



# COLBY FREE PRESS

## Hospice auction



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

**ABOVE:** Karen O'Neal (left) and Wanda Brown thought about increasing the bid on a quilt and pillows donated by Keela Case during the Hospice Auction, Saturday, at the City Limits Convention Center. **BELOW:** Michelle Morris, was bidding on a concrete Bench donated by Barton Concrete. She ended up being the high bidder. Seated next to Morris was her husband, Daniel. Behind them were Don and Kathy Harrison with Gery Skolout in the forefront. Jenny Niblock, Hospice chairperson, said the total from the silent and live auction was about \$40,000 — the highest amount the fundraising event has yielded thus far.



## Sheriff back to work Baughn returns

By Jan Katz Ackerman

Colby Free Press

Thomas County Sheriff Mike Baughn returned to work this morning and plans to seek a second term as sheriff.

"I'm back to work full-time as of today and things are going well," Baughn said.

Baughn handed over control of the department to Undersheriff Jason Moses Oct. 27 after attempting suicide at a sheriff's convention in Junction City.

Baughn last week apologized to the public, family and staff members for his actions and is moving forward with his life and career.

"I've talked to all my staff individually and told them if they had any questions to go ahead and ask," Baughn said.

"I also asked them if they were confident with having me back and everyone said they were looking forward to a fresh start."

Elected in 2004, Baughn said he intends to seek re-election in 2008 despite the suicide attempt.

"I'm sure it will be a factor, it always will be, but if I successfully complete my term I don't see any reason not to run again."

Baughn said after he attempted suicide he was evaluated by a psychologist and diagnosed with having difficulty dealing with stress. He is seeking treatment at the Colby office of High Plains Mental Health.

"I'm going to deal with how to better manage my stress."

"I need to not get in a situation where stress gets to me," Baughn said.

He admitted excessive drinking at a convention banquet lead to the suicide attempt, but said he is committed to never drinking again.



M. Baughn

## Commissioners hear apology

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

Thomas County Sheriff Mike Baughn was back on duty this morning, and as one of his first actions, he apologized at today's county commissioners meeting.

Baughn said he wanted to come talk to the commissioners and apologize for the position he put himself and the voters in.

"I think I owe them and I owe you the same thing," he said.

Baughn said he normally isn't one to share, but recent stress, a knee injury, a death and injury to a deputy all built up and lead to his suicide attempt Oct. 27.

He also admitted alcohol contributed to it, and said it won't happen again.

"I just don't make a habit of doing that," Baughn said. "It's over."

He assured them he is back, and "OK."

Baughn said he had a father-son relationship with Deputy Cory Wang, and said he should have had more of an employer-employee relationship. Wang committed suicide in September.

Baughn said he is sheriff and responsible for his actions.

Baughn added his new outlook is the silver lining that came out of a "stupid incident."

He admitted he showed poor judgment and leadership, but he can turn that around. He said he has received support from his

staff, church family and people around the area.

Commissioner Paul Steele said there have now been two alcohol-related incidents that have affected the sheriff's office and wanted to know if Baughn would take a leadership role in dealing with alcohol.

He suggested Baughn figure out a way to deal with staff to get them to understand to be more accountable for their actions off duty and after hours.

Baughn said he has a "zero tolerance" for any alcohol in the department.

He is considering instituting random drug testing, which they haven't had before.

"I think I can enforce that policy (zero tolerance)," he said.

Baughn has stressed to staff he doesn't want them in bars because public perception is "If you're in a bar, you're drinking."

Chairman Ron Evans said Baughn showed courage in facing his problems head on, and out in the open, and thanked him for coming to the meeting.

"I say good luck to you and it's good to have you back," he said.

Commissioner Ken Christiansen said Baughn will have to prove himself again to the people of Thomas County.

Baughn's answer was he has the experience and training to do his job, and will show that to people.

"I was not a teetotaler before this and my last hard liquor was in June at a trail ride in Russell Springs," Baughn said.

"But if you think Carrie Nation was anti-liquor, you wait until I get on my band wagon."

Baughn said support he has re-

ceived since being back in Colby has been overwhelmingly favorable and greatly appreciated.

"I've received wonder support from staff, people of the community, as well as family and church members, and people from the area," he said.

## Quick release from jail has sheriff looking at policy

By Jan Katz Ackerman

Colby Free Press

The rapid release of Arizona man from the Thomas County Jail has authorities questioning their own policy.

Undersheriff Jason Moses said this morning he and Sheriff Mike Baughn are reviewing Thomas County Jail procedures.

Prompting the investigation was the Oct. 31 detainment of Luis Robert Herrera, 40, of Tucson, Ariz. Herrera was arrested at 6:42 p.m. for alleged laundering of more than \$50,000. He was released from jail at 7:46 p.m. Further details were

unavailable. Moses and Baughn were both out of town when Herrera was stopped for a routine traffic stop.

Moses said deputies gained Herrera's consent to search his car and one of the K-9 dogs alerted them to something suspicious in the trunk of the car. Following the dog's lead, deputies found more than \$50,000 in luggage in the trunk. Moses said no other suspicious items were found during the search. Still unsure why Herrera spent just over one hour in jail before being released, Moses said he still does not have an answer about the short time frame.

"I'm not sure, but I fully intend to investigate the reasoning behind it. We are reviewing the practice," Moses said.

When asked why Herrera was detained so briefly, Thomas County Attorney Andrea Wyrick said she didn't know about the case.

"I only know about a criminal investigation if law enforcement officers forward it to me. In this instance, I haven't received anything yet," Wyrick said. As for the money in the alleged money laundering case, the cash will remain in the custody of the Sheriff's Office until the case is closed.

## Thomas County resolves payroll issues

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

The Thomas County Commissioners found out how payroll issues are going to be resolved at their meeting this morning.

Daniel Hayden, Cara Daise, Melanie Jackson, Kimberly Brown, Tanya Cox and Kris Cameron of BankWest were at the meeting to discuss the problem.

Commissioner Paul Steele said there had been two instances in the past month where employee payroll wasn't getting to accounts when it should have.

Cameron, branch manager at BankWest, said they have a solution that will work.

"We've all gotten together and visited on this," she said.



P. Steele

**“It sounds to me like we can make this work.”**

Paul Steele,  
Thomas County Commissioner

The problem, Cameron said, can be fixed by using the bank's cash management system that's already in place to make sure payroll gets where it needs to go, and when.

County Treasurer Donita Applebury said they already use the system.

Cameron said they can better utilize it will work to do so.

Steele added he wants Applebury and County Clerk Shelly Harms kept involved in the process to make sure there's accountability.

"It sounds to me like we can make this work," he said.

The commissioners also talked again with landfill supervisor Larry Jumper about fees at the landfill. Jumper handed out an analysis that showed a breakdown of how much money different materials bring in.

However, they only discussed the issue and will deal with it again during the annual landfill meeting which will be held at 7 p.m. Monday, Dec. 12 at the Thomas County Office Complex.

Wellness of county employees was also discussed. The commissioners approved giving a \$25 coupon to each full-time employee to be used at the annual wellness fair to be

held in January. Chairman Ron Evans said it's a preventive measure that could save the county money down the line, and will also be something their insurance company will look at when it's time to renew insurance next year.

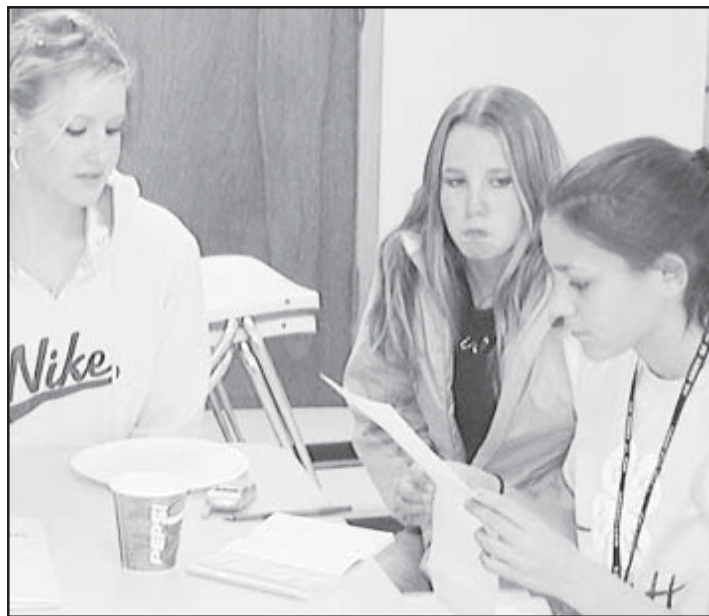
Evans said finding a problem now could help save on medical expenses later.

The regional recycling center was also on the agenda. The commissioners discussed its heating bill with director Lynette Koon, but also found out the center recently received a \$93,643 grant from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment.

Koon said the money will help buy equipment for centers in member counties, along with a pickup and flatbed trailer for Thomas County, which will help cut down on future freight costs.

The center has received almost \$500,000 in grants in past few years to pay for its operating expenses.

## Training day



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Brenda Wilson, Sally Wilson and Kelly Gerstner worked during a 4-H officer training session Friday at the 4-H Building at the Thomas County Fairgrounds. The officers were learning how to do their duties for the coming year.