



# COLBY FREE PRESS

## Holiday tradition in Colby

By **PATTY DECKER**

*Free Press Editor*

For more than a decade, the Bickner family has been decorating the trees on the side of their home at Fourth and School for the holidays.

Marvin and Deb Bickner said they started with elves swinging on the tree branches and when the family couldn't find anymore elves, they diversified.

One of the reasons the Bickners looked for more elves one year, said Deb, was because they made the mistake of leaving sunflower seeds at the base of the trees for the squirrels.

The squirrels not only ate the sunflower seeds, but tore the stuffing out of many little elves.

"We had elf casualties everywhere," she said. Consequently, the family started looking for replacements.

"It normally takes about 3 to 4 hours to decorate the trees," Deb said.

The two girls said they have no idea how many items are in the three trees, but there's a lot of them. Each year, Marvin said they seem to add a few more things and with the whole family helping, the project is a fun activity. The Bickners say they enjoy decorating each year and hope their contribution brings joy to others as well.



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

The Bickner Family in Colby added a few last-minute touches to one of the three trees near their home decorated for the holidays. Left to right are Deb, Marvin, Bridget and Barbara.

## Taking the reins

# Chamber has new director

By **TISHA COX**

*Colby Free Press*

The Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce has a new director.

Mary Ann Downing started on Nov. 15 and officially takes over later this month, replacing Jada Tubbs, who is leaving the chamber later this month to become a full-time mom.

Colby has been home for Downing for nearly a year and she moved here from Lawrence when she married Keith Downing.

She worked in economic development five months with Gerry Fulwider with the Thomas County Economic Development Alliance before taking the chamber job.

Her experience in Lawrence was in sales and marketing, where she was also a chamber member.

"It did a lot of good for businesses and the community," Downing said.

"I always had an interest in the benefits of the chamber."

She said working for the chamber utilizes skills she already has, like



**M. Downing**

meeting people and promoting a product that you believe in, which is the community.

Though still learning the ropes, Downing is settling into the job. She said she and Tubbs have had meetings with chamber members and busy with activities like Business After 5 and a ribbon cutting. This week, the two are going on chamber visits.

Downing said she's met many members so far and is enjoying the learning experience.

She has one goal in mind for the chamber and that's to get the economic development alliance, the chamber and the convention and visitors bureau all on the same page.

"In the long run, we all three have the same goal," Downing said, and that is to promote Colby as a place to live, work and raise a family.

She said they need to make sure there's no overlap and work separately but work together with each emphasizing what it does best.

Downing said she's excited about her new position and has had a great teacher in Tubbs.

"I have some hard footsteps to follow but I'm very excited about the challenges," she said.

Downing feels fortunate to have the opportunity to work for the chamber with her background.



**Santa Claus**

# L-o-o-o-o-n-g Distance

## North Pole . . . to Colby

Santa Claus has contacted the *Colby Free Press* and told Editor Patty Decker that he wants to hear from children in the Thomas County area.

During a telephone interview on Wednesday, Decker said Santa Claus suggested some options for getting mail to him that would be in enough time for Christmas.

"I listen to all the wishes of children," Santa said, directing Decker and the newspaper staff to again place a mailbox in their front office. Another option would be through the U.S. Postal Service by mailing letters in care of Santa to the *Free Press*, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan. 67701 or directly to Santa Claus at the North Pole. For those who want to use e-mail, Santa asks they send them to pdecker@nwkanas.com.

Then on Wednesday, Dec. 15, after forwarding correspondence to Santa, the newspaper will begin publishing as many letters as possible before Christmas.

Santa City is another location where families can leave letters and children can visit with St. Nick's helpers. The hours for Santa City are Saturday and Sunday from 1 to 5 p.m. and beginning Monday, Dec. 13, from 6 to 8 p.m. weekdays until Christmas Eve. On that day, Santa will talk with children from 1 to 3 p.m.

No matter what avenue children choose to send their requests to Santa, he said he is confident that he and his helpers will get everything done in time for Christmas.



**Editor Patty Decker**

## Lawn wrecker wrecks Gem

By **TISHA COX**

*Colby Free Press*

The Thomas County Sheriff's Office had a busy Wednesday afternoon with an incident in Gem.

Undersheriff Mike Baughn said his office received a call at 4:34 p.m. about an allegedly "highly intoxicated" and armed individual driving a grey 4x4 through lawns in Gem.

He said the individual drove through a yard, breaking a fence and then drove through several other yards. The most damage was done to two yards and a cellar door.

Baughn said a deputy responded, and they were assisted by the Kansas Highway Patrol because Baughn and another deputy were busy on the other side of the county.

"They didn't catch the suspect but they know who it was," he said.

The name of the individual can't be released until they talk with county attorney Alan Taylor, but Baughn said his office is recommending charges of reckless driving and criminal damage.

## Briefly

### Orchestra performs Sunday

The Pride of the Prairie Orchestra will present "Sounds of the Season," Sunday, beginning at 3:30 p.m. in the Colby High School auditorium. Tickets are available at the door or with "Friends of the Orchestra" membership. Refreshments will be served during intermission.

### USDA program cutoff looming

The cutoff date for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) applications to be considered for fiscal year 2005 funding is Jan. 21, 2005. Stop by the local United States Department of Agriculture Service Center and visit with the Natural Resources Conservation Service or local conservation district staff to get more information about helping address your resource concerns. In Colby, call (785) 462-7671 Ext. 300.

### Santa Helpers Shop to open soon

The Santa Helpers Shop will once again be open to give infants and young children through fifth grade the opportunity to buy wrapped gifts for their moms and dads, said Julie Harlow, one of the coordinators. The event is sponsored by the Blue Jean Ladies (formerly Mu Epsilon) and will be open from 9 to 11 a.m., Saturday, Dec. 11, at Pioneer Memorial Library. All gifts are \$3 and there will be a four-gift limit.

### Museum hosting events Sunday

The Prairie Museum of Art and History is hosting several events on Sunday, including "Beary Merry Bears" from 1-5 p.m. Sunday. The museum has Steiff Bears available in the gift shop and also featuring an animal gift shop. Other special events include a presentation on archeol-

ogy in Kansas by Don Rowilson and paintings by Don Denning of Monument. For information, call 462-4590.

### Interagency coalition meeting

The Thomas County Interagency Coalition will hold its monthly meeting at 11:30 a.m. Thursday at Montana Mike's.

### Gem Lions pancake feed next week

The Gem Lions Club is hosting its annual pancake feed from 11 a.m.-7 p.m. Wednesday at the Gem Community Building. Pancakes, sausage, eggs, pie and Lions Candy Day mints are on the menu. The club recycles used eyeglasses and hearing aids, so bring them with you. Lots of good food and visiting and free will donations will be asked for with the net proceeds being used for Community Betterment, Sight Programs, Education and more.

### Free Gaither video concert

A Gaither video concert will be featured at 6 p.m. at Colby Wesleyan Church on Sunday. The new concert is "Live at the Ryman Auditorium." The concert is open to the public and free of charge.

### Soup supper planned Tuesday

The Colby All-Sports Booster Club is sponsoring a soup supper starting at 5:30 p.m., Tuesday, in the Colby Community Building. The supper will be in conjunction with the Colby High School boys and girls basketball games against Hays High. Three soups: chicken noodle, chili, and vegetable beef, along with relishes, dessert and drinks will be featured on the menu, said Dana Dempewolf, soup chairperson. The supper is free-will donation with proceeds to renovating the football stadium.

Colby  
Hoxie  
Oakley



## Let's talk about the 50s

**Tonight...**Clear. Lows around 15-18. West winds 5 to 10 mph.  
**Friday...**Sunny. Highs in the mid 40s to around 50. West winds 5 to 15 mph.  
**Friday night...**Clear. Lows in the lower 20s. West winds 5 to 10 mph.  
**Saturday...**Sunny. Highs in the lower 50s. West winds 5 to 10 mph.  
**Saturday night...**Clear in the evening then becoming partly cloudy. Lows in the lower 20s.  
**Sunday...**Partly cloudy. Highs in the upper 40s to around 50.

### The numbers

Wednesday's high, 37  
Low this morning, 15  
Year ago today, 52 and 31  
Records for this date, 75 in 1926 and -6 in 1985  
Precipitation past 24 hours to 8 a.m. today, 0.00  
December, 0.00  
Snowfall, 0.00  
Soil temperature, 35

### The sources:

The forecast is from the National Weather Service, and other numbers are from the Northwest Research-Extension Center, Colby. A recorded forecast updated throughout the day is available by calling (785) 899-7119. Current temperatures, call 460-TEMP.

