

Opinion



Free Press Viewpoint

A sign of things to come

Congratulations and thank you to all involved with the installation of Colby's new message sign adjacent to Interstate 70 between Colby's two exits.

The thousands of people who drive up and down I-70 will know a little more about our fair town and community and may even be curious enough to know what else is going on after they read the messages.

Big flashing lights is a great way to get motorists' attention. That's been proven at Oasis Travel Center at exit 53 because of its similar electronic sign.

The activation of the new lighted message board was perfect the day before Thanksgiving Day four-day weekend- the busiest travel time of the year.

The sign is a wonderful complement to the Colby Visitor's Center at exit 53, brilliantly ran and staffed by Ralph Fischer.

The sign is intended to promote Prairie Museum of Art History and our annual events, but it could help in other areas. That could just be the beginning of things bigger and better. Someone stops at the museum then asks for other things to do, places to go and shop while in town.

Besides, those people who stayed overnight in a Colby hotel room, paid for the sign anyway via a tax. We need to invite those people to come back and look around.

Remember, the sign is only a way to get people to stop in Colby. Our friendliness, helpfulness and manners will be what those people remember most.

— John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press

About those letters . . .

The *Free Press* encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, if at all possible, and should include a telephone number and an address. All letters must include a signature. Unsigned letters cannot be published. We reserve the right to edit for clarity and length, and, likewise, reserve the right to reject letters deemed to be of no public interest or libelous.

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@nwkansan.com or pdecker@nwkansan.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-4774
U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-6521
U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 2443 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. 202/225-2715 or Fax 202/225-5124
State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building, 303 SW 10th St. Rm. 171-W, Topeka 66612. 785/296-7676 e mail: jmorrison@ink.org web: www.ink.org/public/legislators/jmorrison
State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th St., Rm. 128-S., Topeka, Kan. 66612, 785/296-7399 ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us



The 12 days of Christmas

A couple of weeks ago, the Thomas County Extension office hosted a "Harvest of Holidays" event with Diann Gerstner, Logan County Agent Lori Sporer, and Melinda Daily with the Sunflower District (Wallace, Sherman and Cheyenne counties).

One of the handouts dealt with "the 12 days of Christmas," and even though most of the time has passed (it started the day after Thanksgiving), it still might be useful for those of us who are behind. Lori Sporer submitted the following list:

On the first day of Christmas: The day after Thanksgiving (Nov. 24) purchase Christmas card stamp and computer address labels. Also put up outside lights and decorations.

• Oh boy, I am already behind, but my husband, Randy, did put up outside lights in the back yard.

On the second day: (Nov. 25) Put up the tree and finalize the gift list.

• Doggone it, I am getting really behind now. • This was my birthday and turning 54 took most of the day to accept it.

On the third day: (Nov. 26) Put up Christmas nick nacs, collectibles, family holiday treasures and start looking through your recipes for special dinners and holiday baking.

• Does it count for anything that I am thinking about these things?

On the fourth day: (Nov. 27) Delegate a family member to write the annual Christmas letter. Allow yourself only 20 minutes to write it. Use humor and keep it short...it isn't the only letter they'll get.

• I am pitiful and extremely disorganized. Let's not talk about where I am at this point in the list.

On the fifth day: (Nov. 28) Write one-fourth of your Christmas cards and finish putting out the decorations.

• Maybe I can get a reprieve on this one.

On the sixth day: (Nov. 29) The mid-week is a great time to do your Christmas shopping to beat the crowds. Plan ahead and either use vacation time or a discretionary day. Go early and take



Patty Decker

• Deep Thoughts

your lists. Also complete another one-fourth of the cards.

• Gee whiz, that's sure a tall order for this week. Maybe I can also put on my list to get some canned goods for Genesis and buy some items for soldiers in Iraq to donate to the Northwest Kansas Family Readiness group — drop boxes are at Wal-Mart.

On the seventh day: (Nov. 30) Remind the grandparents of the children's Christmas programs at church and school. Complete another one-fourth of the cards.

• Oh boy, I am knee-deep in alligators at this point, but at least the children are grown-up.

On the eighth day: (Dec. 1) Finalize your dinner plans and if you plan on having a party, consider making it potluck.

• Whew....this one isn't so bad since I probably won't be having any big parties.

On the ninth day: (Dec. 2) Finish up the Christmas cards today! Make a menu for a buffet style Christmas morning breakfast. Set up a gift wrap station, a card table with tape, scissors, paper, boxes, tissue paper and bows.

• Thankfully, it will be Saturday. Of course, this is also a busy news day and maybe others might consider some of these activities too. For example, Santa's lunch is 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at Colby Grade School; Santa City is open 1 to 5 p.m.; Steve Molstad's reception at Ascension-on-the-Prairie Episcopal Church from 3:30 to 5 p.m.; the flag pole dedication at 2 p.m. at the Masonic Lodge, 215 N. Franklin, the Lions Club pancake feed is from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m.; and maybe

I will drive around town and decide who I think has the best Christmas displays for the decorating contest. Nominations are accepted at Dillons and Wal-Mart. If I am forgetting something, please forgive me. Actually, setting up a gift wrap station is a good idea! But again, I haven't done that yet.

On the tenth day: (Dec. 3) Prepare your baking day. Organize recipes, make a list, include festive paper plates, trays, zip lock bags, and remember to get fresh yeast, baking soda and powder.

• Is everyone this organized? I am so depressed, but I know the Colby Christmas Parade at 5:30 p.m. on Franklin Avenue will get me in the mood. Remember there's remote control car racing at First Baptist Church from 3 to 5 p.m. also!

On the eleventh day: (Dec. 4) Make plans with your loved ones for a special night and send out any party invitations at least 12 days before the party. Also call and confirm family holiday plans.

• I think I better back up and buy my Christmas cards, shop, and generally review this entire list.

On the twelfth day: (Dec. 5) Baking Day! Bake goodies for the family, neighbors, teachers, ministers, postman, co-workers and finish all gift wrapping.

Now, you can enjoy the rest of your holiday season because the Christmas "to do" list is completed.

• Hmmm...doubtful I will be done, but will continue to persevere. Did anyone make it?

Christmas is such a fun time of the year and even though I am truly behind in what I should have done, that's just me. Somehow it will all get done and, in the end, will be the best Christmas ever. As Tiny Tim would say, "God bless us everyone one."

Decker is editor of the Free Press. Her column appears on Fridays.

Your turn

Understand the producers' situation

Jon Starns Brewster

Recently returning from the KACD (Kansas Association of Conservation Districts) convention in Wichita, I feel it is necessary for me to share my viewpoints and experience on the USDA Service Center office closures.

I am certain it is fair to say that the consensus of the producers of ranch and farm land that were present in Wichita do not want to see any county FSA or NRCS offices closed or merged. Through Legislative and Administration research I have come to find that some very unorthodox decision making has been going on. Monies allocated for conservation practices and administration has been reallocated to other states that have not done so well. Kansas ranks sixth in the nation for conservation applied to the ground. Why on earth would you try to fix something that isn't broke? Is this what you call taking from the efficient and giving to the less efficient? Do we not need more conservation rather than less? May of 2004 should answer that for you. I was taught and led to believe through time that agriculture was the backbone of this country, has this changed? Do other industries not depend on agriculture anymore?

This decision to reallocate conservation dollars was made by a man that goes by the title of Chief and the name of Bruce Knight. Since this decision, the president has decided to promote Mr. Knight to Under Secretary for Marketing

and Regulatory Programs. Arlen Lancaster has since then replaced him as Chief of NRCS.

Mr. Lancaster said in a recent meeting in Salina that 150 miles to the nearest USDA service center was of no concern to him. How many of you producers would like to drive 150 miles every time you visit the center? It is estimated that the average producer visits the USDA service center five times a year. Now let's put this in perspective for the average taxpayer. As Area I Representative of KACD, there are 18,870 producers in my 18 county area which extends from Cheyenne County to Wallace to Russell to Smith and all in between. I don't like to deal hypothetically however, if 18,870 of us drive half the distance of 150 miles then drove home that would be 14,152,500 miles at the current IRS rate, that would come to \$6,297,862.50. (Which by the way is more than the NRCS budget was cut for 2008)

If this were to happen, along with these dollars, how many other dollars would be spent from your current county in relation to saving miles for other trips? Respectfully so I am sure that you understand the situation producers are in right now.

There are 11 proposed USDA service center closures and many to follow. Just a few facts to throw into the dilemma are USDA's budget is \$77.7 billion which is less than one-half of 1 percent of the federal budget. Less than 25 percent of that one-half of 1 percent of the federal

budget is put into farm programs and conservation combined. More than 50 percent of USDA's budget goes to food and nutrition programs. Perhaps the new farm bill should be renamed the Food and Nutrition Bill.

I have been told by many legislators that it is hard to sell agriculture to urban legislators before elections. It looks to me like more than twice of the money in the farm bill goes to schools and welfare programs. Where are all the people on welfare - urban or rural? In my more recent conversations with legislators they have told me that they have received a few communications from producers concerning this subject matter. It is very obvious to me that if we don't all get involved with communicating to your legislators, state and federal, then when the economy turns sour, you will have absolutely no right to complain when you have to move to another area for a job.

It is a fact that USDA office closures will create a very large, negative impact on our communities. Farm program payments for this area alone come to over \$191 million which does not include loans, yield increases, and conservation practices. As USDA offices are closed across the state, services, population, and money will decline at a progressively negative rate. I urge all of us, whether we are directly involved in agriculture or not, to individually and through group efforts convey the importance of county offices as they now exist within our state.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

