

Happy New Year!

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Crops, vandalism top 2010 stories

2010 brought with it bumper crops, departing leaders, explosive chemicals and vandalism that brought a town together.

Here are just a few of the stories from the pages of the *Colby Free Press* that captured our attention this year:

1 Farmers see bumper crops

2010 was a banner year for Thomas County farmers.

In January and February, they were still finishing up the 2009 corn harvest. The Hi-Plains Co-op elevator in Dresden reported taking in 100,000 bushels of corn in February. Rain kept farmers from getting to the fields.

Wheat made it through the winter in good shape. Harvest came in July, and it was not without its difficulties. A hail storm that damaged about 77,000 acres and heavy rains kept the combines from rolling several days.

Once farmers got into the fields, however, they found yields of 50 to 85 bushels per acre, test weights as high as 64 pounds, moisture around 12 percent and low dockage – foreign matter in with the

wheat. Prices near \$4 for cash wheat didn't hurt either.

Toward the end of the year, however, things turned dry. Strong La Nina currents in the Pacific reduced rain and snowfall on the Great Plains, putting Thomas County under drought conditions. This helped the corn harvest, which came and went quickly this time. Frontier Ag reported yields up to 250 bushels per acre for irrigated corn and 120 bushels for dryland corn.

2 Beulah Cemetery scrambled by vandals

Sometime in the night of Aug. 9 or the morning of Aug. 10, unknown vandals went into Beulah Cemetery and knocked over or damaged more than 160 headstones. Most of the stones were simply kicked over, but in some cases flowers were picked up and thrown around and vases smashed.

The story made headlines from Colby to Wichita. While the Colby Police Department investigated, more than 170 people took a few hours to put the stones back



VERA SLOAN/Colby Free Press

upright. A monument company came out with a truck and crane to lift the headstones and set them up while student groups, commu-

nity organizations and other volunteers put in the putty that glued the stones down.

3 County celebrates 125th anniversary all year

Thomas County turned 125 this year, and a citizen committee planned events throughout the year to celebrate the sesquicentennial.

Beginning in 2009, the celebration lasted all year and included a kick-off reception, museum exhibits, history projects and a big party. Several parades incorporated the anniversary theme, "The Spirit of the Prairie Lives On."

The final bash on Oct. 9 included musical acts, a historical personality fashion show and a video presentation.

Happening in and around the anniversary were the Colby High School and Brewster High School all-school reunions and the "last-ever" Kansas-Nebraska Chautauqua. The Chautauqua brought

performers to recreate famous personalities from the Great Depression.

4 Rep. Jim Morrison dies

On Wednesday, Nov. 24, Rep. Jim Morrison died in a Denver hospital while under treatment for a heart condition. Morrison had just won his 10th election to the Kansas House of Representatives.

Morrison, a Colby native, was an optometrist, Ham radio operator and member of several volunteer organizations, in addition to his duties as a legislator.

It fell to the 121st District's Republican committee to choose a successor on Sunday, Dec. 19. Four candidates entered the race: Colby City Councilman Dave Voss, Sheridan County farmer Brian Baalman, Rick Billinger, a Goodland City commissioner, and Brenda McCants, development director at the Northwest Kansas Technical College.

It took three votes – each time the candidate with the lowest votes was eliminated – but eventually the

98 assembled committee members chose to send Billinger to Topeka. He said he would focus in part on keeping the district's schools and hospitals well funded.

5 Health care company fails

Embark Health, a Florida company that sold end-of-life services, planned to open a call center in Colby. The city got involved, loaning about \$450,000 and getting a \$450,000 state loan to help the company revamp the former Inlow Interior building on Franklin Avenue. The company had promised to provide about 130 new jobs in four years.

The operation was just getting off the ground when the company ran out of cash. Chief Executive Officer Michael Brothers asked the Colby City Council for an additional \$100,000 loan in March, but public outcry at a meeting in April convinced the council to reject the request.

The company couldn't find more financing and closed its

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KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

More than 170 people turned up at Beulah Cemetery to help right headstones knocked over by vandals in early August.

Thieves make off with heavy generator

By Andy Heintz

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Thieves apparently hauled off a 4,000- to 5,000-pound generator from a Nex-Tech Wireless tower site at County Roads S and 5 northwest of Levant sometime Thursday evening or early Friday morning.

Thomas County Sheriff Rod Taylor said the generator had been bolted down to a concrete pad and surrounded by a wire fence. He said thieves cut through the fence and cut the bolts off.

He said the people who took the generator seemed to know what they were doing, because they had the equipment needed to cut the generator free and load it up. He said the thieves could have

used a forklift to load the generator. Another experienced lawman said the generator could have been winched up onto a flatbed truck or trailer.

Taylor said the the bolts were probably cut with a battery-powered saw.

The sheriff said his office was told about the incident by a Nex-Tech employee, Ryan Hills from Plainville, on Friday.

Colby College equestrian coach Shanda Mattix reported her Honda Rancher 350 all-terrain vehicle stolen from near County Roads R and 17, about three miles west of College Drive and Range Avenue between Thursday evening and Friday morning. Mattix reported the theft to the sheriff's office on Friday, Taylor said.

Financial officer is new hospital chief

By Kevin Bottrell

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The Citizens Medical Center board has decided to keep Kevin Trenkle as its permanent chief executive officer, rewarding a 17-year career with the hospital's top job.

Trenkle, who had been the hospital's chief financial officer, had been interim chief since Janice McCart resigned in August. The hospital will be looking for a new financial officer, Trenkle said, but meanwhile he will do double duty.

Trenkle said he was sorry to see McCart leave.

"She was undoubtedly the

best CEO I've seen here," he said.

Trenkle said he was chosen because he's been around and knows how the operation works. The promotion was approved at a board meeting in December. Board Chairman Robb Ross said Trenkle has been a tremendous asset to the hospital over the past 17 years.

"During those 17 years he has worked well and closely with individuals who have held the position of chief executive officer, and has previously taken on the responsibilities of interim CEO – once in '95-'96, and again for 15 months in '03-'04."

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City Council votes to up employee pay

By Andy Heintz

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The Colby City Council voted 4-3 in favor of a 3 percent raise to help workers deal with increases in the cost of living at a meeting Tuesday at City Hall.

Councilmen David Voss, Tim Hutfles and Mark Beringer were the three dissenting votes. Voting in favor were Omar Weber, Beverly Eicher, Jim Brown, Pat Mallory and Fred Taylor.

"I think it's important to show we appreciate what they do," Eicher said. "Words don't mean much. We need to show them."

City Manager Carolyn Armstrong proposed the raise, which would apply to all city employees.

Hutfles said he appreciated all that the city employees do, but at the same time the whole community is experiencing a downturn.

"Some people haven't had a raise in five years," he said, "and some have taken cuts."

Hutfles noted that people living on fixed incomes were having to deal with raised water, sanitation and electric rates.

Brown said keeping good employees saves the city money in the long run.

Colby Police Chief Randy Jones said he didn't think the raises were overly generous, adding that the council's decision to forgive \$2,000 owed to city by Meadow Lake Golf Course and Lounge was an example of when the coun-

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Briefly

Trash crews to take Friday off

The Colby Sanitation Department will not pick up residential trash on New Year's Eve. Those routes were picked up today. The department will not pick up commercial trash Friday or Saturday. For information, call the Colby Public Works office at 460-4420.

Landfill to close for the holidays

The Thomas County Landfill will close Saturday for the New Year's holiday but be open from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday. It will close again Monday. For information, call 462-8139.

Blood drives here next week

The American Red Cross will be collecting blood

from noon to 6 p.m. Tuesday and 7:45 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Wednesday at the Colby Community Building. Go to redcrossblood.org or call (800) 733-2767 to schedule an appointment. Walk-ins are welcome. The agency needs volunteers to help at the Colby drives. For information, call coordinator Bev Vaughn at 462-3861 or 443-1467.

Head Start looking for kids

Head Start, a tuition-free preschool, is accepting applications for its 2011-2012 school year. The school accepts applications all year long for kids aged 3 and 4. For information, or to get an application, call 460-6067.

Courthouse elevator needs repair

The elevator at the Thomas County Courthouse

will be out of service Friday so a new motor starter can be installed. The work had been scheduled for Tuesday and Wednesday. For information, call County Clerk Shelly Harms at 460-4500.

Courts to close early for New Year's

The Thomas County District Court office will close at noon Friday so the staff can complete end-of-the-year accounting. The office will open again on Tuesday. For information, call 460-4540.

Hill City artist featured at museum

Works by Hill City artist and teacher David Chalfant are on exhibit at the Prairie Museum of Art and History through the end of the week. His sculptures and paintings have been shown in regional and national shows. For information, contact the museum at 460-

4590 or museumed@st-tel.net.

Youth league to meet next month

A parent-player meeting for Youth League Basketball will begin at 8 p.m. Wednesday at the Colby United Methodist Church. Coach Matt Ludwig said the cost is \$20 per player, and games will begin the following weekend. For information, call the church at 462-2761.



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