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Sheriff's office asking for help with thefts

By Christina Beringer

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The Thomas County Sheriff's office said Thursday there have been a string of thefts in Thomas County and throughout other surrounding Kansas counties that might be related.

"There have been several reports taken in the past few weeks of copper, cast iron, radiators, batteries, cattle panels, tools and various other items stolen from occupied and abandoned farms," said Under-sheriff Marc Finley. "We are asking for assistance in locating suspicious activity and vehicles in Thomas County."

Finley said the reports have mostly been in the southern and southeastern

parts of the county and they have a sus-pect in mind, but very little evidence.

"We don't have enough to go on, yet," he said. "and we need people to report suspicions immediately so we can check them out."

He said a lot of the time, people don't notice thefts right away or wait days to file a report. This, he said, only hinders their investigations. He also recommended that farmers be vigilant over their property in the country, especially during the winter months when they may not be living there, as this is a prime time for criminal activity.

The sheriff's department gets a lot of reports about stolen equipment and farms being broken into at the beginning of summer, but the thefts probably occurred

months prior and nobody noticed, said Finley.

"You wouldn't believe how many cars are spotted in the country with people having no business being out there," he said. "The best thing is for people to re-port those cars to us as soon as possible so we can send someone to find out what they are up to. They might be related to one of the thefts; you just never know."

Finley said that not only have there been farm-related thefts in Thomas County, but other counties have had reports of stolen tractor trailers, semis and even truck-loads of corn.

Wichita County Undersheriff Mike Wilson said whoever is behind their thefts must know what they are doing.

"We got a report that late in the night

on Friday, Dec. 2, or early that Saturday morning a semi and an attached grain trailer was stolen three miles north of Le-oti," Wilson said. "The battery was dead and it would have taken a long time to get it running."

On Tuesday another theft was reported in Logan County, Wilson said. The semi was found abandoned, parked and running with tags from Seward County. When they called Seward County to report the suspicious semi, the owners didn't even know it was missing.

"I guess it had been parked for a long time and they didn't know it was gone," said Wilson. "Again, they would've been out there awhile to get it going."

Similar incidents have also been report-ed in Cheyenne County, where a truck-

load of corn was taken, and in Rawlins County as well.

The reports that Wilson is aware of all took place at night, he said, and many of the vehicles stolen had keys in them.

He said unlike Thomas County, there has only been one report in the last six months regarding stolen scrap iron and copper in Wichita County.

"I'm not surprised, though, since prices are so high right now," he said. "About six months ago, we had a problem with it, but not lately."

Finley said the salvage yard in Colby has been very cooperative in watching out for suspicious persons trying to sell scrap metal. He said more often than not,

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Postal Service to meet public

Representatives from the U.S. Postal Service will meet with the public at 8 p.m. Monday in room 108 of the Colby Community Col-lege student union.

The topic: whether or not the postal service should move Colby's mail processing to Denver. Since Sept. 17, all mail for the region that is heading outside the 677 zip codes has been going to Salina to be sorted, but that will have to change.

The *Salina Journal* reported on Tuesday that the service has made the decision to close the Salina facility less than a week after the public meeting. Once the change is made, all mail that was going into Salina will go to the Wichita processing Center. Salina will lose about 18 jobs while Wichita will gain 21. The service is looking at consolidating most of the process-ing centers in Kansas to Wichita. For cities like Colby and Liberal, however, it's shorter to head to out of state processing facilities like Denver or Amarillo, Texas.

The service has been studying

the move since September, and says it would save \$28,426 in workhours and \$323 in mainte-nance per year. However it would also cost \$14,337 more to trans-port mail to Denver for process-ing, making for a net savings of \$14,412. If the service goes ahead with the move, the Colby Post Of-fice would lose one position.

There are several hundred clo-sures being studied around the country. In 2006, there were 673 processing facilities around the country. Today there are 487 and the service is looking to have less than 200 processing facilities by 2013. Under it's current plan, there would be one processing center in Kansas – Wichita – three in Mis-souri, two in Colorado and Wy-oming and one each in Nebraska and Oklahoma. The service says this could save it up to \$3 billion.

These consolidations have led the Postal Service to propose a two- to three-day delivery stan-dard instead of it's current one-day standard.

State representative has employment idea

By Kevin Bottrell

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State Rep. Rick Billinger has an idea: pay moving expenses for people to move from eastern Kan-sas to western Kansas to fill the available jobs.

Billinger told a small group of citizens and Colby officials Tues-day that he plans to propose the idea to Gov. Sam Brownback. Unemployment is low in western Kansas but jobs are available, he said, so the state could offer incen-tives for people to move from east-ern Kansas where unemployment is high. The Kansas Department of Labor's October report says un-employment in Thomas County is 3.7 percent, while Johnson Coun-ty is at 5.9 percent; Leavenworth, 7.9; and Wyandotte, 9.5.

This would also bring more families to the smaller Kansas towns, boosting school enroll-ment, Billinger said he intends

to sell the idea to the governor as a way to build on the Rural Op-portunity Zone program approved last year.

However, he said, one problem with the plan is how many people are living perfectly well on wel-fare.

"It's way too easy to live on welfare," he said.

Billinger said Social and Reha-bilitative Services Director Robert Siedlecki is proposing that the state require welfare recipients to perform 30 hours of commu-nity service. This would require people on welfare to give back to their communities, he said, and many would choose to go find a job rather than do the community service.

Billinger said he is also focusing a lot of energy on the economy. Several people asked him about the proposal to end the income tax, and how the state could pay

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An elf or two



KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

Tyler Zerr had a solo part as an elf in the Colby fifth grade's musical production "Once on a Housetop" on Tuesday in the grade school auditorium. The students performed songs about elves and chimney sweeps, among other topics.

Utica couple killed in Las Vegas helicopter crash

By Cristina Silva
and Ken Ritter

The Associated Press

LAS VEGAS – Delwin and Ta-mara Chapman were in Las Vegas to renew their wedding vows after 25 years of marriage when a luxu-ry helicopter tour of the twinkling Las Vegas Strip and the iconic Hoover Dam caught their atten-tion. Delwin loved to fly.

The sunset tour ended in a

smoky crash Wednesday night, killing the Chapmans, a 31-year-old pilot and two other passen-gers in an accident that scattered helicopter debris across the River Mountains bordering Lake Mead.

Clark County Coroner Michael Murphy said the bodies were not easily recognizable and identifi-ing the victims would likely in-volve the use of DNA, fingerprint and dental records.

Ron Solze, whose son is mar-ried to one of the Chapmans' four daughters, identified the couple, saying they were well known in their small hometown of Utica, south of Quinter. Delwin ran a construction company and his wife recently closed her hairstyl-ing shop in the town of about 160 people.

"It's a small town, so this affects a lot of people," Solze said. "They were good people."

Howard Bever, the Chapman's pastor, said Delwin Chapman was the property chairman of the church in Utica and used his repair and maintenance skills to keep the church in immaculate shape.

"Someone said if (Delwin) thought he was going to go, though, he would want to go in something like a helicopter," Bev-

er told the *The Hays Daily News*. "He had flown in power para-chutes up to helicopters. He loved the sensation of flying."

Pilot Landon Nield, 31, mean-while, was a devout Mormon and the father of two who married in June in a Las Vegas church.

"He was a good pilot," said his wife, Gabriela Orozco, 38. "He loved what he was doing. His dream was to be a pilot."

Orozco told the Associated Press her husband had flown for roughly seven years, and was taking tour-ists along a typical twilight route when the helicopter crashed.

It's unclear what might have triggered the Nevada crash. The weather was mostly clear near Lake Mead on Wednesday, with a low temperature around 29 and winds around 5 mph. Investigators expect to be on the scene three to five days, said Mark Rosekind with the National Transportation Safety Board.

He said the helicopter crashed near the bottom of a V-shaped can-yon about 150 feet deep. Investi-gators had to climb ladders into the canyon to survey the scene.

Investigators have identified both tail rotor blades and parts of the engine, Rosekind said at a

news conference Thursday night. There's evidence that the main rotor blades remained attached to the rotor hub of the ill-fated air-craft, he said.

The crash was the latest involv-ing tour helicopters across the country in recent years and comes amid concerns about the safety of the air tour industry. From 1994 through 2008, there were 75 com-mercial helicopter accidents in the U.S., excluding air ambulances, resulting in 88 fatalities.

Helicopter-crash trial lawyer Gary Robb said tour pilots are encouraged to push the aircraft's limits.

"There is an incentive for the pilot to provide a 'flight thrill' to passengers," Robb said.

The tour operator, Sundance Helicopters of Las Vegas, had at least five accidents and was the subject of 10 federal enforcement actions since 1994.

CEO Larry Pietropaolo noted there was no distress call before a GPS monitoring the location

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Decatur County murder trial postponed again until February

A court appearance in the murder case against Dylan Coryell Jr. was postponed again on Mon-day.

A preliminary hearing once set for November had been continued to Monday, and now has been continued to February.

Jeff Wagaman, deputy chief of staff for Kansas Attorney General Derek Schmidt, said the prelimi-nary hearing has been scheduled for 9 a.m. Friday, Feb. 3, in Decatur County District Court. Waga-man said Coryell, 24, is being held in the Deca-tur County jail with bond set at \$500,000, cash or surety.

Coryell faces three charges for allegedly shoot-ing Airman Corey Cook, 22, and a companion.

The first count is for premeditated murder in the first degree with an alternative charge of felony murder in the first degree. A premeditated murder involves a planned killing, while a felony mur-der charge applies when a death occurs during a planned felony crime, regardless of whether the death was planned.

The second count is aggravated battery for al-leged injuries to Sarah Campbell, and the third is for aggravated burglary for entering the home where the shooting occurred. Both are felonies.