



## COLBY FREE PRESS

8 pages

# Thunderstorm damages area crops

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A severe thunderstorm damaged trees and crops Monday evening as it moved through Thomas County.

The first National Weather Service reports started to come in from Parks and Benklemann, Neb., in the afternoon, where weather spotters reported hail up to .88 inches. The storm brought down power lines and tore up a roof near Bird City and blew down trees along U.S. 36 in Rawlins County.

The worst part of the storm passed over Levant and Colby about 6 p.m. Hail up to 2 inches and winds gusting to 59 mph pounded fields, trees and buildings across the area. Blowing rain cut visibility to several yards. The service was advising people to stay inside and away from windows.

Almost every cornfield between the two cities showed signs of damage Tuesday morning, with corn stalks blown over, severed or stripped. The Farm Service Agency said today it does not have a tally of the damage yet, as farmers have to wait a certain amount of time to let fields recover on their own.

The storm also damaged trees all over Colby. Sev-

eral large branches were torn off at Fike Park, one tree blew over and damaged a vehicle downtown and some of the new trees along Range Avenue also showed damage.

The storm moved through quickly, however, dropping .78 inches of rain in less than an hour. After that the storm continued south, blowing over a semi-tractor rig near Monument.

Storms passed mainly east of Thomas County late Tuesday night and early this morning.

The evening storm damaged buildings in Nebraska. Skylights were blown out in the McCook Walmart, causing the store to be temporarily shut down. Strong winds and hail also tore the siding off a home in McCook, and heavy rain briefly flooded the streets with three to four inches of water.

As the storm moved into Kansas it continued to drop golf-ball sized hail on Decatur and Norton Counties. Hail up to 2.75 inches, which caused damage to vehicles and roof tiles, was reported in Graham County.

Another storm followed much the same path early this morning. One-inch hail and wind gusts up to 72 mph were recorded in Sheridan County and two transformers were blown down in Hoxie.

The service is predicting a slight chance of thunderstorms Thursday and Friday.



KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

This cornfield, along with many others between Colby and Levant, was damaged by high winds and hail from a storm Monday evening.



KAYLA CORNETT/Colby Free Press



## Firefighters train on propane blazes

Fifty-six area firefighters gathered in Colby on Saturday for propane fire training. Decked out in full gear, the firefighters used a "tree," with multiple spigots emitting the flammable gas (above). They used multiple hoses to bring extinguish the flames. They also practiced how to put out a fire in a half-full tank (left). Firefighters had to wet down the area and continually spray the tank until the flammability was low enough that a firefighter could walk up and turn off a valve. The firefighters used the paved area behind the Colby Fire Station, which was built with exactly this sort of training in mind.

## College teachers speak at event

For the fourth year, Colby Community College instructors Dr. Michael Thompson and Krista Carter were chosen to present two seminars at the Summer Institute for Distance Learning and Instructional Technology held Thursday and Friday on the Johnson County Community College campus in Kansas City.

The theme for the symposium, "The Technology Horizon: What's Ahead for Education," focused on the *Horizon Report: 2011* that lists key trends and emerging technologies anticipated within one to five years for education. The event included presentations, topic-oriented special interest discussion groups, hands-on workshops and demonstrations to over 400 college and university attendees from throughout the Midwest.

"The Game Room - A Conversation about the Future of Learning Games and Virtual Worlds in Education," was the title of the first presentation by Thompson and Carter.

According to the instructors, learning games and virtual worlds can bring realistic and engaging learning opportunities to classes. Games bring the promise of a motivating and enjoyable learning environment because the activities and sensibilities are powerful, offering an opportunity.

"Games and simulations have changed the way our students learn, socialize and problem solve," said Thompson. "Best of all, students love them. Simple, elegant games and virtual worlds

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## County chooses new janitor services

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Thomas County commissioners did not know what to expect when they began going through bids submitted for county lawn care and janitorial services on Monday morning.

"This is just overwhelming, gentlemen," said chairman Ken Christiansen. "We have a duty here to not just look at the most affordable bidders, but also keep in mind who will do the best job."

"It's like comparing apples to oranges," said commissioner Paul Steele as they read through pages of proposals from seven bidders to take care of lawn services for the Thomas County Courthouse and Thomas County Office Complex. Some were comprehensive and some were simple, cut and dried.

Bids were received from Al Smith and Rob Stithem from Earth Works; both attended the meeting to field questions. Other bids were submitted by Chad Applebury, Camouflage Lawn Service, Chad Zimmerman of Z-Enterprise, Tyson Miller of Miller Mowing and Allen Sager of Green Acres.

The commissioners decided that herbicide and fertilizer would be taken care of in-house by the road and bridge department, since there are two persons employed by the county with applicator licenses.

Bids for lawn care were looked

at according to monthly rates for each of the two buildings separately to ensure more comparable standards.

Z-Enterprise, Chad Applebury and Earth Works made the preliminary cut.

"I am really leaning towards Applebury and Earth Works," said commissioner Byron Sowers. "Applebury's bid is the lowest but I think he is just trying to get his foot in the door."

"But I think Rob is on to something with his landscaping ideas and he has experience working on the sprinkler system, too," said Christiansen.

With a bid just slightly more than Applebury's, the commissioners made an ultimate decision to hire Earth Works.

On the other hand, only three bids were received for janitorial services and one didn't even specify which building she was interested in cleaning. The other two bids only included work for the office complex; no specific interest in cleaning the courthouse was indicated.

Bids were received from Gayla Davis, Sheryl Barnett and Krista Alexander. Alexander was chosen to maintain janitorial services for the office complex and Davis

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## Governor to hand back federal health care grant

TOPEKA (AP) - Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback announced Tuesday he will return a \$31.5 million grant the state received to help lay the groundwork for national health insurance reform, citing uncertainty that the federal government will be able to meet its financial commitments.

The cash-strapped state joins Oklahoma as the first two to announce plans to return the money for the so-called early innovator grants to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

"There is much uncertainty surrounding the ability of the federal government to meet its already budgeted future spending obligations," Brownback said in a news release announcing the decision. "Every state should be prepar-

ing for fewer federal resources, not more. To deal with that reality Kansas needs to maintain maximum flexibility. That requires freeing Kansas from the strings attached to the early innovator grant."

Republican House leaders praised the move, but Democratic leaders called it foolish.

State Democratic chairwoman Joan Wagnon said the decision showed Brownback cared more about pleasing Republican extremists than serving the people of Kansas.

"It takes Kansas healthcare decisions out of our hands and puts it into those of the federal government," she said in a statement. "This destroys a chance to build a system for Kansans by Kansans. Legal challenges aside, the Affordable Care Act is the law, and returning

money given to us does not change that fact."

House Speaker Mike O'Neal (R-Hutchinson) said in a news release that federal mandates tie the hands of the Kansas Legislature on too many issues.

"With strings attached, an unknown price tag and an unworkable timeline, the 'early innovator' grant involves unreasonable risk," O'Neal said. "The governor made the right decision. We must continue to focus on health solutions that meet the needs of Kansans."

Other GOP leaders voicing support for the move included Majority Leader Arlen Siegreid (R-Olathe) and Speaker Pro Tem Jene Vickrey (R-Louisburg).

