



Rain gauge dying of thirst

Not much falling from sky to keep Mingo man busy

By TOM A. DREILING

Free Press Publisher

Willie Engelhardt has an official rain gauge that's dying of thirst. Rain dances aren't doing it. Prayers have gone unanswered.

In the last 8 months — October 2001 to the end of May 2002 — only 3.34 inches of moisture has been recorded in his bulky 3 1/2-ft. high by 8-in. circular canister That compares to 12.08 inches during the same period a year earlier. And if something doesn't happen in the next couple of days, June will add no more than perhaps an inch.

"Really dry, really is," Engelhardt said while sitting on the sofa in the front room of his comfortable home in Mingo, occasionally glancing out the large picture window in the direction of the rain gauge in the front yard near the street.

"I've been tracking rainfall here since 1949-50," he said. "The driest year was in 1956 when we had only 8.62 inches. In 1993, a total 33.09 inches made it the wettest year on record."

Engelhardt keeps track of precipitation on a handmade chart, and at the end of each month he pencils in the figure. It shows the wettest month since he's been keeping track was in August 1993 when 12.71 inches fell. When asked if he had any months when absolutely nothing fell from the sky, he said, "Have lots of them...look at the chart."

A study of his chart showed 13 months over his 50+ years recording rainfall with nothing but goose eggs. They were: January 1953, January 1964, December 1964, November 1965, February 1967, March 1968,

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November 1971, December 1976, December 1982, December 1983, December 1984, January 1985 and December 1996.

There were several other months that barely escaped goose egg placement with only 0.01 inches.

Engelhardt is quick to point out that the measuring stick he uses records in hundredths of an inch. He explained that a foot on the measuring stick translates into an inch of rain. Inside the 3 1/2-ft. deep canister he places a 2 1/2-in. wide tube that runs the full length. He then slips on the top which slopes down to and connects with the inner tube. After a rainfall — and he hasn't been getting much practice of late — he inserts the measuring stick to record the result.

He recalled how his accuracy in measurements helped a farmer in the area collect on an insurance claim. He said the farmer needed to know the amount of rainfall on a certain date "and I was able to give it to him."

How long will Engelhardt keep measuring rainfall? "As long as the good Lord lets me," he said. And to the question, "Will there be somebody to take over when you finally hang it up?" he said, "I'm looking for somebody...I know there is somebody out there who wants to do it."

Engelhardt's Mingo rainfall reports



MICHELLE HAWKINS,
TD/Colby Free Press

Willie Engelhardt (above) uses a stick that measures in hundredths to obtain rainfall amounts in the Mingo area. (Left) Engelhardt assembles his official rain gauge, positioned in his front yard. He's been measuring rainfall since 1949-50. Currently, his rain gauge is in dire need of a drink.

winter drought. The interview lasted 30 minutes, but the actual on-air report was less than a minute long.

Willie Engelhardt is 86 years old, but he doesn't look it. He walks sprightly, is a deep thinker and loves conversation, Mingo... and rain — when it comes.

At this writing, Willie's rain gauge still needs water — badly!

are called into the National Weather Service at Goodland, KLOE/Goodland, KXXX/Colby and KGCR, the Christian radio station located just west of Brewster. "I'll be adding the Colby Free Press to my list," he said with a wink. Readers can look for it...if it ever rains..

Engelhardt isn't just the rain guy at Mingo, he wears whatever hat has to

be worn. "If mail comes for the mayor, or the police chief, or whoever, it gets to me," he said with a chuckle."

He pointed to the Mingo Coop Elevator. "Used to be mine...was Engelhardt Grain Co. Sold it a few years ago."

He pulled a scrapbook-of-sorts out from under the couch which revealed a busy Willie Engelhardt — in pictures

and stories from newspaper clippings. One story carried a headline "Area man viewed my millions."

It appeared in the Colby Free Press in 1989 and gave an account of Engelhardt's television interview with an NBC-TV crew which aired on the Nightly News with Tom Brokaw. It was about the condition of the winter wheat crop in the midst of a severe

occupying as few as three members and others as high as 14 members.

Those other boards include the Colby Municipal Airport Board, the Board of Building Appeals, Convention and Tourism board, Economic Development Community Liaison Group, the Thomas County Economic Development Alliance, the Housing Authority, the Kansas Municipal Energy Agency, the Pioneer Memorial Library board, the Planning Commission, the Recreation Commission, the Wellhead Protection Committee, the Board of Zoning Appeals and the City of Colby Tree Board.

Citizens who have an interest in serving on any of the aforementioned boards or would like to learn more about getting involved, are asked to call the city office at 462-4410.

council members, approved a resolution of appreciation for the outgoing councilman.

"We do appreciate Bill's outstanding service to the city and his efforts in advancing its goals," he said.

Keck served with the council from November of 1996 through June of 2002 and Britton will fill Keck's term until it expires in April of 2003. Barrows is currently filling Britton's unexpired term until April of 2003 as well, Hixson said.

In situations where a council member cannot fulfill his term of office for whatever reason, it is the mayor's responsibility to appoint a replacement, often times with input from the council

All appointments, however, must be approved by the council, Hixson said.

In addition to Britton and Barrows terms expiring in April of 2003, there are also two other councilmen whose terms expire. They are Ken Bieber and Darrell Follis. Hixson's term as mayor will also expire in April of 2003 at which time all five members can seek re-election.

The remaining four council members Eugene Wieland, Mark Beringer, John Bremenkamp and Herb Sunderman have terms expiring in April of 2005.

Along with filling any vacancies on the council by appointing someone to fill unexpired terms, Hixson is also responsible for selecting people in the community to sit on a variety of other city-related boards.

Including the city council, he said, there are 13 other boards with some

Councilman's retirement believed shortest ever

By PATTY DECKER

Free Press Editor

It's probably one of the shortest recorded retirements for a councilmen in the history of the Colby City Council, but for Francis Britton, it did happen.

Britton, who retired earlier this month after moving out of the ward he had served for nearly nine years, was reinstalled last week to another ward when fellow councilmen Bill Keck was forced to retire due to health reasons. At that time, Todd Barrows replaced Britton in Ward IV.

"I believe this has got to be some sort of record," said Colby Mayor Warren Hixson, who appointed Britton to fill Keck's unexpired term during the recent council meeting.

Although Keck was absent at that meeting, Hixson, along with other

New face in race for Kansas governorship

TOPEKA (AP) — Ted Pettibone sees quite a bit wrong with state government right now. He describes the Republican Party, which received his family's loyalty for decades, as "dysfunctional."

The 45-year-old comes with an outsider's perspective. Raised in Michigan, he worked for years in other states before coming to Kansas six

years ago. He settled on a farm outside St. Marys, started a new business and became increasingly unhappy about the state of public affairs.

But Pettibone is doing more than complain or write letters to editors. He's running for governor.

Kansans will see his name on the Nov. 5 general election ballot as the candidate of the Reform Party of Kan-

sas. He's got plenty to say, especially about the state's financial problems.

"We have such poor leadership right now," he said during a recent stop at the Statehouse. "If we don't change it, we're about ready to dig ourselves into a hole we'll have a hard time digging out of."

Pettibone's candidacy is a long-shot bid for the state's highest office, given

the Reform Party's status as the smallest of five recognized parties in Kansas. Just before the 2000 general election, fewer than 1,900 voters were affiliated with the Reform Party. That was only 0.1 percent of the more than 1.6 million registered.

Also hurting the party that year was the fight over the Reform Party presidential nomination.

Briefly

The 90s to prevail

If the daytime temperature ever cools down, it'll be interesting to see how thermometers react. They've been stuck in the 90s for so long they may not be able to adjust. And the forecast for the Colby region continues to show the 90s for the rest of the week. Thunderstorms appear in each day's forecast, but the chances are only set at 20-30 percent. Winds will be out of the south 10-20 mph. Colby's high temperatures Saturday and Sunday were right on the 100-degree mark. The overnight low this morning was 65, climbing to 71 by the time many of us climbed out of bed. There was no additional precipitation, leaving the total for

the month at 1.26 inches. The soil temperature at the 4-inch depth is now averaging 83 degrees.

The records for June 24: 107 in 1943 and 43 in 1940. td. (The temperatures and precipitation are provided by the Northwest Kansas Research-Extension Center, Colby.)

Football sign-up urged

There is still room on the rosters, so any 5th or 6th graders interested in playing Federation Football (similar to Pop Warner) this fall need to contact the following: 5th grade — Chris Erickson at 462-3890 after 5 p.m.; 6th grade — Brian Wolf at 443-2407. Team size is limited to 22 players

per team, so interested players are encouraged to sign-up as soon as possible.

Free fans available

The Thomas County Chapter of the American Red Cross has allotted money to purchase fans for those in need, said Molly Oliver, disaster chair.

The fans are free and need not be returned, she said. For those interested, call the Red Cross office at (785) 462-7161 or call board members Dave Evert (785) 694-2633 or Duane Unger (785) 462-6177.

In the event that no one is available at the office, Oliver

said to leave a message and a Red Cross representative will contact you.

Home-owned carnival needs help

There will be another organizational meeting for the Thomas County Amusement Association at 8 p.m. today in the conference room at the Holiday Inn Express.

Kerry Wark, chairman, said any organization or groups of people wanting to get involved at this grassroots level in starting a home-owned carnival here are urged to attend. Volunteers are needed for many different aspects of this project, he said.

