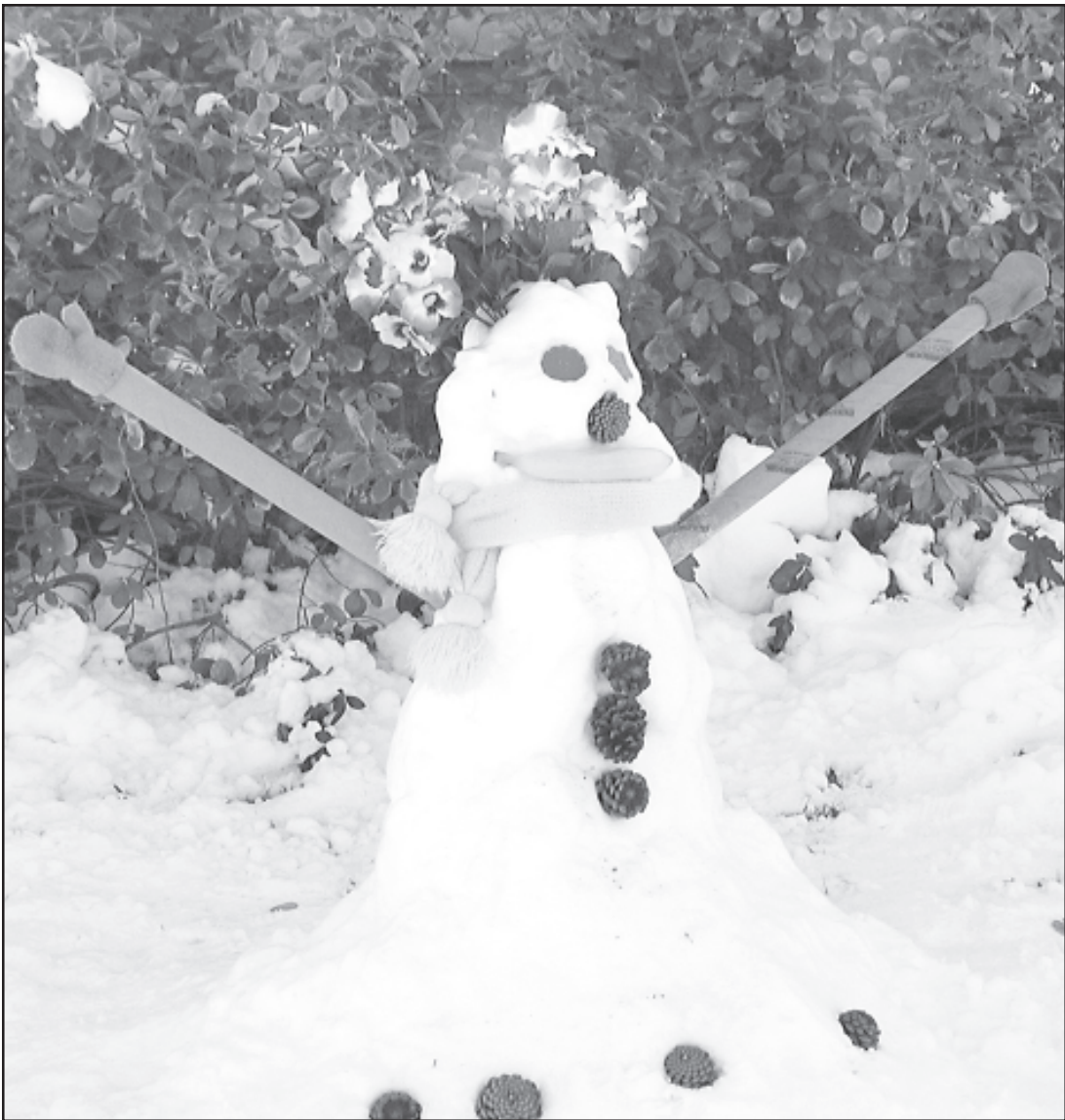


‘I’m melting! I’m melting!’



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

It looked like “Snowmen City” last Friday at Puddle Duck Preschool, 520 W. 5th St., but by Tuesday, most of the snow people were not looking perky as warmer temperatures returned. Stick arms, pom-poms, beads and other accessories lay on the ground or like in the photo above, tall figures have become noticeably shorter. The weatherman, however, is calling for a 30 percent chance of snow on Saturday, which might give the snow people a reprieve.

## Palestinians vote for parliament

GAZACITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — Amid tight security and a sea of green and yellow flags, Palestinians cast ballots in their first parliament election in a decade Wednesday — a historic vote integrating Islamic militants into Palestinian politics and determining the future of peacemaking with Israel. Both the ruling Fatah Party and its challenger, the Islamic militant Hamas, said they were confident of victory, while pollsters said the race was too close to call. Both parties said they would consider a coalition if no clear victor emerges. “These elections will determine the fate of the Palestinian people,” said Mohammed Shaabein, a 71-

year-old retiree in the northern Gaza town of Beit Lahiya. Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas, who voted in the West Bank city of Ramallah, said elections were proceeding smoothly, but complained of Israeli travel restrictions on West Bank roads. Israel had said it would ease checkpoints on voting day. “We are so happy with this election festival,” Abbas said, after dipping his index finger in ink, as required by all those casting ballots to prevent double voting. The day had a joyous feel — some party activists decorated their cars with red carnations, as if for a wedding — and no disruptions were

reported, despite initial concern about possible violence. Some 13,500 police officers were deployed at 1,008 polling stations, taking up positions on rooftops and at entrances to enforce a weapons ban. In the West Bank refugee camp of Balata, gunmen who had initially threatened to derail voting checked their automatic rifles at the door before casting their votes. However, right-wing Israeli lawmakers and extremists attempted to force their way into a Palestinian polling station in east Jerusalem, with 75 policemen blocking their way. And in the southern Gaza town of Khan Younis, police fired into the air to push back a crowd.

## Canadian election expected to improve ties with the U.S.

OTTAWA, ONT. (AP) — Stephen Harper pledged to quickly carry out his campaign promises to cut taxes, get tough on crime and repair strained ties with Washington after his Conservative Party won national elections and ended 13 years of Liberal Party rule in Canada. That may be easier said than done. The Conservatives’ winning margin was too narrow to rule with a majority, a situation that will make it hard for them to get legislation through the divided House of Commons. Monday’s vote showed that Canadians are weary of the Liberal Party’s broken promises and corruption scandals. They were willing to give Harper a chance to govern despite concerns that some of his social views are extreme. “Tonight friends, our great country has voted for change, and Canadians have asked our party to take the lead in delivering that change,” Harper told some 2,000 cheering supporters at his campaign headquarters in Calgary. He said his new government — not likely to be sworn in for several weeks — would immediately move to cut the unpopular national sales tax from 7 to 6 percent, “reform the justice system to fight against crime and gangs,” and begin to allocate \$1,042 to Canadian families for each child they have needing daycare. He also wants to introduce a fed-

eral accountability act that will monitor government spending in an effort to avoid the corruption scandals that have plagued the Liberals. “We will do this because shuffling the deck in Ottawa is not good enough,” he said. “We need to do this to make the system more accountable to you, the Canadian taxpayers.” Relations with the Bush administration will likely improve under Harper as his ideology runs along the same lines of many U.S. Republicans. Harper has said he would reconsider a U.S. missile defense scheme rejected by the Liberal government of Prime Minister Paul Martin. He also said he wanted to move beyond the Kyoto debate by establishing different environmental controls, spend more on the Canadian military, expand its peacekeeping missions and tighten security along the U.S. border to prevent terrorists and guns from crossing. Final results for the 308-seat House showed Conservatives with 124 seats; Liberals with 103; the Bloc Quebecois with 51, New Democratic Party with 29; and one seat to an Independent. The Conservatives also earned 10 seats in Quebec, where they were virtually shut out in the last elections of June 2004. Harper said it was symbolic of the Quebecois desire for national unity as opposed to sovereignty for the French-speaking province. “Our government will build a

new and dynamic voice for federalism in Quebec,” Harper said. Martin conceded defeat and said he would step down as head of the party, though remain in Parliament to represent the Montreal seat he won again. It was an unusual move to do both on the same night, but Martin appeared upbeat and eager to continue to fight the Conservatives from House opposition benches. “I have just called Stephen Harper and I’ve offered him my congratulations,” Martin told a subdued crowd at his headquarters in Montreal. “We differ on many things, but we all share a believe in the potential and the progress of Canada.” The Conservative victory ended more than a decade of Liberal Party rule and could shift the traditionally liberal country to the right on socio-economic issues such as health care, taxation, abortion and gay marriage. Some Canadians have expressed reservations about Harper’s views opposing abortion and marriages between gays and lesbians. The Liberals have angered Washington in recent years, condemning the war in Iraq, and criticizing President Bush for rejecting the Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gas emissions and enacting punitive Canadian lumber tariffs. Martin, 67, had trumpeted eight consecutive budget surpluses and sought to paint Harper as a right-winger posing as a moderate to woo mainstream voters.

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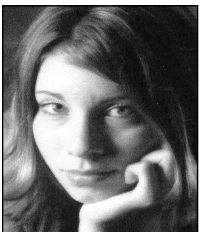
McKenzie Grace  
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Chelsie Kramer  
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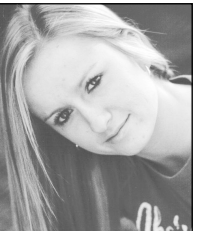
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## Come to the 10th annual Northwest Kansas All-Star Volleyball Match

Sunday, January 29  
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12th & Arcade

## Watch some of the best volleyball seniors from Northwest Kansas play!

Admission is \$4 for adults and \$3 for children under 12.

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