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Teacher given \$1,000 grant

By Christina Beringer

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Sacred Heart School in Colby is adding a spiritual touch to an exercise program developed by physical education teacher Elsie Rietcheck with help from a \$1,000 Healthy Habits for Life grant.

Rietcheck reports 100 percent participation by students in kindergarten through fifth grade in her “Walk 100 Miles with Jesus” program. She said the kids are allowed to walk around the playground and gym before school from 7:30 to 8 a.m., during their recess and after school with a parent supervising.

“We measured,” she said, “and seven trips around the playground is equal to one mile, and 27 laps around the gym totals a mile. Just before the end of the year, we’ll total all of the miles and have an awards ceremony, giving prizes to students who walk 25 miles, 50 miles, 75 miles and 100 miles.”

Money from the grant, sponsored by the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas Foundation, will go for prizes to help entice stu-

dents to walk.

The foundation announced that the school would get one of 158 grants totaling more than \$150,000 to schools in 79 Kansas counties.

“School personnel like Elsie Rietcheck are clearly on the front lines of the collective campaign against childhood obesity, and are working on creative solutions for the students at Sacred Heart School,” said Marlou Wegener, the foundation’s chief operating officer. “The foundation is proud to provide the dollars necessary to help Elsie fund the program she has planned.”

Wegener said that some of the other programs that received money include plans to acquire indoor and outdoor exercise equipment, initiate a nutrition curriculum, organize a community health fair and purchase healthy snacks.

Renewal of the grant program was announced July in Wichita during the 22nd Annual statewide conference of the Kansas School Nurses Organization. The amount of each grant was based on the applicant’s request for the program he or she proposed. Rietcheck received the maximum of \$1,000.



Students walked around the playground of Sacred Heart School on Tuesday as a part of the “Walk 100 miles with Jesus” program, developed by physical education teacher Elsie Rietcheck.

ELSIE RIETCHECK/Sacred Heart School
She received a \$1,000 grant sponsored by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas Foundation for the program.

They weren’t biting



STEVE HAYNES/Colby Free Press

Chuck Plumisto, a Colby volunteer fireman, and his sister, Kelly Marker, took some time in the 60-degree weather Tuesday to fish for the 400 rainbow trout state wildlife officials put in the Villa High pond last week. Were they biting? No; in fact, a state biologist said so far as he knew, no one had caught a trout out of the ice-covered pond yet. He said that should happen sometime after the ice is gone. A \$12.50 state trout permit is required to fish there now, along with a state license for anyone 16 to 64.

First Lady defends her behavior

WASHINGTON (AP) — First lady Michelle Obama is challenging assertions she has forcefully imposed her will on White House aides and says people have inaccurately tried to portray her as “some kind of angry black woman.”

Mrs. Obama tells CBS News she has not read *New York Times* reporter Jodi Kantor’s new book that characterizes her as a behind-the-scenes force in the Executive Mansion, whose strong views often draw her into conflict with President Barack Obama’s top ad-

visers.

“I never read these books,” she told CBS’s Gayle King in an interview broadcast Wednesday, “so I’ve just gotten in the habit of not reading other people’s impressions of people.”

In the book, Mrs. Obama is said to have occasionally bristled at some of the demands and constraints of life in the White House.

In the interview, Mrs. Obama said, “I love this job. It has been a privilege from day one.

“Now there are challenges. If there’s any anxiety that I feel, it’s because I want to make sure that my girls (Malia and Sasha) come out of this on the other end whole.”

The Kantor book portrays a White House where tensions developed between Mrs. Obama and former White House chief of staff Rahm Emanuel and former press secretary and presidential adviser Robert Gibbs.

See “BOOK,” Page 2

Emergency services improves with director

By Christina Beringer

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In less than 30 days, Thomas County commissioners said Monday, the county’s new emergency medical services director has turned the department around.

When Joe Hickert of Goodland accepted the position in early December, he faced a long road to improvements, but he has already surpassed the commissioners expectations.

“Can you believe he has done all this in just 30 days of part-time work?” asked commission Chairman Ken Christiansen during Hickert’s department briefing. “I thought we’d be having these discussions in July or August, but here we are. It’s remarkable.”

The commissioners’ excitement stems from the work Hickert has done to write a new manual of protocols and procedures for the department, including an organizational plan, action plans and detailed descriptions of duties that volunteers and staff can perform,

depending on their level of education, just to name a few accomplishments.

At last count, the manual is up to 183 pages and will help set standards of service for every aspect of patient care and business operations.

“It is a very exciting time for EMS and for Thomas County, and I’m even more excited to be a part of it,” said Hickert. “I’ve already received approval from (physician assistant) Brian Unruh and it sounds like the hospital is very enthusiastic about this, as well.”

“As soon as approval is given by (Dr. Brewster) Kellogg, we will have advanced life support capabilities and can offer a higher level of service to our patients when needed.

“With new ALS services, we’ll be able to offer more affordable transportation options to (distant) facilities as well, and I intend to offer our services to surrounding counties. It will not only save our patients money, but will also bring in an additional source of revenue to the county.”

Included in the protocols will also be procedures for grievances and complaints, both from the public and from within the hospital, which were approved by the commissioners.

These procedures were created, in part, because of two complaints filed in the spring of 2010. Although they took place before Hickert started, the new director said he is taking the incidents seriously and has developed action plans to resolve the issues.

He has also worked diligently to resolve undisclosed complaints that were filed with the Kansas Board of Emergency Medical Services about the service. A meeting is set to take place on Thursday, Feb. 2, in Topeka where Hickert and the commissioners will present the new protocols and policies with hopes of bringing a successful conclusion to that problems.

With many past issues being taken care of and plans in place to increase service, Hickert said, training for volunteers caps his to-

See “DIRECTOR,” Page 2

Kansas governor prepares to give State of State today

By John Milburn

Associated Press

TOPEKA — Legislators said today they are eager to hear Gov. Sam Brownback’s plan for reforming the Kansas tax code and what it would mean to the budget for state agencies.

They hoped to get some indication when the Republican governor gave his State of the State address to a joint session of the Legislature, set for this afternoon.

Brownback has said his tax plan will be revenue-neutral — meaning it would not reduce overall tax collections — but will make the income tax fairer, simpler and, in his words, “flatter.”

Sen. John Vratil, a moderate Leawood Republican who has been targeted in this year’s election by his party’s anti-tax, small-government wing, said the next state budget is likely to remain tight, despite improvements in the state’s finances.

Vratil also said of the governor, “I don’t know what he means by revenue neutral.”

Last session, the House approved a bill that would reduce the state income tax rates each year collections exceed the previous year’s totals. The reductions would apply to corporate and individual income taxes.

The bill stalled in the Senate but is likely to be revived. The Senate has appointed a commission to study tax reform that begins meeting Friday. Sen. Carolyn McGinn, a Sedgewick Republican, is proposing the early rollback of a 1 percent increase in the sales tax rate approved in 2010. The rate would fall from 6.3 percent to 5.7 percent on Jan. 1, 2013, six months earlier than scheduled.

Rep. Marvin Kleeb, an Overland Park Republican, said he expects Brownback to outline a plan for stimulating economic growth and reducing income taxes, calling it “a good place to start.”

“We need solutions now,” he said.

Kansas has seen steady improvement in the economy since Brownback’s first State of the State a year ago. The unemployment rate fell to 6.5 percent in November, but the momentum was tempered last week when Boeing Co. announced it is closing its Wichita defense plant, eliminating 2,100 jobs.

Senate Majority Leader Jay Emler, a Lindsborg Republican, said he expected to hear the broad outline of Brownback plan today, with more details Thursday and Friday. He said his constituents — many of them living in rural areas — are more concerned about property taxes.

“The concern I have about it is, how does it affect the revenue

See “GOVERNOR,” Page 2

