



COLBY FREE PRESS

Monday

February 22, 2010

Volume 121, Number 29

Serving Thomas County since 1888

8 pages



VERA SLOAN/Colby Free Press

Melinda Olson from the Thomas County Community Foundation told Krista Alexander's second-grade class on Friday what an awesome effect their random acts of kindness campaign was having on other students. Their efforts were rewarded with a gift certificate to be used for a charity of their choice.

Foundation recognizes kind acts

By Vera Sloan

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Random Acts of Kindness week was celebrated last week with an open house Friday at the Thomas County Community Foundation, which recognized three acts of kindness reported here.

"We never do these things to get recognition," said Melinda Olson, foundation director, "however, it is nice to set aside a time to recognize some of those acts of kindness."

"For instance, a family whose children have been saving to go to Disney World this summer came up with the idea that they would like to share a part of what they had with someone else. So the kids took a part of their vacation money to give to a family in need."

"Getting caught" doing this kindness was rewarded with a \$25 gift certificate to give to a charity of their choice. Olson said the family's three children attend Colby Grade School, but wish to remain anonymous.

Krista Alexander's second-grade class from Colby Grade School also received a gift card for \$25 for a nonprofit organization of their choice.

The class has been practicing random acts of kindness not just this week, but all the time, she said. The idea is to develop a habit



Retired Senior Volunteers (from left) Marge Weishaar, Gail Vacca, Georgine Leiker and Jean Dempewolf were on hand Friday at the Thomas County Office Complex to accept an award for the volunteer program. Melinda Olson, director of the Thomas County Community Foundation, gave them a check during a Random Acts of Kindness Week open house.

of being kind and courteous. She said she sees a big difference in the students' behavior, since they began the project.

"These actions are showing up in the lunchroom and throughout the school, too," said Principal Lance Kranawitter, "and it's great to watch."

A third award went to a group of people

who volunteer wherever and whenever there's a need, the members of the Retired Senior Volunteer Program.

"Their investment in kindness in the community is an everyday part of life for this group," Olson said. She presented the group with a check for \$433 from the foundation.

Storm makes highways icy; crashes few

By Kevin Bottrell

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A winter storm that moved through Colby on Sunday left only a couple of inches of snow, but a layer of ice beneath it made for some slick roads.

The weather was cold, but mostly clear Saturday until a freezing fog moved in during the evening. The fog turned to snow during the night, but not before coating streets, sidewalks and porches. The National Weather Service said volunteer observers reported 2 to 3 inches of snow around Thomas County for Sunday.

Despite the icy roads, schools managed to open Monday. Colby Superintendent Terrell Harrison said the buses handle the ice well, and because no more snow is predicted for a few days, there was no need to close or delay school. Interstate 70 stayed open

throughout the storm, but conditions were still listed as icy and snowpacked Monday from the state line to Ellis County. Ice warnings were posted. U.S. 36 from the state line to Atwood was listed as completely snowpacked, as was U.S. 24 from the Nine-Mile Corner to Hoxie.

The icy roads did cause some trouble for travelers in Thomas County. The Thomas County Sheriff's Office reported that four drivers slid off I-70 and one on K-25.

At 6:30 a.m. Saturday, a truck slid off I-70 at mile marker 60, about four miles southeast of Colby. Another truck slid off K-25 a half mile south of Colby at 9:30 a.m. Sheriff's deputies and Highway Patrol troopers responded and both trucks were able to get back on the road.

At 5:30 p.m., one car slid off

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Health-care firm begins work here

By Kevin Bottrell

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A \$500,000 economic development project in downtown Colby finally came to fruition when Embark Healthcare opened its doors – or turned on its phones – on Feb. 1.

Chief Executive Officer Michael Brouthers told the Colby City Council on Tuesday that the company is now taking customer calls out of the Colby office. Embark offers Internet access for people's end-of-life directives, such as living wills, organ donation preferences and power of attorney.

The city spent about \$500,000 from to renovate the former Inlow Interiors building downtown, putting in new columns and ceiling beams and bringing the building up to code.

Michelle Mercer from Embark's Daytona, Fla., office was in town last week to train 10 new employees, who started Monday. Junelle

Hills, owner of the Quilt Cabin, is the supervisor in Colby.

"Now that we're live, it's all about selling," Brouthers said.

The Colby location is not a walk-in office, but a call center. Employees will not be making sales calls directly to customers, but rather taking calls from people who have decided they want to sign up. Any outgoing calls, Brouthers said, would be to follow up on customer questions. The marketing department will also be trying to set up contracts with doctors, hospitals and health-care companies whose customers might want end-of-life services.

Brouthers said Embark has already signed two contracts with an insurance company, which will market Embark's services to its 700,000 customers. Brouthers said this doesn't mean Embark will get 700,000 customers, since end-of-life services are not something everyone takes advantage of.

"Most people don't want to

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Volunteer program helps resolve nursing-home problems

By Vera Sloan

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The elderly in nursing homes haven't always had much voice in their treatment, but with help from a volunteer program, residents and their families can and do have someone to turn to.

The Ombudsman program was put into place under President Richard Nixon in the 1970s, a time when much of the nurs-

ing home care was unacceptable, and there was a push for better care for the elderly. It has brought about made major changes in the nursing home industry, says Velvet Johnson, state long-term care ombudsman for this area, and the changes have all been good.

The ombudsman office, under the state Department on Aging, investigates and attempts to resolve problems between residents and management. There are nine offices in the state, Johnson said. Each of-

fice has a supervisor to train and supervise volunteers for individual homes.

Johnson, whose territory covers Region 6, with 21 northwest Kansas counties, was in Colby on Thursday to meet with ombudsmen in this area.

"We could really use some help," she said.

"Region six has more than 60 nursing homes, assisted living and board-and-care facilities," Johnson said. "but the Colby, Goodland and Oakley area, has only four

volunteers, so we have a desperate need for people

"Volunteers take 30 hours training to become certified in order to advocate for the rights of health and safety issues of residents in Kansas long-term care facilities. They are encouraged to attend monthly meetings and participate in training in a variety of situations they will run into."

Johnson said the volunteers are the most important part of the program. They

spend at least one hour a week at the home and send in a monthly report. She said each volunteer is certified to one home or facility to perform as a representative and advocate for the residents.

Ombudsman service is available at all nursing facilities, she said, and a poster announcing the service must be displayed, so that residents and their families know they have a place to turn if they feel their

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Briefly

Business gathering Wednesday

The Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce will hold a "Business After Five" gathering at 5 p.m. Wednesday at Farm Credit, 1190 S. Range Ave. Everyone is invited to tour the new office and enjoy some refreshments. For information, call Holly Whitaker at 460-3401.

Schools to explain budget cuts

The Colby School District plans a community meeting on budget issues at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday in the Colby High School commons. District administrators will discuss past and future budget cuts. A list of the possible upcoming cuts is posted at www.colbyeagles.org. For information, call the district office at 460-5000.

First 'Brown Bag' Wednesday

The Thomas County Ministerial Association will

sponsor the *Lenten Brown Bags and Bibles* program at noon each Wednesday throughout Lent. The theme is The Prodigal Son. Speakers will be Carol Rahn this week, First Presbyterian Church; March 3, Jarrod Spencer, Church of Christ; March 10, Steve Todd, College Drive Assembly of God. Come to the Fellowship Hall of the First Presbyterian Church, 545 W. Fourth St. Bring your own lunch; beverage and dessert will be provided. Call 462-6342 for information.

Food for Thought coming up

"Notable Events and People in Northwest Kansas" will be the topic for the next *Food for Thought* program at the Prairie Museum of Art and History. Evelyn Hoyt Ward, a Brewster native who retired to northwest Kansas, will talk at noon Thursday. The program is free, including a light lunch. For questions, call the museum at 460-4590.

Youth soccer looking for players

Signups for the American Youth Soccer Organization's spring season are open until Friday. The cost is \$40; kids must be around 6 to participate. The organization is also looking for parents to coach or referee. For information or to sign up, call Emily Griffin at 460-0647.

RC Club to hold Sunday races

The First Baptist Church RC Club will hold races from 2 to 5 p.m. Sunday. Kids 10 or older and adults are welcome; the church can provide cars. For information, call Kent Higerd at 462-3440.

Sacred Heart carnival Sunday

Sacred Heart Catholic School's annual carnival will be from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sunday, featuring food, games and a raffle drawing at 3. Sacred Heart

students are out selling raffle tickets, and the top sellers in each grade get prizes. For information, call the school at 460-2813.

Professor to speak here

Dr. Ron Green, a professor of religion at Dartmouth University, will speak at 7 p.m. Tuesday, March 9, at the Cultural Arts Center at Colby Community College as part of the Max Pickerill Lecture Series. Sue Evans will give a review of Green's book, "Babies by Design," at noon Wednesday, March 3, at the Pioneer Memorial Library. For information, call Linda Davis-Stephens at (785) 460-5528.

