

Opinion

Free Press Viewpoint



Colby area is full of magicians

The cold of Sunday evening was not felt because of the warmth in Colby for about a half hour.

Colby's ninth annual holiday parade definitely fit the parade's theme "Magic of Christmas."

According to Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Holly Stephens, a record 41 entries were in the parade. Consider the temperature was below freezing (but warmer than last year's parade) and you could easily think of a million other things to do. But that did not stop the hundreds of people who were in or watched the parade.

The magic was in the float designs.

Colby Ag's presentation was brilliant. What looked like a top hat, intentionally collapsed to show the ATV inside. The ATV was on a rotating stage complete with sprays of confetti.

Farmers and Merchants Bank actually built a gigantic snowglobe. Clear plastic surrounded a Christmas/winter scene.

Dillons' float was clever. Grocery carts were used as reindeer for Santa's sleigh.

Bickner Electric's float was, well, electrifying. The audience saw a holiday-decorated living room stroll down Franklin Avenue. Only electricians could do such work.

The college's campus crusade organization built a live Nativity set on a trailer to remind the people what Christmas is all about.

There were dozens of other floats with impressive designs and lights — Horlacher Jewelry, Dance Center and Starbucks, just to name a few.

If it was not the decorations that made the floats stand out, it was the support behind the groups. It looked like all of the Abilene Hustlers 4-H members were on their float and many Heartland Christian School students and parents were on their float.

A big thank you goes to Sunflower Bank for providing free hot dogs and College Drive Assembly of God Church for the strategically located hot chocolate stand along the parade route.

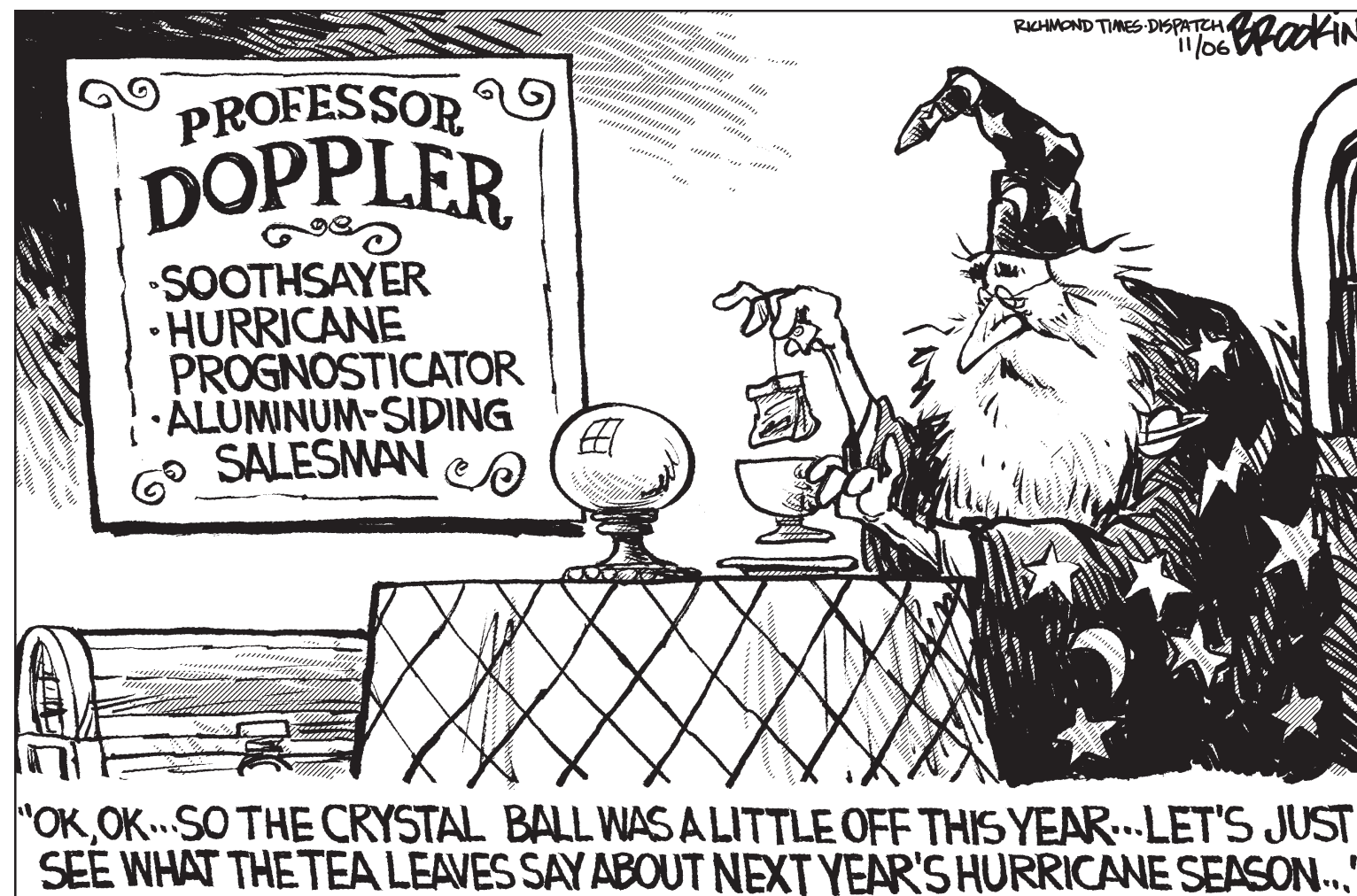
There is magic in Christmas in Colby — it's from all the people who made the parade a memorable one.

— John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press

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.

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Waiting for the puck to drop

The second NHL season after the lockout of 2004-2005 is two months old now.

I can count the number of games I've seen so far on one hand, and so far, the season has been pretty quiet.

No big trades have happened yet, but if one believes the rumors, a not-so-small one could happen at well, almost any time now.

The Colorado Avalanche let go one of its best players more than a year ago. Peter Forsberg was instrumental during the team's two Stanley Cup championship runs and was an integral part of their playoff success over the past decade.

In a twist of irony, he ended up signing a deal with the team that had originally drafted him back in 1992 — the Philadelphia Flyers.

But because of one of the most-touted trades ever in the league, Forsberg and most of Philly's future ended up belonging to the Quebec Nordiques, who moved to Colorado before the beginning of the 1995-1996 season.

The Flyers are off to their worst start in franchise history. Their general manager and head coach were ousted. Players have been benched but nothing much has changed.

They've won a few more games, but that's about it.

Now the pressure is still on Forsberg to perform. But that's an almost unrealistic expectation because Forsberg is in his first year as captain, and has been dealing with injuries.

He has a chronic foot injury that has sidelined him twice before.

As a matter of fact, he shouldn't even be playing right now. He had his second corrective sur-



Tisha Cox
 • Off The Beaten Path

gery on his right foot and ankle this summer, and was scheduled to have the same procedure done on his left foot and ankle, which would have kept him out until the beginning of 2007.

However, he opted not to have the surgery, and instead is playing through unnecessary pain out of a rumored sense of obligation to a team he realistically owes nothing.

Forsberg has a no-trade clause in his contract, and if he had any sense, he would waive it and go back to Colorado.

But of course, this is the Flyers I'm talking about, and the words "sense" and "logic" do not apply.

This is the team that has had some dubious practices when it comes to management and medical treatment of players.

Former GM Bobby Clark's feud with former team captain Eric Lindros will go down in league infamy.

And a bit of trivia — Lindros was drafted by the Nordiques in 1991. They chose him first pick in the draft, but he refused to play in Quebec, and his rights were eventually awarded to Philly.

Rumor does have it, and has been buzzing for

a couple of weeks now that Colorado is interested in re-acquiring Forsberg.

Makes sense. Colorado could use a No. 2 center because Avalanche captain Joe Sakic can't carry the team by himself.

And Forsberg, just with his presence, makes the players around him better.

Pressure off Sakic and leadership wouldn't be the only advantages.

Winger Milan Hejduk has been very unhappy since Forsberg's departure. The two were linemates, and buddies off-ice, so that would no doubt help boost Hejduk's confidence and performance.

Intangibles. So much more than just statistics makes a player good, or great.

In every sport, there are athletes that never put up great statistics, but make great leaders.

Forsberg was given the "C" in Philly because they thought he could rally the team there.

But his influence as a captain was Sakic, who leads by example. He is neither loud nor boisterous, but get results from his teammates. (He has been called "Quoteless Joe" by the press.)

Forsberg is much the same.

My point is Philly management pulled its usual asinine tricks, picking the best (i.e. most expensive) player and expecting results.

But team-building is more than money. Learning how to lose builds character. Maybe the Flyers can learn from that.

Tisha Cox is a general assignment reporter/photographer for the Free Press. Her column appears on Mondays. tcx@nwkansan.com.

Tracing the herd

By John Schlageck
 Kansas Farm Bureau

Farmers and ranchers have a deep-rooted sense of commitment when it comes to caring for their cattle, hogs, sheep — whatever their livestock. Nothing is better than overseeing a healthy, prosperous herd.

Most livestock people are also shrewd businessmen and women who keep a close eye on operating costs and an even closer eye on their bottom line. They continually seek out an edge that will bring more revenue into their operations.

There's a relatively new program in Kansas that is geared to helping producers with animal health, marketing and herd management — three key ingredients to a successful livestock operation. This new program is designed to chart information on livestock and has the potential to deliver a premium to the producer in the market place.

This program — that's gaining notoriety and is helping change the way livestock producers market their cattle — is called Beef Verification Solution (BVS).

Started by Kansas Farm Bureau in 2004, this identification program allows individual producers to track their cattle from the cows to the calves to the processing plant. Likewise, as the marketplace demands animal traceability to sat-

isfy consumer demands, Beef Verification Solution can position Kansas farmers and ranchers to take advantage of these market opportunities.

In the long run, this technology (radio frequency identification ear tags, electronic scanners and software) will help provide protection in the area of herd health by tracing foreign animal diseases and providing health surveillance by state and federal animal officials.

"The biggest reason for traceability or an animal identification program is to know where an animal comes from," Mark Nelson, Kansas Farm Bureau Commodities Director says. "In today's fluid market, livestock are moving farther and faster in this country."

As an example, Kansas cattle herds may be brucellosis-free, however cattlemen in this state continue to bring in livestock from other places. There is a need to know where an animal comes from.

Both source and age verification are vital. When this country recorded its first ever Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) case in December 2003, the Japanese and other Asian markets closed their doors to U.S. beef. In order to reopen those markets, the U.S. beef industry had to devise a way to ensure that all beef sold to those countries was from animals that met specific age requirements at the time they were processed.

The way to do so is to comply with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's export verification program.

"The first step for any producer thinking about selling source and age verified animals is to enroll in a USDA-approved program like ours," Nelson says.

Beef Verification Solution is an approved provider of age and source verified cattle through AgInfoLink's Process Verified Program. The biggest advantage of this process verified program is that it allows a producer to retain his/her marketing flexibility.

Producers can sell to more than one packer, feedlot or sale barn. This provides more bargaining power in the producer's hands and gives them the ability to sell the source and age information they've collected on their farm or ranch.

In the end, Beef Verification Solution is designed to connect farmers and ranchers with a service provider and assist them with animal identification. From a beef producer's perspective this will allow them to better manage their herd while meeting the all-important demands of consumers.

Editor's note: John Schlageck has been writing about farming and ranching in Kansas for more than 25 years. He is the managing editor of "Kansas Living," a quarterly magazine dedicated to agriculture and rural life in Kansas.

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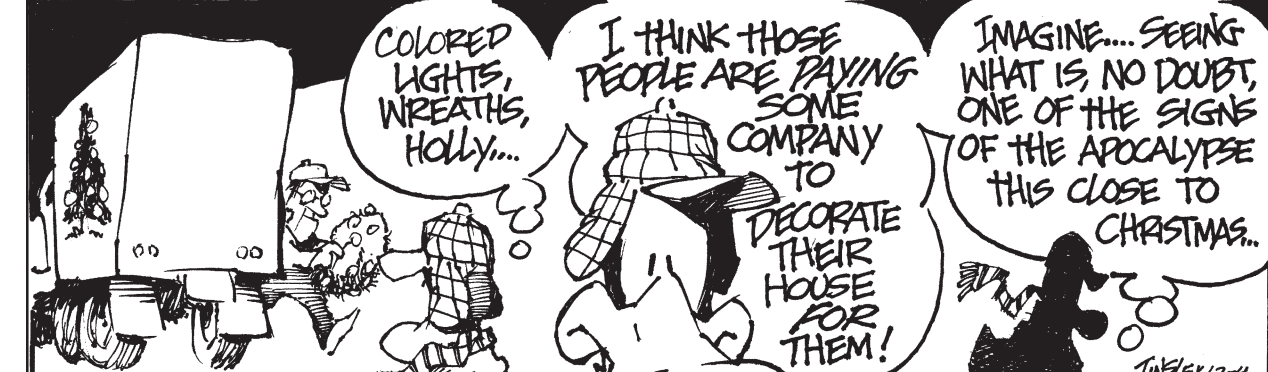
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