



## Other Viewpoints

# Wildcats' season was a great ride

Every member of the Kansas State University football team and its coaching staff should have awakened Saturday feeling very good about their season and the thrills they provided Wildcat fans and casual observers throughout the state.

It was a great run, and everyone associated with the team should be proud of its accomplishments. We're quite sure Wildcat fans are proud of their favorite team, as they have every right to be.

College football players across the country start each season with high expectations and dreams of finishing the year in a bowl game. Certainly K-State players and coaches thought a winning season and a bowl game were within reach when they began practice in August.

We doubt anyone, however, was expecting K-State to be in the chase for the Big 12 title on the last weekend of the regular season. Finishing second in the conference race and being invited to play in the Cotton Bowl would have sounded like a fantasy even after the Wildcats' season-opening victory.

The journey from that initial, narrow win – over a team most expected the 'Cats to thump handily – all the way to the Cotton Bowl in Dallas was a testament to the desire and work ethic of the young men wearing the uniforms and their coaches, most notably head coach Bill Snyder.

The team went on a roll after that first win and was bowl eligible after its first six games, much earlier than most had thought that could happen. The winning streak hit seven before the Wildcats stumbled against the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University in back-to-back games. A strong finish with three consecutive wins left the team with a 10-2 record. By then, just about everyone who followed the team was expecting the invitation from the Cotton Bowl that came through a short time later.

Snyder quipped on more than one occasion that his players, with their habit of winning close games in the fourth quarter, were going to give him a heart attack. Many fans, too, probably watched with hearts stuck in their throats on more than one occasion as the team proceeded to win a lot of squeakers.

No one was really complaining, though.

It wasn't that long ago that 10-win seasons were the norm for the Wildcats. But Snyder retired and a new regime wasn't able to get the team anywhere close to 10 wins or a prestigious bowl. Snyder returned to "calm the waters," as he put it, but from here it sure looks like he's making waves again in Manhattan.

Winning the Cotton Bowl trophy in front of the thousands of purple-clad faithful who traveled to Dallas for the game would have been a nice touch, to be sure, but that bauble's elusiveness doesn't sour the taste of a great season.

It was a wonderful ride, and the Wildcats are to be congratulated for accomplishing what few could have imagined.

– *The Topeka Capital-Journal, via the Associated Press*

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# Resolved: build finances and programs

Dear community,

Welcome to the New Year! I hope everyone had a wonderful holiday season.

It goes without saying, but I trust everyone remembered the real reason for Christmas – hint, his name is in the title – and everyone remembered why it was so important to stay up until midnight on the 31st – to celebrate every last minute of my birthday. The fireworks were a nice touch as well.

My family spent the holidays in the “deep south,” putting almost 2,900 miles on the car. What surprised me, though, was how I looked forward to returning home. In just a few short months, Colby has become home to the Vaciks and that is due to each of you – thanks.

I am not much for New Year's resolutions. If we know what we ought to be doing and are not doing it, we probably never thought it important and will lose focus quickly.

On the other hand, the new year can provide a time for reflection and a template for planning ahead. In that line, I offer my resolutions for the new year at the college.

First, I resolve to quit worrying about money. That is more difficult than it might seem. In fact, the only way I can think to keep this resolution will be to undertake serious fund raising over the coming year or longer.

Frankly, even after cutting around three-quarters of a million dollars from the previous year's budget, holding off on raises and not filling a number of open positions, the last few months of 2011 were troubling. Were it not for a generous gift from the Pat Embree Estate Trust, assistance from our county and creative fund management, I am not certain how the college would have made it to 2012.

The problem is the timing of our cash flow, which is heavily weighted to the beginning of the year (January) and somewhat to the middle (May and August). In order to survive the lean months or cover unforeseen issues that might



**Steve Vacik**

## • From the president

arise, we must have reserves on hand.

The rule of thumb is that an institution should have three months of operating expenses on hand; we have less than one month. Not only does the lack of reserves hinder the college from innovation, it is an issue the Higher Learning Commission will address when they review our accreditation in a couple of years.

Asking people to contribute to build reserves is not as exciting as giving to a specific project but it is necessary if we are going to be the college you expect. I want to stop worrying about money, so we are going to work fervently toward alleviating our current circumstances.

Despite monetary concerns, I also resolve on behalf of the college to pursue excellence in the coming year. As someone mentioned to me, we cannot be content. You have heard the expression, “good is the enemy of great.”

We are moving ahead with the extension of the nursing program to WaKeeney, an expansion of our offerings in Norton, the inclusion of an online-only option for the vet tech program and, pending state approval, the introduction of additional allied health programs in partnership with fellow community colleges. The college also has personnel needs that must be addressed to serve the needs of students and meet state and federal mandates and guidelines.

Colby Community College introduced the concept last year of seeking to be different, better and purposeful. To maintain that goal, we must be active rather than reactive. So when you see or hear something or someone new as-

sociated with the college, it is not because we are flush with resources. Rather, taking what we have, we are striving to make it go as far as possible. We have set continual improvement in all aspects of the institution as a goal.

My final resolution is best summed up in something shared with me, to be intentional in decision-making. Too often we allow decisions to be directed by circumstance rather than planning. One thing that has become clear to me is the need to research, develop a plan with broad input, act decisively and then use the results to improve or change the plan.

This year, the college will be working on a strategic plan for the next three to five years – where we want to be and how we will know when we get there. This plan will direct everything from curriculum design to budgeting. Once it has been developed and reviewed by college personnel and the board of trustees, we will make it available to our community so you can know what we hope to accomplish.

We are already seeing the importance in being intentional through recruiting and retention. It is important that we work with focus to become a college of which you can be proud. The development of a purpose-driven, ambitious strategic plan will show our commitment to be intentional in the coming years.

These resolutions ought to keep us on task for 2012, which I am convinced has the potential to be among the best years ever at the college. There are too many to do an adequate job of thanking for their support in 2011, but I would be remiss if I did not mention my gratitude to our faculty, staff and trustees for their service to and support of students during the past year. To everyone, here's to a year full of blessings too numerous to count.

*Dr. Stephen Vacik is president of Colby Community College. Vacik is a native of Fargo, N.D.*

# Education in 2011: doing more with less

State funding of K-12 education, which consumes 51 percent of the Kansas state tax dollar was cut to \$3,780. In response to the 2005 Kansas Supreme Court Montoy v. Kansas ruling, base state aid per pupil was targeted at \$4,400 for 2009. But massive revenue shortfalls forced cuts that pushed the funding back to 1990s levels.

The number of school districts in Kansas continued to fall to 286. After having remained level at 303 for decades, the dramatic decrease in base state aid as well as a shift in Kansas population eastward forced many smaller rural schools to consolidate. Not on the radar were attendance centers shut down and students moved to other schools within the district.

This resulted in additional reductions in teachers and administrators. Having lost over 1600 licensed personnel in the summer of 2010, several hundred more licensed positions were lost this summer. These were disproportionately from music, art and other subjects outside the mandated testing. Many newly graduated teachers found no jobs and had to move into other career paths.

Meanwhile, Kansas added 777 more students this fall. With more students and fewer teachers, class sizes have continued to increase.

Nationwide, for-profit online schools continued their record expansion of low-value programs and devouring federal money directed



**John Richard Schrock**

## • Education Frontlines

to aiding returning veterans. These operations that often spend more money on advertising than on faculty drained a half billion dollars in GI Bill funding last year.

Alternate route programs continued to proliferate despite the 2008 end of the teacher shortage, producing partly trained teachers who compete for limited vacancies.

The Kansas State Board of Education voted to have a seat at the table of National Science Standards. Hoping to be one of the six to eight states to develop the standards, the board voted to apply for a “seat at the table.” Achieve Inc., the group that will develop the “Next Generation Science Standards” decided to have all 20 state applicants at the table.

Then in November, an additional six states were allowed to join. There is little illusion left that Kansas will have any significant input, Achieve admits they “will rely on a group of outside experts to help make a final decision.”

Gov. Brownback carried through on cam-

paign promises to modify the state tax formula for school funding. So far, poorer rural districts are promised that they will be “held harmless.” Maintaining the current low tide funding will continue the impoverishment of rural and mid-income school education.

Meanwhile, the Schools for Fair Funding group of 55 Kansas school districts, who filed their lawsuit for greater tax funding in December 2010, will still take their case to trial in June 2012.

Faced with impossible partisan gridlock, Congress failed to revise the No Child Left Behind insane goal of 100 percent-proficient-by-2014 despite bipartisan admission that it was harming American education at many levels. U.S. Department of Education Secretary Duncan therefore is offering “waivers” for states that will agree to performance pay and other federal mandates.

The federal budget compromise continues funding for Race-to-the-Top grants that extort state compliance with federal policy.

The only bright light for parents and students going into 2012 is a growing nationwide effort to boycott state assessment tests and bring the No Child system to a halt.

*John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.*

## Mallard Fillmore

## • Bruce Tinsley

**Mallard's 2012 New-Year's Prediction**  
# 21:

IN AN ATTEMPT TO CUT COSTS, THE U.S. POSTAL SERVICE WILL CONSOLIDATE ITS 'DEPARTMENT OF LOSING YOUR STUFF...'

...AND IT'S 'DEPARTMENT OF BREAKING YOUR STUFF' INTO ONE DEPARTMENT.