

from our viewpoint...

## Honor to Presidents, our young winners

February is the month we celebrate two of our great presidents, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. Years ago, we actually celebrated them separately, with Lincoln's birthday on Feb. 12 and Washington's on Feb. 22, but today they are lumped together into one big Monday holiday. We suppose that is a good thing, because there are 43 presidents who should be honored, and it would be difficult to celebrate every birthday. Traditionally, there were no parades or other celebrations for either Lincoln or Washington, nor did the banks, post office or public offices close. That is another difference, with President's Day now a national holiday – at least for some people. Thinking about honoring people, the month has been a great one for celebrating the youth of Goodland and Sherman County as we heard the music programs of the second and fifth grades, watched the induction of 14 new members of the Goodland High School National Honor Society and the awarding of the poster, limerick, essay and computer tech awards at the Conservation District banquet. We are proud of the high school students who went to the state piano contest over the weekend. The members of the Scholars Bowl team who competed this year, and the members of the Science Olympiad team who went to Fort Hays State.

The Cowboy wrestlers did well at regionals in Russell, finishing second and qualifying 11 men for the state tournament in Salina beginning on Friday. All the members of the wrestling team deserve a "well done" for the efforts this year. Who says wrestlers "don't get no respect." Go Cowboys! We enjoyed talking to Adam Duell, BreAnna Nemecheck and Devin Mangus about their experience on the Conservation District Eco-Team. They are busy learning about the types of soil and issues dealing with water conservation for the Envirothon in May in Salina. This is a program to teach conservation to the next generation. With the efforts of coach Sandy Rodgers, this team will continue to learn and expand their knowledge with chances to improve their record. The Goodland High DECA teams deserve a "well done" for their efforts this month to support entrepreneurship, and preparing for their state tournament. We have heard Michael Smith's Voice of Democracy speech more than once, but when he spoke as part of the Family, Career and Community Leaders flag ceremony at Max Jones Fieldhouse between the last home basketball games on Feb. 10. We could feel the intensity of his feeling and the resounding applause was proof the words hit home with the audience. We felt chills and pride as the X-Pressos sang the Star Spangled Banner that same night. February is a month for celebrations, whether we are celebrating the historic lives of our Presidents, or the efforts of our young people as they grow and prepare to become the leaders who someday might include another president. — *Tom Betz*

## where to write

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## Vacation fun in southeast Asia

**Introduction**  
*Darin and Kati (Amos) Curts are serving as WorldTeach volunteers in the People's Republic of China. WorldTeach, affiliated with Harvard University, has an agreement with the Hunan Provincial Department of Education and Foreign Affairs to place volunteers as English teacher. Darin and Kati are teaching in Yueyang, Hunan, PRC, at Yueyang Ba Zhong (Yueyang #8 Middle School) for one year.*  
 February, 2006  
 Sawaddee Kha, Sawaddee Khrap (Thai Hello),

This month's letter comes to you from China, vis-à-vis Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Due to the month-long Chinese New Year celebration, we were granted a three-week vacation. Our holiday was spent in a whirlwind tour of Southeast Asia. Formed in ignorance and apathy, our views of Southeast Asian countries underwent a significant transformation during our visit. When one envisions a trip to Thailand, Cambodia, or Vietnam, thoughts and images of war-torn nations flood the mind. My father spent time in Thailand as a member of the U.S. Air Force. Cambodia's Khmer Rouge is still a recent nightmare, and the mere word "Vietnam" conjures up thoughts of unrest. Such imaged are well-earned. Southeast Asia has struggled through turmoil that probably only its people can truly understand. Still, the legacy of the region isn't found in the war remnants or land mines. Instead, it is the countries and their people, who are as alluring and exotic as they are amiable and welcoming. Perhaps most important to the Thai philosophy of life, sanuk (fun) is evident throughout the country. Around Chiang Mai, we rode elephants through the jungle and visited the Karon Longnecks, a hill tribe whose women lengthen their necks with gold rings as a beautification technique. We attended a Thai cooking class and ate curries and coconut-fried bananas. In Bangkok, we followed throngs of tourists and saffron-robed monks around the Grand



Darin and Kati Curts while touring the ruins of Angkor Wat in Cambodia.

Palace and Temple of the Emerald Buddha, then shopped the street markets lined with go-go bars, a reminder of Thailand's scandalous sex-industry. In the south, we went snorkeling and relaxed on the beautiful beaches of Phuket Island, which is very much rebuilt since the disastrous tsunami of 2004. In all its wonder, Thailand is a diverse land of beauty and sanuk. Vietnam zoomed around us as we focused our travels in and near Ho Chi Minh City (lo-

cally called Saigon). We toured the War Remnants Museum, Reunification Palace (formerly Independence Hall), and Cu Chi Tunnels, but Vietnam survived as much more than a war. It is a crazy mix of motorbikes and markets, of conical hats and ao dai (traditional Vietnamese dress). Strolling through markets and tourist bazaars, we passed street vendors selling Vietnamese coffee and sandwiches on French baguettes. We floated down the Mekong River, visited the headquarters of the colorful Caodai religion, ate hand-made coconut candy, and rowed our way down narrow, foliage-lined canals. Vietnam is a diamond in the rough. Cambodia gave the most apprehension and the most surprising joy. After hearing stories of armed robbery and landmine-dotted countryside, we were hesitant to book a flight. The lure of the Temples at Angkor overpowered our anxiety, and the only regret we had was limiting our stay to a few days. As we stood gazing at Angkor Wat, we agreed it is worthy to be one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Our Cambodian hospitality ex-

tended past the beautiful weather and came to us through the people. Past the tourist center and the high-rise hotels, the dirt roads showed us the smiles of the locals. Our tuk-tuk driver greeted us with a sincere smile as if he were a close friend, and the man selling used books waved with the arms a landmine had claimed. Though danger still exists in remote areas, Cambodia was not only safe, it was splendid! Henry Miller once said, "One's destination is never a place, but in a new way of seeing things." This is certainly true for us. Our views of Southeast Asia were proved dated at best and narrow-minded at worst. We learned quickly that when all you know is in the past, perhaps the best way to find the truth is to live the present.

Lia suhn hao-y (Cambodian Goodbye)  
 Darin and Kati Curts

### Letter Policy

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