



8 pages

# COLBY FREE PRESS

75¢

Wednesday

February 2, 2011

Volume 122, Number 18

Serving Thomas County since 1888



KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

Although Colby got less than three inches of snow Monday, blowing snow created a driving hazard Monday night and nearly covered some roads in town and in the county Tuesday.

The snow had stopped falling over night but high winds blew snow off the fields and across the roads.

## Snowstorm dusts Colby area, blankets eastern half of the state

By John Hanna

The Associated Press

TOPEKA — Frigid winds whipped up heavy snow Tuesday across the eastern half of Kansas, closing schools and creating treacherous driving conditions, although the state dodged the historic levels of snow and ice felt by some of its neighbors.

As predicted, Colby and northwest Kansas only received one to three inches, but high winds and low temperatures created dangerous wind chill.

The storm was serious enough for Gov. Sam Brownback to encourage people to just stay home.

The Legislature took the advice and canceled all of its meetings, including House

and Senate sessions, for both Tuesday and Wednesday, after Brownback told most state employees in the Topeka area to stay home those days. But at least a few people ventured out during the day to buy groceries or find entertainment for restless, home-bound children.

Brownback declared a state of emergency in 53 of the state's 105 counties, and cattlemen started worrying about their herds, though an industry group wasn't expecting significant losses.

State officials blamed the weather for a fatal car accident Monday in western Kansas but said the state was lucky to escape the icy conditions that plagued other states with more than a foot of snow, threatening to bring down power lines.

The system stretched some 2,000 miles, blanketing a third of the nation.

"First and foremost, stay home. Don't make yourself a victim," Brownback said during an afternoon news conference at the state's emergency operations center in Topeka, which had been staffed around-the-clock since Monday.

In Topeka, as the snow flew around her at the city's main downtown bus terminal, Ashley Miller acknowledged feeling crazy for venturing out for some grocery shopping with her roommate. But they also were headed to a local social services agency for lunch; she's hoping eventually to get computer training so that she can find work.

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## Spellers to compete in county-wide bee

The county's top spellers will face off against each other at the Thomas County Spelling Bee at 10 a.m. Wednesday, Feb. 16, at Heartland Christian School.

Rae Stewart, a Brewster teacher who helps coordinate the bee, said the competition rotates among five Thomas County schools: Heartland, Colby Middle School, Golden Plains Middle School, Brewster Middle School and Sacred Heart Catholic School. Each school sends its three top spellers.

The public is welcome to come watch the bee, Stewart said.

"It's a lot of fun," she said. "It can get very competitive."

Stewart said the county bee also functions as the Scripps National spelling bee qualifier. Students who are enrolled in Scripps can qualify for the regional competition in Great Bend. The Scripps scores are done independently, she said, because students don't have to enroll.

The bee is open to home-schooled students, Stewart said, and anyone interested should contact her at the Brewster school at (785) 694-2236 or at home at (785) 694-2971.

## New courthouse boiler fails state inspection

By Vera Sloan

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The Thomas County Commissioners got a surprise Monday when they learned that the new boiler heating system they installed in the courthouse in the fall didn't pass state inspection.

"According to this inspection sheet, it looks like the pressure is set too high," said Chairman Ken Christiansen, "and it looks like it's in the valve that goes to the pressure gauge."

The commissioners faxed the inspection sheet to P and M Contractors, the Kansas City company who sold and installed the boiler system. They were waiting to

hear back from P and M when the meeting ended at noon.

Twelve students and their instructor Autumn Arasmith from Colby Community College's state and local government class observed the meeting.

In other business:

• Sheriff Rod Taylor brought the commissioners a copy of a report dated 1993 that addressed the same questions they are addressing today concerning the jail. Commissioner Steele told the college class the county is in the early stages of looking at remodeling the jail facilities. The commissioners plan to ride with the sheriff to Scott County in the coming

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## Next hopeful to see board on Thursday

By Andy Heintz

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The Colby College board will interview a Kansas Board of Regents member with experience in the worlds of education and business Thursday at Thomas Hall.

Charles D. Kater, director of technical programs and curriculum at the board of regents, will be the second of four candidates interviewed by the board. The meeting will start at 7 a.m. and end at 9. The public will be able to meet with Kater in the multipurpose room of the student union between 10:30 and 11:45 a.m. The last two interviews will be conducted on Friday and Monday under the same format.

Kater was the vice president of workforce development at Northwest Arkansas Community College in Bentonville in 2009. During his time at the college, the university was one of the two community colleges in the state to be designated by the governor as a "Center for Excellence" for resi-

dential energy efficiency (green jobs training center).

Kater was the dean of the College of Professional Studies, vice president of community college outreach and director of satellite operations at Bellevue University in Nebraska from 2004 to 2008. Kater launched 20 new academic programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. He was responsible for 27 full-time faculty members, 250 adjunct faculty, a support staff of eight and 5,000 students. He managed a \$7 million annual budget.

Kater was also the associate dean of professional and online studies at Southwestern College in Wichita in 2002-2003 and a consultant of the Saint Francis Health Center in 2002. He was an adjunct faculty member at Friends University in Wichita in 2002.

According to his resume, he conducted the world's first online training program for people who wanted to conduct webcasts and training programs on the Internet

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## Lease auction a first for Thomas County

By Vera Sloan

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A practice used in Iowa and other farm states east of Kansas made its way to Western Kansas on Jan. 15.

A public auction for a five-year lease on 2,500 acres of dry cropland in east-central Thomas County filled the Shepherd's Staff building in Rexford to overflowing. Farmers, eager to increase the size of their operation, got a chance to bid on a cash lease that would allow them to farm someone else's land.

"Cash lease for crop land has been common for the past 35 years," said Lynn Johnson of Johnson Realty in Oberlin, owner and auctioneer of Johnson Real Estate and Auction company who conducted the auction. "Normally, dry land leases for \$35 an acre. It's a practice that got started when wheat was \$3 a bushel and corn was bringing \$2 a bushel, but more recently it's not uncommon for farmers to pay \$60 an acre for cash rent on dry crop land.

"With an auction, everyone gets an equal chance and the owner doesn't have to choose between neighbors and friends as to who will get to farm the cropland. It hadn't been done here before and the owner

wanted to try it and see how it worked."

Johnson said that with land selling for \$2,000 an acre and more, an owner shouldn't have to sit there and take only \$35 an acre for a lease anymore.

He said the 2,500 acres up for lease on Jan. 15 averaged \$126 an acre on good crop land. It was flat with no waste acres, no irrigation and no growing crop, Johnson said, and whoever farms it would have the option to plant whatever he wanted to plant. The farmer who bought the lease will have to come up with the cash rent payment every year for the next five years.

Johnson said lease auctions are common in Iowa but have never been tried here. However, he did note he had an auction for a combination of grass, dry land and irrigated land in December of 2009. As far as he knows this is the first one in this area, and it has created a lot of interest.

"It was a fun day," Johnson said. "The successful bids were from farmers in Sheridan and Thomas Counties, and I really appreciated all the interest and all the bidders."

"I was contacted by three other people before I left the auction and I'm getting calls every day now from people who are interested in doing the same thing."

## Briefly

### Pick up cemetery decorations

Christmas grave decorations at Beulah Cemetery must be picked up by Friday. Decorations still in place after Friday will be disposed of. For information, call secretary Relda Galli at 462-6714.

### Food sign-up open now

Prairie Land Food sign-up is open until Monday at the State Farm Insurance office, 905 E. Fourth St. Delivery will be Saturday, Feb. 19, at the Sacred Heart School gym. For more information, call Gene Griffin at 460-3579.

### Television board meets here

The board of directors of Smoky Hills Public Television Corporation Inc. will have a meeting at 1 p.m. Thursday at the Prairie Museum of Art and History. The public is invited to attend.

### Dance Saturday at clubhouse

There will be a singles and couples dance from 6 to 10 p.m. Saturday at the Meadow Lake Golf Course clubhouse. Craig Stevens will provide the music. For information, call Lue Duffey at (785) 269-7057.

### Show school spirit, get in free

The Colby Community College Athletic Department is encouraging area students to show their school pride during the Trojan basketball games Saturday. All students from any school, wearing something identifying that school, will get in free. Parents who go with their student will get in half-price. The women's game will begin at 6 p.m. followed by the men about 8 p.m. The Trojan Pep Band will be performing and several college T-shirts will be given away. For information, contact Debbie Schwanke at 460-5411 or Ryan Sturdy at 460-5548.

### Youth plan dinner, auction

The Colby Middle School Methodist Youth Fellowship will hold a Valentine's pasta dinner and community service work auction from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Sunday at Colby United Methodist Church. The auction will begin at 12:35 p.m. Fellowship members will be auctioned off for community service projects. Money raised will go to the fellowship's mission projects. For information, call the church at 460-2761.

### Baseball sign-up is Sunday

American Legion Baseball will have a sign-up day at 3 p.m. Sunday upstairs at the Colby Community Building for eligible players aged 16 to 19. Coach Jeff Krzycki said all interested players must sign up at the meeting. For information, call Krzycki at 443-2542.

### Church to hold marriage talks

The Colby Independent Baptist Church will hold a free marriage and family conference Sunday to next Wednesday at the church. Lectures will be at 9:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m. and 6 p.m. Sunday; and at 7 p.m. Monday through Wednesday. Dr. Bob Bliss from Colorado Springs will speak about biblical principles for successful marriage, family and home life. The conference is open to the public. For information, call Pastor Bernard Heinz at 460-0313.



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