



COLBY FREE PRESS

8 pages

Students escape as bus rolls onto side

By Steve Haynes

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When a Golden Plains school bus carrying 16 students slid into a ditch on muddy County Road Y north of Rexford on Tuesday and rolled onto its side, blocking the main door, the driver, the bus monitor and all the kids knew just what to do. Superintendent Mary Ellen Welshhon

said later in the day it made her proud, and it also made her glad the district has all its students practice escape procedures every year.

"Fortunately, it was not too serious," she said. "There's going to be bumps and bruises."

She said all three students taken to the Citizens Medical Center emergency room in Colby later returned to class.

The incident occurred about 7:40 a.m.,

the Kansas Highway Patrol reported. The 2008 Freightliner bus was being driven eastbound on the gravel road when it slid off the roadway to the right, struck a culvert and overturned onto its right side.

The bus, driven by Gary Lee Hibbs, 63, Rexford, was only a couple of miles from the high school in Rexford, but carried students mostly from Thomas County for that school and the elementary school in Selden.

"Gary said the bus started to fishtail and then slid into the ditch. It just leaned over on its side," the superintendent said. "Everybody said it was kinda like slow motion."

She praised the way both the adults on the bus, Hibbs and Mary Theresa Luna, 46, a school employee acting as the bus monitor, and the students reacted. With the main door blocked, she said, the kids knew how to get out the emergency exit

at the rear.

"Gary said the kids were great," Welshhon said. "The bigger ones helped the little ones."

The superintendent said she was on her way to her office in Selden when she got a call about the accident. The adults had called both the school office and 911.

Welshhon turned around and sped to

See "STUDENTS," Page 2



Blowing the horns

Junior Chelsy Schroeder of Colby (above) practiced on the clarinova while junior Matthew Dickman watched at the Regional Music Festival in Oberlin on Saturday. Brewster sophomore Ashley Barrie (right) practiced in the break room on a saxophone. Dozens of students from 24 area high schools descended on the town for the competition. Olivia Wetter (below left), a clarinet player for Colby High, practiced with band teacher Joey Nichols. Colby took more than 40 students to the festival.

CYNTHIA HAYNES
The Oberlin Herald



Rain boosts year's totals around region

By Kayla Cornett

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It's been a rainy couple of days here in Colby, but forecasters believe it will let up by Saturday.

In the past 24 hours, Colby has received 1.11 inches of precipitation and Goodland got .87 of an inch. An unofficial reading from Oberlin totaled 1.72 inches for the last two days, while the official reading for Colby was 1.67.

That just doubled the year's total precipitation at the Kansas State University Research and Extension regional office, and brought the total closer to normal, which is 2.11 inches by the end of March.

Meteorologist Chris Schaffer of the National Weather Service in Goodland said the bulk of the rain has moved off to the north, toward the St. Francis area, but there was still some drizzle this morning.

Schaffer said the rain is tapering off because the low-pressure system which brought it is moving east and out of the area.

Thomas County, along with Sherman, Sheridan, Norton, Rawlins, Logan and other counties, have been advised of possible hazardous weather from today

through Friday. The weather service says that after the precipitation ends this evening, areas of fog will develop and there is a good chance that many locations will have visibilities below a half mile.

Schaffer said that since the area has been receiving so much rain, he expects a lot of low-level moisture, and as the temperature cools off tonight, light winds, good conditions for fog.

On Thursday, the advisory said, areas of fog will continue through the morning. Thursday night into Friday morning, areas of fog will once again develop over most of the area, and visibilities could be reduced below half a mile over much of the area.

Precipitation could return on Friday, with Colby having a 20 percent chance of thunderstorms Friday afternoon and a 30 percent chance Friday night along and east of the Colorado border.

The service said a few of these thunderstorms could become severe, with large hail and damaging winds.

Schaffer said from Colby eastward has the best chance of getting rain, and the service will continue to update the advisory.

Outage at vendor holds up licenses

Driver's license offices throughout Kansas — including the one in Colby — were still unable to renew or issue new driver's licenses and ID cards today as technicians for an out-of-state vendor made repairs on a malfunctioning server.

The Kansas Department of Revenue said the server malfunctioned over the weekend but is due to be replaced. The department said vehicle titles and registration services remain unaffected.

An employee at the exam office in Colby said that they did not have any more information than

the release sent out by the Topeka office, adding that the issue hasn't affected Colbyites very much.

"Everybody has handled it very well," she said. "We're really proud of our public."

She said the office was open today to answer questions and the office, along with the rest across the state, is giving 15-day extensions to people whose licenses or ID cards have expired or are set to expire this week. She said no one has come in to the Colby office yet to take advantage of this extension.

'Controlled burn' grew quickly into an inferno

By Rema Rahman

The Associated Press

DENVER — Sam Lucas was among the first to begin calling 911 about a wildfire burning near his home on the outskirts of Denver.

But the dispatcher, having already answered a handful of calls about the fire, cut Lucas off to tell him it was a controlled burn and that the forest service was on the scene.

"We got 79-mile-an-hour winds out there and they got a controlled burn?" Lucas said

on the 911 call, one of 130 calls over a total of 10 hours that were released Tuesday.

When the dispatcher says yes, he replies "Oh wonderful. Thank you."

He and his wife were later found dead at their burned out home.

The 911 calls from March 26 raised further questions about emergency officials' response to last week's fast-growing fire, which authorities believe killed three people, damaged or

See "FIRE," Page 2

County hears feds won't pay for upgrade

By Kayla Cornett

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The Thomas County commissioners heard a report from Angela Gaede, medical biller for the county Health Department, Friday about a setback in the department's plans to move to electronic health records.

She said the system was to be paid for by incentive money through the Regional Extension Center of the Kansas Foundation for Medical Care, but the center told her the department didn't qualify.

"What really happened was that they found out that we don't qualify for that incentive money,"

Gaede said. "What happened was on the federal level, the Regional Extension Center found out that incentive money left out local health departments and mental health facilities. It was a little glitch in the fine writing."

However, she said, federal officials left the rules and regulations open for comment and suggestions on changes. Gaede said state officials encouraged them to submit a comment, and she said she has already done this.

She wrote a letter saying the department should qualify for the money because it provides the same service as the facilities that do qualify.

She said she also submitted this comment to the Kansas Associa-

tion of Local Health Departments to encourage all of the departments across the state to submit comments as well.

Gaede said she was told by a woman at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that they still have a chance to get regulations changed if enough comments come in.

Commissioner Paul Steele asked if there was anything ordered that the county needs to pay for, and Gaede said no, because they wanted to know for sure that they were going to get the money before they ordered anything.

Still, Gaede said, they are not going to find out if they get the money for at least a year and they still have a deadline under the new

coding law, and she doesn't think they can do the coding without software that will cost \$41,000.

"It's my opinion that we need it," Gaede said, adding that she figured the department was going to be on hold for purchasing the new software for a while.

She also reported that as of last week, the department has collected \$1,552 through the Kansas Setoff Program, which can pull money owed to the county from money the state owes people, including tax refunds and lottery winnings.

See "COUNTY," Page 2

