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Harvest kicks off

Wheat harvest kicked into gear this week in Thomas County, with more and more harvesters in the field each day. Ed Cersovsky (above) was driving a combine Monday while his son Chase (below) drove a grain cart. They were cutting dryland wheat corners around two crop circles south of Halford.

MARIAN BALLARD
Colby Free Press



Secretary visits Colby about voting

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Secretary of State Kris Kobach stopped by Colby on Tuesday to talk about the new voting law, the Secure and Fair Elections (SAFE) Act, passed in 2011 which requires voters to present photo identification at the polls.

Kobach said he and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Elections/Legislative Matters Brad Bryant are on an 11-city tour to boost voter registration and spread the word about the act. He started the meeting in Colby by giving an overview of the law to a group of about six.

He said the law combines a requirement for photo identification at the polls, equivalent protection for mail-in ballots by cross-checking signatures, and proof of U.S. citizenship when a first-time voter registers in Kansas. (The proof of citizenship requirement won't go

into effect until Jan. 1, however.) Kobach said Kansas is the first state in the union to pass such a law, but Alabama and Pennsylvania have each passed different parts of the act. He said he's happy some states are following Kansas' example.

He said 53 county and local elections have been held since Jan. 1, with Wichita's city election being the biggest. Kobach said 68,047 votes have been cast statewide under the act and just 84 people didn't produce a photo ID at the polls, which he said is a little more than 1/10 of 1 percent of the voters.

He said his staff looked up those 84 people in the driver's license database and found that most of them actually did have a license or a nondriver ID card.

"They either forgot it or they were making a point," Kobach said, "and so they purposely didn't

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Man killed in shooting in south central Kansas

HARDTNER (AP) — Authorities in a small, south-central Kansas town are investigating the shooting death of a 31-year-old man as a homicide.

The Hutchinson News reports (bit.ly/JZRTc6) a woman was also shot and wounded at the home. Barber County Attorney Richard Raleigh says the woman's injuries were not life-threatening.

The dead man was identified as

Tony Rosenbaum. Authorities said the woman called 911 from the nearby home of relatives around 12:30 a.m. Tuesday.

Sheriff's officers and Kansas Highway Patrol troopers quickly arrived at the house where the shootings occurred, but didn't enter until about 8 a.m., fearing a suspect might still be inside.

Gunman dies after 14-hour pharmacy standoff

OMAHA (AP) — A gunman who held a pharmacy owner hostage at his store in rural western Nebraska is dead after a 14-hour standoff, the Nebraska State Patrol said early Wednesday.

The gunman, 27-year-old Andres Gonzales, died after a shoot-out with Nebraska State Patrol SWAT team members at the pharmacy in Alliance, patrol spokeswoman Deb Collins said in a statement.

None of the SWAT officers were injured. Gonzales earlier shot one city po-

lice officer and a state patrol officer. A second city police officer was injured by shrapnel. None of the officers suffered life-threatening injuries.

The statement did not explain how Gonzales, of Alliance, died. Under state law, a grand jury must review Gonzales' death because police were trying to arrest him when he was shot and killed.

The standoff began Tuesday morning when Gonzales entered Thiele Pharmacy and Gifts in downtown Alliance, a

Nebraska Panhandle city of about 8,600 people. Authorities said police officers responded to reports of a robbery.

Gonzales took the pharmacy's owner, 62-year-old Charles Lierk, hostage for hours, Collins said. Lierk managed to escape but was shot as he ran and is in stable condition, Collins said. Police and the state patrol did not say who shot Lierk.

Ray Hielscher told the Lincoln Journal Star that he was watching the pharmacy from a Radio Shack across the street and

saw the hostage run out about 5:30 p.m. Hielscher said he heard shots as the hostage ran out the front door and made it to nearby police.

Separately, police found a body at a nearby home Tuesday but declined to say whether it was related to the standoff. Police don't know how that person died, State Patrol Lt. Lance Rogers said.

The standoff prompted police to close off several blocks of downtown Alliance, where residents were shaken by the dra-

ma. "When we woke this morning in the best hometown in America, little did anyone in our wildest dreams foresee what would transpire today," said Mayor Fred Feldges.

Most of downtown Alliance remained blocked off for the investigation Wednesday morning and will likely remain closed for the rest of the day, City Manager J.D.

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DUI law targets refusals

TOPEKA (AP) — Suspected drunken drivers who refuse to take blood and breath tests will face mandatory jail time under a state law that takes effect July 1.

First-time offenders are exempted from the law, which is designed to deal with motorists who refuse the tests, often leaving prosecutors with little evidence for convictions, The Kansas City Star reported (bit.ly/KTqMFR).

"These people pose a threat," said Johnson County District Attorney Steve Howe, who pushed for the law. "We need to hold them accountable."

Currently in Kansas, refusing the tests can cause drivers to have their licenses suspended. That doesn't deter many chronic offenders, Howe said. They drive with or without a license.

The new law carries the same penalties as a drunk-driving conviction — up to a year in jail for those with multiple convictions —



MARIAN BALLARD/Colby Free Press

Flames leapt eight feet high over a field of wheat south of Levant Tuesday which caught fire as it was being harvested.

Equipment malfunction starts fire in harvest field

Another in a series of harvest field fires struck Tuesday when an equipment malfunction started a fire in a field three miles south of Levant on County Road 11, where Dennis Hayes was cutting wheat.

Assistant Fire Chief Sean Hankin said the call came in about 11:15 a.m. for the fire which began in the southeast corner of the field and was pushed by winds of 16 to 25 mph toward the northwest.

The Colby Fire Department had two tanker trucks on the scene, each carrying about 1,000 gallons of water. Bartlett Grain in Levant sent additional water to the fields in the company's own tanks. Hankin said fire fighters wound up using about 3,000 gallons of water to get the fire out. They finished up just before 1 p.m. after Hayes brought in a disc to turn over cornstalks in an adjacent field to the east which were be-

ginning to smolder even after most of the fire was out.

Firemen were helped by the fact there was a green cornfield next to the wheat, which slowed the blaze and helped them extinguish it.

Hankin said the strong wind and dry conditions caused concern that embers would be blown up and jump the green corn to another wheat field beyond.

He said the department has had three field fires in the last few days in Thomas County. Others have been reported in Gove and Atwood.

With the dry conditions and constant

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