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‘Gosh, this is too good to be true,’ farmer says as combines begin to roll

KIOWA (AP) — Farmer Doug Swonger smiled broadly as he watched a combine dump another load of wheat into a waiting grain truck.

“He has a binful. Wow,” Swonger said Thursday. “Gosh, this is too good to be true.”

Swonger’s smile grew as the combine driver told him the wheat was so thick he could not make it around the field before he had to unload. So far, Swonger’s crop is making 60 to 65 bushels an acre with test weights of 57 pounds a bushel.

“It’s been many years since I’ve had one this lush,” Swonger said.

A year ago, the crop on the wheat field he was standing on Thursday was so poor Swonger plowed it under, along with 400 other acres of drought-stricken wheat. He was lucky to cut 25 bushels an acre on another 500 acres.

Crop insurance helped him survive, as did his cattle. His best paycheck came from jobs as a referee for high school and college sports.

He said he will use the money from this bountiful harvest to make up some of the losses of the past two years — and hopefully get everything paid off.

“There is nothing like cutting 60

bushel an acre wheat. Everybody around here has the same wheat crop,” Swonger said. “The Lord blessed us with good moisture, now I hope he blesses us with a few days of dry weather.”

At the OK Grain Co-op, grain trucks waited for their turn to unload as mostly clear skies and warming temperatures quickened the pace of harvest in this town that is historically among the first in the state to cut wheat.

By mid-afternoon, the elevator had taken in a total of 307,000 bushels, with most having arrived a day earlier, said manager Alan Meyers. Test weights have been averaging 61 pounds a bushel. Farmers are reporting yields as high as 50 bushels an acre — exceptionally good in a part of the state that usually sees 40 bushel an acre yields.

Wheat with test weights of at least 60 pounds grades as No. 1 wheat.

Pharmacist John Hagood bought the Corner Drug Store in Kiowa this past year. He also owns a drug store in Medicine Lodge. Even he can tell when the wheat looks good — his business depends on the agricultural economy here.

He likes to see the heavily laden grain trucks and farm implements

rumbling down the town’s Main Street as they head to the elevator and the farms surrounding this rural hamlet.

All the custom harvesters and activity in town may bring in an extra sale or two at the drug store now, but the real impact of a good harvest on the local economy comes long-term, he said.

“Agriculture is our biggest business — it is our major producer,” Hagood said. “We have had two poor years. We need a good harvest because that will help farmers, help the bank, help the overall economy.”

He figures last year’s poor crops cut into the sale of nonessential items like greeting cards, beauty items and gifts by at least 10 percent at his drug stores.

At Jarvis Auto Supply, store manager Gerald Elwood said farmers have to do well for any business in town to prosper. He said all the Main Street businesses have past-due accounts they are carrying for farmers after two years of drought.

“People will take care of them right away when we have a good crop like this. ... We are all in it together. Everybody is pretty loyal. They spend money in town,” Elwood said.

By TOM (TD) DREILING

Free Press Publisher

Everything’s “Go!” for the “Prayer Rally for the Local Medical Community.”

The rally will be held at 7 p.m. on Tuesday in the Little Theater in the Colby Community Building, said Todd Stramel, Colby, contact person for the event.

The public is cordially invited to join in the cause, emphasized as “non-political” and “non-partisan.”

This is the community’s second rally in which prayer is being used

to help with a situation. Back in February, a “Northwest Kansas Rally for Rain” was held in the 4-H Building at the Thomas County Fairgrounds and attracted in the neighborhood of 100 people from within and out of the area. Leonard Kinkade of rural Brewster spearheaded that effort.

Two meetings were held to plan and organize next Tuesday’s rally. The first took place on June 5 and the second was held last night.

The format for the rally will include prayer, music and readings.

Heavy fighting in Iraq

BALAD, Iraq (AP) — U.S. forces killed 27 Iraqi fighters in a ground and air pursuit Friday after the Iraqis attacked an American tank patrol north of Baghdad, bringing the opposition death toll in four days of skirmishes to about 100, according to the military.

Friday’s clash came as American forces pressed forward with a massive sweep to crush resistance by supporters of Saddam Hussein’s ousted regime north of Baghdad.

Air Force Gen. Richard B. Myers said U.S. forces were sifting through intelligence that “foreign fighters” may have been at an alleged terrorist training camp northwest of Baghdad bombed early Thursday by U.S. forces.

In Washington on Friday, a senior Pentagon official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said about 70 opposition fighters were killed in Thursday’s attack — most apparently non-Iraqis from other countries in the region.

If confirmed, it would be the first

indication since the war’s end that non-Iraqi volunteers were still in the country. Before the war in March, Iraq claimed that thousands of Arab fighters poured into the country to resist the invasion. They provided some of the stiffest resistance once American forces entered Baghdad.

Separately, U.S. troops acting on an intelligence tip arrested 74 people described as sympathizers of the al-Qaida terrorist network in a raid Thursday near the northern city of Kirkuk, said the U.S. Central Command. U.S. Central Command said an “organized group” ambushed the tanks with rocket propelled grenades near Balad, about 35 miles from the capital on the main highway north. The statement did not mention U.S. casualties.

The patrol returned fire and killed four of the assailants in the initial gunbattle, the military said.

When the rest of the attackers fled, Apache helicopters joined the chase along with tanks.

Briefly

College board meets Monday

The regular meeting of the Colby Community College Board of Trustees will be held Monday at 5 p.m. in the board room of the Thomas Hall administration building. Items on the agenda include reports on administrative software and natural gas bids. Also approval is expended on various contracts and agreements, policies and procedure manual, capital outlay, disposal of college property and contract/salary considerations for non-unit employees. All meetings are open to the public.

Personal, real estate taxes due

The second half of 2002 Thomas County personal and real estate taxes are due by Friday, June 20. For questions, call the county treasurer’s office at 462-4520.

Babysitting class planned

The Super Sitter Class will be held from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.,

Wednesday, June 25 in the Thomas County Office Complex. Children who have completed fifth grade are eligible to enroll, said officials at the Thomas County Health Department. Events planned throughout the day include baby bath demonstration, interaction with local daycare children, fire safety and 911. Children who plan to attend need to bring pen and paper and a sack lunch. Snacks will be provided. The cost of the class is \$15. To enroll, call the health department at (785) 462-4596.

Share sign up underway

Heartland Share delivery is scheduled for Saturday, June 28, at 10 a.m. in the Colby Sacred Heart School gymnasium. As an added bonus this month is those ordering Share and a special of the month will have an opportunity to win a barbecue grill. Questions to 460-3579.

La Leche League plans meetings

La Leche League of Northwest Kansas announces a sum-

mer series of informal meetings for women interested in finding out more about breast feeding. Meetings will be held Sunday, June 22 and Sunday, July 20, from 2:30 to 4 p.m. at the First Presbyterian Church meeting room, 515 W. 4th St., Colby. A family potluck is also planned from 6 to 7 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 17 at Fike Park. The events, said Connie Davis, with La Leche League, are for all interested mothers-to-be, mothers with nursing babies and their partners or support people. For information, to rent or buy a pump or questions about the meetings, call Davis at (785) 462-7188 or (785) 675-3501.

‘Harvest for Health’ tourney set

The Citizens Foundation is sponsoring its 13th annual “Harvest for Health” golf tournament on Friday, June 20 at the Colby Country Club. Registration will be from 8-9 a.m. with tee time starting promptly at 9 a.m. The cost will include prizes, a light breakfast, lunch and hors d’oeuvres. Questions or to register, call 462-1214.



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

The city’s public power department worked on getting the electricity up and running for the amusement rides at the Thomas County fairgrounds today. For the past month, crews were busy installing lines and setting transformers, said Rick Carter, electrical distribution supervisor. Other linemen working on the project today included Justin Helus (top of pole), Shayne Stupka (lower part of pole), Larry Horinek (by metering box) and Carter (not pictured). The Thomas County Amusement Association still needs volunteers to help get the rides ready and encourages anyone who can help to show up at the fairgrounds on Saturdays.

Local officers receive high honor

By PATTY DECKER

Free Press Editor

Four Colby police officers were given the Gold Award of Valor during a special awards ceremony held in Topeka.

Colby Police Officers Ron Alexander, Bob Herron and Allen Marcum, along with Corporal Tom Nickols, were recognized for their efforts in pursuing and stopping three homicide suspects in September of 2002, said Colby Police Chief Randy Jones. Also honored at the ceremony was Logan County Undersheriff Jason Moses.

It would later be known that the suspects were involved in a murder in Colorado. In recognizing the officers for their valor, the incident was revisited which started at about 11:45 p.m., Sunday, Sept. 15, 2002,

when Alexander said several shots were being fired on his and the other three officers cars. As the high-speed chase continued just inside Logan County, Undersheriff Jason Moses went into action by setting up a tire-deflating device near the K-25 and K-40 junction.

As the suspect vehicle approached the device, one of them fired on Moses, Jones said. Even after two tires were deflated and the driver lost control, the suspects still continued on.

When Alexander, Herron and Marcum approached the car after it had stopped, they found the driver, Robert Poulsan, 30, of Utah, slumped over the wheel and it was later determined he had shot himself in the head. Another man, Ryan Schenck, 26, of Provo, Utah, had

jumped from the car and tried to hide in the road ditch. The third person, Melissa Ricketts, 20, of Helper, Utah, was in the back of the car screaming that Poulsan had shot himself.

Officials would later learn that Poulsan, Schneck, and Ricketts had allegedly murdered a 25 year-old man along the banks of the Gunnison River in Mesa County, Colo. and had stolen his car.

Colorado authorities, at that time, told local officials that they believed had these three people not been stopped, they would have killed again.

The awards were given to all four police officers during the Kansas Association of Chiefs of Police Awards for Valor banquet held at the Capital Plaza Hotel in Topeka.



Thunderstorms

Thomas, Logan Counties

Tonight...Mostly cloudy with scattered showers and thunderstorms. Lows in the lower 60s. Southeast wind 10 to 15 mph. Chance of rain 50 percent. Saturday...Mostly cloudy with a chance of showers and thunderstorms. Highs in the lower 80s. Southeast wind around 15 mph. Chance of rain 30 percent. Saturday night...A slight chance of showers and thunderstorms until midnight...Otherwise partly cloudy. Lows near 60. Chance of rain 30 percent. Sunday...Partly sunny. Highs in the mid 80s. Sunday night...Partly cloudy. Lows near 60. Monday...Partly cloudy. Highs in the mid 80s.

By the numbers

Thursday’s high, 85
Low this morning, 58
Year ago today, 77 and 53
Records for the date, 103 in 1952, 37 in 1947
Soil temperature, 75
24 hour precipitation to 8 a.m. today, 0.04
June’s precipitation to date, 1.68
Year’s precipitation to date, 8.03
2002’s precipitation to date, 4.00

Water Usage/Colby

June 12 = 1.748 million gallons

