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Former doctor, Hoxie facility settle lawsuit

By Jan Katz Ackerman

Colby Free Press

A lawsuit involving Sheridan County's commissioners, health complex, former employed doctor and administrator has settled out of court.

Dr. Margarita Hammeke and her husband, Paul D. Hammeke, dropped their \$1.4 million dollar wrongful termination suit and settled for \$75,000.

"All the t's were crossed and the i's dotted about five weeks ago," Joe Stratton, administrator, said.

Documents from the United States District Court in Wichita state the Hammekes were suing Sheridan County Commissioners David Zimmerman, Ron Schamberger and Keith Kennedy, Sheridan County Hospital and trustees Richard Krannawitter, Ross Carder, Craig Cooper, Allen Neal and Randy Farber in their official and individual capacities.

The Hammekes signed contracts in March 2005, both of which were terminated in June 2005 after having only been at work for about a month. Margarita was to have been paid \$162,000 and Paul another \$70,000, plus benefits.

The reason for the termination is not disclosed due to falling under personnel matters and the right to keep it confidential. However, the Hammekes claimed in their lawsuit their civil rights had been violated.

Margarita, who is Hispanic and Native American, claimed the hospital discriminated against her and violated Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Paul claimed his rights were violated when he was let go for supporting his wife in her claim she was terminated due to a conflict with a "Caucasian male contract physician."

The couple claimed they suffered damages due to their contracts being prematurely terminated and they were not treated fairly or given chance to present their side of their case to the board

of trustees. Despite being given three opportunities for due process hearings, both individuals failed to attend the meetings during which their due process hearings were set.

An order of dismissal filed with the court in Wichita Nov. 24 states both sides in the case "resolved their differences and settled this matter." United States District Judge J. Thomas Marten dismissed the case with prejudice, meaning neither side can file it again and ordered both sides to pay their own costs.

Richard Krannawitter, chairman of the board of trustees, said the trustees weighed the cost of battling the Hammekes in court versus letting the complex's insurance company pay an out of court settlement.

"We offset litigation expenses toward the settlement," Krannawitter said. "All we are out is the deductible and attorney fees. It was good enough for our insurance company and it's good enough for me."

According to Stratton, the deductible was \$5,000, a cost paid by the taxpayer supported complex.

Besides not paying a \$1 million plus dollar tab for the lawsuit, Krannawitter said the complex fared well when the Hammekes filed Equal Employment Opportunity Commission claims against the trustees.

"They both filed with the EEOC and both lost," Krannawitter said. "We won those, and we won an unemployment hearing Dr. Hammeke filed."

Art Palmer of Goodell, Stratton, Edmonds and Palmer of Topeka represented the complex. Palmer on Wednesday said he has a policy of not talking about cases and refused comment.

Although court documents list the Hammekes living in Texas, Krannawitter said the last time he had seen them was in June when they left Hoxie.

"They are going their way and we are moving on," he said.



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Donna Jennings, left, Leilani Thomas from Colby Convention and Visitors Bureau and Eric Eicher, director of the Thomas County Community Foundation, visit Colby's Santa City last week. The community foundation donated \$500 to Santa City

in honor of Donna's husband, Dave Jennings, who died earlier this month. Jennings was one of the founders of Santa City, and the donation was from money raised at the foundation's Santa's Workshop event this month. Santa City is in Fike Park.

Goodland possible site for new clinic

By Tom Betz

The Goodland Star-News

Area veterans are being encouraged to get on the phone and tell the Department of Veterans Affairs in Denver they want a new outreach clinic opened in Goodland.

Three High Plains communities are in the running for one new clinic that will be opened next year to serve a nine-county area, the department's Rocky Mountain Region said last Monday: Yuma and Burlington in Colorado or Goodland.

Veterans are being urged to call the regional office in Denver at (866) 301-9626 to register their support for the Goodland Regional Medical Center.

"I'd like to see them get 5,000 calls from Sherman County," said Jay Jolly, Goodland hospital administrator. "We are very much behind it and would like to see Goodland get the clinic."

A message being circulated by e-mail to American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars veterans in the area says:

"You can help promote the Goodland hospital by calling the Rocky Mountain Region for Veterans Affairs.

The only thing you have to do is call an 800 number and let them know you are in support of the clinic to be located in Goodland.

"You can speak with one of the ladies that answer or leave a message saying you are in support of the

clinic in Goodland.

"They will tell you that a location has not been determined, but they are tracking the number of calls they get for each town."

The announcement came from the Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson in Washington. In Goodland, veterans say they hope their town is the chosen one.

Ken Baum, former American Legion post commander, alerted *The Star-News* to the announcement last Monday. He said he was one of the first veterans to call the regional office and put in a few good words for Goodland.

The agency said 4,000 veterans in the nine-county area the new clinic will serve are more than an hour's drive from government health care.

Because 44 percent of the area's population is 65 or older, it is difficult for many to visit a distant facility, especially in the winter, Nicholson said.

The Denver office has said the clinic is to be opened in the next few months; a decision on the town may be made in January.

Jolly said the hospital has the staff and facilities to support the clinic, and there is community support for providing veterans with health care.

"By putting health care outpatient facilities in rural communities, we're enhancing veterans' access to VA's world-class health care," Nicholson said. "The clinic will help ensure these veterans receive the health care they have earned through their service."

New Colby business lights downtown

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

Most businesses won't be able to hold a candle to a new shop in Colby, because candles are made

there.

The Yellow Brick Road Candle Company, 112 E. Fifth St., opened right before the holiday shopping season. Owner Melanie Hart and her mother, Cherine Ward, started

making candles in 2003.

"Me and my mom make the candles. My mom is my partner," Hart said. "This is the first time we've had a store. We both love candles, and wanted to see if we

could make their own instead of having to buy them. It went further and further and here we are."

They went online to learn how to make the candles, and eventually found places to buy scents and jars. The candles used to be made in WaKeeney, where Ward lives, but the bulk are now made in Colby.

Their candles are different because they are made from soybean based wax.

Soy wax washes out with soap and water, has no toxins and is better to breathe and lasts longer than conventional candle wax. Another benefit is that it is a renewable resource, and using the crop also helps support farmers.

Candles come in several sizes — four, six, 8, 12, 16, 18 and 28 ounces. The largest is a 32-ounce crock candle.

"They last for quite a while," she said.

Yellow Brick has more than 100 oils to choose from.

White candles with custom labels are also popular.

"That's our biggest seller with our consultants," she said.

Yellow Brick is not just candles either. Soy is also in most of the products offered at the shop. Hart also has shampoo and conditioner, pet shampoo, lotions, soap, body spray, bath fizzes, diaper rash ointment and more. All of the products are made by Hart and her mother.

"It took a lot of time to work up something they liked, but the results have been well worth it. We're pretty good at it now," Hart said.

President Ford's ceremonies begin Friday

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a state funeral for the president who only wanted to be speaker of the House, Gerald R. Ford's casket will return to the Congress he served on his historic journey to an unelected presidency.

Ford will lie in state in the Capitol Rotunda, where 10 other presidents have been honored. But he also will lie in repose outside the chambers of the House — where he honed his leadership skills — and the Senate, where — as vice president — he served in his constitutional role as the chamber's president.

Ceremonies begin Friday in a California church, followed by a flight across the country Ford sought to heal after the trauma of Watergate and the resignation of his disgraced predecessor, Richard Nixon.

The mourning ends five days later with Ford's entombment on a hillside near his Grand Rapids, Mich., presidential museum.

Funeral details for the nation's 38th president were made public Wednesday. He will lie in state in the Rotunda, where the public and dignitaries will pay their respects.

“

Thanks for a well-lived life. You made us proud to be Americans.”

written in condolence book

of the former president's death.

They started coming within an hour of the announcement Tuesday night that Ford had died. They brought flags, candles, flowers and signs to create a makeshift memorial in the plaza outside the museum's front doors.

Museum officials placed condolence books in the museum's entrance and kept the vestibule open for the steady flow of visitors arriving throughout the brisk and windy day.

"God bless you, Mr. Ford," one person wrote.

"Thanks for a well-lived life. You made us proud to be Americans," wrote another.



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Melanie Hart, owner of the Yellow Brick Road Candle Co., poured a candle. The business offers candles and many other items.