

Scouts go green for cookie sale

The Girl Scouts say they are going green in 2011: Thanks-A-Lot cookies will be wearing new soft-sided packaging this year instead of the usual carton.

"By eliminating the carton, more than 150 tons of paper-board will be kept out of the waste stream, enough to fill 14 garbage trucks," said Lisa Cech of the Girl Scouts of Kansas Heartland Hays regional office.

Colby's Girl Scout Cookie Kick-off will be at 10 a.m. Satur-

day, Jan. 22, at the Colby Community College Student Union. All area Scouts from age 5 to 17 are encouraged to attend, Cech said. Cookies sales will run through March 13.

Penny Kline represents the Colby area as the Girl Scouts service unit manager. Mint Culver is the product sales manager, which includes the cookie sales. For information, call Culver at 460-6005 or Kline at 460-2929.

Sidewalk de-icers provide no traction

De-icer does not provide the traction needed to walk safely on slick sidewalks.

"The traditional way to create traction is to scatter cinders or sand," said Ward Upham, horticulturist with Kansas State University Research and Extension, "but some homeowners are now using natural-clay 'kitty litter' instead. Others are feeding the birds while providing traction by sprinkling cracked corn or bird seed."

Each option has vpros and cons, Upham said, but none works as well as getting out the shovel and removing snow and ice as soon as a winter storm subsides.

De-icer can help with removal - particularly if applied before the storm or after the snow's been moved out of the way. De-icers' basic purpose is simply to break the bond between ice and pavement, usually by causing the ice to melt, he explained. In general, the thinner and newer the ice, the better de-icers work.

"You need to follow up with a traction provider only if you leave slick spots or slush behind - either of which can make walking hazardous," Upham said. "If so, you may want to make people leave their shoes at the front door."

Slush itself contains ice, but if it's loaded with de-icer, it also may be rather slimy. In turn, when the slimy stuff comes indoors on shoes, it may create spots that dry and leave chemical residues.

Of course, walkers will track traction-adding materials such as

cinders or cat litter, as well, Upham said. And once indoors, cinders can stain fabrics. Sand can be difficult to clean up, plus it can abrade rugs and floors. Scattered, damp kitty litter can be a sticky mess.

How big a nuisance that becomes, however, relates to a second problem with traction-providing materials: Homeowners tend to forget to sweep up and throw them away as soon as the current need is gone.

"When you leave such materials on your sidewalk, they end up in one of two places," he said. "They get stuck in the edges of your landscape, or snow melt and rain take them into your street's gutter, down into the storm drain system and out to a nearby natural body of water. There, they become a space-filling pollutant."

The materials stuck in landscape edges can be a problem, too. Sand can build up to create a layer that interferes with rooting or, if mixed with clay soils, can create a dirt mixture that's a lot like concrete. Adding cinders will raise the soil's pH - which may already be high where limestone abounds. Bird seed can sprout into "out-of-place plants," the very definition for weeds.

"Mistakenly using de-icer to provide traction can be worse, though," Upham warned. "You don't want to use any more de-icer than absolutely necessary around your landscape."

Back to work at the college



DEBBIE SCHWANKE/Colby Community College

Algebra instructor Brad Griffith met with his "Math for Health Professionals" class Tuesday morning at Colby Community College, where classes have started for the spring semester.

Final registration will continue this week for students who were not able to make it to campus Monday.

Hubble telescope zeroes in on green blob in space

By Seth Borenstein

AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) - The Hubble Space Telescope got its first peek at a mysterious giant green blob in outer space and found that it's strangely alive.

The bizarre glowing blob is giving birth to new stars, some only a couple million years old, in a remote area of the universe where stars don't normally form.

The blob of gas, first discovered by a Dutch teacher in 2007, is named Hanny's Voorwerp. Voorwerp is Dutch for object.

NASA released the new Hubble photo Monday at the American Astronomical Society meeting in Seattle.

Parts of the green blob are collapsing and the

resulting pressure from that creates the stars. The stellar nurseries are outside of a normal galaxy, which is usually where stars live.

That makes these "very lonely newborn stars" that are "in the middle of nowhere," said Bill Keel, the University of Alabama astronomer who examined the blob.

The blob, the size of our own Milky Way galaxy, is 650 million light years away. Each light year is about 6 trillion miles.

The blob is mostly hydrogen gas swirling from a close encounter of two galaxies, and it glows because it is illuminated by a quasar in one of the galaxies. A quasar is a bright object full of energy powered by a black hole.

The blob was discovered by elementary teacher Hanny van Arkel, who was 24 at the time, as part of a worldwide Galaxy Zoo proj-

ect where everyday people can look at archived star photographs to catalog new objects.

Van Arkel said when she first saw the odd object in 2007 it appeared blue and smaller. The Hubble photo provides a clear picture and better explanation for what is happening around the blob.

"It actually looked like a blue smudge," van Arkel told the Associated Press. "Now it looks like dancing frog in the sky because it's green."

She says she can even see what passes for arms and eyes.

Since van Arkel's discovery, astronomers have looked for similar gas blobs and found 18 of them. All are about half the size of Hanny's Voorwerp, Keel said.

Fifteen-passenger vans still a risk, say government agencies

Kansas officials have issued a safety warning for owners of 15-passenger vans, which can be hard to handle, especially with an inexperienced driver, and have a tendency to roll.

These vans are commonly used by churches and other groups for road trips.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration recently released a consumer advisory on these vans, the state says, prompted by recent crashes in New York and Georgia. Those crashes involved 15-passenger vans that rolled, resulting in 10 deaths, the agency said.

"In partnership with KDOT, we have drafted a letter to all registered owners of these vehicles," said Secretary of Revenue Joan Wagnon. "This letter gives important consumer information as well as a link to the NHTSA consumer advisory...."

Here are some safety tips for those who travel in 15-passenger vans:

- If you are the owner, make sure the vehicle is properly maintained.
- Owners should make sure drivers are fully trained and experienced in operating a 15-passenger van and properly licensed.

Information can be found at www.ksdot.org/burTrafficSaf/news/nhtsacaution15passvan.pdf.

On the Beat

COLBY POLICE Monday

8:15 a.m. - Helped with stalled at Fourth and Riddle. Able to get started and out of traffic.

11:27 a.m. - Vehicle stalled, impeding traffic at Franklin and College. Pushed out of roadway.

5:21 p.m. - Theft of leather jacket. Was not a theft; will do civil stand-by for subjects.

5:57 p.m. - Provided information on traffic stop at Country Club Drive and Willow.

6 p.m. - Car blocking driveway. Spoke to owner; vehicle moved.

7:01 p.m. - Open line 911 call. On callback, subject reported vehicle parked in middle of roadway for more than 10 minutes.

9:12 p.m. - Teenagers reported in store at 115 W. Willow knocking down displays and refusing to leave. Had them leave.

Tuesday

12:48 a.m. - Ambulance requested, turned over to emergency medical services.

11:07 a.m. - Provided ride from stalled semi at westbound I-70 on-ramp Exit 53 to Petro Lube.

11:35 a.m. - Report filed for inde-

cent liberties.

11:48 a.m. - Accident at Fifth and Court.

5:27 p.m. - Parking complaint at Post Office. All vehicles had moved by 5:55 p.m.

5:35 p.m. - Subject came to station in reference to theft of dog in

December 2009, which may have been located. Spoke to reporting party.

6:01 p.m. - Caller reported semi dropped its trailer in the 900 block of Davis Avenue. Provided traffic control for Butch's wrecker to get it moved; all OK.

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