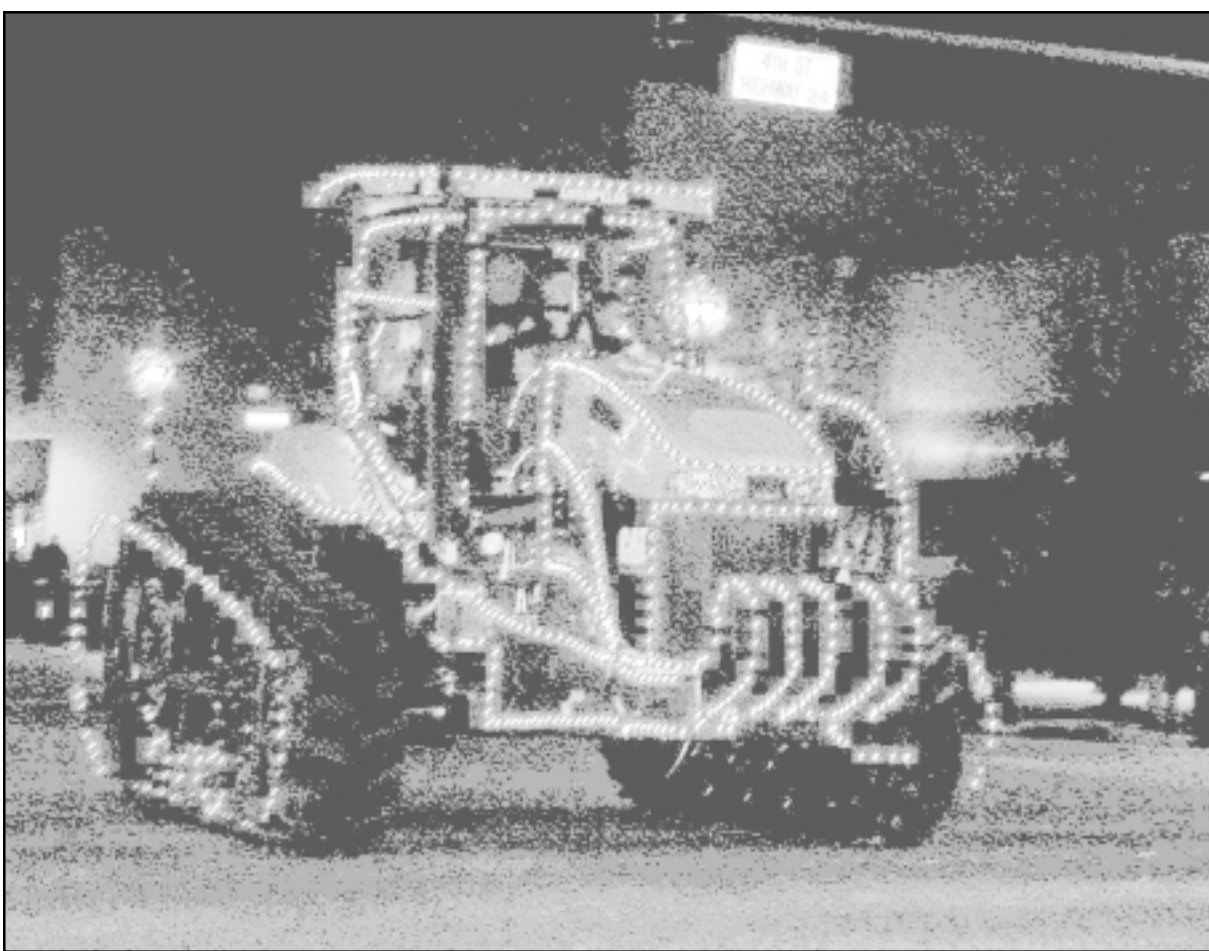




COLBY FREE PRESS



MICHELLE L. HAWKINS/Colby Free Press

Martin Tractor Company of Colby drove its way into a second-place finish for best lighted vehicle during Sunday night's parade. The Challenger was decked out in white lights and driven by Kerry Wark.

Super show!

P

arade called 'best yet'

By **PATTY DECKER**

Free Press Editor

Hundreds of people got into the spirit of the season by attending the annual Christmas Parade in Colby on Sunday night.

The event, with the theme of *Cruise to Colby this Christmas*, was considered a huge success by the co-sponsors, Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce and the *Colby Free Press*.

"We had 44 entries with a total of 59 units participating in the parade," said Jada Tubbs, in charge of Colby promotions with the Chamber.

In addition to the great weather and attendance, Tubbs said she wanted to thank the participants who made this year's parade the best yet.

"The good weather was a big factor and floats and other displays were up by more than 50 percent from the previous year," she said.

As for parade prizes, first place winners in each of the five categories judged included Colby Ag for best lit vehicle; Colby Drill Team for best organizational float; Casey and Nathan Quagliano for child's best of show; Assembly of God Church for best religious organization and Great Western Tire for best business.

Second place winners included Martin Tractor for best lit, Toys for Tots in the organizational float category, Braden Lynn for best of show in the children's display, Trinity Lutheran Church for religious organization and First National Bank in best business.

Following parade activities, hot cider was served and Santa and Mrs. Claus were available to talk with children.

The idea of the parade is to get people involved in the holiday season and based on the outcome of visitors

and participants it's working.

"We were so very pleased with the parade and, along with other merchants, are looking forward to the continuing holiday activities," Tubbs said.

"Another super Christmas Parade," was the comment from Tom (TD) Dreiling, *Free Press* publisher.

"It is always so good to see so many people involved in the parade and so many people lining the streets to take it all in."

He said the Chamber does "one heck of a super job getting the parade lined up and on its way on time. There are a lot of people in the background — I call them unsung heroes — who volunteer their time to make sure it all comes together."

He added, "From all of us at the newspaper to all of them, 'Thank you!'"

School district reorganization plan resurfaces in wake of budget shortfall

TOPEKA (AP) — Two superintendents hope their proposal for a regional education district ignites a serious debate about school consolidation and inequities in how the state distributes its aid.

"With the continued decline in enrollment in many of our school districts, it is obvious that without restructuring, education opportunities will degrade," said Ken Kennedy, superintendent in Pratt.

Kennedy and Manhattan superintendent Sharol Little have spent the past couple of years working on a plan to reorganize the state's 303 school districts. They used business models from McDonald's, Wal-Mart and regional hospitals as their guide.

The plan would create regional education districts by collapsing smaller districts into ones covering larger areas. That would allow for better use of resources with fewer buildings, activities, operating budgets, administrators and school boards, they argue.

Kennedy and Little have been pitching the plan around Kansas.

"It's time for the Legislature to take a look at it," Little said.

Even as Kennedy and Little try to sell their proposal, two western Kansas districts have come to the conclusion that they cannot survive alone. On Tuesday, the State Board of Education is to act on a request by the Bazine and

Ransom school districts to consolidate.

The districts, located in Ness County, will have a combined enrollment of 223 students — 129 at Ransom and 94 in Bazine. The entire county, with four districts, has an enrollment of about 560 students.

Within the last year, the West Graham-Morland district has dissolved to become part of the Hill City district as enrollments declined and keeping schools open became difficult.

School consolidation has been a bitter subject in Kansas for four decades, and legislators hesitate even to discuss it. A 1963 state law ordered consolidation, and it was upheld by the courts in 1965. By 1969, 1,850 districts had been winnowed down to only 310.

Kennedy said many communities still fear a loss of identity with further consolidation.

"It's the idea that the entire community really revolves around their school," he said.

In 2001, legislators and the state board received a consultant's support which suggested that 50 of the state's school districts could be collapsed to improve education and make the allocation of dollars more efficient. Legislators did little with the \$200,000 report.

Kennedy and Little have reached similar conclusions in their report, which they completed on their own

time for little more than \$1,000. They hope that given the state's budget crisis, either plan gets serious consideration.

Gov. Bill Graves has already trimmed nearly \$120 million from the fiscal 2003 budget, including \$17.5 million from schools. The renewed consolidation buzz hints that fewer districts will mean a savings to the state when dollars are tight.

Kennedy and Little say the savings will not be as substantial as legislators might hope but could allow for the better allocation of limited resources.

To encourage the new districts, the superintendents say financial incentives are necessary, including funding for the transfer of school property to other entities. They also believe penalties should be considered for districts that won't consolidate.

But, they said, a revised formula for distributing state aid, now at \$2.3 billion, must consider rural districts that are too isolated and small to consolidate.

Little said the state spends \$220 million to provide extra funds to its smallest districts, simply because they have relatively few students. Consolidation could eliminate that need and improve the quality of education for all size districts, Little said.

"We want to see a better use of the money," she said.

decade ago Iraq may have been close to building an atomic bomb. Lt. Gen. Amer al-Saadi said Iraq no longer has such ambitions.

"It's for the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) to judge how close we were" to a nuclear bomb, al-Saadi said in Baghdad.

Al-Saadi said the United States should stop playing games and hand over its evidence that Iraq has banned weapons.

"The sooner they do it the better," he told reporters.



DARREL PATTILLO/Colby Free Press

Kansas Wildlife officers checked the weapons of two unidentified Colorado deer hunters Friday at a game check station nine miles east of Colby.

Hunters encounter game check station

By **DARREL PATTILLO**

Colby Free Press

Wildlife enforcement officers and Kansas Highway Patrol spent Friday parked at the intersection of Highways 83 and 24, checking for hunters who might be in violation of hunting regulations.

Kansas Wildlife officer Mike Hopper said that the game check station set up at the 9-Mile Corner was there to make sure hunters were in compliance for licenses and tags.

"It's about fifty-fifty," Hopper said, referring to the number of hunters in compliance. "We've got a lot of good hunters out here, but we also have a lot who are trying to get away with stuff."

Hopper said that officers had confiscated guns and game.

Also at the checkpoint Friday were biologists with the Kansas Wildlife and Parks Department, to collect deer heads.

The state is worried about an outbreak of Chronic Waste Disease, a nerve disease fatal to deer and which is cropping up in Colorado, Wyoming, Nebraska, Wisconsin and Minnesota. Lloyd Fox, head biologist for the Kansas Wildlife and Parks Department, said that there have been no cases of Chronic Waste Disease in Kansas, and the department is collecting deer heads so they can be tested for the disease.

Blue barrels are set up all over north-west Kansas, and hunters are asked to take the opportunity to donate the heads for testing. Benny Young, Colby, local enforcement officer, said that the department wants to collect 300 heads for testing.

Fox said that testing would take two or three months before results are known.

Hunters can call the Hays Wildlife office or the Kansas Department of Health and Environment for exact locations of the blue barrels for donating deer heads, although Young did say that they "are all over the place, in hunting areas, locker plants, and at the Kansas Department of Transportation."

Saddam's documents in hands of U.N.

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — International inspectors began hunting through a massive Iraqi arms declaration for clues about whether the country is free of weapons of mass destruction, after Iraq challenged Washington to produce evidence that it has banned arms.

U.S. officials will soon be able to start their own review of the documents after the Security Council agreed late Sunday to give the United States, Russia, France, Britain and China full copies of the 12,000-page declaration on

Monday.

The decision overrode one made Friday to distribute censored copies to the council. The council's other 10 members will only have access to the report once inspectors have translated, analyzed and gleaned it of sensitive material — including possible instructions on bomb-making.

Iraq insists it has no programs for developing nuclear, biological or chemical weapons although on Sunday, an adviser to President Saddam Hussein suggested that more than a

Briefly

College concert is Tuesday

The Colby Community College music department will present its *Winter Concert* on Tuesday at 7:30 p.m. in the Northwest Kansas Cultural Arts Center's Frahm Theatre on campus. The concert is free and will feature the Concert Choir, the Concert Band and Jazz Ensemble.

Middle school to hold concert

Middle School will present its winter band concert at 7:30 p.m., Tuesday in the high school auditorium, said Cathy Cash, band director. Everyone is welcome to attend this festive concert, she said, and free of charge. A few selections that will be played include Angels We Have Heard On High, All I Want For Christmas Is My Two Front Teeth, and O Come To The Manger, she said.

Piano recital open to the public

The students of Sharon Kriss will be featured in a Christmas Piano Recital on Saturday starting at 10 a.m. at the Colby United

Methodist Church. Those performing will be: Lauren and Morgan Bell, Cody Brown, Dustin, Samantha, and Nathan Reed, Lacy O'Neal, Michael Tubbs, Brittany Bange, Kelsea and Emily Geschwentner, Katrina Kaus, Skyler Mengel, Kayla Skiles, Ashley Standage, Cameron Baird, Kaitlyn Albers, Katelin Neuenschwander, Abbie and Megan Allen, Joshua Baden, Kevin Lang, Karl Pratt, Tanner Glad, Valarie Higerd, Erika Erickson, Taylor Miller, Andrea Siemsen and Adelle DeGood. The recital is open to the public.

Charter school hearing scheduled

The Colby School District board of education will hold a public hearing at 2 p.m., Monday, Dec. 16 in the board room of the administration building, 210 S. Range. The purpose of the hearing, said Diana Wieland, curriculum director, is to allow the public an opportunity to review the proposed petition to establish a charter school within the confines of the Colby School District. Detailed information will be available at the hearing or by request from the district. For questions call (785) 465-5000.

Gem Lions' feed is Wednesday

The Gem Lions Club will host their annual *All You Can Eat* pancake feed on Wednesday, from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. at the Gem Community Building. Menu items include pancakes, sausage, eggs, pie, and of course, *Lions Candy Day* mints. A free will donation will be accepted and people are encouraged to bring used eyeglasses and hearing aids to be recycled. Net proceeds will be used for community betterment, sight programs and education.

CPR class set for Thursday

The Thomas County American Red Cross Chapter is planning a CPR course at 6 p.m., Thursday in the Lutheran Church basement on the corner of Fifth St. and Country Club Dr. For those interested in attending the class, call 462-7161 to register.

Area children invited to write Santa

Area children are invited to submit letters to Santa Claus which will be published in a special edition of the Colby Free Press on Friday, Dec. 20. Children can mail letters to Santa at 155 W. 50th

WeatherWatch Colby-Oakley area

The numbers

Sunday's high, 40
Low this morning, 19
Year ago today, 60 and 21
Temperature at 11 today, 38
Records for Dec. 9: 78 in 1939, -20 in 1919

The forecast

Tonight, clear, lows lower 20s, west winds up to 10 mph. Tuesday, all sun, highs mid-50s, west winds up to 10 mph. Tuesday night, clear, lows lower 20s. Wednesday, sunny early then becoming cloudy, highs lower 50s. Wednesday night, cloudy, slight chance for light snow, lows lower 20s. Thursday, partly cloudy, chance for light snow, highs lower 40s.

