



# COLBY FREE PRESS

8 pages

## Colby woman dies following fire

A 27-year-old Colby woman was found near death in her burning home Saturday morning and her 9-month-old baby was missing.

The baby was found safe near Logan, when authorities arrested a man wanted in the case. Police canceled a pickup order for the man and the child about noon Saturday, saying both had been located in Phillips County.

Teri Chase Morris, an emergency medical technician with the Thomas County ambulance crew and a meat department manager at the Colby Walmart, was found about 7 a.m. The Colby Fire Department had been called to her home, 125 S. Chickamauga Ave., at 6:59 a.m. for a fire.

The Colby Police Department and the Kansas Bureau of Investigation were handling the case. Saturday evening, the police department sent out a statement, adding that more information would be released when it becomes available.

Also assisting in the investigation were the Thomas County Sheriff's Office, the state Fire Marshall's Office and the Kansas Highway Patrol.

According to the police statement, after entering the burning house, firemen found the victim near the front of the home. She was not responsive and was taken to Citizens Medical Center, where she later died.

Family members have declined to comment on the woman's death at the request of police. The Colby Police Department referred all questions to Don Brown, communications director for the Kansas Attorney General's Office. Brown did not respond to telephone calls this morning.

Kirby Ross, editor of the *Phillips County Review*, said the Phillips County Sheriff's Office included an item on the case in its regular report of activities. Among the service calls on Saturday, an item says the sheriff's office assisted the KBI in locating an individual wanted in Thomas County. The subject was arrested in rural Phillips County.

Billy Shank of Garden City, Morris' ex-boyfriend, is the alleged suspect. He reportedly was taken to the Phillips County jail, but officials there, reached by telephone this morning, said they'd been told not to comment on the case. Police and jail officials in Colby said the same thing.

Police had cones blocking the street at the corner of Chickamauga and Webster on Saturday.



Two fire engines, the fire chief's car, a city car, three police cars, an ambulance and a Kansas Highway Patrol car were on the scene.

Fire Chief Bob McLemore said the call came in at 7 a.m. Saturday and the fire was out by 7:15.

"The main part of the fire was in a bedroom at the front of the house," he said that morning, adding that he knew someone was inside, but could not say who.

Lois Struckmeyer, who lives across the street from the house, said sirens woke her up and she saw that the south bedroom of the house was on fire.

Phillip LeDou, who lives next door to the woman's home, said a young woman came out of a white four-door car and rang his doorbell to say there was a fire. LeDou said the woman did not

have her phone with her to report it, and then she ran over to the next house.

Ken Billings, who lives two doors down on east side, said the same woman asked him to call 911 as well.

"I came out the door and the house was engulfed in flames," Billings said.

LeDou said he called 911 about 7 a.m., and police officers borrowed his garden hose to put out fire on the grass between his and the woman's house before the fire department showed up.

"The window was on fire and the grass around the front and the back here was burning," LeDou said.

Reportedly, an autopsy was done, which is routine in homicide cases. By this morning, the body had been released to a funeral home. No obituary or other information was available today.



Firemen hosed down a house (above) Saturday morning at 125 S. Chickamauga Ave. just south of the Union Pacific railroad tracks, the scene of a suspicious death and fire. Police kept watch over the house all day, and agents with the Kansas Bureau of Investigation (left) showed up just before 4 p.m. Neighbors woke up to the sound of sirens at 7 a.m. as the Colby Fire Department, Colby Police Department and Emergency Medical Services arrived (below).

SAM DIETER/Colby Free Press



## Brewster fund helps buy new cooler for store

By Sam Dieter

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The community-owned grocery store in Brewster just got a new cooler, one of several initiatives undertaken by a nonprofit group dedicated to projects in the western Thomas County town.

The Brewster Development Fund gave a \$1,000 check Feb. 1 to the Northwestern

Plains American Revolutionary Bicentennial Parks Association to help the store buy a new cooler. It was the latest gift the nonprofit group has provided since it was founded in 1996.

Ryan Edmundson, a loan officer at Farmers Bank and Trust in Brewster, is on the board. He said it was set up to help Brewster with improvement projects.

"The thought was that the money was from here, it's going to stay here," he said.

He compared it to the Thomas County Development Fund, but said most of the money given through that fund originates in Colby, and goes back there. That's fair, Edmundson said, adding, "There's not a whole lot left over for our little 300 people here in Brewster."

Geri Perrotta, assistant manager at the grocery, said that Edmundson used to work there when he was younger.

"He helps us out quite a bit over here,"

she said. "He just volunteers, bringing in groceries and researching shelving or anything that we need."

The grocery got a new cooler about Jan. 28, she said. Edmundson did some research on where to get it after the motor on the old one gave out about a month ago.

Edmundson said that the fund still needs all the help it can get with donations.

"I'm not trying to pat ourselves on the back," he said. "We're here; we're doing good things for the community; if you can help us, great."

Edmundson said he had heard of a farmer who donated a quarter section of

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