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Severe storms damage 30 homes in area

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A cry for financial help to assist tornado victims is being let out by the local director of the American Red Cross.

"These people's whole lives have been changed," said Sherry White, director of the Thomas County Red Cross. "The one major thing we can do is help them rebuild and we need the money to do it."

White said tornadoes that struck Sheridan and Gove Counties on Thursday and Friday damaged or destroyed 30 homes, plus out-buildings on numerous farms.

"It was bad," White said. "It looks to me like what I have is 30 confirmed major or total loss of homes."

White said the classification of major damage to a structure is one that has roof damage, loss of a wall or similar destruction. Minor damage is something that does not make a building uninhabitable, such as a broken window or hail damage.

"A lot depends on what an insurance company says," White said.

The Thomas County Red Cross covers Cheyenne, Rawlins, Thomas, Sheridan, Wallace, Logan and Gove Counties. White said Thursday and Friday's storms effected an area from "Park to Quinter, and all the way up to Studley."

White said her coverage area was ransacked by seven tornadoes on Thursday and another 10 tornadoes on Friday.

"While doing search and rescue on Saturday we had to stop for another tornado," White said. "Fortunately it dissipated. We are used to helping one or two families, but this is a real disaster and we are going to have to dip into our reserves. What we need is cash donations." White said of the homes located within the Thomas County Red Cross coverage area, there were 11 were in Sheridan County and another 19 were in

Gove County that received major damage over the weekend.

We had tornadoes all around us," White said, "But those are the ones that hit us."

While Decatur County is not part of White's responsibility, she said as of Saturday, no homes in Decatur County were considered a total loss, but two homes received major damage and another six were inaccessible to Red Cross emergency response teams. Also not part of her coverage area, White said the weekend storms claimed the lives of a Colorado couple found dead in their car in a field near Pratt.

"Graham County had one home with minor damage and another had been effected by the storms, which means there was no damage but the home had been without electricity," White said.

White said her office, located at 350 S. Range, Suite 8, in Colby, continues to be flooded with calls from victims needing assistance. She said it is up to local people to reach out and help those in need by giving financially to the American Red Cross.

"The best way to help is through financial donations because we know where to put the funds" White said.

"These people shop in our community all year round and it's time for our businesses to help our own people. Cash is the best way to help us help them."

White said the damage not only includes homes which were totally lost or damaged, but it included the loss of vehicles, tractors, a diesel truck, 30 head of cattle and one known death of a family pet. She said as cash reserves are depleted from helping this round of victims it is imperative to rebuild the reserves.

"I've even heard of baby calves that are walking around on broken legs, but with 7 inches of rain and flooding it's hard to get to them. The flooding had delayed damage assessment."

White said she expects the number of victims and damage totals



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



TOP: Residents looked for any shred of their belongings after tornadoes last week in Gove and Sheridan County damaged around 30 homes. LEFT: While some structures remained intact, others had only their foundation remaining as wood and debris covered the ground in parts of both Gove and Sheridan counties.

to grow over the next few days.

"People were out of town for the (Memorial Day) holiday weekend and may call with damage and the numbers may increase," she said. "We must re-establish the bank for the next disaster."

One thing that did not lack over the weekend was volunteers,

White said.

"There was a storm shelter opened up at the Quinter Methodist Church and ladies from all denominations were there cooking meals," White said. "Those ladies gave up their entire weekend to donate their time and talents and they pulled together to cook more

than 1,100 meals."

Besides the church ladies, American Red Cross volunteers from as far away as Salina responded to offer help.

"We had one of the emergency response vehicles, ERVs, from Salina," White said.

The American Red Cross is

available 24 hours a day by calling (785) 462-7161 or by email at thomascorc@st-tel.net. Office hours are 9 a.m. to noon on Monday through Friday.

For a complete list of disaster services offered by the Thomas County Red Cross visit the web site www.redcross.org.

The river runs wild



JOHN VAN NOSTRAND/Colby Free Press

A dog crossed the overflowing drainage ditch along Brookside Drive Friday afternoon after heavy rains and hail fell in Colby Thursday and Friday. According to Kansas State University's research center in Colby, more than an inch of rain fell.

Benefit for Colby woman Sunday

By Jan Katz Ackerman
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A benefit to help defray a Colby woman's medical expenses will take place Sunday, June 1.

Connie Menges, 40, suffered a stroke on Feb. 14 at her home in Colby, but after spending several weeks in a Denver hospital has returned home.

Menges and her husband, Brent, have two daughters, Brittany Jo, 10, and Bailey, 6.

"Her recovery is slow, but going as well as expected," Carol Raile, one of the benefit organizers said.

"(Connie) travels to Hill City once a week for vision therapy and has physical therapy in Colby three times a week."

Starting at 11 a.m. and running through 1 p.m., Raile, along with members of the Thomas County Hospice Advisory Board and Thrivent Financial, a Lutheran Church Missouri Synod organization, will serve sloppy Joes, chips, veggies and desserts to the public. The benefit will take place in the Little Theater of the Colby Community Building which is located at 285 E. 5th Street.

Area businesses and individuals have donated items that will

be given away as part of the fundraiser. Items include a basket of Kansas University memorabilia; decorative yard art; gift certificates ranging from \$100 to \$150; \$100 in Chamber Bucks; a massage, facial, manicure and pedicure; as well as a 30-minute airplane ride.

"There will be a drawing at 1 p.m. for the donated items," Raile said.

"You do not need to be present to win and tickets can be purchased until 1 p.m. on Sunday."

For tickets for the drawing or more information about the benefit contact Malinda Cheney at (785) 462-7621 or Raile at 443-3089.

Museum to sponsor traveling exhibit

The Prairie Museum of Art and History will be one of the locations for the traveling exhibit: The Flint Hills: A Kansas Treasure, said Sue Taylor, director.

The exhibit will be at the museum from Tuesday, June 3 through June 17. National Geographic Magazine's April 2007 issue examined the beautiful Flint Hills

of Kansas through the lens of respected photojournalist and Kansas native, Jim Richardson, she said. The 22-page feature section captured a glimpse of the majesty of this unique Kansas prairie-land. Richardson took over 11,000 photos in the Flint Hills for this project. To complement the magazine spread and further celebrate the

Flint Hills, The National Geographic Society and the Kansas Division of Travel and Tourism are sponsoring a traveling exhibit of 32 large-scale photographs, some of which are featured in the magazine. For questions, call the museum at (785) 460-4590 or stop by the facility, 1905 S. Franklin Ave., Colby.

Briefly

Mobile center visits Friday

The Kansas Department of Commerce and Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce have partnered to exhibit the KansasWorks Mobile Center, a custom-built recreational vehicle designed as a traveling workforce services office. The vehicle will The Mobile Center staff will be available to offer employers tip sheets on how to be a successful recruiter in preparation for the upcoming job fair. Area business owners are encouraged to stop by and list current positions online and to utilize the center for information regarding recruiting and retaining employees, apprenticeship programs, and interviewing tips. For questions, call Holly Stephens, executive director of the Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce at (785) 460-3401 or Horinek (785) 462-6862.

Tractor, car show Sunday

Selden's Main Street on Sunday will be the site of the 15th annual Antique and Tractor Show starting with registration at 9 a.m. for tractors and cars. Activities will include a horseshoe pitching competition at 10 a.m.; antique baler demonstrations, 10:30 a.m., noon, and 2 p.m.; basketball free-throw contest, 11:30 a.m., for young people in grades third through eighth; and kiddie tractor pull, 1 p.m., for ages 5-6, 7-8, and 9-10. Other events include a barrel roll contest at 2:30 p.m., craft show throughout the day and a parade at 3:30 p.m. The show is sponsored by the American Legion and everyone is invited to participate in the show or view the antique and classic tractors, cars, small engines and more, organizers said. For questions, call (785) 386-4481, 386-4331, or 386-4536.

County meets Friday

The Thomas County Commissioners will hold their regular end-of-the-month meeting Friday. Colby City Manager Carolyn Armstrong and Police Chief Randy Jones will talk about the communications contract between the city and county at 9 a.m. From 9:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. the commissioners talk with Don Hartman about wind energy and from 10:30 to 10:45 a.m., with Emergency Management Director Susan McMahan about the title of a trailer. Clair Schrock, county roads supervisor and representative of Martin Tractor are scheduled from 10:45 to 11 a.m. to sign paperwork for purchase of new road graders. Schrock will also talk to the commissioners about the 2008 noxious weed agreement. From 11:05 to 11:30 a.m. Health Administrator Lisa

Molstad will talk about finding a replacement following her resignation last week.

At 11:30 a.m. the commissioners will meet with Darrin Bell to talk about cleaning matters within the courthouse. All meetings are open to the public. For questions, call 460-4500.

Picnic in the Park June 4

The annual "Picnic in the Park" events begin at noon, Wednesday, June 4, at Fike Park and will continue through Wednesday, July 30, said Holly Stephens, executive director of the Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce. Kicking off the event is Larry Booth. The event is sponsored by the Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce, Colby Convention and Visitors Bureau and Colby Free Press.