



Director strives to improve medical service

By Kayla Cornett

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The Thomas County Commissioners heard from Joe Hickert, Emergency Medical Services director, on Tuesday during their weekly meeting about changes to the department and approved a program provider and educational plan.

Hickert said they have been busy the past two weeks getting the carpet cleaned, moving pictures and revising the service's map book.

"The last time this map book was updated was in 2007," Hickert said.

He said it had the names, addresses and

phone numbers listed so they took that information out and shredded it. He said they don't care about that information because it is outdated and they just want to be able to find the address they are receiving a call for.

"The best thing about hiring someone from outside to come in and run something is I find out the weaknesses really fast," Hickert said, "cause I don't know my way around town, I don't know my way around the county."

He said he would try to find his way to an address using the map book and it was really difficult to navigate. He also said he found out that most of the volunteers couldn't find their way around the map

book either, so the revised version has tabs and "follows a natural flow."

Hickert then brought up an issue he's been having, which is people not having their houses addressed properly.

"Everybody needs to step up to the plate and make their addresses taller so they can be read from the middle of the street at night," he said. "And that applies to the county also. If they want us to come help them, they gotta do their part and put the addresses where we can read them..."

Hickert said they also ordered five Broselow pediatric emergency tapes, which are used as a guide to give proper resuscitation to a child. The tape measures the

approximate height and weight of the child while on the gurney.

He said it was \$120 total for the tapes and he plans on putting one in each ambulance. Even though the department doesn't receive very many pediatric calls, Hickert said these tapes will help reduce the stress of the situation.

He said he will most likely be losing three employees in the near future. Hickert said one will most likely be hired by the Garden City Fire Department, another is going through a life change and the third is stepping back to focus on having a social life.

"I am looking at different options and when I have my ducks in a row and know

what to present you guys with ... I'll talk with you about that," he said. "But I wanted to give you a heads-up on that."

Hickert said every county in the area is having this same problem and Steele added that it's actually statewide. However, Hickert said the Thomas County service will be getting all of the transfers from a provider in Goodland if the local service can't fill the request, which is 95 percent of the time.

He said he is also planning on talking to Vicky Duffy about registered nurses for the back of the ambulances and pump information.

See "DIRECTOR," Page 2

Committee prepares for emergencies

By Christina Beringer

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The Local Emergency Planning Committee met at noon on Wednesday at the Colby Fire Department.

The meeting began with a conference call sponsored by the National Weather Service in Goodland. Meteorologists explained this weekend's threat for a winter storm warning from the front range to Hays.

Questions were asked by people from throughout western Kansas, eastern Colorado and southwestern Nebraska, including Joe Vyzourek with KXXX-KQLS radio in Colby.

Following the call, Thomas County emergency preparedness Director Susan McMahan told members the dates for 2012 meetings, on Wednesdays, May 2, Aug. 1 and, Nov. 7.

She also welcomed Christina Beringer of the Colby Free Press as the committee's newest member, filling the communications and media spot. McMahan said the committee now has a full group.

A possible exercise may soon take place as a result of work being done by the AgSecurity Committee, which is doing a risk analysis on agricultural related agencies.

Several other exercises have been planned throughout the community.

Jeanene Brown, the director of education services of Citizens Medical Center, said the hospital will sponsor a "table-top drill" from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Wednesday, April 11, that regional hospital staff will attend. They'll work on a scenario regarding a chemical spill. Brown invited members of the emergency planning committee to attend as well.

McMahan informed members to expect a training exercise during the August meeting and announced that Midwest Energy is planning pipeline training at 11:30 a.m. on Wednesday, Feb. 22.

Clint Milliman announced an animal disease emergency response meeting to take place starting at 9 a.m. Tuesday at the Community Building in Colby. Area experts will provide education and training for biosecurity and disinfection, public health updates and animal disease traceability, just to name a few topics.

Approval was received by the Thomas County Commissioners to do an 80/20 cost share in 2013. The financial support is necessary for a hazardous materials planning grant that the committee is seeking.

See "COMMITTEE," Page 2

Gathering for lunch



Heartland Christian School held a barbecue Sunday, drawing about 450 hungry people. In about its 10th year, the popular event is one of four major fund raisers put on by the school each year.

EVAN BARNUM/Colby Free Press

Expansion proceeds at Casey's



KATHRYN BALLARD/Colby Free Press

Construction workers labored outside Casey's General Store on Thursday. The firm is expanding its store by adding a kitchen that will sell pizza and sandwiches. The project is expected to take two to three months.

Labor Department changes child labor plan under pressure

By Sam Hananel

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Under pressure from farm groups, the Labor Department has agreed to modify a plan that's intended to keep children away from some of the most dangerous farm jobs.

The proposal now will include broader exemptions for children whose parents are part owners or operators of farms, or have a substantial interest in a farm partnership or corporation, officials said Wednesday. The rules would ban children younger than 16 from using most power-driven equipment and prevent those younger than 18 from working in feed lots, grain bins and stockyards.

Farm groups had complained that the initial rules — proposed last year — would upset traditions where children often work alongside their parents and relatives to learn how a farm operates.

The rule's original language exempted youths only on farms wholly owned or operated by their parents, but did not include thousands of farms owned by closely held corporations or partnerships of family members and other relatives.

Labor Secretary Hilda Solis said

her agency would work with the Agriculture Department to ensure that the rules reflect the concerns of rural communities.

"The Department of Labor appreciates and respects the role of parents in raising their children and assigning tasks and chores to their children on farms," Solis said in a statement.

American Farm Bureau President Bob Stallman called the decision a positive step, but predicted the rules would still have "a detrimental effect on family farms." He said they would create an even tighter supply of farm labor that is already in short supply.

"Laws and regulations need to be sensible and within reason, not prohibiting teenagers from performing simple everyday farm functions like operating a battery-powered screwdriver," Stallman said.

Labor officials say their goal is to better protect children who are more vulnerable to injury when performing tasks like driving tractors. The fatality rate for farm workers aged 15 to 17 is four times higher than in non-farm industries, according to a study from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. The study found that 74 percent of chil-

dren under age 15 who were killed on the job from 2003 to 2010 were employed in agriculture.

The Labor Department estimates the rule would affect fewer than 56,000 workers.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said the decision to broaden exemptions show the Labor Department listened to the nation's farmers.

"This announcement and the additional opportunity for comment represent a common-sense approach to strengthen our agricultural economy while keeping farm kids safe," Vilsack said.

More than 30 lawmakers from farm states had called on the department to rescind the rules, saying they would have a negative impact on rural employers and interfere with parents' ability to train the next generation of farmers.

One of those lawmakers, Kansas Republican Sen. Jerry Moran, called the decision Wednesday "promising news" but said the overall proposal remains "a threat to the future of agriculture." He said the new rules would prohibit

See "LABOR," Page 2

