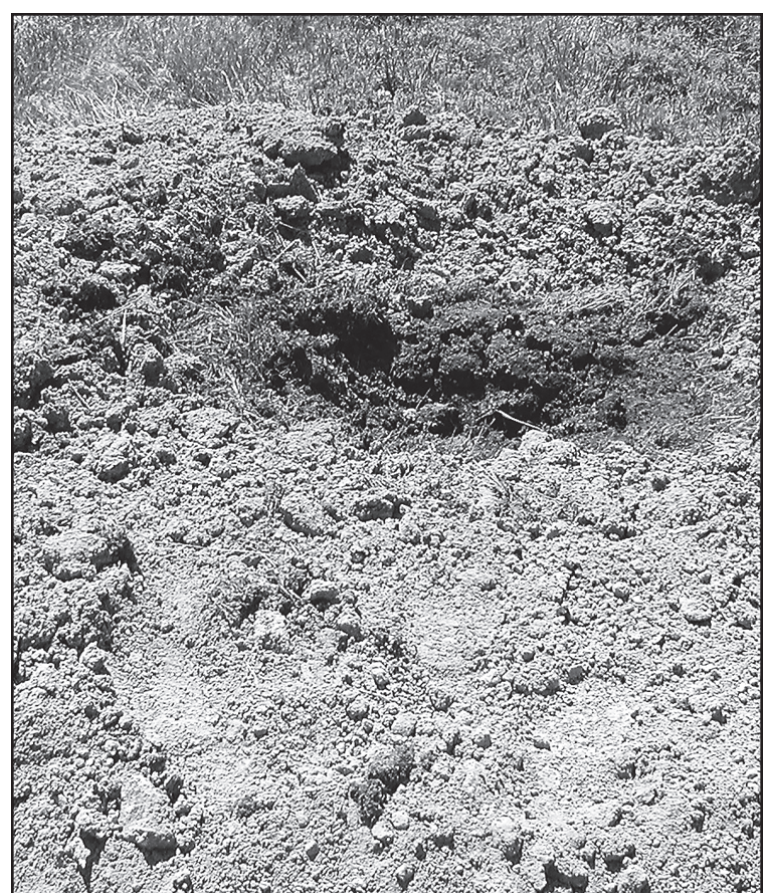




SUSAN McMAHAN/Thomas County Emergency Management



VERA SLOAN/Colby Free Press

Two members of the state fire marshal's explosives unit (left) lowered a container of white phosphorus into a special blast trailer for the trip to the landfill. It took three trips from the college chemistry building to the trailer, designed to channel a blast upwards, and a county dump trip filled with sand. At the landfill, the squad dug a shallow hole (above) and detonated the chemicals.

Bomb squad blows up volatile acid

By Vera Sloan
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A state bomb squad blew up six jars of volatile picric acid at the landfill Monday, jars that had been found in a Colby Community College lab last week during a supposedly routine inventory.

Picric acid is a compound that, when dried and crystallized, can explode because it is sensitive to shocks, heat or friction, said Susan McMahan, Thomas County emergency preparedness director.

It all began last Wednesday, said Dr. Paula Davis, vice president for academic affairs at the college, when she asked for an inventory of classroom equipment and supplies.

Chemistry instructor Chad Ma-

gee and some students doing the inventory discovered crystallized picric acid in two rooms in the office area of the chemistry department. The discovery prompted college officials to call the county emergency management department and the city fire department, who in turn called the state fire marshal's office in Wichita.

"It is not that unusual," said Davis, "for a chemical to have to be removed from a chemistry department in a school."

When Magee saw the acid, Davis said, he recognized it as dangerous and called the college officials to tell them he thought it probably needed to be removed.

"There were six quarter-pound bottles of picric acid, with two being considered unstable," said Fire Chief Bob McLemore. "One

What is picric acid?

- Picric acid is a solid yellow crystalline compound made from phenol, sulfuric acid and nitric acid.
• The acid is stored in glass or plastic bottles under a layer of water. Metal containers can cause the acid to form picrate salts, which are even more sensitive to heat or vibration than the acid itself.
• In dried and crystallized form, percussion or rapid heating can cause the acid or the picrate salts to explode.

was a third full and the other was two thirds full. Crystallization had begun near the top of the bottles, and anytime that happens, they are determined to be a hazardous product. The remaining bottles

were hydrated and considered to be stable."

Another discovery was a quart jar about a fourth full of white phosphorus. White phosphorus is a waxy solid that burns easily and

is used in chemical manufacturing and for smoke munitions and incendiary devices for military use.

Davis said it is difficult to say how old the chemicals were, but the biggest thing to do was to make sure to keep everyone safe. Since the department doesn't use the acid anymore, she said, the instructors chose to get rid of all of it, even the "safe" bottles.

Barry Kaaz, dean of eternal affairs and buildings management, said he called the Colby Fire Department late Wednesday afternoon to tell them what the inventory had turned up.

Fire Chief Bob McLemore said he told Kaaz to secure the building while he made some calls.

"Anything with this potential has to be taken care of by the Kansas fire marshal's bomb squad,"

said McMahan.

McLemore said he was told the bomb squad was training in Kansas City, but that if the chemicals weren't handled and the scene was secured, it would be safe to wait until the squad could get there Monday morning.

McMahan said she called together a team from the fire department, city police, sheriff's office and the county emergency medical services, land fill and road departments, and began to put together an incident action plan to have ready when the bomb squad arrived Monday.

"There were 12 of us in the room," she said, "and we literally laid it out on the table what the possibilities were. We had to

See "ACID," Page 3

House contest features experience versus new voice

Seniority is key, says 18-year representative

By Kevin Bottrell
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State Rep. Jim Morrison is running what he calls his "last campaign."

Morrison, a Colby native, has served in the Kansas House of Representatives for 18 years. He took over for the last few months of a term and then ran in the 1992 election. He said the extra few months allowed him to get a lot more one-on-one training as a lawmaker, rather than in a class with other freshmen legislators.

The House leadership encouraged him run again this year, he

said, because his seniority will come in handy when the legislature reapportions the districts next session. Morrison said because the 2010 census shows a drop in the population of western Kansas, the Legislature will have to draw new boundaries and may eliminate as many as two representatives and one senator west of Hays.

The worst-case scenario, he said, is that the 121st District, which includes Thomas, Sherman, Sheridan and Graham counties, may be split and combined with the 120th to the north and 118th to the south.

With fewer legislators representing western Kansas, he said, it would be harder to get laws passed that benefit the region. The whole region could be steamrolled by a single area like

Kansas City that has more representation.

"We're small by circumstance, not by choice," he said.

Because of his seniority - Morrison is one of the five longest-serving representatives - he said he would likely be on the committee that would handle redrawing the districts.

The state budget, especially the 1 percent sales tax, was the big issue during the last session. Morrison said he voted against the budget bill because too many things - such as the sales tax - would hurt people in western Kansas.

See "MORRISON," Page 3



Jim Morrison

District needs new voice, says challenger

By Kevin Bottrell
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Challenging Rep. Jim Morrison in the Republican primary is Goodland college fund raiser Brenda McCants.

McCants announced her entry into the race at a series of events in each of the four counties in April. She said she had been thinking about running for about a year. She said she didn't want to run against Morrison, but she

spoke to him and he encouraged her to run.

McCants has lived in northwest Kansas for 17 years. She served as a fund raiser for Goodland Regional Medical Center and is currently director of development at Northwest Kansas Technical College.

She said that, although she respects Morrison's commitment and his years of service, northwest Kansas needs a new voice. If elected, she wanted to focus on areas including veterans benefits, health care, education and seniors. Her work at the Goodland hospital gave her an inside look at how health care works in Kansas, she said.

One idea she would champion is establishing more clinics for veterans around the state.

"That way they wouldn't have

to drive so far," McCants said.

Taking care of veterans and their families, she said, is the least the country can do to honor their service. McCants described herself as a "military brat" whose father was in the Army for 30 years.

Education is another concern. Two school superintendents attended her announcement meeting in Hoxie, she said, both concerned about keeping schools open. Finding a way to increase the area's population, she said, would allow smaller schools to remain open. McCants said she particularly wants to protect the community and technical colleges, which are essential for workforce development.

"They serve some students

See "McCANTS," Page 3



B. McCants

ELECTION 2010

Briefly

Registration open for reunion
Registration is still open for the Colby All School Reunion this Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Alumni who plan to attend should go to www.eaglesalumni.org or register at the high school commons from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday.

Candidate to meet and greet here
Republican congressional candidate Rob Wasinger visit with Colby-area voters from 2 to 2:45 p.m. Thursday at J&B Meat Market. For information, call campaign manager Billy Valentine at (620) 794-2560.

Crews fogging for mosquitoes
Colby city crews are fogging for mosquitoes south of Webster on Mondays or Tuesdays and north of Webster on Thursdays. You can help, officials say:

check your yard and empty anything holding stagnant water, such as cans, swimming pools or tires. For information, call the Public Works office at 460-4420.

Want to win lunch on Thursday?
Join the Thomas County Coalition at El Dos De Oros restaurant at noon Thursday for a chance to win a delicious meal and become a partner in building a healthy community. For information, call Paige Campbell at 460-8177.

Group wants grant applications
The Thomas County Community Foundation is accepting applications for its second quarter cycle. Nonprofit, government or school agencies in Thomas County are eligible for small grants of about \$500. Applications are due by Wednesday, June 30. For in-

formation, call 460-9152.
Eagles' book a bargain right now
The price of "Flight of the Eagles," a book by Gary Adrian about the history of Colby High sports, will increase from \$25 to \$30 next Wednesday to cover printing costs. Books can be ordered at the old price at www.colbyeagles.org or send a check to the Colby Booster Club at Box 136, Colby, Kan., 67701. Books will also be available at the All School Reunion this week. For information, call Adrian at 460-2931.

Alumni Chorus begins practice
Colby High grads are invited to join the CHS Alumni Chorus, which will rehearse at 7:30 p.m. Thursday at the United Methodist Church. Out-of-town alumni coming in for the five-year reunion can join in at 5 p.m. Friday and 9 a.m. Saturday to be

ready for a performance at the assembly later that morning. For information, call director Jan Wolf at (785) 460-3535.

Church to hold Bible School
The Mingo Bible Church is inviting kids age 4 to sixth grade to a weekend Vacation Bible School from 6 to 8:45 p.m. Friday and 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Saturday. The school's theme is "The Egyptian File (Decoding the Mystery of Life)," and it will include lessons, games, music and crafts. For information, call Pastor Tom Peyton at 462-2930 or 460-7530.

