



COLBY FREE PRESS

Northwest Kansas shows its support Emergency personnel, churches, others respond to Greensburg tornado

Colby Free Press staff

Any organizations, businesses or individuals planning to take donations to tornado ravaged Greensburg are being asked to wait until a location has been established for the items, said Jim Engel, Thomas County Emergency Management director.

At about 9:45 p.m. Friday, a tornado destroyed much of Greensburg, a town of about 1,600 residents, about 200 miles southeast of Colby. Eleven people died in the storm.

“We just heard from the Emergency Operations Center in Topeka, coordinating the efforts in Greensburg that they do not want any loads of donations,” he said.

Engel said he has been getting requests from people on what they can do to help.

“I urge you not to self deploy to the area,” he said. “What the people need now is money donated to the Red Cross, Salvation Army or the United Way. There is no way to handle all of the clothing and food donations that are coming into the area.”

Money will be used to purchase the food needed to feed the victims and responders to the area and some personnel needs of the victims.

In addition, Engel said anyone who has some equipment or personnel willing to go to the area are asked to call 460-4516.

“That information will then be turned over to the Kansas Division of Emergency Management,” he said.

Engel also offered a way to put the Greensburg tornado in perspective.

“Think of a path from south to north, about one-quarter mile west of Range Avenue and a quarter-mile east of Country Club Drive,” he said. “That was the tornado’s destruction path of that EF5 tornado in Greensburg.”

It left residents without homes, its hospital, clinics, grocery stores, gasoline, city and county offices, EMS, fire department, law enforcement, communications and almost everything else that needed for day-to-day operations.

Churches unite



CORT ANDERSON/ Kansas Press Association

Don Stimpson looks through the rubble for anything to salvage from the Big Well Gift Shop in Greensburg.

A group of Hoxie residents are helping Greensburg tornado victims donating food, clothing and household items.

“Part of the reason, for me personally, is that my best friend is from Greensburg and his family still lives there,” Pastor Derek Slack of Hoxie Christian Church said.

Slack’s friend, Barrett Case, grew up in Greensburg, and Case’s parents, Mike and Jan, are among about 10 families that did not have their homes destroyed.

“Barrett has preached here in Hoxie several times when I’ve been gone,” Slack said. “And (Mike and Jan’s) effort is to help others.”

Slack said after the tornado struck Greensburg on Friday, it didn’t take his congregation and members of the Hoxie Area Ministerial Alliance long to band together to assist tornado victims. Part of Alliance’s ministry has included asking volunteers to help load a trailer to deliver clothing and household items to Haviland on Friday.

“By Sunday we had a semi promised to us and yesterday we put out flyers asking for helpers today through Thursday,” Slack said.

Volunteers are working out of Hoxie’s thrift shop, known as the Swap Shop, located one block north of the intersection of U.S. Highway 24 and Kansas Highway 23 in Hoxie. Jack and Jan Collins have donated the use of the trailer which will be pulled to Haviland by either one of their semis or one owned by Eric and Pam Washington.

Besides Slack, the Hoxie Area Ministerial Alliance includes Pastor Carol Rahn of Colby who leads the First Presbyterian Church; Pastor Adam Reichart, Immanuel Lutheran Church; Pastor Jeff Ruckman, Mount Pleasant Baptist near Studley; Father Thomas, St. Frances Cabrini; Pastor Daniel Kim, The Cross and Flame Parish of the United Methodist Church; and Lewis Crayton, Living Word Fellowship.

“A group of people are going to

Greensburg on Monday and Tuesday to make hamburgers and hot dogs for the victims and workers,” Slack said. “Cory Taylor, of Taylor Implement, has donated his grill and Scott Foote, of Hoxie Feed Yard, has donated the beef,” Slack said. “It’s actually a pretty big community effort which is sponsored by the Hoxie Area Ministerial Alliance.”

Dillons collecting cash, boxes

Colby Dillons store manager Tom Chain said people can leave cash and boxes that can be broken down. Those items will then be sent to Greensburg. Boxes will be used by Greensburg residents to store their possessions they recover.

Close enough to feel the change

What piqued the interest of Jeremy Gundling during his youth in Abilene, Texas, has now humbled him during his adulthood.

Gundling is pastor of Colby’s College Drive Assembly of God Church. Gundling, 31, was pastor at Greensburg’s Assembly of God Church from September 2000 to August 2004.

He was at a Barclay College class reunion party in a house between Haviland and Greensburg Friday. Gundling, and his wife Heather, graduated from Barclay in 1998 and 1997, respectively. Haviland is 12 miles east of Greensburg on U.S. Highway 54.

Throughout the party, there were constant reports of the severe storm that produced the tornado that destroyed Greensburg. The houses they were at at the time of the tornado was about six miles from Haviland and Greensburg.

Remembering watching tornadoes touch down in Abilene, Gundling was more worried than curious about what could happen.

“Yeah, I did think about it,” he said about a possible tornado. “Then when we heard about the stormchasers, I knew this was going to be something.”

Gundling said there was hail about the size of golf balls and then about 15 minutes of “no rain, no wind and we had no power. Then you knew something. We never

See “TORNADO,” Page 3

Plenty fur the kids



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Kristen Cuevas with the Natural Resources Conservation Services, in red shirt, talked to students from Rawlins County Elementary and Sharon Springs about skulls and skins of native Kansas species during Kids Conservation Roundup activities at the Colby Community Building today. The event was sponsored by the Northwest Kansas Environmental Alliance and taught children about conservation.

President visits Greensburg

GREENSBURG (AP) — Stepping through the rubble, President Bush got his first look Wednesday at what little is left of this farming town of 1,600 people after last week’s killer tornado. Starting a day’s tour of the wreckage, Bush hovered in a helicopter over the town in southwest Kansas.

He saw the flattened ruins from Friday night’s storm that killed at least 11 people. It was the most punishing tornado to hit the United States in years. On a short ride into town, Bush got a rundown of the

damage and the recovery from city administrator Steve Hewitt and Democratic Gov. Kathleen Sebelius.

She and the White House had a spat a day ago over whether National Guard deployments to Iraq had hampered the government’s ability to respond.

The president then took to the city’s streets on foot to comfort a community now little more than a snarled mess of mud, wood, glass and wires.

Roaring at up to 205 mph and

spanning 1.7 miles, the twister destroyed an estimated 95 percent of the town, with almost every building gone, including churches, the city hall and the hospital. Bush had already ordered emergency aid for the people, business and governments in the Greensburg area.

His trip was about delivering something else — presidential empathy.

The White House has sought a much more aggressive and engaged

See “VISIT,” Page 3

The vote is in: polling places stay

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

Next election, all Thomas County voters will not have to come to Colby to cast their ballots. County Clerk Shelly Harms made the decision to hold off on further consolidation.

“I basically decided through public opinion and careful consideration that it’s best to keep the polling locations,” she said.

Harms considered consolidating polling locations after the April 3 election.

If consolidation was implemented it would have meant all Thomas County residents voting in one Colby location. As it now stands, residents will continue to vote in Colby, Rexford or Brewster, depending on where they live.

However, Harms still encourages people to take advantage of advance voting. It will be available three

weeks before the next election. Voters can either vote by mail, or drop by the clerk’s office at the courthouse, which will have expanded hours to accommodate voters.

“Elections involve a lot of work,” she said.

For the November 2006 election, Harms tried to make transport and set-up of voting equipment simpler, and with volunteer help, she said it will be easier next time.

“That was a big part of my decision,” she said.

Before mandated voting equipment, there was still a lot to do with the hauling and set-up of voting booths and materials. Now, heavy, sensitive voting equipment has to be transported to each polling location.

“There is more to haul, but to fewer places,” she said.

Most of her voter input came from Brewster and surrounding area. People there said they did not

want to come to Colby to vote.

“That’s what I wanted,” Harms said.

Commissioner Ken Christiansen said Harms’ choice was a good one.

“It was a wise decision,” he said.

Christiansen said the only extra cost would be poll workers.

High fuel costs coupled with having to hire more poll workers and help to haul and set up voting equipment was one reason consolidation was considered.

The April election was the second election since polling places were consolidated in 2004. The 2006 mid-term election in November was the first.

Consolidation became an issue in 2005 when in December, the commissioners voted to consolidate voting locations. The decision was made because of the Help Americans Vote Act requiring states to have voting equipment American Disabilities Act compliant.