



Community responds after tornado

By Heather Alwin
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Area groups and volunteers are finding ways to help the victims of the tornado that hit parts of the Oklahoma City area Monday, killing 24 people. Local volunteers plan a fund raiser, including a bake sale and sale of car wash tickets, and a collection of donated items. Local businesses are also donating their money, goods and services. Government and nonprofit groups encourage monetary donations, and blood donations will also be accepted at the regularly scheduled blood drive. Tiffany Thomas (443-0924) and Peggy Quintero

(462-5075) plan to collect donations at a bake sale from 3 to 8 p.m. on Thursday at Walmart. Kansas Quick Lube will donate car-wash tickets to be sold at this fund raiser. Owner Patrick Toth said he heard about the event on Facebook and volunteered to help. 'Obviously, that initiative kind of pulls at your heartstrings,' he said. Money donations will go to the American Red Cross, the women said, and other donations will go to Oak Crest Church of Christ in Oklahoma City to be distributed to tornado victims. According to the pair, the Red Cross suggests some needs for donations: paper towels, gloves, bottled water, sports drinks, diapers, formula, wet

wipes, individually wrapped snacks, hand sanitizer, sunscreen, heavy-duty trash bags, personal toiletry items, pillows, sheets, towels and soap. The agency is not accepting clothes at this time. Donations can be dropped off until Monday at the Sleep Inn, which has donated towels, sheets and soap to the cause, or at Maurices at Franklin Avenue and Willow Drive. The women said Kelly Lampe of Lampe Motorsports in St. Francis will take these donations, as well as others from Goodland and Oakley, to Oklahoma for distribution. Kayla Sloan says she will donate half of her Mary Kay profits to the cause, and Wendi Ehlers will donate 100 percent of her commissions from Origami

Owl sales. Cari Merrill, a representative of the Red Cross Blood Services for the Central Plains Region, said blood supply needs are being met at this time, but the agency always needs people to donate blood. 'The blood on the shelves today, that's available for patients tomorrow,' she said. Merrill said money to help pay for disaster operations would be the best donation now, but Bev Vaughn, coordinator here for the Red Cross, said, 'Donating blood is a good way to show your support.' The Red Cross will hold a blood drive from noon

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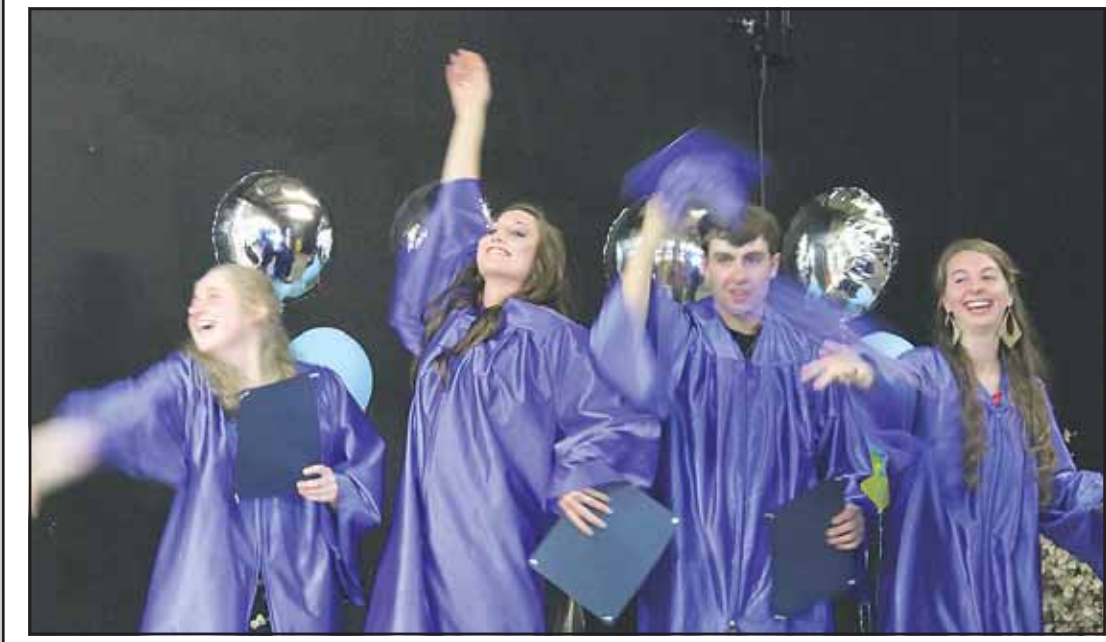
DIANE CARTER/Heartland Christian School

Colby's Heartland High graduates of 2013 (above) took a moment to clown for the camera after the ceremony Saturday. Kindergartner Kalyssa Bandy (below right) gave Jessica Quist a big hug, and Mark Wood (below left) had a hug for his daughter Jenifer Wood. All the grads (bottom) gave an exuberant toss to their mortarboards to end the program.

Heartland graduates

Heartland Christian School's four graduates walked down the aisle together at the school's commencement ceremony Saturday. Codey Schmeiser, Jenifer Wood, Alexi Regier and Jessica

Quist marched into the hall, then Pastor Gene Rothfuss of the Colby Wesleyan Church led a prayer and Administrator Renee Schmeiser welcomed the graduates. Pastor Jay Stewart spoke. Quist, the class valedictorian, talked about her experiences spending her senior year at Heartland, her home schooling over the rest of her high school years and the struggles she had as a Christian in eighth grade at a public school in Colorado. Her three classmates each spoke as well. Two school board members, Mark Gundlach and Randy Regier, presented diplomas to the graduates, and Gundlach presented them to the audience.



Oklahoma tornado damage estimates rise

By Ramit Plushnick-Masti
Associated Press

MOORE, Okla. - The cost of a massive tornado that battered an Oklahoma City suburb could be more than \$2 billion, according to a preliminary official estimate announced Wednesday. State authorities meanwhile said two infants were among the 24 people who perished in the twister.

Oklahoma Insurance Department spokeswoman Calley Herth told The Associated Press that the early damage tally is based on visual assessments of the extensive disaster zone that stretches more than 17 miles and the fact that Monday's tornado was on the ground for 40 minutes.

The financial cost of the tornado in Moore could be greater than the \$2 billion in damage from the 2011 tornado that killed 158 people in Joplin, Mo., Herth said, adding that the Joplin twister left a smaller trail of destruction.

Authorities have yet to say how many homes were damaged or destroyed, but an aerial view of the site shows whole neighborhoods obliterated, with gouged earth littered with splintered wood and pulverized cars.

Dan Ramsey, president of the Independent Insurance Agents of Oklahoma, said a damage estimate in the low billions is 'not surprising.'

'Certainly it's in the hundreds of millions,' Ramsey said. 'I suppose seeing projections from similar disasters, it could stretch to a billion' or more.

The National Weather Service said the tornado was a top-of-the-scale EF5 twister with winds of at least 200 mph - the first EF5 tornado of 2013.

With no reports of anyone still missing, the Oklahoma medical examiner's office announced that

it has positively identified 23 of the 24 people who died in the tornado, and that 10 of those killed are children.

All of the children have been identified, among them 4-month-old Case Futrell and 7-month-old Sydnee Vargyas. Both babies died from head injuries. The eight other children ranged in age from 4 years to 9 years. Of those, six were suffocated. The other two died from massive injuries.

Medical examiner's office spokeswoman Amy Elliott said they are still trying to contact relatives of eight of the victims.

Authorities and residents of Moore have started to assess the damage and plot a future course for Moore, a town of about 56,000 that was also hit by a massive tornado in 1999.

Mayor Glen Lewis said

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Getting off the hook



SAM DIETER/Colby Free Press

Bryce Ginther, 15, got the hook out of a catfish Saturday morning at the annual Fishing Derby at Villa High Pond. For more fishing photos, turn to page 5.

Self-regulation voted

By a nearly three-to-one margin, Midwest Energy members voted to allow the cooperative to regulate itself, giving its member-elected board most of the decision-making authority previously held by the Kansas Corporation Commission.

Nearly 50,000 ballots were mailed to members in April. A total of 11,115 completed ballots were returned to Adams, Brown, Beran and Ball of Hays, an independent accounting firm retained to count the ballots and certify the results. The final count was 8,001 members (72 percent) voting 'Yes' for self-regulation, with 3,114 (28 percent) voting 'No.'

'We were very pleased with the strong ballot response,' said Midwest President and General Man-

ager Earnie Lehman. 'We made every effort and took every opportunity to inform members how self-regulation would help our cooperative, and the strong turnout is an indicator we hit our target.'

The drive for self-regulation began in January, with an employee and member education campaign using direct mailings, radio and newspaper ads to outline the proposal. Town-hall-style meetings were held in Great Bend, Colby, Scott City and Hays in March and April for members who wanted to discuss the proposal.

'I appreciate the vote of confidence the member-

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Sales tax talks take new twist

By John Hanna
AP Political Writer

TOPEKA - Kansas legislators are considering a proposal to impose a lower state sales tax on groceries than on other consumer goods.

Senate Republicans offered the proposal Wednesday during negotiations with House members on tax issues.

House and Senate Republicans disagree over how much the state's 6.3 percent sales tax should drop in July.

It's set to decline to 5.7 percent, but Gov. Sam Brownback and Senate GOP leaders have said allowing it to drop much will cause budget problems and prevent Kansas from cutting income taxes.

In negotiations, GOP senators

proposed keeping the sales tax at 6.25 percent, while the House's plan was 6 percent.

As a compromise, Republican senators suggested dropping the sales tax on groceries to 5.7 percent while keeping the tax on other items at 6.25 percent.

