



Elevator work underway at Oakley site

By Sam Dieter
Colby Free Press
sdieter@nwks.com

Repair work is underway for a grain elevator in Oakley, three bins of which collapsed last year. "So it will go back looking exactly like it did," Ben Brandvik, marketing manager for Frontier Ag in Goodland. The southeast side of the company's elevator in Oakley collapsed on Nov. 20 last year, covering the adjacent Union Pacific railroad line with a small mountain of corn. Knocking over several train cars and forcing Union Pacific to build a temporary track around the collapse. Three bins on the east side of the eleva-

tor were broken, and eventually torn down entirely, but now there is a crane next to the elevator and concrete work has started. Brandvik says there has been nonstop work since the collapse, from clean up to having engineers evaluate any more structural weaknesses. C-tech Ag has been hired to re-build them, he said, and forms for the concrete were put in place about three weeks ago. He says the work on the three bins should be completed in August, too late for them to be used for the wheat harvest, but earlier enough for other crops. He would not say how much the repairs will cost, or if Frontier Ag has been asked to reimburse Union Pacific.



The Frontier Ag grain elevator in Oakley was showing signs of improvement Tuesday after it collapsed last November. SAM DIETER/Colby Free Press

Fiftieth reunion may be last, say Menlo gathering planners

By Vera Sloan
sl604@st-tel.net

It was a tough day 50 years ago in 1963 when Menlo School District patrons learned what many small rural communities fear could someday happen to them: because of low enrollment and lack of money, the school would be forced to close its doors. Although there's no longer a trace of where the red-brick school house stood, Menlo's school and community spirit lives on. Just as they have every year since that last day of school 50 years ago, former students, teachers and friends of the Menlo School and community will celebrate old friendships and long-time memories on Sunday, May 26. The celebration will be a little different this year. The day's events will begin with a catered lunch at 12:30 p.m. at the Colby Community Building, followed by a public reception from 3 to 5 p.m. at the Prairie Museum of Art and History. The program will include the history of the school from its inception, gathered from the Thomas County archives, and a video made from photos of its last 40 years. Former teachers and families will be recognized and there will be a display of memorabilia. Former students, teachers and anyone who considers themselves to be from Menlo or has a connection to Menlo are invited to take part in what some say could be the last all-school and community reunion. Invitations have been mailed to everyone who ever attended or taught at Menlo. To attend the meal, people should reply no later than Friday, May 10. However, the free reception at the Prairie Museum is open to the public. (Students from rival schools are encouraged to attend as well.) Traditionally, School District No. 46 in Menlo celebrated the last day of school with a potluck dinner which included the entire community. The day was a come-and-go affair with visiting, games, lots of food, handing out grade cards and schoolmates saying farewell until school took up again in the fall. So it's no accident that the tradition has con-

tinued for half a century. "There's a chance that this year could very well be the last reunion for the Menlo School," said planning committee member Rex Klaurens, a retired Air Force colonel living in San Antonio, Texas. "That's why we're going all out on this 50th anniversary of the school's closing. "People are scattered, they are getting older and it's just difficult to find someone that wants to take on a big project." Other members of the committee are Donnie Murphy, Leavenworth; Dorothy (Murphy) Strick, Denver; Leona (Cousins) Feldt, Hoxie; and Vera (Klaurens) Sloan, Colby. "The committee is very grateful for the generosity of sponsors Frontier Ag Inc., (formerly the Menlo Co-op) of Menlo and the Dillons store in Colby for the help they have provided," Murphy said, "and we would include a big thank you to the crew at the Colby Community Building and the museum for their willingness to work with us." Back in the days of homesteaders, children in the Menlo area attended country schools until two of the homesteaders, Sam and Dick Cheney, thought it was time to build a one-room school house in Menlo. There is no record of how many students showed up for that first day of lessons in 1890. Pastor David Spitzer was persuaded to serve as the first teacher. As the community grew, the little one-room school house was too small, and in 1904 it was sold to be used as a church. A two-story frame elementary school was erected. With a demand for more education, two years of high school was added in 1915. The town grew and businesses lined the Main Street - a bank, drug store, grocery, variety store, hardware store, creamery, blacksmith shop, telephone office and a newspaper. As more people moved into the area, consolidation with other small schools became a necessity. Farmer Cecil Watkins circulated a petition in 1921 to consolidate six small elementary districts into one. That made it possible to approve bonds for \$70,000 to build a modern two-



This little one room school house (above) served Menlo from 1890 until 1904. A two-story school house with a bell tower (below) replaced the first building in 1904. The playground of the same building (bottom) showed a lot of kids winding a May pole.

Photos courtesy of Thomas County Historical Society and Jan Wichman



See "REUNION," Page 2

Governor spars over new gun law

By John Hanna
AP Political Writer

TOPEKA - U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder has told Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback that a new state law attempting to block federal regulation of some guns is unconstitutional and that the federal government is willing to go to court over the issue. But Brownback replied in a letter Thursday that Kansans hold dear their right to bear arms and are protecting the state's sovereignty. Secretary of State Kris Kobach, a former law professor who helped draft the law, accused the nation's top law enforcement official of "blustering" over the issue. "The people of Kansas have clearly expressed their sovereign will," Brownback said at the conclusion of his letter. "It is my hope that upon further review, you will see their right to do so." Kansas' law declares that the federal government has no authority to regulate guns, ammunition and accessories manufactured, sold and kept only in Kansas. The law also makes it a felony for a federal agent to enforce any law, regulation, order or treaty covering those items. The new statute says that Kansas-only guns, ammunition and accessories aren't a part of interstate commerce, which the federal government regulates under the U.S. Constitution. But in a letter to Brownback, Holder said the Constitution prohibits states from pre-empting federal laws. Holder sent his letter April 26, the day after the Kansas law took

effect, and the U.S. attorney's office for Kansas released it Thursday. "Kansas may not prevent federal employees and officials from carrying out their official responsibilities," Holder wrote in his letter. "And a state certainly may not criminalize the exercise of federal responsibilities." Patricia Stoneking, president of the Kansas State Rifle Association, said gun rights supporters were prepared for such a response from President Barack Obama's administration. The president has sought new gun control measures since December's deadly mass elementary school shooting in Newtown, Conn. The Republican governor is a gun rights supporter, and the measure passed the GOP-dominated Legislature by wide margins. Kobach also is a Republican. "I think the people of Kansas are going to back this up," Stoneking said. "Probably thousands of grass-roots citizens are all in." Brownback said in his letter to Holder: "The right to keep and bear arms is a right that Kansans hold dear." The governor added, "The people of Kansas have repeatedly and overwhelmingly reaffirmed their commitment to protecting this fundamental right." The Kansas law is modeled on a 2009 Montana law that is being reviewed by a federal appeals court, and Alaska lawmakers approved a similar measure last month. Alabama, Missouri and

See "GUN LAW," Page 3

Officers who died honored in service

TOPEKA (AP) - Two Topeka police officers who died in the line of duty last year were honored at a ceremony honoring Kansas law enforcement officers at the Statehouse. The 31st annual Kansas Law Enforcement Memorial service was to be held Friday at the Statehouse. It included the unveiling of a memorial that adds the names of Cpl. David Gogian and officer Jeff Atherly of Topeka. They were shot to death in December while checking possible drug activity outside a supermar-

ket. Their killer later was fatally shot by law enforcement officers. The officers were honored Thursday with a candlelight vigil at the Statehouse and an annual memorial at the Topeka Law Enforcement Center. The Topeka Capital-Journal reports (bit.ly/1076oSC) 268 law enforcement officials in Kansas have died in the line of duty.

