



8 pages

# COLBY FREE PRESS

75¢

Monday

December 5, 2011  
Volume 122, Number 189  
Serving Thomas County since 1888



KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

Colby got its first big snowstorm of the winter on Saturday. Downtown Colby got about 7 inches from snowfall in morning and afternoon. The icy and snowpacked roads caused numerous slide-offs and accidents both in town and out in the county. The National Weather Service is predicting some snow flurries tonight and cold temperatures for the rest of the week.

## Colby blanketed with first big snow

By Kevin Bottrell

Colby Free Press  
kbottrell@nwkans.com

Northwest Kansas saw its first heavy snowfall of the year Saturday. The snow began Saturday morning and had ended by nightfall. During that time it dropped anywhere from 3 to 7 inches on Thomas County. National Weather Service spotters reported 6 inches of snow in Colby and 7 inches in Levant. The snowfall was heavier to the north. Spotters reported 8 inches in Cedar Bluffs and 10.7 inches north of Traer in Decatur County and an estimated 12 inches in Herndon in Rawlins County. Spotters also reported drifts up to two feet in places

and plenty of blowing snow. The Kansas Department of Transportation closed I-70 from the Colorado border to Colby on Saturday afternoon. The icy and snowpacked roads caused several accidents. The Colby Police Department dealt with a half-dozen cars that slid off the road on Range Avenue throughout the day along with one that slid off near the Grant Avenue and Summit Street intersection. They also responded to a non-injury accident in the Colby Community College parking lot. Thomas County Sheriff's deputies assisted numerous slide-offs on I-70 as well as an accident on K-25. A semi-tractor rig jackknifed into the median just

See "SNOW," Page 2



These three cats were huddled in the doorway of the KXXX building on Sunday, trying to stay out of the cold.

## County hires new emergency medical services director

By Christina Beringer

Colby Free Press  
colby.society@nwkans.com

After two and a half months of searching, a half-dozen interviews and one failed hire, a new Emergency Medical Services director has finally accepted the position for Thomas County. Joe Hickert of Goodland comes with more than 20 years of experience. He is a registered nurse, a certified paramedic and has provided his expertise to Russell, Ellis County, Goodland and even a private ambulance service in Denver. "I don't want to be over confident, but

I think he's just what we've been waiting for," said Thomas County Commissioner Chairman Ken Christiansen. Christiansen was enthusiastic about Hickert, saying his professional background in the medical services is "very impressive." Christiansen said late last month a different candidate had accepted the position but on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving he called to say he decided not to take it due to the uncertainty of the Thomas County Emergency Medical Service's future. Commissioners were surprised about his sudden decline, but when Hickert

called showing interest in the position, they promptly invited him to Colby for an interview. Hickert plans to begin on a part-time basis for December while he finds a place to live in Colby. He'll also be carrying out his 30-day notice with EagleMed – a private aerial medevac service in Goodland. January will be his first month as the full-time director. "I am already familiar with the medical services in Colby," explained Hickert. "I know the crews and have a lot of respect for the system. I am very impressed with the fire department and look forward to meeting the fire chief, chief of police and

forging new relationships." Hickert said he has already met his colleagues, Don Morton and Candy Bryant, whom he'll be supervising. As the new director, one of Hickert's major plans is to enhance the county's ability to provide more advanced care and services, moving the department from Basic Life Support to Advanced Life Support functions. Because of his credentials and experience, this is something that seems much more attainable, he said. Once he starts work, he will be one of only two paramedics in the county. In addition to the new hire, the commissioners have also been tackling com-

plaints that were filed with the Kansas State Board of Emergency Medical Services concerning the county ambulance service. Christiansen said he and his fellow commissioners Paul Steele and Byron Sowers attended a meeting Thursday with county attorney Kevin Berens. The group appeared before the Kansas board's investigation committee in Topeka. Christiansen did not give details about the meeting but said they received suggestions about "deficiencies that need cleaned up." A follow-up meeting is scheduled for February.



CHRISTINA BERINGER/Colby Free Press

## Families getting ready for Holiday Home Tour

Kathy Britton (left) adjusted a wreath that she brought home from her desk at Colby Community College. Britton's home, at 412 Smith Dr., is on the Kappa Upsilon Holiday Home Tour. The tour will be from 2 to 5 p.m. Sunday. Tickets are \$10 and are available at Donelan Jewelry, Plum Creek and Heritage Salon. Britton's home features a Christmas tree in every room. Britton said her family has not bought any ornament for those trees. All of the decorations have been given to them.

## State representative to meet public here

State Rep. Rick Billinger will be at the Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce from 11 a.m. to noon Tuesday to meet with the public. Billinger said he wants to spend time talking with constituents this month before the Legislature goes into session in January. "There's a lot of people from Thomas County I've not met," he said. "If someone from there calls me up, I want to know who they are." Billinger said the Legislature

will have a lot on its plate in January, including the budget, immigration and redistricting. Some of the issues that will get voted on include proposals from Gov. Sam Brownback, such as income tax reduction or elimination, a new education funding formula, Medicare reform and water rights. This will be Billinger's second session representing the 121st District. A former mayor and city commissioner in Goodland, he was voted in by the Republican Committee last December.

## Supreme Court to hear smoking ban appeal

By John Milburn  
The Associated Press

TOPEKA – Kansas officials are appealing a lower court ruling that has blocked specific provisions of the statewide smoking ban that applies to certain private clubs. The Kansas Supreme Court has scheduled arguments for Wednesday in a case being appealed by the attorney general, asking the

justices to lift a temporary injunction issued in June 2010. Shawnee County District Judge Franklin Theis issued the injunction after attorneys for the Downtown Bar and Grill of Tonganoxie filed a lawsuit over a deadline in

See "APPEAL," Page 2

