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PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

Colby Free Press Advertising Director Crystal Rucker handed a gift last week to Tracy and LeAnn Rall of McDonald. The McDonalds had the first baby of 2006, Wyatt, Tuesday in Hays. The McDonalds won various prizes provided by area merchants for having the first child of the year either in Thomas County or delivered by a Thomas County physician.

First baby of 2006: Surprise!

By **Patty Decker**
Free Press Editor

Winning the First Baby of the Year contest was a “big surprise” in more ways than one, said the happy parents of a healthy baby boy.

Tracy and LeAnn Rall of McDonald welcomed their family’s newest addition, Wyatt Lee, born Tuesday at Hays Medical Center.

“I always thought it would be cool to have a New Year’s baby,”

LeAnn said, “but I didn’t think it would ever happen.”

Prior to Wyatt’s birth, the couple’s other three children came close or were born on special occasions.

“Sheena, 12, was born on Valentine’s Day,” she said, “and Logan, 9, missed St. Patrick’s Day by two days.”

The 6-year-old, Levi, was born on his grandfather’s birthday and now Wyatt has his own special day in the family.

Adding to the surprise was Wyatt’s weight of 10 pounds, 4

ounces.

“I was thinking he would be a little over nine pounds, but he was just a bigger baby and it took a lot to get him out,” LeAnn said.

LeAnn said Dr. Victor Hildyard, a family practice physician at Colby Medical and Surgical Center, was her doctor throughout the pregnancy. Dr. Joel Fort performed the Cesarean section in Hays.

As part of the contest and celebration, merchants in Thomas County offered gifts and specials for either the parents or newborn.

In addition to the items provided

by Thomas County businesses, Tracy said they also were given a gift certificate from the “Frosty Mug” in McDonald.

Tracy works at a dairy farm and LeAnn is a stay-at-home mom.

Paternal grandparents are Larenz and Jeannine Rall of Colby. Maternal grandparents are Pete and Ann Sommerfeld of Durham.

“Levi said he wanted a sister, but he told us later that he is proud of having another brother,” LeAnn said.

Legislators may have overtime

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — As they begin this year’s annual session, legislators face a very real chance they will return this summer for a special session and, like last year, face orders from the Kansas Supreme Court to provide more money to public schools.

Yes, education funding will be the biggest issue of the session opening Monday and ending by early May. And yes, legislators of all philosophical stripes expect to fashion a school finance plan using data from a report they commissioned to determine what it will cost to provide all children with a suitable education.

But many of the Republicans who control both chambers still want to avoid increasing taxes. Meanwhile, the justices still appear ready to order hundreds of millions of dollars in new spending — and they’re planning to review whatever lawmakers produce this spring.

“I just see all the pieces falling into place, very similar to last year,” said Sen. John Vratil, R-Leawood, an attorney. “Those pieces led to a special session last year.”

While special legislative sessions are common in other states, they’re not in Kansas. Last year’s was the 21st in 144 years of statehood, and it was the first in more than 15 years. The last back-to-back special sessions were in 1933 and 1934.

Legislators have plenty of reasons to dread another special session, starting with their unpleasant memories of last year’s 12 days. While neighbors took vacations or prepared for harvest, legislators were forced to meet over two weeks in June and July.

Republicans in particular resented the Supreme Court telling legislators to spend more money on schools — and setting an amount. Conservatives had the most reasons to feel bruised, having lost the battle over money and having failed to win approval of proposals to rein in

the judiciary.

Also, all 125 House seats are on the ballot this year, and a summer special session would take away precious campaign time before the Aug. 1 primary elections.

The justices haven’t talked publicly about the special session, but the courts came under attack for being too activist. Additional rulings are likely to stoke whatever fires of discontent remain.

“I don’t think there’s much appetite on either side of 10th Avenue for a repeat of last year,” said Senate Majority Leader Derek Schmidt, R-Independence, referring to the street that runs between the Capitol and the Kansas Judicial Center.

House Speaker Doug Mays, R-Topeka, said he is optimistic that legislators can resolve school finance issues and avoid a second special session.

Asked why, though, Mays replied, “I was just born optimistic. I can’t help it. Usually, I’m wrong.”

There are valid reasons for pessimism about another special session, rooted in how legislators and the Supreme Court have responded to a 1999 lawsuit filed over education funding by parents and administrators in Dodge City and Salina.

Last year, legislators gave public schools what normally would be a huge increase — under the court’s prodding, \$290 million, or more than 10 percent. The state now spends more than \$3 billion annually in state aid.

After the special session, the Supreme Court declared the Legislature’s work sufficient “for interim purposes.” The court has said it could order an increase in the state’s annual spending by a whopping \$560 million — an additional 18 percent — unless lawmakers provided better numbers.

The educational cost study was designed to do just that, but legislators still can take different approaches in a school finance plan.

They can focus on estimating the cost of “inputs” — what goes into a suitable education for every child — or they take an “outputs” approach by providing enough money to make sure every child becomes proficient in reading, math and other subjects.

New Truck Town already getting truck load of business

By **Tisha Cox**
Colby Free Press

Truck Town in Colby is open and more than ready for business according to owners Kirk and Holly Young.

Two sales were made the first day they were open, Dec. Stanley and Shirley Porch of Wanblee, S.D. were the first customers.

The Youngs moved to Colby from Oberlin in July 2004 with the intention of moving their business here. Construction started on the new building six months ago, and it’s mostly complete with the exception of some electrical work.

“This is where all the retail will take place,” Holly said.

The new Colby location will sell all makes and models of used semis and new and used grain trailers. They will also rent or lease trailers.

Kirk said the refurbishing aspect is the latest part of their business.

“The newest addition to what we’re doing is the truck wash,” he said.

They have an area for oil changes

and lubes, a shop, truck wash, sales lot and inside will eventually carry truck parts and chrome accessories.

Kirk is researching how Truck Town can be a drop-off point for used oil.

Kirk said the new building contains all of the latest technology.

The shop is also high-tech in another aspect. He said they have a system to use waste oil to heat the shop, considered an alternative energy source.

“It’s as new as you can get,” he said.

The two started in Oberlin in 1988, selling cars from a one-room building. Eventually they expanded and grew into the location they had. Holly said the entire process to move began nearly two years ago.

Their transition to selling semis started when they decided to get out of the music business. Holly had been touring, and they decided to come back to Kansas. They had bought their first semi, and later sold when they came back.

They also wanted a business that

would be regional, and trucks were the logical choice for them. Their decision to move to Colby more than a year ago was prompted by the need for more space, and the fact relocating by Interstate 70 would

provide even more business.

“We’ve been busier than planned,” Kirk said.

They currently have five full-time and two part-time employees

in Colby. They’re also keeping three full-time and one part-time employees in Oberlin.

The Youngs thank Colby City Manager Carolyn Armstrong to make the move easier.



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Truck Town employee Mark Bartlett put new lug nuts on a semi tire Friday. The business opened last month after construction began six months ago. Owners Kirk and Holly Young (left) relocated the retail portion of the business from Oberlin. The business includes retail, shop and wash.



Kansas debt grows

WICHITA (AP) — State per-capita debt has nearly quadrupled in the last 12 years, a new Wichita State University study has found.

As Kansas’ debt ballooned to nearly \$4 billion, the state went from being ranked 43rd among the 50 states for \$363-per-capita debt in 1992 to a 17th-placeranking in 2004, according to the research at Wichita State’s Public Finance Center.

Simply put, if the state had to pay off its debt today, every man, woman and child would owe roughly \$1,400.

Those figures are likely to get some attention as state lawmakers begin their annual session Monday.

Bart Hildreth, the principal author of the study, said the amount of state debt is critical because taxpayers will eventually have to pay it all off — with interest. Hildreth said the state has not reached a crisis point but it should be cautious about borrowing more.

Duane Goossen, the state’s secretary of administration and budget director, said he had not yet seen the report and couldn’t comment on it directly.

“Although our debt level has risen, it is, I believe, manageable within the state budget,” he said.

Goossen said the bulk of the increased debt came from two sources — the state highway construction program and a \$500 million bond issue to help pay off unfunded liabilities in the Kansas Public Employee Retirement System.