

Opinion



A Kansas Viewpoint

A well deserved pat on the back

By Tom Dreiling
Thanks to an Olathe youngster, our state came in for some great publicity at last Thursday's 2007 National Geographic *Geography Bee* in Washington, D.C. Suneil Iyer, 12, a student at Indian Trail Junior High School, Olathe, placed second in the national bee, and in the process won a \$15,000 college scholarship.
The winner was 14-year-old Caitlin Snaring, a homeschooled 8th grader from Redmond, Wash. She not only won a \$25,000 scholarship, but also won a lifetime membership in the National Geographic Society. Caitlin also has the distinction of being only the second girl to win the Bee since its debut in 1989.
This bee, like all the others, is tough and challenging. No short cuts. You either know the answer or you don't. No prompting. It's you and you alone in the spotlight.
The winning question was: "A city that is divided by a river of the same name was the imperial capital of Vietnam for more than a century. Name this city, which is still an important cultural center."
The answer? Hue.
While watching these kids perform so well, we chalk it up to the classroom teacher, the face we don't see, but a face deeply involved in the process.
When we see these kids stepping up and making us proud, don't we sometimes wonder what the problem is because all we seem to hear is more of the negative than the positive about our nation's classrooms?
Have we forgotten there is a lot of good being done?
Are we not paying attention?
Teachers are not the kind of people to pat themselves on the back. We need to do that for them. It certainly would be in order for us, right here at home, to pen a thank-you note recognizing our teachers for their efforts, their successes, and the good care and attention they give our children throughout the school year.
No truer words were spoken than these: "Where would anyone us be were it not for a teacher?"
You know the answer.
—Tom Dreiling is publisher of the Norton Telegram

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

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This ride is quick, I better enjoy it

I have been attending AA meetings the past five months and have had some success.
No, it's not the AA meetings you are probably thinking of.
These AA meetings are my own creation — Activity and Attention. I attend these meetings with my kids, Grant, 5, and Kari, 4.
The first AA meeting happened Christmas weekend last year. Wife Jennifer was cleaning the kitchen floor and she unconsciously put the chairs from the table in the kitchen in a row in the adjacent hallway. For some unknown reason, I visioned a bus in the chairs. Grant had always wanted to ride in a traditional bus, so I asked him if he wanted to ride in a bus. I pointed to the chairs. He looked and had the same vision.
In just a matter of moments all four of us were sitting in a chair acting like we were on a bus ride. The funnier parts happened when Jennifer and I started acting like Grant and Kari do on our long car trips. The kids, through their laughs, knew we were teasing them.
That's an AA meeting — it's really time spent in a unique way. Either Jennifer or I, or both of us, find an activity and give the kids the attention. The kids like the activity and the genuine attention we all receive from it.
Jennifer realized cleaning the kitchen floor could wait a little longer. Chances to spend time with the kids can't wait.
As parents before Jennifer and I, and those after us, finding quality time with the kids is a challenge. Parents work full-time jobs, come home



John Van Nostrand
• Line in the Dust

The walk from downtown Colby to home is an easy walk for the kids. Grant asked about the grain elevators, railroad tracks and what he calls "the big hill" on Country Club Drive - north of Fifth Street.
Kari saw a house we went to when we helped the Colby Wesleyan Church give flowers to moms for Mother's Day. She also looked for the cats in the yards.
You don't have to make gigantic, complex plans and spend bajillions for those kind of moments. A mom once told me at a Colby High basketball game she and her husband decided to spend money on good moments with their kids, not material things. I agree and sometimes you don't have to spend a dime for a good moment with young kids.
With school out and summer here, life won't change. I still have to work. Jennifer still has things to do too. Grant and Kari will both play T-ball this summer. There will be weekend trips to grandmas' houses, to the pool and maybe fishing in northern Wyoming where I swear God rested on his seventh day. We still need to be spontaneous and find some AA time.
For he kids' last day of preschool last week they got a ride to Fike Park for the class' year-end picnic.
I just hope they remember the bus ride on the kitchen chairs.
— John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press.

A long way to go

I just returned from Greensburg after a week of helping provide fire protection with a group from the Colby Fire Department for the cleanup effort and it was a real eye-opener.
I have ridden out three hurricanes and seen the effects of another. I have also seen the effects of a major tornado — the one that hit south Wichita in the early 90s — and I have seen the destruction of a war zone, but the totality of what happened to Greensburg was still overwhelming.
There is no doubt the city will require many years to recover from the devastation. Most of the homes are gone, the school is destroyed and the infrastructure — law enforcement, fire protection, EMS and utilities — are only now starting to come back online.
There are, however, many bright spots. The sheriff's department still needs a little help from outside agencies, but they are again able to protect their county and EMS is up and running.
There were also many positives in the way the operation was handled, especially at the ground level. In our case, there were nine firefighters from four departments, yet we quickly began working together as a unit.
You know a fire department has good morale when they play pranks and we apparently had good morale. As is the case in such events, our duties often went beyond fire protection. We also built and repaired signs for the streets and for events going on in town, helped close off dangerous buildings, smoothed a few ruffled feathers from time to time and even watered a herd of goats left behind.
We also rode out another thunderstorm in makeshift shelters which leaked (at least mine did) and slept on cots in what was left of the fire station.
There are bound to be some rough spots among agencies with different missions, but even those seemed to be cleared up quickly.
We were able to talk to some of the local folks and some of the stories were riveting. We were also able to hear the story first hand from Comanche County Fire Chief Larry Ellis, whose men were among the first to arrive on the scene. It was captivating.
Unfortunately, many of the locals will not return in the near future. Not because they do not want to, but rather because they have lost everything and must do something for shelter and a job.
They simply cannot wait until things are cleaned up and rebuilt. Some of them, however,



Jay Kelley
• Speaking my mind

expressed their desire to return at some future point. I won't speculate on the population loss, but it is safe to say that Greensburg will not be as big when it is rebuilt.
The Dillons store manager was apparently one of the heroes of that night. He opened the store and fed and sheltered his neighbors until help could arrive.
Unfortunately, the Kwik Shop, another subsidiary of Kroger, Inc., had a different view of disaster relief. They were open, operating from a trailer, and selling their wares at highly inflated prices.
I bought a disposable camera from them to take pictures of our group and the station for \$13.99. That isn't a bad profit considering the same camera costs \$4-9 anywhere else. The Topeka firefighters reported similar markups on tobacco.
There is a lot of work remaining. I can't say enough about the relief groups offering us food and drinks. We were also being fed as part of our mission, but many volunteers weren't and those groups, from all churches and relief organizations, were a godsend.
Those groups rely on volunteers, as do the professionals. No one sent people who did not want to go. If you can volunteer, do so. It will change you, but you won't regret it.
Jay Kelley is a local writer who speaks his mind from time to time. His e-mail is jkelly@st-tel.net.

About those letters . . .
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