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Tame thunderstorm intensifies up north

By Kevin Bottrell

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Sometimes a storm that doesn't do much over here can get pretty intense down the line, like the thunderstorm Monday that brushed by Colby but laid waste to a McCook, Neb., lumber yard.

The storm dropped .03 to .09 of an inch of rain in Colby about 1 p.m., with winds of 30 to 40 mph. By the time it got to McCook, though, it was strong enough to rip the roof right off a lumber yard.

Meteorologist Scott Mentzer with the National Weather Service office in Goodland said the storm got into an area with more moisture and more unstable air as it moved north from Colby. This intensified

the wind, rain and hail.

Mentzer said a microburst of wind tore the galvanized steel roof off Kildare Lumber, on B Street, which is U.S. 6-34 in downtown McCook. The sheets of steel blew onto the highway, knocking over a light pole, striking several parked cars and hitting a passing semitrailer truck. No one was hurt, but the microburst also knocked some bricks off a building and damaged nearby trees.

A microburst is a localized downdraft from a thunderstorm, Mentzer said, caused when a storm has warm, dry air near the ground and more moist air higher, about 15,000 feet. Rain from the higher clouds evaporates as it hits the dry air, causing the

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Early count puts Colby down 14 students this year

By Kevin Bottrell

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Preliminary head counts at Colby School District show about 1.5 percent fewer students than last year, continuing the slow decline in enrollment over the past few years.

Colby Grade School opened the term with 337 students, 20 fewer than last year, said District Business Manager Jo DeYoung. Colby Middle School has 214 students, 17 fewer than last year. Colby High School has 371 students, 23 more than last year.

In all, district has 14 fewer students than last year.

DeYoung said this head count will likely change between now

and Sept. 20, when the district has to send in official numbers to be audited by the state. The state uses a web-based computer program called Powerschool to check the counts. Powerschool assigns each student a unique number, which allows the Kansas Department of Education to see if students are being claimed by more than one district.

The head count includes 41 students from the Thomas County Learning Center, counted with the high school, and 22 from the preschool, counted with the grade school. DeYoung said it also includes students who come to the public schools for electives, such as a group that comes from Sacred Heart Catholic School to play in the grade school band.

The head count does not reflect the number the district's budget is based on, DeYoung said. That involves Full Time Equivalency, which counts some students as fractions depending on what services they receive. Kindergartners are counted as half-time, as are outside students receiving services, such as the Sacred Heart band students. Learning center students count as a fraction based on how many hours they spend there.

The Full Time Equivalency count is what the state uses to determine how much money the district gets. After this year's state budget negotiations, base state aid settled at \$4,012 per student, according to the Kansas Association of School Boards.

Keeping Colby beautiful



VERA SLOAN/Colby Free Press

Jim Stanley and Tracy Galli with the Colby Rotary Trash Patrol pulled pieces of plastic from a fence near McDonalds on Thursday. The patrol was out in force, cleaning up the ditches on both sides of South Range Avenue from College Drive to McDonalds. Seventeen members of the club signed up to pick up and bag trash for the second time this year. This is the club's 15th year helping to make the entrance into Colby from Interstate 70 just a little more inviting to visitors. The club cleans the ditches each spring and fall as a community service.



KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press



Workers start paving U.S. 24

Work began this week on the stretch of U.S. 24 from the Colby city limits to the Nine-Mile Corner, the junction with U.S. 83. Flaggers started ferrying traffic back and forth Tuesday using a pilot car (above) while others got the paving equipment ready (left). The project will also include U.S. 83 from the U.S. 24 junction to the Sheridan County line at Rexford and the ramps at Interstate 70 and Country Club Drive.

Second paving project to begin in Thomas County this week

A project to seal 10 miles of Interstate 70 from Brewster to Levant in Thomas County should begin at the end of this week or the first part of next week. Traffic may be reduced to one lane in either direction during the sealing.

Beginning at the Sherman County line, workers for Heft and Sons, of Greensburg will apply a conventional asphalt seal. Crews will spread a thin layer of asphalt over the pavement then coat it with a layer of rock chips that is pressed into place with rollers.

The total estimated cost is \$521,656, said Kristen Brands, district public affairs manager for the Kan-

sas Department of Transportation in Norton. Work should be complete, weather permitting, by the end of next week.

"We ask that the traveling public exercise caution while driving through construction zones," said Brands. "Slow down and pay attention to workers and signs."

For information, contact Area Engineer Eric Oelschlager in Atwood at (785) 626-3258 or erico@ksot.org or Brands at (785) 877-3315 or kristenb@ksdot.org.

State says tax revenue up in August

By John Hanna

Associated Press Writer

TOPEKA — Kansas collected nearly \$38 million more in taxes than anticipated in August, raising hopes that the state can avoid major reductions in its current budget.

The state Department of Revenue issued a preliminary report showing that the state collected \$414 million in taxes during the month. That's 10 percent more than the \$376 million that had been forecast in official revenue

projections.

Both retail sales and individual income tax collections were stronger than anticipated. The surplus made up for a small shortfall in tax collections in July, the first month of the state's 2011 fiscal year. For the two months, tax collections were a net \$35 million ahead of expectations.

Democratic Gov. Mark Parkinson saw the latest figures as confirmation that Kansas' economy isn't going to suffer even though the state raised its sales tax from 5.3 percent to 6.3 percent on July

1. The revenue projections account for the increase.

Parkinson pushed for the tax increase to avoid further major cuts in education, social services and other programs following rounds of budget reductions in 2009. Critics predicted the tax increase would blunt any recovery.

"Higher-than-expected revenues this month is another clear sign that Kansas is on the road to recovery," Parkinson said in a statement. "Kansas continues to

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Briefly

No trash collection on Monday

The Colby Sanitation Department will not pick up trash on Monday because of the Labor Day holiday. Monday's route will be picked up Tuesday. Cans should be out to the curb by 8 a.m. For information, call the Public Works office at 460-4420.

Scout sign up Thursday in park

Girl Scout representatives will be in Colby's Fike Park from 5:30 to 7 p.m. Thursday to talk about the benefits of Scouting and to help with registration. For information about Girl Scouts of Kansas Heartland, go to www.kansasgirlscouts.org or call the office in Hays at (888) 811-8832.

Red Cross coming to get blood

The American Red Cross will hold a blood drive from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Thursday at the Colby Community Building, 285 E. Fifth St. Donors must be

at least 17, or 16 with a parental consent form. To reserve a time, call (800) 733-2767. Walk ins are welcome.

City to honor retiree Thursday

The City of Colby will have a retirement reception for Gary Berens from 3 to 5 p.m. Thursday in the council chambers at City Hall. Berens is retiring after more than 30 years in the electric department. For information, call 460-4400.

County office to close Friday

The Thomas County Health Department office, 350 S. Range Ave., will close Friday so the staff can attend a meeting. For information, call the department at 460-4590.

Orchestra looking for players

The Pride of the Prairie Orchestra will have a rehearsal and meeting for new and returning members

at 7 p.m. Monday, Sept. 13, in the Colby Community College band room. The rehearsal will be from 7:30 to 9 p.m. New musicians are not required to audition; just show up. For information, call orchestra President Mary Shoaff at 462-2159 or email comments@prairieorchestra.com.

Outdoor skills day on Sept. 10

The Kansas Wildlife and Parks Department and Colby Community College will hold the Northwest Kansas Youth Outdoor Skills Day and Outdoor Expo from 9 to 5 p.m. Friday and Saturday, Sept. 10 and 11, at the college and the Colby Trap Club. Register at Colby Lumber by Friday, Sept. 8. For information, call Wildlife Specialist Matt Bain at 462-3367.

Wildlife Dept. offering hunter ed

The Kansas Wildlife and Parks Department will hold a field day from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, Sept.

11, at the Colby Trap Club to accompany a new online hunter education course. Registration is required. Online instruction and quizzes are available now, with classroom instruction and the test from 5:30 to 10 p.m. Friday, Sept. 8, at Colby Community College. For information or to register, call Wildlife Specialist Matt Bain at 462-7993 or 462-3367.

Walk, run for Recovery Month

The Thomas County Coalition will hold a 5K Awareness Walk/Run for Celebrate Recovery Month at 9 a.m. Saturday, Sept. 11, at the Colby Community Building. For information, call Melany Wilks at 460-4470.



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