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FIELD FIRE!

By Patty Decker  
Free Press Editor

Combines and grain trucks are not the only heavy equipment in Kansas wheat fields. Fire trucks show up too. Drier weather combined with hotter temperatures has been a recipe for fire as evidenced this week with two incidents in Thomas County and one in Sherman County. Sean Hankin, Colby assistant fire chief, said a fire near County Road T, about five miles west of Colby burned about 150 acres of wheat stubble Monday. The fire started about 9 p.m. when a power line broke and the two live wires sent flames in two different directions. "It took about two hours to put the fires out with 11 firefighters at the scene," he said. The Colby Fire Department brought its two water tanker trucks and the rural pumper as support. The owner of the field, at this time, is unknown as the investigation continues. The next two fires happened Thursday — one in Thomas County and the other earlier near Brewster.

The fire in Sherman County sent firefighters from Goodland and Brewster to a wheat field owned by Darrell Owens of Edson on County Road 30, south of Interstate 70 (milemarker 28), said Terry Niblock, Brewster firefighter. "We checked out the combine first to see if it could have caused the fire," he said. After checking other possible causes, Niblock said, a plastic bottle was discovered and speculation is that the sun hitting it may have created a magnified effect creating a fire. More than 30 acres of wheat were destroyed before firefighters could get the blaze under control, he said. Also Thursday, Hankin said a semi truck lost a bearing about 6 p.m. on Kansas Highway 25, near Colby may have been the cause of another fire. Hankin said a bearing seized and hot pieces flew off onto both sides of the road causing fires. "We found parts of the bearing after the fire was under control," he said. Although not fire-related, another incident earlier in the week involved a grain truck that rolled over north of Colby. There were no injuries.



A fire near Edson late Thursday afternoon destroyed almost 30 acres of wheat in Darrell Owens' field. Brewster fire officials specu-

late the fire started when the sun hit a discarded plastic bottle, creating a magnified effect on the dry wheat crop.

TOM CUMMINGS/Courtesy photo

Storms make others think twice about safety

Michelle Myers  
Free Press Intern

Thomas County has had its share of tornadoes, but none of them can quite compare to the devastation of Greensburg, or even Bird City. Although the tornado that southern Colby had last August did some damage, its surprise attack only served as a small sample of a tornado's capability for massive destruction. It was on the ground for only 15 minutes, but it produced damage to several vehicles at Taylor Motors at the Southwind Plaza and Comfort Inn, including minor injuries to guests swimming at the Comfort Inn pool. As a result, businesses reviewed their emergency procedures. Jason Woofter, Oasis Travel Center manager, said that after the tornado, they gave an update to employers to make sure they knew what to do in case a tornado was predicted to hit. "If we have notification, we would go into the freezer. That's the safest place," said Woofter. However, if a tornado like the F5 that hit Greensburg May 4 went through Colby, think of a path from south to north, about 1/4 mile west of Range Avenue and 1/4 mile east of Country Club Drive, said Jim

Engel, emergency management director. "That would leave thousands of people without homes, hospital, clinics, grocery stores, gasoline, city and county offices, EMS, fire department, law enforcement, communications and almost everything else that would be needed for day to day operations," said Engel. Steven Reed, Wal-Mart manager, said that if a tornado leveled the building, "The corporate level would decide what to do and the associates would be relocated to Goodland, Hays or McCook." He also said that the corporate would bring in more resources, like water or food if it was needed, and the debris would be cleaned up immediately. Also, Sheela Lowry, state representative with Dillons, said, "Safety is paramount. We will have people monitor the weather, make public announcements if a watch is upgraded to a warning, and let the customers know what the weather is doing." She said that every Dillons has a shelter and they will encourage customers to take shelter with them if a warning is issued. Colby's Citizens Medical Center is also prepared to deal with severe weather and storms. Floyd Moore,

safety director, said, "Visitors, guests and patients are moved to safe areas in the building that are away from windows." Since tornadoes can translate into many injured people, the hospital will activate their Code White policy, if necessary, where all employees will be called back to help with the large influx of victims, said Moore. With that put into perspective, it's important for families to know about storm safety and how they should respond. "Seek shelter, preferably in a basement or interior room. Cover your head and stay inside. If you're outside, go to a ditch or culvert," said Christine Krause from the Goodland Weather Service. Engel said the number one thing that people should do is get a weather radio to not only keep them informed about the weather, but also about civil emergencies. Also, families should talk about what they should do in case of an emergency, and come up with a plan. In addition, Engel emphasized people should be prepared to help their neighbors. "There's not much preparation you can do if you're a victim, so you should be able to rely on your neighbors," said Engel. "Be prepared.

Keep up with the weather and get a weather radio." Tornado season is through spring and summer with April and May at the peak because of the favorable weather they bring. However, tornadoes can still form as early as March, said Krause. Bird City's damage happened in late March, and was part of a series of storms that damaged Holly, Colo. She said that the ideal weather would be a lot of instability, moisture, lift, and wind shear (change of wind speed) to produce thunderstorms that will have the ability to create tornadoes. As part of Tornado Alley, Kansas is among the 10-state area where tornadoes commonly occur, including Texas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, Colorado, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Missouri and Arkansas. Although, it is possible for tornadoes to form anywhere and at any time of the year. Tornadoes are ranked using the six-tiered Fujita Scale, ranging from F0-F5, and the amount of damage they do. Tornadoes that are considered "weak" are F0 and F1 with winds

from 40-112 mph. F2 and F3 have wind speeds of 113-206 mph and do major to severe damage. F4 and F5, which Greensburg experienced, have winds exceed 206 mph. These violent tornadoes typically last for hours and can travel more than 100 miles while doing catastrophic damage. The Goodland Weather Service also holds Storm Spotter Talks in the late winter and early spring to educate the public about weather and what they can do to stay safe.

Otherwise, cost is 25 cents per ticket or five for \$1. Bona said that the Colby High School dance team will be doing face painting and the "smiley guy" will be making an appearance. In addition, the public is invited to a free concert sponsored by the Lions Club. A group of senior citizens from Rexford called the Red Barn Gang will be playing a concert at 4 p.m. and again at 5 p.m. This is the second annual event that the Lions Club has done for Independence Day, and Mead said that it looks like next year will be even bigger. "We just want to thank everyone who is helping with it," said Mead. For information, call (785) 462-2422 or the Chamber, 460-3401.

Lions ready to have a blast July 4

Michelle Myers  
Free Press Intern

People have a reason to stay in Colby this year to celebrate the 4th of July before the Kiwanis Club fireworks light up the sky. "Last year, I realized that nobody was doing anything like it. Everybody would leave town to celebrate the 4th of July," said Colby High Plains Lions Club vice president John Mead. "We want people to enjoy what Colby has to offer." Besides celebrating their 30th anniversary, the Colby High Plains Lions Club will also be celebrating Independence Day with a free supper starting at 7 p.m. at the 4-H building, games and even a dunk tank will be there for the public's

enjoyment, said Lion Roger Hale. The Lion Leo Club will be involved in the evening events, as well. Wal-Mart is also joining in by hosting a bake sale by Wal-Mart associates, raffling off a \$25 gift card, offering snow cones, prizes and more. Tickets can be purchased at the fairgrounds starting at 1 p.m. to play games like the bean bag toss, water balloon toss, tricycle race, a fishing game and others. Amber Bona from the jewelry department at Wal-Mart is largely responsible for the events that Wal-Mart will be hosting Wednesday. She said that all proceeds will help the Children's Miracle Network and the Genesis Food Bank. Non-perishable food items will translate into free tickets and go to Genesis.

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Tails never fails, or does it?

Here's another chance for you to win \$231. An entry form for The Colby Free Press "Cointest" July 4 at the Thomas County Fairgrounds is in today's paper. Cointest will be held in conjunction with other holiday activities at the fairgrounds. Here's how Cointest works People are asked to write their name and hometown on the entry form. Entry forms can be returned to any of the sponsors or the Colby Free Press. Entry forms must be returned by the close of business Tuesday. Photocopied entries will not be accepted. More entry forms, via today's paper, are available at the Colby Free Press. The form is also in the June 20 Country Advocate, if you still have that. Please write legibly. At about 4 p.m., during Colby's July 4th festivities at the 4H build-

ing at the Thomas County Fairgrounds, 43 of the entries will be randomly selected. People who submitted an entry form must be present to play and win. (The United States are on its 43rd president, hence 43 entries.) To avoid having trouble with multiple people with the same name from different towns people are asked to bring photo ID to the contest. The 43 people will be divided into five groups of eight and one group of three. Each group will have a coin-flip tournament. Those who call heads and it lands tails, is out of the contest. "We have a very clever way to do this tournament. The one group of three will start things off and demonstrate how the tournament will be held. This tournament may not be exactly what you think it will be,"

said John Van Nostrand, publisher of the Colby Free Press. "Those who play will have some intense and dramatic decisions to make if they still want to win the grand prize. Of course, the closer we get to the grand prize, the more intense those decisions will be. No matter what, this will be a lot of fun." The winner from each group will then be in the final round and flip tournament for the grand prize of \$231. (America is 231 years old this year). Other Cointests sponsors are Peoples Bank, First National Bank, Farm Credit of Western Kansas; Raymond James Financial Services, Inc. — Jim Oliver; Edward Jones investment — Darryl Henry; Colby radio stations KXXX/KQLS; Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce and Colby Visitors and Convention Bureau.



JOHN VAN NOSTRAND/Colby Free Press

Kim Reddick, left, and Cindy Reinert talked about their inventory at the fireworks stand Thursday which opened for business at the Thomas County Fairgrounds. The two were given permission to have the stand at the fairgrounds and will use a portion of their revenue to benefit Colby schools.