



8 pages

COLBY FREE PRESS

75¢

Thursday

February 23, 2012
Volume 123, Number 30
Serving Thomas County since 1888

Norton firm plans trains through Colby

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Colby City Council members heard Tuesday that Ag Valley Co-op plans to send hundred-car grain trains from a new loading facility in Norton down the Kyle Railroad to Colby, where they would switch to Union Pacific lines through town.

The 6,000-foot trains, more than a mile long, could block two crossings on Country Club Drive and all the east-west streets in between, including Fourth Street (U.S. 24), City Manager Carolyn Armstrong said. The line connecting the

two railroads crosses Fourth near Rasure Lumber.

Armstrong told the council a Kyle representative contacted her to set up a meeting earlier this month, supposedly to discuss the railroad's tracks in Colby. Armstrong said she asked Police Chief Randy Jones, Fire Chief Bob McLemore and Emergency Medical Services Director Joe Hickert to attend the meeting with her.

The group learned of Ag Valley's plans during this meeting Feb. 8. The trains would be 6,000 feet (over a mile) long and move about 5 mph on the track through town due to the condition of the track and some curves. The company said

it expects to run 22 trains through town each year, less than two a month.

"This will mean that all major traffic ways from east to west and north to south could potentially be blocked at once," Armstrong said.

Streets affected would include East Eighth, East Seventh, East Fifth, Fourth Street, Pine Street and Country Club Drive, both the far north crossing on the Kyle line and the south crossing of the Union Pacific.

Armstrong said that from a public safety standpoint, this could isolate ambulance, fire and police services for up to half of Colby's residents for up to 30 minutes at a time.

"That is totally unacceptable to our community," she said.

A Goodland is considering a similar plan, she added, and that could triple the train traffic through Colby to 66 trains a year, more than one a week.

Ag Valley has set up a meeting from 1 to 5 p.m. Wednesday at the Thomas County Office Complex in Colby, 350 S. Range Ave., to discuss this plan with officials and the public. Representatives from Ag Valley and the railroads will be present.

Armstrong said she has contacted the Public Affairs Division of Union Pacific to arrange a personal visit to address the town's concerns for public safety, the con-

dition of the tracks and other options that might be available for Ag Valley. She has not heard from the rail giant, she said.

The Ag Valley project received state aid, the manager said, and she hopes to find a contact at the state to plead the city's case.

She said that Ag Valley has other routes available that do not affect public safety in any community.

"We don't want to stifle economic development in Norton," she said, "but I don't feel it should occur at the expense of public safety in Colby."

Armstrong and the council said they hope people will turn out for the meeting Wednesday to express their opinions.

Storm spotter class planned for next month

If you want to learn more about tornadoes, thunderstorms and severe weather, or would like to serve as a volunteer storm spotter, plan to attend a free class next month in Colby.

The National Weather Service and Thomas County Emergency Management will offer the class at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 6, downstairs at the Colby Community Building.

The class, taught each spring by Weather Service meteorologists, is open to anyone interested in helping spot and report severe weather. Those who take the class can sign up as storm spotters. Many will be police officers, firemen and emergency preparedness officials recertifying their skills.

Dave Floyd, warning coordination meteorologist at the Goodland forecast office, said Chris Foltz, a forecaster in Goodland, will lead the Colby class this year. Foltz chases storms on his days off, he said, and should have some good slides.

The class will cover thunderstorm formation, organization and evolution, associated clouds and their meaning, thunderstorm hazards and safety practices, and what and how to report. Floyd said this year, they also will cover information about storms last year, which was particularly deadly for tornadoes.

"We'll talk about the storms last year in Joplin, Mo., and the Southeast," he said, "and some thoughts on how people get their information."

He said the service has talked about whether people get too many warnings, or whether it should change the way it gives warnings. Most of the bad storms last year were well-reported in advance, he said, and people had plenty of warning. In Joplin, most people should have had half an hour.

"We don't like to dwell on the previous year's storms," he said, "but there was a lot that happened."

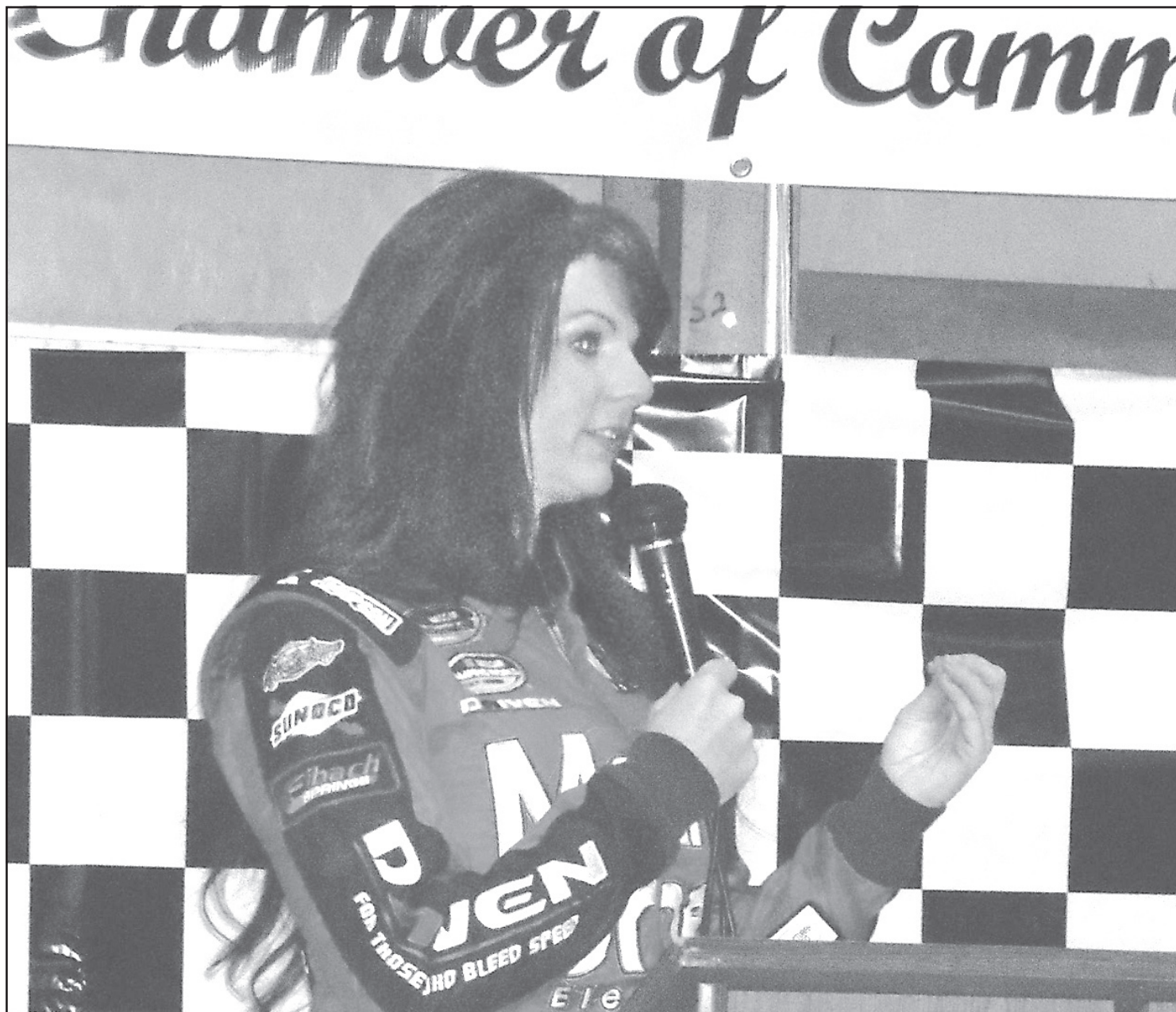
"In Joplin, they had great lead time, but 162 people lost their lives, 550 nationwide."

"The question gets raised, if we're so good with warnings, why did so many people die. We always say 'head to the basement and you'll be safe,' but when an F5 (tornado) comes by and sweeps the house clear, it may not be all that safe."

At least part of the answer is having as many people watching every storm as possible. Even with improved radar, Floyd said, there's no substitute for eyes on a storm to provide warning of tornadoes and other severe weather.

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Driven for Success



Jennifer Jo Cobb, a professional race-car driver, speaker, entrepreneur and corporate spokesperson, talked at the Oakley Chamber of Commerce's banquet Monday night. Her theme was "Driven for Success," and Cobb talked about her dream

and motivation to become a NASCAR driver. To succeed, she said, you must sometimes face failure and setbacks, knowing your determination was and is your greatest accomplishment.

AMY THRASHER/Oakley Chamber of Commerce

Weighing the beef



KATHRYN BALLARD/Colby Free Press

Jenna Crampton wrote down the results for the 4-H Fair Project beef weigh-in Saturday at Colby Livestock Auction while

Shelby Crampton and Deann Shields did the weighing.

Workers conference coming to Colby

Shepherd's Staff of Rexford, Heartland Christian School of Colby and the New Life Christian Book Store of McCook will sponsor their second annual Christian Workers Conference for the Tri-State Area next week.

The conference, to be held at Heartland on Saturday, March 3, hopes to connect rural churches with training and resources. It's not just for pastors, youth workers and Sunday school leaders, organizers say, but for anyone who serves in their church, including musicians, technicians, board members and others.

Sponsors say they expect between 200 and 250 people in town for the event.

"We had 100 last year," said spokesman Gwen Griffiths, "and the goal was to double it. It looks like we will make it."

"We really saw a need in a rural area like this. We do have people coming from Colorado, from all over western Kansas and even central Kansas, and from Nebraska this year."

The main speaker will be Brian Wechsler, executive director of Village Missions in The Dalles, Ore. He says he'll encourage



B. Wechsler

workers to understand and apply the concepts found in St. Paul's letter to the Philippians (2:5-8): A willingness to abandon what we desire and a willingness to accept what we dislike.

The conference will offer 38 workshops based on nine subjects, or tracks.

Two workshops will include tours of the Shepherd's Staff's conference and retreat center facilities in Rexford. Other tracks are aimed towards men, women, college and youth, children, missions and music, leaders, legal issues, technology and "tips from the pros."

The conference will have a vendor hall, with more than 20 suppliers expected to demonstrate and sell their wares.

The conference will begin with registration and check-in at 8 a.m. and the first main sessions at 8:45. Lunch is included in the \$45 fee. Preregistration is encouraged, but space is still available and organizers will accept walk ins, Griffiths said. To register, go to www.shepherdstaff.org or call (888) 687-2565.

