



Parched grass catches fire in two areas

By Steve Haynes

Colby Free Press
s.haynes@nwkans.com

Colby fire crews made two runs Wednesday, sending a tanker to help with a pasture fire in the southwest part of Thomas County, then taking three trucks to Levant after a woman's trash fire escaped and got into dry grass and a couple of old cars.

The range fire between Brewster and Winona, near County Roads G and 8, was mostly out by the time Colby firemen got there, said Ross Carney, fire service officer for the Colby department. The tanker transferred its water to fire trucks at the scene and came home.

Rex Jamison, Brewster assistant

fire chief, said the first call came in about 3 p.m. The fire, right at the Brewster Fire District's south boundary, covered about 200 to 250 acres, he said.

"Just another grass fire," he said. "It got pretty hot for a little bit, but once we got enough trucks there, we got it knocked down."

Firemen were back in town about 5 p.m., he said.

The fire occurred in the wake of large wildfires elsewhere in the state, as high winds whipped flames through dry grass. While fire danger was down today, with a 40 percent chance for thunderstorms today and tonight, the National Weather Service issued a

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Shutdown looms as leaders bicker

By Andrew Taylor

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Still short of a deal, congressional leaders bargained and squabbled by turns Thursday on legislation to cut spending and prevent a partial government shutdown that loomed for Friday at midnight.

After all-night talks among aides, President Barack Obama summoned Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., to a White House meeting for the second time in a little over 12 hours.

Before departing the Capitol,

Boehner urged the House to pass a bill to cut \$12 billion in spending, fund the Pentagon through the end of the year and keep the government running for a week.

"There is absolutely no policy reason for the Senate to not follow the House in taking these responsible steps to support our troops and to keep our government open," he said.

Reid said otherwise, although he, too, made it clear he wants to avoid a shutdown that the White House says would create problems for combat troops overseas

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CYNTHIA HAYNES/Colby Free Press

KU honors area students

Colby High had the largest group, 14 seniors, at the Kansas Honors Program dinner in Oberlin on Wednesday. Sam Kendrick (above, walking away) was the only guy in the group, which gathered in at the head table as each was introduced by Principal Larry Gabel. The event, sponsored by the University of Kansas Alumni Association and Endowment, recognized the top 10 percent of graduating classes across the state. Fifteen northwest Kansas schools were represented; Professor Don Steeples, a Palco native, advised the seniors to become professionals. Two Oakley High students made it, Hanna Hubert (left in right photo) and Merabeth Corbett.



Departing youths draining rural towns, says lecturer

By Kevin Bottrell

Colby Free Press
kbottrell@nwkans.com

Small towns invest the most time and resources in young people who are most likely to leave after high school, said Dr. Patrick Carr on Monday at Colby Community College, and that needs to change.

Carr, a sociologist from Ireland and this year's Max Pickerill lecturer, said that trend is one of the reasons for what he calls the "hollowing out" of rural towns, where the brightest young people leave, the town's population declines and those who stay have few opportunities.

Carr earned his bachelor's and master's degrees from University College Dublin. He got a scholarship to study abroad and used it to get a doctorate in sociology from the University of Chicago in 1998. He now teaches at Rutgers University in New Jersey.

Together with fellow sociologist Maria Kefalas, he moved to a small town in Iowa — which they renamed "Ellis" to maintain its anonymity — to study the problem of declining population. The pair spoke to the town's high school graduates from the 1980s and 1990s, both those who stayed and those who left. They published their findings in the book, "Hollowing out the Middle: The Rural Brain Drain and What it Means for America."

"What we came up with was, when you come of



KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press
Irish sociologist Dr. Patrick Carr spoke Monday at Colby Community College about the reasons for the decline of rural towns.

age, there are two main questions," he said. "Do you stay or do you go? And, if you go, do you ever come back?"

Most small towns can be placed somewhere on a continuum, he said, with robust, healthy towns on one end. These towns have good jobs, a stable middle class and a good standard of living. On the other end are towns in the "hollowing out" stage. Towns get hollowed out, he said, when the young people have left and the older people are dying. These areas usually lack health care infrastructure, jobs and even schools.

"That's the doomsday scenario," he added.

Gradual shifts over the last 20 to 25 years have moved more towns, especially in the Midwest and Plains, toward the dying end of the scale. From 1980 to 2000, 600 counties lost 10 percent or more of their population, he said, and it was more often the young and educated people who left. From 2000 to 2005, 642 counties had more deaths than births.

"These trends alone can erode small towns," he said.

Many of these towns have few children or young families. Schools have to consolidate with those miles away, Carr said, which almost always hurts the town.

Carr said that during the last 25 years, changes in rural economies — such as the trend toward large farming operations — have further eroded small-town populations. Manufacturing jobs have shifted overseas or are no longer as good as they once were.

In "Ellis," Carr said, one of the main occupations for many years was to work at the John Deere fac-

tory in the next town. It paid well and provided good benefits. Now, with companies looking to cut expenses, the jobs don't pay as well. Workers are being fired and then hired back at lower salaries with no benefits.

"The opportunities for those who stay or return are much less appealing," he said.

Carr's research found that young people in small towns can be lumped into several groups: leavers, stayers and returners. Within the leavers, he said, are two paths, the achievers, who go on to do great things elsewhere, and the seekers, who want to go out and see the world.

Achievers might be people like the football captain or the student council president, he said, people who get a disproportionate amount of the town's resources, but are the ones most likely to leave and never come back. The seekers didn't have those resources behind them, but found other ways to leave, such as military service.

The stayers get the least amount of the town's resources, Carr said. They likely got jobs while still in high school and kept them. Carr said the stayers he interviewed in Ellis felt they were a forgotten group and they were ill-prepared to deal with the modern economy. They believed that if they worked hard they would get ahead, he said, but didn't. However, Carr said, the stayers he interviewed said they couldn't

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Briefly

Biscuits and sausage in Brewster

The Brewster United Methodist Church will have a biscuit, sausage and gravy feed from 5:30 and 7 p.m. Sunday at the church. Donations will be accepted for youth activities. For information, call Nadine Kammer at (785) 694-2456.

Come on out for Baptist revival

The Colby Independent Baptist Church will hold revival services Sunday through Wednesday at the church. Sunday services begin at 10:30 a.m. and 6 p.m. and the weeknight services at 7 p.m. For information, call Pastor Bernard Heinz at 460-0313.

City crew plans to fill cracks

The city street crew will start filling cracks on Monday, weather permitting. The work should take two to three days. Public Works Director Chris Bieker asks that people move vehicles off these streets:

Ninth Street from Thompson Avenue to Lane Drive, 10th Street from Thompson Drive to Country Club Drive, Lynn Avenue from Ninth Street to Lue Drive and Thompson Avenue from Brookside to Ninth Street. For information, call the Public Works office at (785) 460-4420.

Kindergarten screening Tuesday

Colby Grade School and the Northwest Kansas Education Service Center will have kindergarten screenings from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday and 8 a.m. to noon Tuesday at the Colby United Methodist Church. The screenings test children's hearing, language skills and cognitive development to check readiness for school. To make an appointment, call school nurse Amy Huffles at 460-5111.

Museum offers spear tossing

Try your hand at tossing a spear with an atlatl, see

Paleolithic tools, learn how to excavate an archeological site and more at the first Archeology Day offered by the High Plains Chapter of the Kansas Anthropological Association, from 2 to 4:30 p.m. Saturday at the Prairie Museum of Art and History at 1905 S. Franklin Ave. For information, contact Ann Miner at the museum, 460-4590 or museumed@st-tel.net.

Treasurer's office to close

The Thomas County Treasurer's office will close Tuesday and Wednesday so the staff can do motor vehicle training. The office will also close from noon to 1 p.m. next Thursday and Friday, April 15. For information, call the treasurer at 460-4520.

Girl Scouts collecting old flags

The Colby Girl Scouts will have a collection box in the lobby of the Pioneer Memorial Library from

now through Saturday, April 16, for their annual flag disposal drive. They remind everyone that U.S. flags should be properly disposed of if they're dirty, no longer rectangular, faded or in general disrepair. For information, call Katherine Kersenbrock-Ostmeyer at (785) 443-2479.

Students plan Italian meal

The Colby High School forensics and debate teams will offer an Italian-theme dinner theater at 6 p.m. next Thursday in the high school commons. After the meal, top forensics competitors will perform. Donations will be taken for team expenses. For information, call coach Nancy Rundel at 460-5300.

