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Crime higher in state

TOPEKA (AP) — New FBI figures show Kansas posted one of the worst increases in violent crime in the nation last year, and Attorney General Steve Six said Tuesday he plans to look for ways to combat the problem.

The FBI reported that violent crime in Kansas increased 7 percent in 2007, while the national number declined 0.7 percent. Twenty-four states saw an increase, but only five greater than Kansas.

"It was disturbing to me," Six told reporters. "I'm personally interested in seeing and taking every step we can to reduce crime."

In Kansas, the jump was caused by a rise in robberies and aggravated assaults. The number of murders and rapes actually declined.

Six said he and the Kansas Bureau of Investigation will examine the figures more closely, but can't yet pinpoint any one reason for the rise, though he believes the economy is a factor.

"We'll be sitting down and talking to the KBI and working on ideas we can bring from the attorney general's office on how to reduce crime across the state," the attorney general said.

The FBI's annual report is a compilation of offense and arrest data reported by nearly 18,000 law enforcement agencies throughout the nation. Violent crimes are murder, non-negligent manslaughter, rape, robbery and aggravated assault.

Kansas agencies reported 12,566 such offenses in 2007, or an increase of 818 over the 2006 figure of 11,748. The rate of violent crimes per 100,000 residents grew to 453 from 425.

Other states saw significant overall decreases in violent crime. For example, the number dropped by more than 9 percent in Colorado and Vermont.

Montana had the biggest increase, 14.9 percent, according to the statistics.

Robberies and aggravated assaults are by far the most numerous violent crimes, accounting for about 94 percent of the total nationally in 2007, according to the FBI statistics. Kansas agencies reported 2,016 robberies in 2007, an increase of 7.4 percent, and 9,212 aggravated assaults, up 8.3 percent.

In contrast, the number of murders and non-negligent manslaughter reports dropped to 107 from 127, a decline of 15.7 percent, and the number of rapes dropped to 1,231 from 1,238, or 0.6 percent.

Six said aggressive pursuit of cases and tough sentences deter potential criminals.

"When they have jobs, they don't commit as many crimes," Six said.

"If you're talking about long-term plans, I think early childhood education is one of the smartest investments the state can make in preventing crime down the road."

Founding children



ANDY HEINTZ/Colby Free Press

Move over, Thomas Jefferson. Students in Jennifer Koel's first-grade class at Colby Grade School worked on their own constitution this morning as part of the Constitution Day activities.

County approves roof repairs

By Jan Katz Ackerman
Free Press Reporter
jkackerman@gmail.com

Commissioners gave a roofing project at the Thomas County courthouse and law enforcement center a thumbs up on Monday, hearing that work should begin within a few weeks.

"We can start in six to eight weeks as a worst-case scenario," Scott Cameron of Roofmasters Roofing Inc. of Colby said. "The worst part is getting materials."

The roof on the courthouse will be similar to the one on the Colby City Hall, he said, using Lamarite slate composite shingles 12-inches wide and dusk grey in color. The roof on the law enforcement center will be a rubberized membrane with insulation under it.

Cameron attended Monday's meeting to defend the company. Unhappy with the current courthouse roof installed by Roofmasters, the commissioners for the past year, have worked at getting the project lined up. The current roofs were damaged by hail and must be replaced.

"I'm sure you understand our concerns," Commissioner Paul Steele said.

"If you go up to the attic when it's raining, you'll see the 100 buckets."

Cameron said Colby architect Glen Strait specified the shingles and Roofmasters installed them according to manufacture directions.

"We were just hired to do the work," Cameron said. "Fred (Haines) started this business 35 years ago, and he employs a lot of people. What I took away from the article was you don't have faith in us."

Commissioner Byron Sowers was quoted in an article, which ran Sept. 11 in the *Colby Free Press*, as saying if Roofmasters was approved for the \$319,274 dollar job, he wanted an inspector on the site every day.

"I understand if you put a 20-year roof up there," Sowers said. "It ought to last 20 years."

"Yes, but that doesn't take into account hail and ice," Cameron said.

"We are working with the United States Air Force right now. We are not a fly-by-night company. We live and work here."

Cameron said had Roofmasters "spiced" the roof, the company would not have applied the composition shingles the architect specified. However, Tuesday morning Strait defended his choice.

"The composition shingles currently on the courthouse were the best shingles on the market at the time," Strait said. "The wind conditions on that roof are

"If you go up to the attic when it's raining, you'll see the 100 buckets."

Paul Steele,
County Commissioner

extreme. They were rated for 90 mph winds."

Roofmasters was one of 14 companies contacted by a consulting firm, Custom Energy, asking for quotes for the roof. The only companies to submit figures were Roofmasters and Holliday Grace Roofing Co. of Denver, which bid \$521,000.

Steele asked what kind of roofing felt Roofmasters would use under the shingles.

"We'd use synthetic felt, or ice-and-water felt, that if small holes get in it, they heal themselves," Cameron said.

Steele wanted to know how the felt would be applied to the roof deck.

"It's held down with cap nails and nailed by hand," Cameron replied.

For the past few months, the commissioners have worked through Ellen Edwards, project engineer for Overland Park-based Custom, on the project.

Cameron went over a spreadsheet Edwards had submitted to the commissioners.

He said he did not understand why she listed lighting renovation, heating and air condition upgrades and water renovation under the Roofmasters contractor column.

The cost of those three items for the courthouse, law enforcement center and county office complex located at 350 S. Range Ave. would add another \$707,999, but will not be undertaken at this time.

"We don't do lighting, heating and air conditioning and water renovation," Cameron said.

The commissioners unanimously approved having Custom Energy draft documents to approve Roofmasters to install the two new roofs. Yet to be decided is how the project will be paid for, either by cash reserves or through borrowing with "no-fund" warrants.

Steele said the county has enough money to pay for the two roofs in reserves, but "then we are broke."

Steele said state law allows counties to levy tax increases for projects such as roof replacement, but he wants to pursue the idea of borrowing some money no-fund warrants as a way to not dip so deep into the reserves.

Mentoring group gets grant

By Jan Katz Ackerman
Free Press Reporter
jkackerman@gmail.com

Children who need mentors to help them find their way will be able to get some help through a grant awarded to the Thomas County Big Brothers Big Sisters program.

Director Diane Stithem this is the second time in three years the agency has received the grant from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment.

"Kansas Mentors is a statewide initiative with the mission to provide every young person, ages 5 to 18, in Kansas access to a suitable mentor," Stithem said. "The initiative is being led by Gov. Kathleen Sebelius and Bill Snyder, former head coach of the Kansas State University football team."

"The program is designed both

to serve as a resource for existing mentoring programs such as Big Brothers Big Sisters of Thomas County and for Kansas communities wishing to start a program....

"The grant is to provide on-to-one mentoring service to Thomas County youth through the Bigs In School program."

Once matched, mentors and students meet once a week at the child's school for 30 to 45 minutes, she said.

"School based mentors can help with schoolwork, play games or just listen," Stithem said. "Currently, in Thomas County, we have four BIS matches at Brewster Elementary, three at Colby Elementary, one at Golden Plains, and one at Sacred Heart."

Gov. Sebelius and Snyder announced 23 grant recipients that will share in \$182,000, including the Thomas County program.

"The financial pressure that many mentoring programs face can be daunting," Sebelius said. "By supporting our state's mentoring partners, we are helping these organizations provide a crucial service to our children."

Stithem said Snyder is taking mentoring into a competitive mode with the Coaches' Challenge, joining with Tom Osborne, former University of Nebraska football coach.

"These youngsters need our help," Snyder said. "Being a mentor doesn't require a lot of time or any money. We are asking for an individual to spare an hour a week to spend time with a young person in the community."

For information, go to www.kansasmentors.org. or call Stithem at Big Brothers Big Sisters of Thomas County at (785) 460-9125.

Briefly

Free watermelon Friday

Colby Care Center, 105 E. College, plans a free watermelon feed at 4 p.m. Friday to celebrate the refurbishing of its flag pole, including a flag-raising ceremony by Colby Cub Scouts. A resident will sing the National Anthem as Scouts raise the flag.

Class of '82 members

The Forever '82 Fund, a new service of the Thomas County Community Foundation, will be used for community betterment in the name of members of the Colby High Class of 1982. The class hopes to accumulate enough money to have a permanent fund so it will can have an impact each year forever. Fallen classmates so far include Brenda Drullinger, Joyce Hatfield, Kelly Ellis, David Tangeman, Marty Crampton and Lin-

da (Stoecklein) Holzhüter. Send tax-deductible gifts to the foundation at 350 S. Range Ave., Suite 14, Colby, Kan. 67701, noting in the memo section that the check is for the Forever '82 Fund. For information, call 460-9152 or e-mail tccf@st-tel.net.

Free barbecue on Saturday

In celebration of September as Recovery Month, the Regional Prevention Center and Central Kansas Foundation are sponsoring a "Band and Barbecue" from 5 to 9 p.m. Saturday at Fike Park downtown. Everyone is invited to enjoy free hot dogs, hamburgers, potato chips and drinks. Other events will include games for children and time to chat.

Program to help parents

Smart Start Northwest Kansas will offer a program called "Nurturing Families" for parents and children beginning next Tuesday, Sept. 23. The program emphasizes the importance of people learning new par-

enting skills and all family members learning new and healthier ways to live together, the agency says. The free eight-week program will include a meal, a training session and family interaction time. Contact Smart Start at 465-9103 for information or to register.

Stray dogs found

Colby Animal Clinic has a lot of strays waiting for owners to find them and take them home. If the strays remain unclaimed, they will be up for adoption next week, a clinic spokesman said. To identify or adopt a pet, call 460-8621 or visit the clinic, 810 E. Fourth St.

Bluegrass event Thursday

Tickets are available for a concert featuring the Isaacs and Chace McNinch, bluegrass singers, at 7:30 p.m. Thursday in the Colby High auditorium.

For questions, prices or ticket locations, call (785) 443-1994.

1958 Class reunion planned

The Colby High School Class of 1958 will hold its 50th reunion Thursday through Sunday, Oct. 2-5, in Branson, Mo., said Sandy Harper, one of the organizers. "If you were in the class, we would like to hear from you," she said. For questions, call her at 462-3759 or Norma Higerd, 462-7806.

Memory Walk Saturday

The annual Alzheimer's Memory Walk and balloon release will be Saturday at Fike Park. Anyone interested in walking should register at 10 a.m., and the walk begins at 10:30. If you want to sponsor or form a team, call Jody Metcalf, 462-3275, or Jada Tubbs, 460-9084. Money raised goes for research into better treatment and a possible cure, organizers said.

