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## Greensburg tornado teaches Thomas County

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

Greensburg law enforcement received a helping hand from Thomas County.

Thomas County Undersheriff Jason Moses spent a week in Greensburg. He helped get the community's communications back online.

More than 90 percent of the town was destroyed May 4, when a tornado struck. It left the community without any of the necessary infrastructure to provide government services, including law enforcement and communications.

Moses and deputies Ken Patton, Sheri Lee and Tanya Christensen and reserve deputy Dennis Allison went May 5 to help. The others returned to Colby May 7; Moses stayed until May 11.

Dennis Allison rode to Greensburg with Moses.

"I remember asking him how anyone could live through that," he said.

In his 11 years in law enforcement, Moses said he had never seen anything like the aftermath of the tornado there.

"Usually you know where you're at in perspective to the town," Moses said.

They did an initial assessment, then spent the night on cots in the basement at the Pratt County Sheriff's Office.

Sunday morning at 7:30 a.m. they were back in Greensburg. All of the personnel but Moses were assigned to a post. Allison and Patton were assigned to guard a bank and Lee and Christensen were posted on the northwest edge of town.

Moses' assignment was to the commu-

nications branch.

"It was my job to reestablish Kiowa County communication systems and get their dispatch center running," he said.

By 4 p.m. that day, the city radio was operating with a trailer provided by Grant County to house the dispatch center.

Alltel put up a repeater for cell phones at the courthouse. On May 7, service was restored and calls were being answered in Kiowa County. The crime information computer system was operational Tuesday.

"They had a full-service dispatch by Tuesday night," he said. "It was quite a chore."

Branch commanders would assess needs, take those back to their teams and make assignments for the daily communication plan. Greensburg was a hub for surrounding communities. Its destruction didn't impact just its residents.

"It affects everybody in that area," he said. "I was determined to build them something."

Haviland and Mullinville still needed dispatch service.

The Thomas County officials also had help from the Kansas Department of Transportation, Kansas Army National Guard, Alltel and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

The FEMA representative asked the team what they needed, and Moses said they had the necessary work done.

"That was not the reaction they were expecting because at past disasters, people have waited for FEMA to show up and did not have anything done. FEMA said it was sufficient, and we took them off guard," he said.

Moses also received a compliment from President George W. Bush while he was there.

"He told me he liked my hat and I thanked him," he said. "He was received well."

Lee said people appreciated the president's visit.

A couple of issues no one thought of was

See "TORNADO," Page 3



Photos courtesy of SHERI LEE AND TANYA CHRISTENSEN

**ABOVE:** A two-story home in Greensburg had a mobile home in its front yard after the Friday, May 4, tornado. **BELOW:** Tornado winds wrecked this pickup and drove a two-by-four into its door.



## Six students lead Colby High class of 2007

### Six valedictorians unique to group of 70 students

By Patty Decker

Free Press Editor

Colby High School's 2007 commencement ceremony will feature not one, but six valedictorians when the graduating class receives their diplomas at 3 p.m., Sunday, in the Colby Community Building, 285 E. Fifth St.

"Six valedictorians is not typical, but we are proud that we do"

said Kylie Cersovsky, registrar and senior class sponsor.

Those students include Kristen Cox, Elizabeth Erickson, Michael Juenemann, Rishonna Martin, Trevor Siebert and Andrew Toth. The class of 2007 has 70 students.

In order to qualify as a valedictorian a student must have a 4.0 grade point average (all As) and have completed the Kansas Board of Regent's curriculum, a set of courses used by state universities for entrance requirements and includes extra study in English, natural sciences, social sciences, mathematics and computer technology.

"Each of the students address the

class, except Andrew, who is still in Germany on an exchange program," Cersovsky said.

Salutatorian is Ashley Barnes and she will speak at commencement.

In addition to the valedictorian and salutatorians, Greg Koenig, Colby High School's former head football coach will give the commencement address.

The selection process in choosing this year's commencement speaker is something new.

Both Principal Rocky Robbins and Assistant Principal Larry Gabel decided to break tradition whereby the administration

chooses the speaker and instead opted to give the class some of that responsibility.

"This is their graduation and the students should have input into who they want to give the address," she said.

In the future, the graduating classes will be given a list of names to choose from and it will be by a majority vote as to which speaker is decided.

Koenig, an English teacher and head football coach in Beloit, was employed at Colby High School from 2004-2006.

He was born in Seattle, Wash., but grew up in North Dakota, at-

tending Valley City State University in Valley City, N.D.

Prior to arriving in Colby, he spent six seasons as the head football coach in Las Animas High School in Las Animas, Colo. Koenig and his wife, Rhonda, have three children: Jeremy, Jada and Zack.

"I enjoy building relationships with students and making a positive impact in their lives," he said.

Also present at the ceremony will be Superintendent Kirk Nielsen and school board members.

Baccalaureate services will be at 1:30 p.m. in the Little Theater at the Colby Community Building.



Former Colby High School head football coach Greg Koenig will speak Sunday at Colby High School commencement.

## Left in the balance



JAN KATZ ACKERMAN/Colby Free Press

A delivery truck owned by Double CC Delivery of Manhattan, dangled from a guard rail after Victor Schroeder, 62 of Colby, swerved to miss a deer and slid into the bridge railing. Schroeder was hauling John Deere parts from Oberlin to Hoxie and then

to Colby when the accident occurred at 5:30 a.m., 4 and one-half miles north of Hoxie on Kansas Highway 23. Schroeder was not injured in the accident. No other details were available.

## Fair plans debated

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

Responsibilities between the Thomas County Fair Board and Extension Executive Board regarding the Thomas County Fair are getting worked out.

Fair board president Mark Anderson said the two boards met recently.

The extension council is responsible for 4-H decisions and the fair board is responsible for scheduling, facilities, premiums and overseeing the open class.

The problem arose after five head of cattle were weighed a week after the official weigh-in date in February. That caused a debate over who was actually responsible for 4-H decisions. The fair board was also paying for some expenses the executive council didn't realize.

Fair board member Bill Shields said the hard feelings perceived from earlier and confusion have been dealt with. He said the two groups will make things work.

"We came away from it pretty good," Shields said.

Anderson said the fair board will meet in July to get ready for the fair, which runs July 31-Aug. 4. He also suggested they meet after the fair to review the fair.

Release time of animals was also discussed. The board passed two

motions on the issue.

Champion 4-H animals eligible to represent Thomas County at the Tri-State Royal can be released at 9 p.m. the Friday of the fair, only with the approval of the fair board president or vice president and the species superintendent.

All other animals will be released after 8 a.m. Saturday.

• The board approved a request for a new event for the fair.

Marlene Pfeifer, with the Thomas County Emergency Medical Services, approached the board about holding an event at this year's fair.

Instead of the annual Nine-Run Run that has been held the day of the parade, Pfeifer asked if they could use the tent area at the grounds to hold a barbecue from noon to 2 p.m. after the parade.

The free-will donation barbecue would be used as a fundraiser for Emergency Medical Services for new equipment. The board approved the request. Also, a new building was discussed.

Board member Darrel Dible asked for permission to let bids for a new 20 by 65-foot barn.

• Extension agent Diann Gerstner said small-animal weigh-in was held Thursday. Seventeen bucket calves, 24 goats, 31 sheep and 114 pigs were weighed. Gerstner said she also has most of the judges lined up for the fair.