



COLBY FREE PRESS

Fire!

Two downtown businesses gone

By **PATTY DECKER**
Free Press Editor

A fire destroyed two downtown Colby businesses, along with an extensive inventory stored in both locations on Thursday night.

No one was injured in the blaze that was reported at 10:23 p.m., said Colby Fire Chief Bob McLemore today. However, one owner feared the worst for his hunting dog.

Hutfles Construction at 315 E. 4th and Northwest Kansas Telecommunications, next door, at 325 E. 4th, were both totally consumed as firefighters worked through the early morning hours today to save the neighboring business, P & D Auto Repair.

“When we got here minutes after the 911 call,” McLemore said, “the fire was already through the roof at the Hutfles Construction location.”

The Colby Fire Department had five pumper trucks at the scene, 22 firefighters and four hours later had the situation under control.

“We were fortunate to get the fire stopped before it spread into P & D,” he said. During the initial assessment early this morning, and before the Kansas State Fire Marshal arrived, McLemore said there appeared to be no interior damage at the P & D location, but there was some smoke damage inside and the heating system on the roof will need repairs or replacement.

Business owners, Ron Hutfles of Hutfles Construction and Jack Johnson of Northwest Kansas Telecommunications, were at the scene earlier today looking at the damage.

Johnson said he had six vehicles, three golf carts and more than 1,000 telephone units stored in his building prior to the blaze. “I also had left my hunting dog in the building last night and I kept hoping maybe she got out in time,” he said, “but I don’t think she made it.”

Hutfles said he lost his business pickup and lots of tools in the building, an 18’ boat, golf cart, golf clubs, and many other items.

Both Johnson and Hutfles said they were stunned that everything was gone.

“I feel like somebody just hit me in the belly — this fire sure took the wind out of my sails,” said Johnson. “I had just installed a new air conditioning

and furnace and was looking at more remodeling upstairs,” he said, “it (the building) was starting to look half-decent — but it doesn’t look so good this morning.”

Hutfles, who started his business in his garage more than 10 years ago, had moved to East Fourth in 1994 and remodeled the building in 1996.

“I feel like a farmer who loses all his crops to a freeze — I lost everything,” Hutfles said.

Although both owners had insurance, the fire left both of them feeling distraught. As for Johnson, he plans to start anew, but today said he is not sure when, where, or how at the moment.

“I have too many customers in my business that need these services,” he said. At Northwest Kansas Communications, Johnson said he primarily works with telephone systems for various businesses and schools. His building was an 80’ x 50’ wood-framed, stucco structure that housed his communication business in the front portion of the office with the back part storing pleasure-type vehicles and hobby items.

Hutfles’ building, also 80’ x 50’ was a wood-framed, metal building with the attic portion a common wall between his business and Johnson’s.

“I really haven’t had time to decide whether or not I will rebuild at this location or relocate somewhere else,” Hutfles said. However, he did say that Darrell Pabst, of Colby, has agreed to help him set up shop temporarily in one of the buildings he owns out by Beulah Cemetery.

McLemore said it was too soon to tell where the fire’s point of origin was. “The fire marshal will help us determine that over the next few days.”

The two building were still smoldering today as firefighters continued to sift through the wreckage.

“Sometimes these fires can smolder for a couple of days,” said Assistant Fire Chief Rick Dickman, who was among the first at the scene.

According to the Colby Police dispatch log, the 911 call was first received by a passer-by at 10:23 p.m. Along with the first call, Colby Police Officer Bob Herron, who was patrolling in that area, also spotted the flames at nearly the same moment, officials said.



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

There’s not much left of the Hutfles Construction and Northwest Kansas Communications buildings following a fire on Thursday night. **ABOVE:** Three Colby firefighters continued to assess damage today after being up all night battling the blaze. Along with firefighters and other law enforcement officials, Thomas County Red Cross volunteers were on hand to serve coffee throughout the early morning hours. **BELOW:** Chuck Plumisto, Colby volunteer firefighter, stood in the doorway of what used to be the entrance into Hutfles Construction.



Patients face uncertainty over diluted drugs

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — It’s been a year since Marlene Strait’s mother died, and now she has to wonder if watered-down chemotherapy drugs played a role.

Strait’s mother, Rachel Van Sant, was treated by a doctor who bought the cancer drugs Taxol and Gemzar from pharmacist Robert R. Courtney. Courtney is charged with diluting the treatments, which could cost up to \$1,000 or more.

The FBI says samples tested after being prepared by Courtney’s Research Medical Tower Pharmacy contained between 39 percent and less than 1 percent of the potentially lifesaving drugs. The drugs in question were distributed directly to doctors by Courtney’s pharmacy in Kansas City, and authorities say there’s no reason to worry about Gemzar and Taxol handled by other pharmacies.

The news has prompted doctors who

used Courtney’s chemotherapy mixes to scour their records to find patients who got the treatments. Some, like Strait’s mother, have died of their cancer. Strait says she knows the endometrial cancer might have killed her mother anyway. She knows the allegedly diluted drugs weren’t discovered until May 2001, more than a year after her mother, a patient of Dr. Verda Hunter, was treated with Taxol from Courtney’s pharmacy. What she does-

n’t know is whether her mother was robbed of her best chance to fight the cancer that ended her life at 55.

Now Strait says she’s “going through the grieving process all over again, and feeling like I failed my own mother in not being able to help her.”

On Thursday, Hunter’s lawyer said the doctor wouldn’t comment.

Courtney, 48, is jailed without bond on a single federal charge of misbranding and adulteration of a drug.



Thumbs up!



- ✓Lloyd & Lucille White — on a well-deserved honor.
- ✓Ellen Lewallen — Winona’s new postmaster.
- ✓Relay for Life — organizers and participants, for another successful event.
- ✓Michael Thompson, Andie Trantham, Sandra Murrell, Krista Schoenfeld, Gina Chvatal — Colby Community College’s newest faculty members.
- ✓Mark Ostmeyer and Ken Bixenman — Angel Flighters.
- ✓Nine-Run-Run — coordinators and participants, for another fine result.
- ✓Mark Hansen — for your work on the National Commission on Election Reform.

Briefly

Weather: Warm and dry

Little, if any precipitation is expected now through Monday for the Colby region, according to the National Weather Service. However, warm temperatures can be expected. Here is the forecast: Tonight, partly cloudy, a 20 percent chance for thunderstorms, lows in the upper 50s and light winds; Saturday, partly sunny, highs 85-90 and northwest winds 5-15 mph; Saturday night, partly cloudy and lows 55-60; Sunday and Monday, continued dry, lows 55-65 and highs 85-95. Colby’s high Thursday was 88 and the overnight low this morning was 55. Precipitation remains at 0.29 inches for the month. The soil temperature at the four-inch depth is averaging 79 degrees. The records for Aug. 17: 106 in 1902 and 48 in 1944. *(The daily temperatures, precipi-*

tation and records are provided by the Northwest Kansas Research-Extension Center, Colby.)

Soccer registration Saturday

There will be an open registration for youth ages 4 1/2 and up for the fall AYSO soccer season in Colby. Players interested can sign up from 8 to noon, Saturday, at Walmart. For information or questions, call Gene Sicard, 462-2468.

Commissioners meet Monday

The Thomas County Commissioners will meet at 9 a.m. Monday in the commissioners room of the courthouse. Here is the agenda: Dennis Chandler will bring an update on the

Extension office at 9; Denny Burke will discuss cost of microfilming for the register of deed’s office at 9:30; emergency preparedness coordinator John Lygeros will discuss the cost of moving a tornado siren at 10; Jim Harms, county employee, will bring a question on the policy book at 10:30; landfill supervisor Larry Jumper will discuss disposal of concrete at the landfill at 11; Donita Applebury, county treasurer and Tracey Perkins, county clerk will have personnel questions at 11:30. The meeting is open to the public and input is appreciated.

College board to meet

The Colby Community College Board of Trustees will meet at 5 p.m. Monday in the board room of the Thomas

Hall Administration Building. They will discuss refunding of certificates of participation, approve contracts, and discuss liquidated damages due to the resignation of Joan Jilka. Copier bids will also be opened, and bills paid. The board is expected to go into closed session to discuss negotiations. The meeting is open to the public.

Big photo exhibit Sunday

The Friends of Pioneer Memorial Library in Colby are having their “Day in the Life of Thomas County” photo exhibit on Sunday at the library. All photography participants are encouraged to come at 1 p.m. and the general public is invited to attend between 2 and 4 p.m. For more information, contact the library at 462-4470.

