



COLBY FREE PRESS

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Sheridan County says goodbye to sheriff

By Jan Katz Ackerman

Colby Free Press

Had a pin been dropped in downtown Hoxie during Sheridan County Sheriff Jim Johnson's funeral procession it would have echoed its entire 25 minutes.

Only two cars sat on Main Street after funeral Tuesday attended by about 1,000 people.

"Freedom is not free," Gov. Kathleen Sebelius said. "It comes with a price as we are seeing here today."

Talking about service and sacrifice, Sebelius said the crowd at the funeral showed Johnson was "truly respected." She asked the community to focus on that.

"Sheriff Johnson leaves behind a loving wife and large family," she said.

"Please wrap your arms around them and show them you care."

Johnson, 54, known for trying to use counsel and reasoning before force, was killed Thursday while interviewing a Hoxie man in his office about voluntary commitment for mental health care.

Steven Reitcheck, 35, moments after agreeing to seek treatment, pulled a gun and shot and killed Johnson. Reitcheck was shot and killed by part-time deputy Brandon Fenner who was in the office at the time of the interview and shooting.

Calling Fenner "courageous," Kansas Attorney General Phill Kline said Johnson and Fenner are among those public servants willing to put their lives on the line for another.

"Jim Johnson led with his heart," Kline said. "And he had a big heart and as such, he was vulnerable to those he served."

"I do not understand the mysteries of life, but I know there will be a day of rejoicing for Johnson's willingness to lay down his life for his brother," Kline said.

A flag draped casket was between a Kansas Highway Patrol honor guard and flowers. Charles Liles of Wichita and Joseph Henre of Kansas City played a bagpipe procession as Johnson's immediate family walked to the front of the 750 seat Hoxie High School auditorium.

Seated behind Johnson's family were his remaining family members and friends. About 350 law enforcement officers and political dignitaries from across the state sat at the back. The remainder of those attending were seated in the gymnasium where they watched on a large screen television. An untold number watched through closed circuit television broadcast throughout the community.

Sally Cameron, Hoxie resident and former classmate of Johnson,



JAN KATZ ACKERMAN/Colby Free Press

Three Kansas Highway Patrol troopers stood at attention as the funeral procession for the late Sheridan County Sheriff Jim Johnson

made its way through Hoxie to the cemetery located about a mile north of town on K-23.

played the piano. Adriane Moss, a distant cousin of Johnson, and Garrett Kaiser, a family friend, were soloists.

Pastor Derek Slack of Hoxie's Christian Church officiated the ser-

vice. Casket bearers were Clint Dobbs, Jeffrey Irwin, Ryan January, Mark Hartman, Jarrod Knoll, John Cahoj, Richie Cahoj and Brandon Rietcheck. Honorary casket bearers were Jerry Bull, J.R. Kaiser, Bran-

don Carver, Mitch Moss and Joe Moss.

"Today we mourn, we honor and we celebrate the life of officer James Johnson of Hoxie, Kansas," Slack said.

Calling him a friend to many, Slack encouraged the Johnson family through prayer, scripture and two hymns, "Rock of Ages" and

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Veteran's Day Parade planned in Colby

By Patty Decker

Free Press Editor

As in years past, a Veteran's Day Parade will be held in downtown Colby. This year's parade is at 10 a.m., Saturday, Nov. 11.

Colby-area veterans and any other groups or individuals wanting to take part are invited, said Jim Vap, VFW and American Legion member.

"Veterans are urged to wear their red caps," he said, "and bicycles, floats and other displays are welcome."

Now in its fifth year, the parade will begin at Fike Park on Franklin Avenue and head south to Second Street.

From there, the parade will turn

left and continue up the hill to the Thomas County Courthouse.

Once the parade arrives at the court house, a memorial service will take place to honor all Thomas County veterans.

Some parade entries include the Colby High School Band and buses for those veterans unable to walk.

After the service concludes, a free dinner for all veterans and their families is planned with a request for a salad or dessert. Location has yet to be determined.

Spectators are also encouraged to line up along any of the parade route locations to recognize these veterans, Vap said.

For questions about participating, call Leland Kindler at (785) 443-2365.

Family, friends remember fallen sheriff

By Jan Katz Ackerman

Colby Free Press

The city of Hoxie shutdown before noon Tuesday to prepare for the funeral of Sheridan County Sheriff Jim Johnson who was killed in the line of duty Thursday.

Johnson, sheriff for the past 18 years, was shot and killed while visiting with Steven Reitcheck, 35, about voluntary commitment to a mental facility. Johnson's funeral at Hoxie High School was attended by about 1,000 people.

The funeral received attention from a variety of Kansas media outlets.

After the crowd of 1,000 saw photos of Johnson, 54, from those as a baby through his

adult life, individuals spoke about him.

Johnson's son, Eric Bellamaganya of Kansas City, Mo., said "today was the hardest day of my life."

Bellamaganya read a message written in eulogy format by his mother, Linda Johnson to her husband. Linda J said while Jim J was an only child, he was blessed with many cousins.

"Even after 25 years of marriage," she wrote, "I still don't know all the family and friends."

A farm boy and mechanic, Linda wrote that husband decided to "follow his dad's footsteps" and in 1979, decided to train for law enforcement.

Johnson's father, Millard Johnson, was Hoxie Chief of Police for many years.

"Jim was a caregiver to all," Bellamaganya said reading his mom's words. "Even if they didn't want to be watched."

"And I want to add," he said, "He had many sleepless nights watching out for you."

Adding a light-heartedness to the aservice was Jarrod Knoll. He demonstrated how he used to welcome Jim to a room.

"Hey Jimbo," Knoll said, raising his right leg and moving his right fistted hand back and forth over his lifted leg.

Knoll said Johnson made him promise that no lies would be told at his funeral.

"He was the best sheriff in America," he said, "and that's no lie."

Saying Johnson's motto for his office and deputies was protect and serve, Knoll said Johnson

lived up to that motto and he planned to do likewise.

"I know no one who could honor that motto better," Knoll said.

"His memory is going to live on long after all of us are dust." Knoll said Johnson's office was full of artifacts and antiques, as well as family photos.

He said if Johnson had a difficult day all he had to do was look at the pictures and everything would be "OK."

He encouraged those at the funeral and listening by closed circuit television to follow Johnson's lifestyle and forgive someone, give someone a hug and tell others that they are loved.

"Jim is right," Knoll said. "Life is too short."

Sweets for the sweet



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Maria Lourdes, left, and son Aaron, center, looked over treats while Judy Kleinsorge, children's librarian at Pioneer Memorial Library, offered a monster face cake to Aaron during Halloween open house festivities Tuesday. The open house was held in place of Family Night Storytime, which will resume at 7 p.m. Tuesday, with a theme of "snowmen."

County commissioners hear about recycling grant

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

Recycling was on the agenda at the Thomas County Commissioners meeting Monday.

Lynette Koon with the Northwest Kansas Regional Recycling Organization gave a presentation on a regional recycling grant. She said more than \$5 million in requests went into the state, but only \$1 million is available.

"They do look favorable on regional projects," Koon said.

She had to do a proposal for each county and one regional summary for the \$170,000 grant request

If approved, the money will be used for three recycling trailers, recycling bins and building improvements at one county. If the recycling organization doesn't get the full amount, Koon said she has a plan but didn't elaborate on details.

She also talked about how much waste has been brought into the recycling center in Thomas County. More than 200 tons have come through the center so far this year and Koon expects at least that much more by the end of the year.

Also, she said \$715 has been spent on fuel since May to pick up materials from other member counties in the recycling group. Five counties are on the route.

"We're very pleased with how our figures are going," Koon said. Koon said there has been a dis-

"The cooperation between counties has been tremendous. They're really helping each other out."

Lynette Koon,
Regional Recycling Center

cussion on pooling counties and making their own waste authority out of the recycling organization.

"The cooperation between counties has been tremendous. They're really helping each other out," Koon said.

The commissioners also heard a request for space at the Thomas County Office Complex.

Matt Bain, a wildlife biologist with the Kansas Division of Wildlife and Parks, asked if it would be possible for their offices to move to the office complex next year. Space will be available after RC&D moves out in April.

"We've needed different office space for 20 years," Bain said.

However, chairman Ron Evans said the office complex is for Thomas County entities, and other organizations in the building might want the space.

"Decisions will have to be made within the next six months," he said.

Commissioners also heard a presentation from Thomas County

Health Department administrator Juanita Gatz. She had a renewal from the federal government for public safety money of almost \$15,000. She said the money used to fall under the category of bioterrorism, but that has changed. The money doesn't come with any stipulations on how it should be spent.

"There are no guidelines," Gatz said.

The department doesn't need any equipment, and she is unsure about how to spend the money.

Instead of signing the forms for the money, Evans suggested to let the government know they need more guidance.

In other business, the commissioners approved \$25 for tests for each county employee at the health fair in January.

Commissioner Paul Steele said this is the second year for the idea. However, if employees don't use the money for testing, it will be applied toward a flu shot next year.