



## Fire forces 1,000 to flee from homes

From staff reports and the Associated Press  
WRAY, Colo. — Fed by wind and lack of moisture, a huge fire burned up pastures and corn stubble in Yuma County, Colo., just west of the Kansas line, on Sunday.

The Yuma Pioneer reported investigators were still unsure today what caused the fire, which started about 1:30 p.m. Sunday in a field about 10 to 15 miles south of U.S. 34 and eight miles east of the town of Yuma.

Authorities evacuated an area 13 miles long and 14 wide, including the town of Eckley, population 300. Evacuees were housed in Wray and Yuma. Parts of U.S. 34 have been closed to traffic as well as many county roads in the area. Reduced visibility from smoke was causing accidents, authorities said.

Winds gusted anywhere from 50 to 70 mph, pushing the fire across roads. Pioneer editor Tony Rayl said at least two homes and several farm buildings have been damaged or destroyed. Rayl said three firefighters were injured and taken to Yuma District Hospital.

Volunteers finally got control of the fire last night after the wind died down overnight. NBC News in Denver reported the fire was 50 percent contained Sunday night and 90 percent contained Monday morning.

Evacuees from Eckley were allowed back in their homes about 9:15 p.m. Sunday night after the danger there passed. At one point,

the evacuation order included a 220-square-mile area in the northeast corner of the state. The fire filled the skies with so much smoke that firefighters couldn't see the flames.

The Denver Post (bit.ly/FS1AZ4) reported that firefighter Jennifer Struckmeyer suffered burns on her foot, and two of her relatives who are also firefighters were injured when a "wall of fire" overran their truck.

Struckmeyer was in a Greeley hospital with second- and third-degree burns to her body. Her brother-in-law, Damon Struckmeyer, and a third firefighter, Darren Stewart, were also injured, according to her mother-in-law, Beverly Struckmeyer, who said she's Damon Struckmeyer's mother and Stewart's grandmother.

Yuma County Sheriff Chad Day said this morning he planned to take an aerial survey of the damage today. More than a dozen area fire departments fought the blaze, which started at about 1:15 p.m. Sunday south of Yuma and quickly spread toward Eckley.

"The smoke is just thick and rising way up into the air," Mike McCaleb, emergency manager in Washington County, said earlier Sunday. With high winds also kicking up dirt, "visibility was nothing."

Chris Foltz, a meteorologist for the National Weather Service office in Goodland, said the fire was fueled by sustained winds of 30 to 35 mph.

## Offering up a taste



A volunteer poured a taste of wine and beer tasting Saturday as part of a benefit for the Pickin' on the Plains Bluegrass and Folk Festival at the City Limits Convention Center. Organizers planned for 100 people at the tasting,

which also included some harder drinks, with more expected for a dance afterward featuring the Colby band "The Mama's Boys." Money raised will go to help pay for national artists invited to the festival.

KAYLA CORNETT/Colby Free Press

## 'Occupy' gearing up for spring

By Karen Matthews

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Occupy Wall Street protesters anticipate that with the coming of spring their movement for "economic justice" will pick up momentum, making priorities of issues as varied as the environment and the November elections.

But on Sunday, a day after police broke up a rally at Manhattan's Zuccotti Park and arrested dozens, some observers wondered whether a movement so diffuse could accomplish anything.

"I'm really grateful to be part of a generation that wants change, 'cause we should all want change," said Jennifer Campbell, a graduate student in documentary filmmaking at Hofstra

University, "but I'm not sure what that change is, or if they know what that change is."

And Harlem resident Kanene Holder said the movement is broader than any one issue. "This is not a beauty pageant," she said. "We cannot homogenize this movement into one streamlined vision."

See "OCCUPY," Page 2



CHRISTINA BERINGER/Colby Free Press

Carol Thiel (pictured) and Judie Withers of Colby teamed up to share stories and family history of Emily Thiel Stover, an ancestor who was among the earliest settlers in Thomas County, at this month's Food for Thought at the Prairie Museum of Art and History.

## Descendants talk about lives of pioneer women on prairie

By Christina Beringer

Colby Free Press  
colby.society@nwksas.com

Thomas County people told stories Thursday to about 60 people at the Prairie Museum of Art and History about women in their families who were among the earliest settlers of the Colby area.

The program for this month's Food for Thought luncheon honored Women's History Month by focusing on those hardy women who came here to make a new life on the High Plains.

### CATHARINA AND EMILY THIEL

The session began with Carol Thiel and Judie Withers, who talked about Thiel women and their

family history, ending with a biography of Amelia (Emily) Thiel Stover, Withers' grandmother.

The two focused first on how Emily's family came to live in the United States and how their mother, Catharina Magaretha (Gloe) Thiel, worked hard to support her four children and husband from the time she was married in 1872 until her death in 1937. This included working the fields while caring for the household, the garden and her kids.

Carol said Catharina was forced to leave her children at home alone while she worked. The

See "WOMEN," Page 2

## Study finds meth babies prone to several problems

CHICAGO (AP) — The first study to look at methamphetamine's potential lasting effects on children whose mothers used it during pregnancy finds these kids at higher risk for behavior problems than other children.

The behavior differences — anxiety, depression, moodiness — weren't huge, but lead researcher Linda LaGasse called them "very worrisome."

Methamphetamine is a stimulant like crack cocaine, and earlier research showed meth babies have similarities to so-called "crack babies" — smaller in size and prone to drowsiness and stress. Results in long-term studies conflict on whether children of cocaine-using mothers have lasting behavior

problems.

Whether problems persist in young children of meth users is unknown. But LaGasse, who does research at Brown University's Center of the Study of Children at Risk, said methamphetamine has stronger effects on the brain so it may be more likely to cause lasting effects in children.

The study was published online Monday in Pediatrics. The National Institutes of Health paid for the research, including a grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Government data suggest more than 10 million Americans have used meth; fewer than 1 percent of pregnant women are users. Joseph Frascella, who heads a

behavioral division at the National Institute on Drug Abuse, said the research is among "groundbreaking" studies examining effects of substance abuse during pregnancy.

But because the study is a first, the results should be viewed cautiously and need to be repeated, he said.

The study of children tracked from age 3 through 5 builds on earlier research by LaGasse on the same group — 330 youngsters tracked in the Midwest and West, areas where meth use is most common. Mothers were recruited shortly after giving birth in Des Moines, Iowa; Honolulu, Los Angeles, and Tulsa. All were asked about prenatal meth use.

## Teacher pensions strap states

WASHINGTON (AP) — As a new generation of teachers replaces retiring baby boomers, financially strapped states face a quandary — what to do about teacher pensions.

A majority of states' teacher retirement funds are underfunded, some significantly below rates considered solvent, according to a recent analysis by the National Council on Teacher Quality, a research and policy group that seeks to improve the quality of teachers. The situation has stoked political fights across the country as state lawmakers weigh options such as moving teachers from a traditional defined benefit pensions to 401(k)-style plans, raising the retirement age or making teachers wait a decade to be vested in their plans.

The shortfalls reflect what's happening with public state and local

pensions nationwide, with teacher pensions included in a more than \$660 billion shortfall in what's been put aside for such retirement benefits and what is owed, the Pew Center on the States has estimated. Many states offer separate pension plans for teachers, while others include them in broader plans that cover other government workers.

What's happening with public pensions is mirroring private industry. Companies have been abandoning traditional benefits because of the cost and the risk and replacing them with 401(k) type plans, which are more portable but transfer more of the risk to the worker.

In education circles, the issue takes on special significance because of its impact on kids. Pension policies affect the ability of districts to hire and retain teach-

ers, and money used to shore up pension funds can mean tax hikes or come at the expense of other areas like education. As legislators weigh what to do, an estimated 1 million teachers are expected to retire within the next decade. The economic downturn has helped fueled the pensions shortfalls; states in better economic times expanded benefits that today are difficult to pay.

One current pension battleground is Kansas, where Republican Gov. Sam Brownback wants to transfer new teachers and other government workers to a 401(k)-style plan. The Kansas Public Employees Retirement System projects an \$8.3 billion gap between anticipated revenues and benefits through 2033.

