

# Opinion

## Your turn

### God bless Colby

**Roger Herren**  
Executive Director Thomas County Chapter  
American Red Cross

Accompanying the rain, sleet, snow and ice our community bonded together as only a rural community can, wholeheartedly. With all the cold weather outside, inside the Colby Community Building many a heart was warmed up.

Whether it was a smiling face of a Red Cross volunteer checking our visitors in, or a National Guardsman escorting them to the gym to find a place to stay. After they were settled down it was a joy to see kids playing, adults passing the time by talking and telling their stories. There were even local families which took in a variety of visitors. It made me truly proud to consider myself a Colbyite.

As the executive director of the Thomas County chapter of the American Red Cross, I would like to thank all the volunteers from all the organizations who made the shelter experience the best and most rewarding experience it could be. Another thank you should go out to Dillons' for their donations, Tom, Carla, and the staff who was omitted in all the articles in the paper. Without their help and extra effort, the culinary delights wouldn't have been as great as they were. I would also like to thank Mike Woofter for his help and donations of pizzas.

Hopefully we won't have any more need for shelters the rest of the winter season. God bless Colby and northwest Kansas.

## Job well done

**Phyllis Ziegelmeier**  
Gem, Kan.

As the havoc of the past weekends blizzard starts to wind down we should take the time to thank some very hard working and dedicated people.

Here in the town of Gem we were without power from about 7:00 Sunday night until about 9:00 Monday morning. As I sat in my steadily growing colder but still warm home wishing I had lights and heat the employees of Mid West Energy were out trying to restore power to the many places that were out.

The next morning as I tried to make my way to work, (which I got to about 2 hours late) the snow and wind blowing so hard you couldn't see anything but white I wondered how on earth those poor people could even find the power lines and why they would risk their welfare for the rest of us.

The same reason that even though I was late I sat at the Post Office all day with no mail and no customers. Because it is our jobs. That's what we do. But every once in awhile it is nice to hear a thank you. So to the MWE employees who were out on that miserable night and the next day facing freezing hazardous conditions to restore my power, my hat is off to you.

Thank you very much. Job well done.

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail [jvannostrand@nwkansas.com](mailto:jvannostrand@nwkansas.com) or [pdecker@nwkansas.com](mailto:pdecker@nwkansas.com).

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[freepress@nwkansas.com](mailto:freepress@nwkansas.com)

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**John Van Nostrand - Publisher**  
[jvannostrand@nwkansas.com](mailto:jvannostrand@nwkansas.com)

**NEWS**

**Patty Decker - Editor**  
[pdecker@nwkansas.com](mailto:pdecker@nwkansas.com)

**Tisha Cox - General Assignment**  
[tcox@nwkansas.com](mailto:tcox@nwkansas.com)

**Jan Katz Ackerman, Area Reporter**  
[ackermanjk@ruraltel.net](mailto:ackermanjk@ruraltel.net)

**ADVERTISING**

**Crystal Rucker - Advertising Sales/Director**  
[crystalr@nwkansas.com](mailto:crystalr@nwkansas.com)

**Jasmine Crottinger - Advertising Sales**  
[jasminec@nwkansas.com](mailto:jasminec@nwkansas.com)

**Cindy Davis - Advertising Sales**  
[c.davis@nwkansas.com](mailto:c.davis@nwkansas.com)

**BUSINESS OFFICE**

**Lea Bandy - Circulation Manager**  
[lea@nwkansas.com](mailto:lea@nwkansas.com)

**Jeanette Applegate - Bookkeeping & Ad Building**  
[japplegate@nwkansas.com](mailto:japplegate@nwkansas.com)

**Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator**  
[support@nwkansas.com](mailto:support@nwkansas.com)

**NOR'WEST PRESS**

**Jim Bowker - General Manager**

**Richard Westfahl, Lana Westfahl, Ron VanLoenen, Judy McKnight**

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## A reality check worth cashing

The pull of the heart is stronger than the pull of culture.

Saturday I visited my longtime best friend Mike, his wife Patti and their new daughter Allison at their home in an upscale suburb of Denver. I wanted to see their house before they plan on leaving it early next year. I'll explain why later. (I also wanted to see their first child too.)

Mike and Patti built their house and moved in October 2004. They both have extremely well-paying jobs working as computer engineers for an insurance company. Their combined income bought the place.

Mike graduated from Colorado School of Mines in Golden, Colo., a high-tech school with a significant drop-out rate because of the intensity and demands in the classroom. Job placement for Mines graduates is good and Mike proved that almost the moment he had diploma in hand.

Their house is indeed fancy. Many bedrooms, soft lighting, marble counters, theater-like sound system, soft, warm colors, fireplace, two-car garage are all in a well-manicured, no-crime developing neighborhood.

But even with all of that, there is not enough room for a little kid to enjoy going outside. Look outside Mike's windows and you could see what his neighbor was watching on TV. Considering how much they paid, they need more of an "outside" to complement the size of the house. Their yard is more like a dog-run than a place for a kid to run. I just don't understand those kind of subdivisions.

But the past few months, they realized they shouldn't spend all of their hard earned dollars on a shell, er, house. They also realized they both shouldn't be working for money.

### John Van Nostrand

#### • Line in the Dust

Moments before we arrived, Mike put the for sale sign on the front blade of grass, I mean, lawn. They just got back from meeting with a realtor.

A combination of Patti's stress at work and the emotional battle leaving their daughter at daycare convinced them to sell the house, have Patti quit her job, find a smaller, less expensive house and Patti stay at home with Allison.

Their daycare provider is conveniently across the street from their place of work. But Patti said she is still not close enough to Allison.

Based on their own research and timeline, they hope to have the house sold and ready to find a new home in March. Hopefully that will also give them the time to prepare to a new lifestyle.

They are surrounded by houses as big and fancy as theirs. Luxury SUVs are in the garages and probably ski tickets to Aspen and Vail are to. They will have to face going to the franchise restaurants rather than the exquisite places in downtown Denver. Those three-day weekend trips flying somewhere will probably be replaced by an overnight stay in Estes Park and so on.

I've always thought Mike had an expensive

lifestyle, but he always had the income to pay for it. A former editor of mine once told me when your income goes up so does your expenses.

Mike told me he struggled with college because of the pressure and really never enjoyed his college years. He once told me he was jealous because he could tell I enjoyed my years at a junior college. I wonder if Mike's high-dollar interests were a way to make him forget his college years.

Switching to a stay-at-home parent can be difficult. Trust me, I know. It's not only learning how to live on one income but there is also stress of having to deal with the kids' occasional tirades and accidents.

I recommend the stay-at-home parent having an occasional break just so they can get out of the house to pursue a hobby or interact with adults. It can recharge the parent's battery.

While driving through the city to get to Mike's home we passed many cars apparently so full of Christmas gifts you couldn't see in the windows.

I was hoping the people driving those cars purchased gifts for their family of five kids to justify the quantity.

Remember, the person who Christmas is based on received only three gifts.

We are surrounded by so much materialism. What we want and what we need have been confused. I am proud of the decision Mike and Patti have made.

A paycheck can't match Allison's cute, innocent, toothless smile.

And never will.

John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press.

## The Republican philanthropist

**Christopher C. Shubert**  
Colby, Kan.

I just came across the most extraordinary piece of information. I was reading the news on the Internet, and there was an article with a title to the effect that, "Bible Belt States are Greatest Givers".

I was surprised to read a headline like this, so I chased it down to the original source: A study done by the Massachusetts-based Catalogue for Philanthropy does, indeed, show (among other things), that Bible-belt states rank higher in their giving ratios than do, say, New England states or West Coast states.

(The giving ratio is the average "percentage" of income which individuals dedicated to charitable causes, according to 2000-2003 IRS tax records.) This does not mean that Bible Belt states necessarily give more money to charity; it only means that the average resident in a Bible Belt state gives a higher percentage of their income to charity than the average resident in, say, a New England state. Take, for example, Mississippi – the poorest state in the Union – whose citizens gave, on average, over 13 percent of their incomes to charity. New Hampshire residents, at the bottom of the charity scale, gave on average less than 5 percent of their incomes to charity.

But the real eye-opener came when I lined up the charitable giving percentages with the polling results of the 2004 election. I was shocked by the results. "Red" states – states which favored Bush in the last election – were almost always better givers than "blue" states, which favored Kerry. The top 25 giving states were all "red", while the bottom nine states for giving

were all "blue". All 19 Kerry states were below the national average charity ratio (about 8 percent), while two thirds of the 31 Bush states were above the national average.

(Where does Kansas rank on the list, you may ask? Kansas was a red state, solidly Bush, and is just a hair above the national charity average – and about a full percentage point ahead of the most charitable blue state, New York.)

If you had asked me before I did my research, I would have guessed that "red" states and "blue" states were about equal on their charitable giving, and that no one state, or group of states, could claim bragging rights when it came to charity. I was wrong. After several hours of crunching numbers, building graphs, and squinting at the results, it became quite clear: red states clearly had the advantage when it came to charity. And, you can just about draw a line on a graph which says, "The more a state supported Bush, the more charitable it is." (Yes, I have a graph, drawn from IRS records, which shows exactly that trend.)

I have been used to living under the stereotype of the "selfish Republican": For years, now, it has been more-than-hinted – sometimes outright stated – that Republicans are selfish, while Democrats are charitable and giving. Stereotypes like this are hard to conquer, no matter how unfair they may seem – and no matter how many personal examples you can come up with to counteract them. And those of us who have lived under that stereotype – who have been implied to be or accused of being Selfish Republicans – have always felt the unfairness of it. So it comes as some relief that there is national information, IRS information, which helps balance the scales.

This information, if it means anything at all, tells us that Republican states are actually more charitable than Democratic states.

Of course, this does not mean that there are no selfish Republicans. Nor does it mean that there are no charitable Democrats, or that every Republican is more charitable than every Democrat. Those would be stereotypes, too, and also unfair. But it does mean that the stereotype of the selfish Republican must now be called by its proper name: A myth. (My wife thinks it ought to be called a lie, but I am willing to allow that it is just a mistake, if not necessarily a completely honest mistake.)

If I were a charity-minded Democrat, I would certainly not let this information pass unremarked: I would be making every effort to find out how to rally my blue-state friends to rise up and match the charity levels of these red state Republicans. And if I were a Republican, I would use this information to forcefully rebut the myth of the Selfish Republican.

One other point needs to be made about this information: Apparently our national, tax-funded charity system does not represent red state values. What this tells us about the state of our welfare system, I will leave up to the reader. But it also tells us something about red state citizens: Even after paying their tax levy, red-state citizens are willing to give out of their own pockets to support the charitable causes that they prefer. They put their money where their values are.

Maybe now, we can get rid of that old prejudice of the "selfish Republican", and instead welcome and admire the true figure: The Republican Philanthropist.

### Doonesbury

• Gary Trudeau