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Emergency crews busy; calls steady

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Thomas County's Emergency Medical Services department has served a total of 246 patients this year, up from 216 at this time last year, Director Joe Hickert told county commissioners at their meeting Friday.

He said the ambulance crew has received about the same number of calls this year as last. Ambulance runs totaled 122 this year and 118 this time last year, he said, while long-distance transfers totaled 46 this year compared to 49 last year.

Though the department recently collected \$5,000 in medical payments, Hickert said, it also discovered it had been overpaid by about \$7,000 due to the length of time some insurance companies take to pay claims, over six months in some cases.

The commissioners and Hickert discussed a recent change allow-

ing experienced registered nurses to serve as medical providers in the back of an ambulance. Since June 1, nurses have been allowed to help ambulance crews because the department changed its nursing protocols to create standing orders that comply with Kansas Board of Nursing standards, Hickert said.

"It works out well for the patients," he said, "especially in western Kansas."

Commissioner Paul Steele voiced approval of the practice and asked Hickert if any changes in state law might be needed to allow nurses to continue to serve in this capacity. Hickert said he did not feel legislation was necessary.

Hickert also reported that all of the ambulance drivers passed an emergency vehicle operations course earlier in June.

In other business, the commissioners:

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Appraisals low on land values

Thomas County's agricultural land is being appraised for tax purposes at 2.3 percent of its actual value, according to a 2012 Real Estate Appraisal and Sales Ratio Study that compares assessed land values with actual sales prices in Thomas County.

Bruce Webb, appointed as the Thomas County appraiser at a county commissioners' meeting Friday, explained these figures to the commissioners as they asked questions.

The county's values for residential land were 91 percent of the actual sales prices, Webb said, meaning the county charges taxes, on average, based on 91 percent of the actual value of a home.

Commercial land values were 94 percent of the actual sales figures.

The state sets the value for agricultural land based on its income potential, Commissioner Paul

Steele said, and the county has no control

"People in town are subsidizing farmers to a major degree," he added.

Since residential and commercial land is assessed at near-actual value but agricultural land values are artificially low, residential and commercial landowners shoulder a heavier tax burden, he said.

"We're paying their taxes for them," Steele said.

He said he plans to ask state officials for an increase to the value of pasture land from its current \$10 per acre.

"It's been that way as long as I've been in office," the veteran commissioner said.

Commissioner Mike Baughn echoed his sentiments, saying, "The way they have it adversely affects our part of the state for sure."



HEATHER ALWIN/Colby Free Press

Hundreds of people (above) munched pancakes and sausage at the Colby Fire Department's pancake-feed fund raiser Saturday morning at the department's garage. Brielle Britton (below) used her fingers to get bites of pancake in her mouth. The fire

fighters opened up some of their rigs (bottom right) to let kids see the view from inside and on top the shiny engines. John Schmidt of the Modern Woodmen of America (below left) flipped pancakes to feed the hungry crowd.

Firemen help

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Just under 500 people enjoyed a pancake-and-sausage feed Saturday morning at the Colby fire station to raise money for Lewis Creighton and brothers Austin and Tyson Plumisto, victims of a June 1 fire at the Colby Trailer Village.

The Colby Fire Department, which responded to the fire, put on the feed, raising \$3,982. The Modern Woodmen of America committed \$1,500 to the cause, so each household will receive over \$2,700.

The department has close ties to the victims of this particular fire since Austin Plumisto is a fire department volunteer, said

Chief Bob McLemore.

"The Plumistos in general have been a large part of the fire department for a number of years," added Assistant Chief Sean Hankin.

The cause of the fire was ruled "undetermined" by a state fire marshal's investigator. Investigation revealed an area of origin where the fire started in Creighton's home, McLemore said, but there were several possible ignition sources, making it impossible to determine which was the actual cause.

The fire spread quickly because of wind that night, demolishing Creighton's home and destroying the contents of the trailer where the Plumisto brothers lived.



Gem horse wins award

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A 2-year-old horse is helping 9-year-old Tessa Hill of Gem keep her focus in school.

When Tessa began to struggle with a lack of motivation and focus, said her parents, Billy

and Ashleigh Hill, they began searching for a way to keep their daughter motivated without medication.

"Distractions were very common for Tessa, which caused issues with her ability to retain information to complete her school work," said her mom.

She said Tessa had always loved their neighbors' horses, so the family adopted the horse, named Cowboy, from Anderson Corral Rescue in Phillipsburg.

After Cowboy joined the family, Tessa's performance improved dramatically, said Ashleigh. Her grades went up and her focus around the house increased.

"Cowboy ended up being her motivation to stay focused," said Ashleigh. "Cowboy has been a blessing to our daughter since the day he arrived at our home, and we thank God for

the companionship they have together every day."

During the school year, Tessa goes out to the barn to do her homework in Cowboy's stall, where she feels most comfortable and focused.

Tessa and Cowboy compete in Kansas Western Horseman's Association shows and have qualified to compete at state together in a few events this year, her parents said. Cowboy and Tessa will also compete in the Thomas County 4-H horse show.

Cowboy was named the Kansas Veterinary Medical Association's 2013 Companion Pet of the Year award last month, recognizing his role in Tessa's life.

ASHLEIGH HILL
Tessa Hill snuggled with Cowboy, the Kansas Veterinary Medical Association's 2013 Companion Pet of the Year. Cowboy helps Hill focus on her schoolwork.

