

## Planting time



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Master Gardener Ann Miner placed mulch around yucca and hen and chick plants in front of the Thomas County Office Complex Thursday. The gardeners were working on the garden in front of extension and landscaping around the office complex. Extension agent Doug Musick said the group planted two van loads of plants donated by Dan Baalman of Golden Plains Garden Center and Greenhouses in Colby.

# U.S. soldiers hit the links in the desert thanks to gifts

GARDEN CITY (AP) — From the green golf courses of Garden City to the Green Zone in Baghdad, Kaye Nichols has found a way to stay connected to her son, Tim Nichols, a specialist with C Company, 2nd Battalion, 137th Infantry, currently stationed in the Iraqi capital.

Kaye Nichols, who lives outside of Garden City and owns Kirby Service Center, and Tim Nichols have organized a local program to send golf equipment to soldiers currently fighting in Iraq.

"We are only allowed to bring so much stuff here and on the return trip home," Tim Nichols said in a recent interview via e-mail. "Golf clubs would not be allowed. ... There is no real golf course, and I did not want to risk or leave behind my personal clubs."

Tim Nichols, who grew up in Holcomb and is now a Wichita resident, also served as a Marine during the first Gulf War in Iraq in 1991.

The effort to provide golf equipment began during the 2005 holiday season when Kaye Nichols was at a loss as to what to send her son for Christmas. With the help of some friends, she was able to put together a package of several golf clubs and balls.

"I felt like everybody needs some kind of entertainment," Kaye Nichols said. "I couldn't send him clothes. ... I couldn't send him food."

While golfing in a war zone would seem like a dangerous activity, the soldiers play only in protected areas.

Even those aren't always guaranteed to be safe, Tim Nichols said.

"We play on base. ... It is mostly safe there," he said. "The bad guys will shoot bullets or mortars over the wall now and then, but we don't play while that is going on."

Even with firefights nearby and

**“ It is a big diversion.... that means you are not thinking about where you are or why.”**

Tim Nichols  
U.S. soldier

bombs exploding in the background, Tim Nichols said, punctuating the air with a swift swing of a club provides a welcome distraction, if only briefly.

"It is a big diversion," he said. "(Hitting) the ball requires concentration, and that means you are not thinking about where you are or why. But there is not much time to use them. We are working 12 hours a day, and most of us only get a day off here and there, one or two a month."

While the unit has a good selection of clubs, it is always in need of more golf balls, Tim Nichols said.

"What we go through is balls," he said. "We like to hit them into either a field or into the lake. That loses balls fast though. The field has tall grass and some have unexploded bombs. It is hard to get balls back from there and impossible to get them out of the lake."

There are five golf courses in the Wichita area that have been assisting with the program, Tim Nichols said.

For Kaye Nichols, the equipment program has allowed her to stay connected with her son while avoiding the steady influx of information on the war.

"This time I hardly pay attention to the news. ... I can't, I just can't," Kaye Nichols said. "I learned my lesson the last time. Before, I was

taken over by it. I don't want to do that again. It consumed my life."

The effort is also a way anyone interested can support the troops in a direct way, she said, adding that she sent her son a package of 200 golf balls for his birthday two weeks ago.

"A lot of people always want to know what they can do. ... Well, this is one thing they can do," she said. "We need people to bring in anything that is golf related — tees, balls, clubs or gloves."

Collecting the equipment has also given Tim Nichols' nephew, Chris Foreman, 13, a way to stay connected with his uncle for the next several months.

Tim Nichols taught him how to play five years ago, and Foreman has since taken up the sport full time. He said he would like to play in high school.

"He is the one who got me interested in golf," Foreman said.

"We don't get to talk on the phone much, but just knowing that I'm helping him out, giving him something to do and getting his mind off the war, makes me feel closer to him."

"It also gives me something to look forward to when he comes back — so when he does, I can show him how I've improved and we can do what we did a couple of years ago."

## Goddard leads state's growth rate

GODDARD (AP) — Five years ago, Michelle and Craig Bay moved their family from west Wichita to Goddard because they liked the small-town feel. They found a house at the right price that was big enough to raise a growing family.

"We liked the fact we were close to Wichita but far enough away," Michelle Bay said.

Two things drew them to town, they said: good schools and a small-town feel.

Goddard's population has risen 57 percent over the past five years, making it the state's fastest-growing city, census estimates show.

Andover had long held that distinction, but this year it ranked sixth statewide.

Goddard's growth spurt started in 2000 with a handful of new housing developments. Since then, the city has averaged seven new homes each month, Mayor Jim Singletary said.

The school district is expanding to keep up, building two new elementary schools — one will open this fall — and one new middle school to handle the increase in students.

Missy Davis, assistant manager at the city pool, sees the effect of Goddard's population growth every day.

More than 200 kids show up at the

pool on an average day, she said.

"With all the new building of schools, we are definitely seeing more kids," she said.

In his office at City Hall, Singletary, who also is the school district's transportation discipline coordinator, wore a T-shirt emblazoned with ruby slippers and the words, "There's no place like home, Goddard, Kansas."

He and his wife, Annette — she is the school district spokeswoman — moved to Goddard in 1988 from Wichita Falls, Texas.

"It's quiet, and you aren't in the direct line of traffic," Jim Singletary said. "But you've got the convenience of a big city."

Much of Goddard's growth spurt began north of U.S. 54 when John Dugan began buying large tracts of land.

Dugan, whose great-grandfather homesteaded near Goddard in 1872, bought more than 1,000 acres, persuaded Goddard to annex the land and began selling it off to developers.

That brought developments such as The Seasons, St. Andrews and Spring Hill.

"My roots and my heart lie in Goddard," Dugan said. "I started with the idea that this small city is close to a large metropolitan area and that someday it would all fill in.

That's happening. Goddard is going to do nothing but grow."

That closeness to Wichita is why the homes sell quickly, said developer Paul Kelsey.

"The fact that Wichita is three miles away makes travel time insignificant," he said. "You have one stoplight in between you and Wichita."

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Check our website: [www.shorrock.com/colby](http://www.shorrock.com/colby)

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