



COLBY FREE PRESS

Home, and Colby, is where the heart is

By **Patty Decker**

Free Press Editor

When Aaron and Bonnie Cope's car broke down in Colby about four months ago, they feared more things would also break down.

Yet for the Copes and their three children, Colby was the answer to

their prayers in more ways than one.

With barely enough money to repair their vehicle, Bonnie and the children stayed in Colby with Bonnie's uncle, Bill Browning, while Aaron returned to Augusta to consider moving arrangements.

"Our rent in Augusta was going

to be raised to \$600 a month," Bonnie said, "and we needed to move again."

After staying with Browning for two weeks, the family rented a place in Colby while Bonnie's husband continued to work and make moving arrangements in Augusta.

The family had little furniture and within two weeks, Aaron reunited with Bonnie and the children, Kayla, 15, Audrey, 14, and James, 7, in Colby.

Bonnie said the family needed to begin attending church as soon as they could. They chose College

Drive Assembly of God Church.

"I volunteered every day in the office," Bonnie said, which for her was a way to help others and keep her mind off her own troubles. One of which is a degenerative joint disease that she has had for about 10 years. Her condition makes it nearly impossible for her to work a regular job.

As the holidays approached, Bonnie said it was going to be a tough Christmas since the family had no money and Aaron had recently changed jobs so there was a gap between paychecks.

Adding to that, Bonnie's mother died Christmas Day in 2004 and that memory would make the holiday even harder for them.

"What the family couldn't realize, though, was members of College Drive Assembly of God Church were listening to their own hearts," said the Rev. Jeremy Gundling. "Life for the Cope family was about to change for the better."

Two months earlier, Gundling said another church family was moving from the area and decided to give their home to Michael Schriner, a member of the church.

The house was originally given to a family, who requested to remain anonymous, after their home burnt down a couple of years ago Gundling said. The anonymous family asked Schriner to "put the home into the hands of someone in a position who needed it."

The vacant home; however, wouldn't sit idle for long.

"Michael (Schriner) and I discussed the house and made this an issue of prayer," Gundling said.

It didn't take long for their prayer to be answered either and soon the entire congregation pulled together to get the house, and Christmas, ready for the Cope family.

"The church body helped with

the physical appearance of the house — inside and out, bought Christmas presents, set up a fully-decorated tree, and coordinated buying a stove, refrigerator, dryer, bedroom sets for two of the children and a new water heater," Gundling said.

Gundling also thanked Beringer Hardware for assisting the church with appliances and CK Lumber for providing them with a line of credit.

On Sunday, Dec. 19, which also was Bonnie's 40th birthday, the pastor called the Cope family to the front of the congregation to say because of their hardships, the church body had decided to buy the children presents. Not knowing what would follow, Bonnie said, "The pastor then had two new bicycles wheeled up to the front."

As the presentation continued, Bonnie recalled hearing the pastor say they also had purchased them a stove and refrigerator and then handed Aaron and her the keys to the house.

"I still get goosebumps every time I talk about this. It wasn't until I saw the keys that I started crying," Bonnie said. After visiting the new home, Bonnie said she couldn't believe all the special touches that everyone had done.

"The wallpaper, the Christmas tree, the presents," she said. Church secretary Lori Haberer put bubble lights on the tree.

"I had told Lori, how as a child, I loved those type of lights," she said.

For Bonnie and her family, it was a Christmas miracle.

She even chuckled that their car has not had one problem since the breakdown in Colby.

"It was as if this is where God wanted us to be," she said, "and we are not moving. Words can never express our thanks and gratitude, but we are so grateful for everything."



MELBA MEYER/Courtesy Photo

A new start

The magic of Christmas is alive and well in Colby as one family know from their own personal experience. Left to right: The Cope family to include Audrey, Kayla, Bonnie, Aaron and James (look-

ing at bicycle) were presented with gifts, appliances and a home by Pastor Jeremy Gundling (far right) during the College Drive Assembly of God Church service on Sunday, Dec. 19.

Legislators prepare for 2006 session

Health care, school finance expected to be discussed

By **Tisha Cox**

Colby Free Press

The new year is days away, and with it comes a new legislative session for Kansas' legislators.

Both Rep. Jim Morrison, R-Colby, and Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, R-Grinnell, will have many issues to deal with in their respective areas.

The 2006 session will begin Jan. 9 and is expected to adjourn in early April.

Up for 2006, there could be a mix of old and new issues. Morrison said first for state representatives will be school finance and health care. They're waiting on a decision from the Supreme Court on school finance, and will deal with it once there's something done.

On health care, issues are accessibility, affordability and availability.

"Fewer people are able to access the system," he said.

The right to health is the only one that is constitutionally guaranteed Morrison said, and he believes access will be one of the biggest issues.

It's reaching "critical mass," and Morrison said health care will come to the forefront.

He said a "sleeper issue" could be how legislature has borrowed money from the Kansas Department of Transportation and other state agencies to put into the general fund pay for projects and programs.

That money needs to be paid back, and it will be a matter they will have to work on this session.

Other potential matters could be home rule authority of cities and counties and privacy and homeland security. He said they will probably

also work on encouraging ethanol and wind production as well as making Kansas more business-friendly.

"The climate exists for lowering taxes to make the state more attractive for businesses," he said. "It's a bipartisan issue. It'll be an interesting discussion."

In the senate, Ostmeyer said school finance will be a concern, and just who will have the final say over who makes those decisions — the legislature or the courts.

He agreed health care will also be a big issue.

"It's a concern year to year."

Ostmeyer also said alternative energy, like wind power, will probably come up. He said there will be more discussion on it, and the options available.

A "hot" issue last year was gambling. He said the possible income is attractive to many, but he doesn't want any part of the revenue the state receives from gambling to finance schools. Ostmeyer expects the issue to be on the agenda for next session.

He also pointed out a positive for 2005. Ostmeyer said for the first time in five years, the state is ending a year with a positive balance.

It's a state law Kansas have a 7.5 percent of the state's budget remain at the end of the year. Over the past five years, the state hasn't.

"But this year, it's actually better than that. We're ending the year better than we thought," Ostmeyer said.



Morrison



Ostmeyer

Going, going, gone



JOHN VAN NOSTRAND/Colby Free Press

Construction crews dismantled the Phillips 66 sign Wednesday at the vacant gas station on South Range Avenue. The gas station, that closed earlier this year, was also demolished. Crews said there are no immediate plans for the site owned by Mike Woofter.

Schiltz found in Missouri

By **Jan Katz Ackerman**

Colby Free Press

An Oakley man who tried to elude authorities has been located and is in Thomas County facing felony charges.

Colby Police Chief Randy Jones said this morning Eric Schiltz, 24, was arrested by the St. Louis (Mo.) Police Department and was returned to Colby Wednesday.

Two weeks ago Thomas County authorities began a nation-wide search for Schiltz for his alleged part in a break-in at Murray Enterprises, Murray Roofing, JM Tree and Law Service and Sundance Spas. All four businesses are located at 780 E. 4th St. in Colby.

Schiltz was booked into the Thomas County Jail on charges of burglary and felony theft, as well as the misdemeanor charge of criminal damage to property. Schiltz and an accomplice, Goldie Mae Moore, 22, also of Oakley, are believed to have committed the Nov. 23 break-in.

The duo allegedly gained access to the building by breaking a window. Taken were laptop computers and a checkbook. Moore, as of today, was also in the Thomas County Jail. She was located in Oklahoma earlier this month.

Thought to be linked to the break-in in Colby, Logan County authorities are investigating a break-in at Oakley Motors Nov. 23. At that time, Oakley Police Chief Danny Shanks said various hand tools used in the mechanic shop were taken.

Besides these charges, Schiltz and Moore face other charges. Schiltz is charged with allegedly trying to accept contraband while in Thomas County Jail Aug. 4 for a probation violation.

He is scheduled for a Jan. 15 jury trial for a July 3 incident of allegedly having stolen fireworks in his possession.