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Soldier here returns from duty

By Sam Dieter
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A Colby citizen-soldier who spent a year in Kuwait can add one more chapter to a long military career, this time as part of a National Guard unit that stayed relatively far out of harm's way. Staff Sgt. Troy Rall is the seventh-grade science teacher at Colby Middle School when he's not off on a military assignment. He was one of three soldiers from Colby who went to the port of Ash Shuaiba in April with the 65-man 170th Support Maintenance Company. The unit, which has headquarters in Norton, was greeted with a homecoming ceremony Dec. 23 at the Salina Airport. "To have these soldiers coming home just in time for Christmas is a wonderful present for

their families," said Maj. Gen. Lee Tafanelli, state adjutant general. "They did an outstanding job during their deployment and have certainly earned this time at home during the holidays." "We were mostly port security," he said of his job in Kuwait. "We had to inspect vehicles and make sure they weren't carrying contraband." The unit was assigned to the port, working on a pier where mostly military equipment was being unloaded. "We did some security patrol while we were there," he said, adding that they acted as a "quick reaction force," a group of soldiers who are ready in case of trouble. "If something goes down," Rall said, "they're the ones that react the quickest. Not a lot happened."

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County says farewell

County Commissioner Ken Christiansen (right in top photo) spoke with Joe Hickert (left), director of the county Emergency Medical Service, and Don Morton, the assistant director, at a retirement reception Monday afternoon. Over cake, Commissioner Byron Sowers (from left in right photo) and his wife Linda chatted with Larry Maxwell, the president of Farm Credit of Western Kansas.

SAM DIETER/Colby Free Press



Schools receive \$1,000 grants

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Colby Public Schools and Sacred Heart Catholic School each got \$1,000 from the Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation of Kansas to help keep their kids healthy. The schools received two of 159 Healthy Habits for Life grants that the foundation sent last month to Kansas schools. They were sent to Tami Brown, wellness committee chair for the Colby schools, and Elsie Reitchek, the physical education teacher at Sacred Heart. Brown said the money will provide students in kindergarten through second grade with healthy snacks but could be used for other activities.

"It has to have some connection to healthy habits," she said, "in other words, either physical activity or nutrition." Food Service Director Rhonda Carney said kids will get an afternoon snack twice a week, fresh fruits and vegetables, or another healthy snack such as granola crackers or Goldfish crackers. The snacks will be in the afternoon, she said, because many elementary kids eat lunch early. "The kindergarten kids eat lunch at 10:45," Carney said, "so by the afternoon they're getting kind of hungry." The school has been getting a grant for healthy snacks from the Kansas Department of Education

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County fixes budget mix-up

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The Thomas County commissioners held a special meeting last Wednesday to transfer money within the budget after a mix-up over audit instructions earlier in the year left several funds in the red. Three resolutions were passed at the special meeting to balance the books for 2012. The first was to transfer \$60,000 from the Ambulance fund to the Ambulance Capital Outlay fund. The second was to move \$50,000 from the Special Equipment fund to the Road and Bridge fund. The final transfer was \$75,000 from the Road and Bridge fund to the Special Highway Improvement fund. "No money is lost," Commissioner Paul Steele said while the transfer forms were filled out. This meeting followed a series of year-end transfers which the commissioners approved at their regular meeting last Monday. Deputy County Treasurer Layn Bruggeman said she learned that she balanced

the books based on a different set of numbers from what the commissioners had approved. The accounting she did for the transfers was based on an audit report sent to her Sept. 13 by accounting firm Adams, Brown, Beran and Ball. The firm does the audit of the county's finances each year before the commissioners approve the transfers. After the audit reports were given to her in September, Bruggeman said, the commissioners decided on several changes to the way they transferred the funds. The firm then made new reports, and the commissioners approved the transfers based off the newer versions of the reports, not the ones Bruggeman was using. Steele, a retired accountant, said he got an audit report from the firm earlier in the year, and sent suggestions back for changes. He said he wanted less money to be transferred out of Road and Bridge because of several projects the county completed. Bruggeman said when she balanced the books based on the newer reports, she found that the difference left several of the county funds in the red.

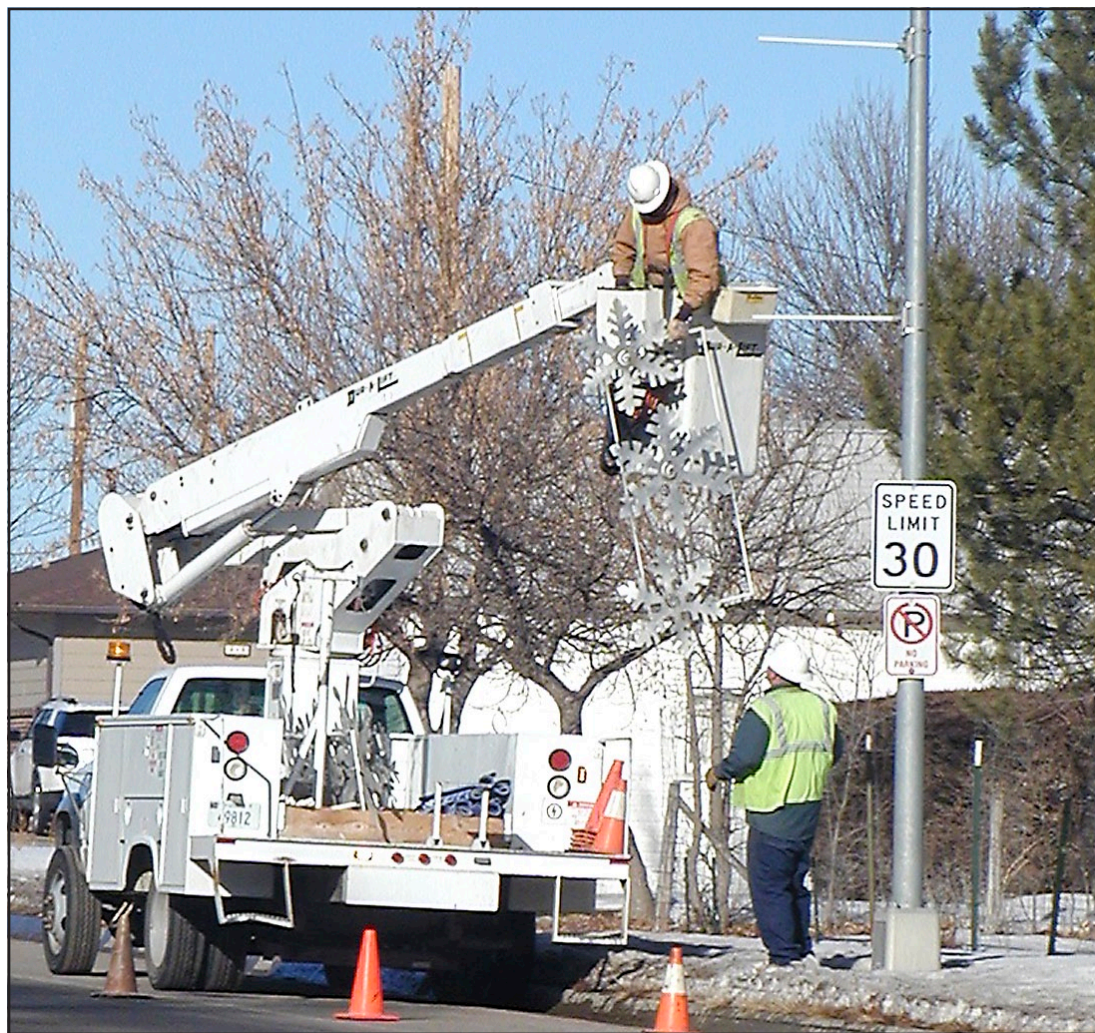
Legislature promises less conflict

By John Hanna
AP Political Writer
TOPEKA — Shaped by childhood struggles and battles with cancer, the Kansas Legislature's new conservative Republican leaders are committed to shrinking government and lowering taxes further, and they're promising less conflict among GOP lawmakers this year.

Even opponents expect incoming Senate President Susan Wagle of Wichita and new House Speaker Ray Merrick of Stilwell to make good on pledges to reduce strife. Wagle and Merrick are allies of conservative Republican Gov. Sam Brownback, while the Senate's leaders were GOP moderates before last year's elections. Wagle, 59, survived multiple bouts of lymphoma since first being diagnosed with cancer in the 1990s, and her hair is still short

from a round of chemotherapy last year. Merrick, 73, recalls a hard-scrabble childhood after his birth in a log cabin in northern Alberta, Canada, when, he said, his biological father deserted the family. In a joint interview with the Associated Press, the two said the Legislature's debates on the budget and economic issues will be shaped by ongoing uncertainty about the national economy and the federal government's ability to manage its own finances.

Taking down decorations



Christmas decorations came down from along city streets Tuesday afternoon, keeping Kyle Brogan (in bucket) and Jason Shephard busy along north Range.

SAM DIETER/Colby Free Press

