



COLBY FREE PRESS

Editor leaving for east

After 17 years,
a new job looms

By Steve Haynes

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Patty Decker was having a hard time leaving. She kept shuffling papers on her desk, looking for one more story to write.

If fact, though Friday was supposed to be her last day on the job, she came in over the weekend and took pictures, wrote a story and lined up a bunch of items. She even made up three pages for the Monday paper.

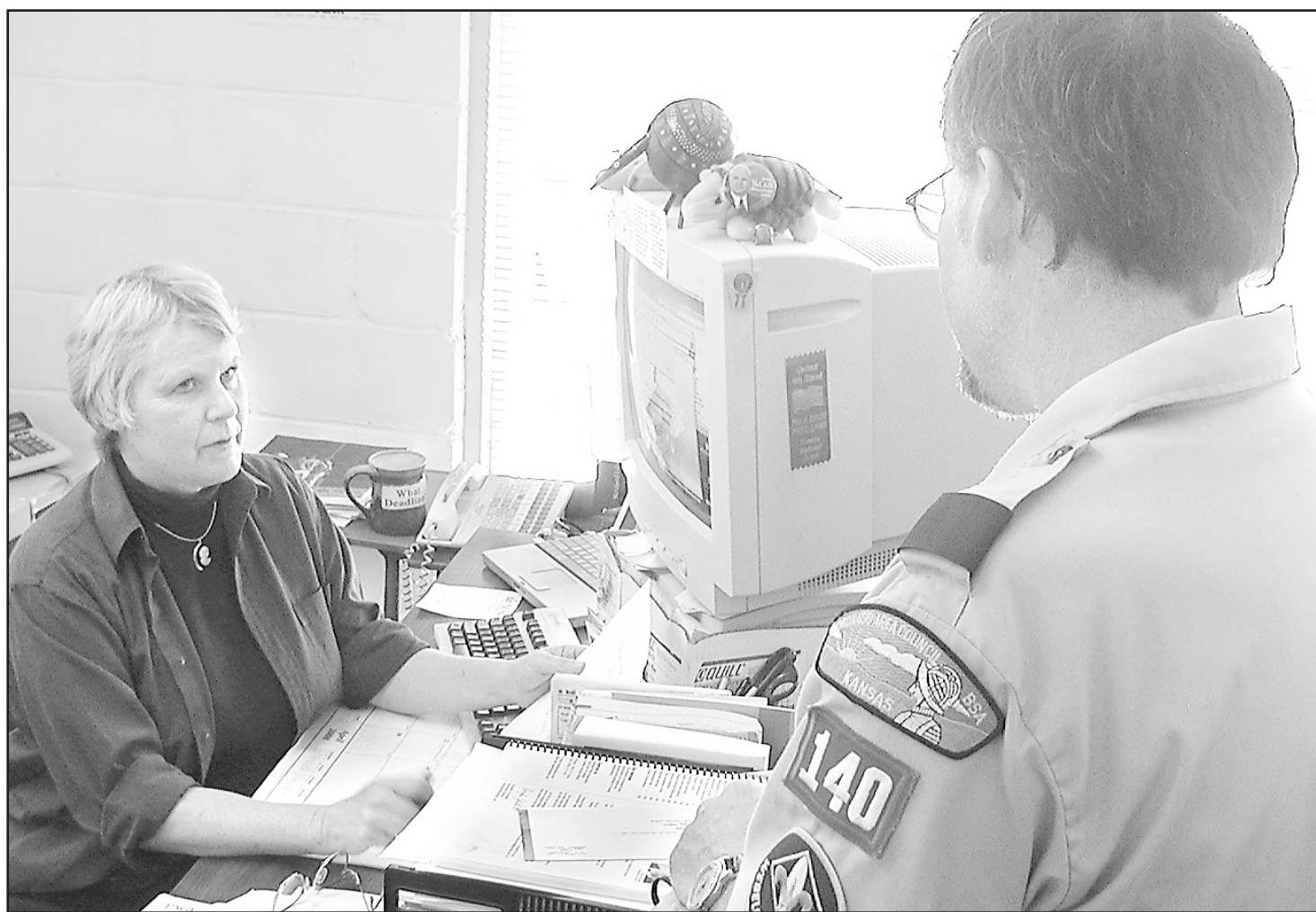
"Seventeen years," she said. "I've actually lived here longer than I have anywhere in my life. Now it's time to move on. I'm really sad. I love this town."

Just being here a few years was something of an accomplishment, because when she came to Colby, editors and publishers came and went in just months. Decker said she had started with the company, U.S. Media, in Mountain Home, Idaho, where she'd moved with her first husband, then an Air Force lawyer.

With two kids to feed, she was looking for a job and applied at the weekly newspaper. The publisher, Mike Thornberry, took a chance on her. A few months after he was transferred to Colby, she said, he called and said he was looking for an editor.

She packed up Tracy, 11, and Joey, 4, and drove to Kansas.

"I had two kids in school," she



STEVE HAYNES/Colby Free Press

Editor Patty Decker talked with Cub Scout Pack Leader Gary Schuette about a story Friday, her last day at the paper. Decker is moving to eastern Kansas with her husband Randy after

recalled. "I didn't know a soul in town. Mike left after a week. He hadn't told me he was leaving."

Four months later, the new publisher left, and the company asked Patty to step up.

"They asked me after being here four months if I wanted to be the publisher," she said. "I was scared to death."

Born in Atchison, on the Missouri River in northeast Kansas, she'd moved around a lot as her dad took one accounting job after another with Yellow Freight, a big trucking company.

Finally, she said, they settled in Springfield, Ill., where he had

a job with the state. She graduated from high school there, and from Lincolnland Community College.

After she married, and her husband finished law school, they lived in California, Berlin for four years, and back in Illinois. After he went into the Air Force, they wound up in Idaho.

In Colby, she said, people made her feel at home. Veteran employees, including Society Editor Maxine Nelson, helped her learn and get the paper out.

"There were lots of personnel problems," Decker said. "I'd go home in tears."

17 years with the *Colby Free Press*, but still came in for a few hours over the weekend and wrote some stories for this week's paper.

One of her goals, she said, was to allow her kids to grow up in one place and finish high school in their hometown. They did.

Tracy is now a professional photographer in Germany, while Joe is a senior at Benedictine College in Atchison.

She said she got involved right after moving to Colby — "They were moving the Cooper Barn to town then." — but the turnover at the paper sometimes made it hard. The mayor at first refused to shake her hand, she said.

"I don't think I need to," he told her. "You probably won't be here long enough."

She found some permanence, though, and a husband, Randy, who then was working at Van's Body and Frame and now is a physical therapist assistant in Hillsboro, where she's going to join him — and look for a job.

She covered some tough stories, she recalled, including the murder of Phoebe Harkins, the paper's landlord, by her boyfriend, and a long, difficult fight between the town's hospital and one of the doctors.

Will she look for a newspaper job back east?

"Probably," she said. "It's special. It gets in your blood."

Banks here are still safe for cash

By Andy Heintz

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The mortgage meltdown has affected many in America, from the working man trying pay his mortgage to massive government-sponsored lenders like Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.

While the credit crisis has hurt people everywhere, area bankers say, it has taken a worse toll on suburban and urban America than in rural parts of the country, where agriculture still plays the dominant role in the local economy.

"The banking crisis affects suburban banks more than rural banks," said Jon Pope, president of the Peoples State Bank in Colby, adding that community banks are feeling the aftershocks.

Pope said that lots of community banks bought preferred stocks of government-sponsored lenders like Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, which pooled the stocks and sold them to large investors like Lehman Brothers and Merrill Lynch, using the money to dole out loans to homeowners. These loans ended up causing thousands of people to suffer foreclosure on their homes because they were unable to pay the mortgage after an unexpected increase in payments.

Many people who bought these adjustable-rate loans did not read the fine print, Pope said, so they were caught off guard when their payments began to spike.

The banker said he guesses that 99 percent of people who take out loans do not read the fine print, and lenders didn't warn them.

"It was a profit-making scheme," Pope said.

The banker said the current crisis was due to a combination of large investment banks such as Lehman and Merrill Lynch not being well regulated, greedy lenders willing to deceive people to make a quick buck, and the naivete of the American people. Pope said he thinks people should deal with local banks, because they are well regulated and safe.

Pope sees the current price of oil as a possible problem in the future for banks here, whose customer base is heavy with farmers.

He said the percentage of profit between the input costs to produce a crop and the price the crops are selling for right now is good, but if the price of grain falls to what it was two years ago, farmers will be losing money. Two years ago, corn was selling for about \$2.75 a bushel and wheat sold for about \$4 a bushel; today, it is \$6.60 a bushel for wheat, \$5.50 a bushel for corn, \$7.30 a bushel for milo, and \$9.68 a bushel for soybeans.

"All input costs for farming are directly or indirectly affected by the cost of oil," he added.

Convoy rolls right in to Special Olympians' hearts

By Andy Heintz

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A joyous atmosphere enveloped Truck Town on Saturday as the Colby contingent of the World's Largest Truck Convoy settled in for lunch with Special Olympics athletes and their families.

There was the large lunch provided by John Anderson, including potato salad, ice cream and brisket. There was live music. It was a beautiful day outside. But the biggest reason people were so happy was because the Special Olympic athletes were having such a good time.

"My favorite part of the day is seeing the smiles on the Olympians faces," said organizer volunteer Denise Mentlick. "The kids just love it. It's really neat for them."

About noon, the 16 trucks rolled into Truck Town much to the excitement of the athletes. The big rigs arrived a little later than expected after a delay in Oakley caused them to leave 15 minutes after the scheduled starting time of 11 a.m. While most of the Olympians were waiting for the trucks, the athletes from Oak-

ley, Quinter, and Hoxie got to ride with the drivers up Interstate 70 and around town.

"They loved to toot the horn," Mentlick said.

This year's convoy had trucks from Colby, Hoxie, Park, Oakley, Leoti, Scott City, Brewster and Hill City. Athletes came from area towns, including Colby, Atwood, Grinnell, Hoxie and Quinter.

During the day, the Special Olympians voted in contests that revolved around the 16 trucks, including Best in Show, Best Paint Job, and Best Chrome. Daryl Goetz' truck was one of the big winners, as it was voted Best in Show and Best Paint Job. Goetz lives in Park, on I-70 in Gove County.

Responsible for the planning and preparation for the event were Joe and Jane Mentlick, co-founders of the Colby event, their daughter Denise Mentlick and truckers throughout northwest Kansas.

Truckers volunteers who helped prepare for this year's convoy included Goetz and his wife Cheryl; Mike Pipelow, Leoti; Gary Wingfield, Hill City; and Jack and Jan Collins and Jack Sloan, all of Hoxie. So far, Mentlick said, the convoy has raised \$8,500 for Special Olympics.



ANDY HEINTZ/Colby Free Press

The Bells (from left) — Justin, Page, Kathy and Josh — enjoyed lunch in the shop at Truck Town after arrival of the World's Largest Truck Convoy on Saturday.

Briefly

Dance team collecting cans

The Colby High School dance team plans an aluminum can drive Saturday at the Orscheln Farm and Home store on South Range to raise money for new uniforms. Bring your cans to the parking lot to help the students.

Scouts out selling popcorn

Colby Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts are selling popcorn door-to-door until Oct. 26. This year's inventory includes microwave popcorn, popping kernels and a variety of tins filled with caramel, chocolate or cheese popcorn. Anyone who isn't contacted by a troop or pack member should call Gary Schuette, pack leader, at 460-0003.

Trail ride set for Oct. 5

The Cottonwood Ranch State Historic Site, near

Studley on U.S. 24 in Sheridan County, plans a free trail ride from 1 to 5 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 5. No motorized vehicles will be allowed on the trail, but wagons and hikers are welcome. Bring your own horse. The event is sponsored by the State Historical Society and the Friends of Cottonwood Ranch. For questions, call (785) 627-5866.

School offers book fair

Sacred Heart Catholic School invites the public to its book fair during parent-teacher conferences from 4 to 8 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 30, and from 2 to 8 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 2.

Landfill going to winter hours

The Thomas County Landfill and the county household hazardous waste collection site will begin fall and winter hours today, said Kristi Mann, assis-

tant deputy county clerk. The hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday; 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday and 1 to 4 p.m. Sunday.

Program should help parents

Smart Start Northwest Kansas will offer a program called "Nurturing Families" for parents and children beginning Tuesday. The program emphasizes the importance of people learning new parenting 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.

Coffee with Coaches' returns

Back by popular demand, said Coach Chris Gardner, "Coffee with the Coaches," begins at 9 a.m. ev-

ery Saturday during the Colby High football season at the Sports Shoppe, 400 N. Franklin Ave. For questions, call 460-5000.

Animals ready for adoption

Colby Animal Clinic has a 2-year old female terrier mix and a female black lab mix puppy ready for adoption. The terrier mix is spayed, friendly and sweet, a clinic spokesperson said. "This dog would make a good farm dog or house dog with some training," she said. The lab puppy is cute and about 10 weeks old. To adopt a pet, call 460-8621.

1958 Class plans reunion

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. For questions, call her at 462-3759.