Station at 990 S. Range Ave., Harper has been issuing licenses for almost 27 years. At age 64, she said it's time to retire.

"One day, you look at the calendar and you are a certain age and realize it's time for a change," she said.

Harper's last day is Thursday and she said she's thankful for all the wonderful people she has met throughout her career.

"I think what I will miss most is the interaction with so many people," she said.

Before her employment with the drivers license division, she had been involved with the public for 19 years working in Colby for Caldwell's Appliance, for John Molstad with Colby Canvas and then as a dispatcher for the Colby Police Department under Police Chief Jerald Thompson.

"There was one year between

Caldwells and Colby Canvas when I moved to Kansas City and worked at Bankers Life Insurance Company," she said.

Born in Hays and growing up in New Almelo, Harper moved to Colby in 1959.

When she started in May 1980 with the Kansas Drivers License Division, Harper said it wasn't anything like it is today.

"We traveled all over northwest Kansas in those days," she said, "alternating Tuesdays in St. Francis and Atwood and Wednesdays in Oberlin and Hoxie."

Goodland and Colby were once a week stops on Thursdays and Fridays, respectively, she said, setting up shop in each of those towns' Kansas Department of Transportation buildings.

In those early years, she worked with Bruce Amos, the other examiner and office supervisor.

For almost 10 years, she and Amos would haul the equipment, which consisted of a typewriter, Polaroid camera, 5 x 7 cards and more into the trunk of a state vehicle — a compact-sized car.

"I cannot remember the make of the car, but it was small," she said. "Each day of the week, we then unloaded at specific towns and went to work. The cash was kept in a tackle box and there were so many forms to carry around."

Then in 1990, the state implemented a CDL (Commercial Drivers



Janet Harper, left, is retiring from the Kansas Drivers License Station in Colby. Earlier this week she helped Glenn Teel of Wallace with a CDL renewal. Even though many towns can issue vehicle

ers License) station in Colby and the other towns were allowed to handle renewals within their county seats.

Technology continued to improve and the computer system got more sophisticated, she said. By 1994, Kansas was connected to all other states through a Problem Driver Pointer System, allowing examiners to know right away if someone had suspended licenses in other states.

Throughout her 27-year career,

Harper said she got to do everything.

As an examiner in a small town, she said she took the photos, checked people's vision, conducting regular vehicle and larger truck testing and gave exams.

"In larger cities," she said, "the supervisor wouldn't be handling every aspect of the job like out here."

For Harper, though, that's what made it enjoyable.

licenses, Harper said when it comes to a CDL, only Scott City, Phillipsburg, Hays or Colby are the only western Kansas locations for applications or renewals.

Only one time, she said, she was involved in an accident while testing someone for their CDL and it wasn't even their fault.

In retirement, Harper said she plans to travel with her husband, Jim, of 43 years and visit their four grandchildren: Jenna, 7; Natalie, 6; Caley, 2; and Sarah, 1.

"I also plan on continuing my Mary Kay business, which is my fun hobby, along with working in the garden and playing golf."

PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

Harper also serves as a Colby Diplomat and was president of that organization and also the Business Professional Women. She is a member of the Sacred Heart Catholic Church.

Even though Harper is sad to say goodbye she does have much to be grateful for.

"We have a fine bunch of people in northwest Kansas and I was fortunate to have been a part of this for the last 27 years."

Alleged stolen cattle sold at Colby Livestock Auction

By **Jan Katz Ackerman**
Colby Free Press

A Monument couple is alleged to have stolen cattle in three counties and formal charges have been filed in two of the counties.

Michael T. Coberly, 24, and his wife, Jackie Ann Coberly, age unknown, have been charged in Logan County District Court for cattle thefts in May.

"This kid is alleged to have sold cattle on

May 11th, 18th and 25th," said Logan County Sheriff Pat Parsons. "He allegedly sold cattle on the 11th and 25th at Colby Livestock in Colby and on the 18th at Russell Livestock in Russell. All 39 head of cattle were stolen and he allegedly cashed checks worth over \$25,000."

Parsons said he tracked down the stolen cattle by verifying ear tags numbers with tags on cattle reported missing. He said on May 18, 15 head of cattle were reported missing from Beef Belt Feeders in Scott

City. On May 25, Logan County residents Dave Hubert, owner of Pure Breed Charolais, and Gary Keller, reported they each were missing eight head of cattle. Parsons said Michael Coberly is a former employee of both Hubert and Keller.

Michael Coberly has been charged with theft by threat, a level nine nonperson felony punishable by five to 17 months in prison and a fine up to \$100,000.

Jackie Coberly has been charged with conspiracy to commit theft for allegedly

having assisted her husband with taking cattle during the night and transporting them to sale barns. Conspiracy to commit theft is a level 10 felony punishable by five to 13 months in prison and a fine up to \$100,000.

According to Scott County Attorney John Shirley, he has charged Michael Coberly with felony theft of cattle for his allegedly taking eight cattle from Beef Belt Feeders. Shirley said he has not charged Jackie Coberly with anything stemming

from her husband's alleged crimes.

Michael Coberly is out of jail on a \$25,000 bond. Jackie Coberly was served with a summons, but she was not taken into custody because of her pregnancy. She remains out of jail on a recognizance bond.

Parsons said he only made the couple's alleged connection to the cattle reported missing in Gove County Friday. As of Tuesday, charges had not been filed in Gove County against either Michael Coberly or Jackie Coberly.

Gardeners keep county green

By **Tisha Cox**
Colby Free Press

Colby isn't known as the 'oasis on the plains' for nothing. And Thomas County's Master Gardeners are helping keep it that way.

Extension agent Doug Musick said the program started in Thomas County in 2000.

"Their primary purpose is to do education," he said.

Master Gardeners is a nationwide program designed to provide unbiased horticultural information to the public. Most states have the program, which is overseen by the state extension service. Participants must first complete a 40-hour course and 40 volunteer hours to the county. For each year a person stays in the program, there is a continuing education requirement of 20 hours of class and 20 more volunteer hours.

The class is offered each year, but in a different part of the state.

Once participants finish the training, they receive a certificate and can use the name "master gardener."

Musick said there are currently 17 active master gardeners in the county. In the past, as many as 30 people in Thomas County have taken the course.

Thomas County has the largest master gardener group in the 26

counties of northwest Kansas, including Ellis County.

Judy Kistler joined the program almost five years ago.

"I just like flowers and gardening," she said. "It's one of the best things I've done."

Kistler has helped with tomato and pepper trials at the Northwest Research-Extension Center, and recently, the Master Gardeners helped with some work in the yard area there.

"Because there is so much to do, it's easy for the group to get its necessary hours," she said.

Another opportunity over the past year has given them even more opportunity.

Musick and the Master Gardeners have turned the area in front of the extension office into a garden. But it's not just any garden.

"Last summer it was bare dirt," he said. Hee does the maintenance but the Master Gardeners planted the area.

Musick said it's still under construction but shows off plants, shrubs and trees that are ideal for the semi-arid climate of northwest Kansas. Fescue and bluegrass are growing green.

Burr oak, hackberry, Japanese

pagoda trees and cedars dot the area.

There are also some sandhill plums that have shot up since their planting in 2005. Musick said the trees reach 10-12 feet in height when mature and have already grown two and a half feet since last year.

The garden has already been used as an educational tool to show off species that require minimal water or maintenance.

More work will be done in the future, but he said the most immediate project he wants to complete is marking all of the plants so people know what species they are.

He said the efforts of the group help show how valuable horticulture and landscaping can be.

"Cool season grasses do well in northwest Kansas, needing watered only about once a week," he said.

Musick said one mistake people tend to make when watering their lawns is watering frequently, but for only short periods of time.

What would be more beneficial is to water less often but for a longer duration.

"They need to get the water down into the soil," he said.

In addition to providing help with the garden project at the extension office and educational duties, the Master Gardener also provide other services.

The group takes care of the herb garden at Colby's Prairie Museum



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press
Thomas County Extension Agent Doug Musick checked on plants in the garden in front of the extension office Tuesday.

of Art and History; gives lawn and garden tours and is developing a self-guided tree tour of Colby.

The group also developed a butterfly identification wheel, which is available at the extension office. Money to pay for the garden project came from the sale of the butterfly wheels.

Donations have also helped with the garden. The Master Gardeners themselves donated some of the plants for the project.

David Pabst donated tree moving, others donated grass seed, irrigation supplies; and tilling was provided by Bill Biel.

Musick said the county commissioners also made a contribution by

paying for a water hydrant to be put in front of the extension building.

Master Gardeners are available to give presentations for groups. Also, applications for next year's program will be accepted in December or January. There is also a program geared toward youth, but Musick said it has not yet been adopted in Thomas County.

For information, call the Thomas County extension office at 460-4582.

"People take a lot of pride in having something green and growing out here," Musick said. "But it does take a lot of work."

Smoking ban proposed

TOPEKA (AP) — State health officials are considering a push for a statewide ban on smoking in public places while they encourage cities to enact their own restrictions in the wake of a national report on secondhand smoke.

The report Tuesday from the U.S. surgeon general concluded that even a small exposure to secondhand smoke is harmful and that ventilation systems or separating smokers from nonsmokers does not provide enough protection.

Anti-smoking groups and the Kansas Department of Health and Environment said the report should help move public opinion — and elected officials — toward banning smoking public places.

But KDHE Secretary Rod Bremby was careful during a news conference not to call for an outright statewide ban, noting the report was only hours old.

"We will continue to monitor that as a policy alternative," Bremby said. "It's definitely something under consideration."

A House committee had a hearing in 2005 on a bill to ban smoking in public places starting in 2007. It died in committee with legislators saying the issue should be settled by local governments.