

Opinion



Monday's Salute

Thumbs



✓to **Maybelle Moore** — on your appointment as Thomas County Register of Deeds.

✓to **Stan Strange** — on your election as president of the Thomas County fair board.

✓to **All Volunteers** — for the success of the 2004 Community Wellness Fair.

✓to **Paige Gawith** — you are living proof that there really is a 'ring god.'

✓to **Jessica Campbell, Grinnell** — first-place winner in the 9th District VFW Auxiliary Patriotic Pen contest. And to local Post 6882 winners **Caitlin Moss**, Rexford, first; **Leanna Larmer**, Heartland Christian School, Colby, second; and **Brandy Ginther**, Rexford, third.

✓to **Donna Pilasterer** — thanks for the many years you spent welcoming newcomers to our community.

✓to **Terry Cousins** — new executive director of the Thomas County Community Foundation.

✓to **All Military Personnel** — thanks for all you do

✓to **All School Bus Drivers** — you are the unsung heroes, and an occasional pat-on-the-back is warranted...and deserved.

(This weekly salute is compiled by Tom A. Dreiling publisher. Questions should be directed to him at td@nwkansas.com or call 462-3963.)

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 td@nwkansas.com.

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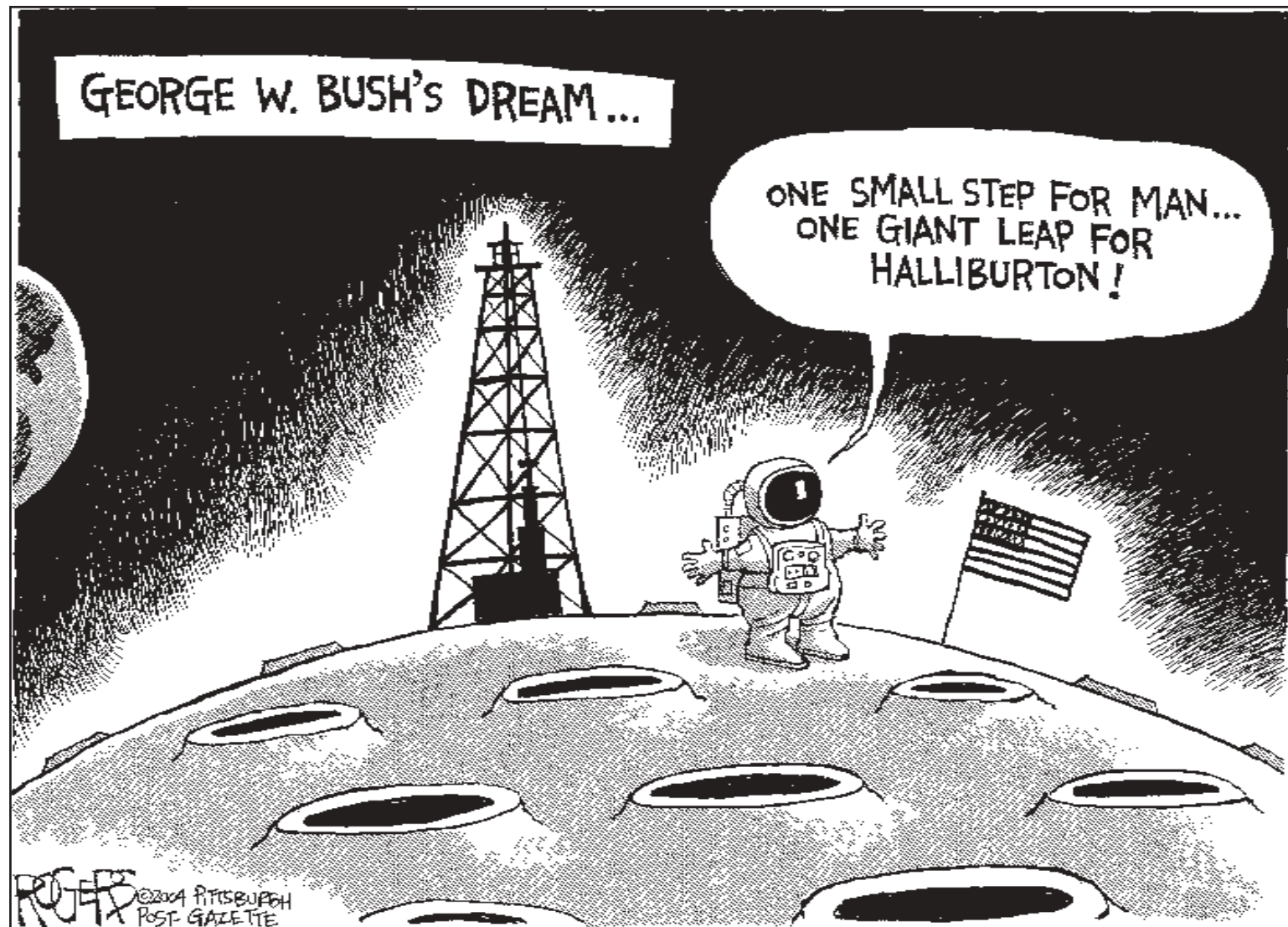
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One small step for man

My sister and I watched CNN's coverage of the Spirit rover's landing on Mars two weeks ago. It wasn't too exciting, just watching a bunch of NASA techs sitting around, waiting for confirmation that the lander made it down to the planet's surface without incident.

Not too long after that, I was happily surfing the Web on Jan. 8 when I hit Yahoo! and checked the headlines like I always do.

My jaw hit the floor when I saw something about Mars, moon and Bush.

I clicked on the headline and read the story.

Mars a future priority. Manned habitat on the moon. Mining helium-3.

Sounds like something out of a book I once read, but it's not fiction. It's fact. Or soon will be.

I've been thinking for a long time that Mars should've been a priority for NASA. But hey, what do I know?

I'm just a reporter.

What do I know about space?

A little I've picked up here and there.

I was on the fence until I heard exactly what the president had to say.

Despite my misgivings about the current administration, the country does need to push forward with research in space and exploration. And the president did the right thing when he asked for the help and support of other nations, but if we get it after the whole Iraq debacle, remains to be seen.

It is kind of exciting when you think about it.

The space program has provided the nation with some of its greatest and most tragic moments. Apollo I, Challenger, Columbia, Gemini, Mercury, Apollo 11, shuttle missions, space station

I remember the first shuttle missions, how they used to be televised all the time when an orbiter



Tisha Cox

• Off The Beaten Path

was being launched or coming back to Earth.

Over the years, aerospace coverage has dwindled to a footnote on the nightly news.

I think space and the oceans of our own planet are the next great frontier for humanity to explore.

I'm normally not a big Bush supporter but depending on how this comes off, it could make or break space exploration in the eyes of the American public.

Unfortunately, the announcement comes at a time when people are thinking about more practical things and will howl about how the money the government is going to blow on needless space missions could be better spent elsewhere.

But what many people don't stop to think is how applications in space have been adapted to every day life.

Research and experimentation on manned space missions, and even the space program itself and its evolution have brought about changes in technology and science.

Even medical research in space has helped develop better ways of taking care of people here on Earth.

Practical applications exist in every day life, conveniences we wouldn't have if the Kennedy administration hadn't been adamant about beating the Russians to the moon.

I knew magnetic resonance imaging was one application developed in association with the space program, but there are literally hundreds of things people use each day and take for granted. They're probably not even aware of where some things came from.

According to the Ethical Atheist Web site, (<http://www.ethicalatheist.com/>), things like disposable diapers, world-wide television broadcasts, more accurate golf balls, joysticks for game systems, satellite television and radio, better spray nozzles for crop dusters; lighter, compact, improved breathing systems for firefighters, and many, many more earth-based applications have been adapted from space-based applications.

If everybody can get over that hump, there's still the issue of astronauts into space.

I know people are going to say why don't they just send more robot probes to Mars to explore before we send any people?

That way we know the dangers.

You can't know everything. You can only prepare for the worst and hope for the best. Wisdom from the old Mercury astronauts.

We didn't know anything about life in zero g or on the moon until we actually went. I think that's going to be the case with Mars.

Mars is the next logical step for humankind's expansion into space. And it'll probably have to be an international effort.

But what it comes down to is a willingness in our own country to achieve the impossible.

Americans rose to the challenge once. Maybe it's time to do it again.

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

Kansas is your customer

John Schlageck

• Insight

those located near large-population, urban areas — must not miss the opportunity to reach the hearts, minds and stomachs of consumers who feel strongly about their food.

Some consumer-savvy producers are already honed in on this concept. They've retooled their farming operation from a conventional commodities-only business to one that includes pick-your-own sweet corn, pumpkins, asparagus, tomatoes and strawberries. They're giving people what they want.

Others now provide home deliveries of fresh produce and sell their produce at local farmers' markets. Still others have added a corn maze, day-on-the-farm activities, ice-cream socials and chuck-wagon cookouts, while inviting everyone from school-aged kids to wedding rehearsal parties — all to enjoy the farm and ranch way of life. This new direction in farming is being driven by farmers and ranchers who are attempting to be less dependent on cheap land and vast acreage. This pioneer is tapping into the population surge and wealth of consumers who

shop online, drive a couple cars including a SUV and don't mind paying a premium for the food they feed their families.

Another common element of this non-traditional farmer is the belief that this shift in production style may not make them rich, but will keep them out in the open spaces, running their own business and doing what they enjoy and want to do. A large percentage of those willing to try something new are younger farmers. In many cases, a young farmer is often considered someone who has yet to reach the half-century mark.

For some traditional farming became too expensive. Others decided traditional farming was no longer worth the effort. Whatever the reason, any farmer will tell you that farming is a difficult process. Still most would agree they are glad they bought their land, and glad they're doing what they enjoy.

No doubt, more and more farmers will be looking at a different direction to stay on their land in the future. The land will continue to be farmed. There will no doubt be fewer farmers but those who are determined to stay in this business of agriculture will have to find innovative ways to farm.

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

Doonesbury

• Gary Trudeau

