



# COLBY FREE PRESS

## Returning home

# Area soldiers: War is worth it

By Jan KatzAckerman

Colby Free Press

Four area soldiers returned from the Iraq War. As they try to continue their civilian life in Kansas, they know what they did thousands of miles away was worth it.



A. Babcock



R. Luvender

Sergeants Derrick Bailey and Richard Luvender both of Colby, Specialist Adam Babcock of Hoxie and Specialist Brian Wolf of Oakley, returned home Thanksgiving Day after serving in Iraq since August 2004.

Like his fellow guardsmen, Bailey is in the process of re-establishing his life stateside. A licensed electrician, Bailey is looking for work in Pittsburg where next semester he will attend Pittsburg State University and major in technology education.

Bailey's fiancée, Jennifer Heatwole of Garden City, is a student at the university majoring in early childhood development. The couple is planning their May 28, 2006 wedding.

"The war set back our wedding date," Bailey said. "I proposed July 1, 2004, and got called up July 29, 2004. We could have gotten married while I was home on (leave) but I didn't feel right about having someone do all the work and me walking out with the sunshine."

While he knows he might be

## Thanksgiving holiday made even more special

By Jan Katz Ackerman

Colby Free Press

Thanksgiving Day was special for four area soldiers who returned after more than a year in Iraq.

Specialist Brian Wolf of Oakley, Specialist Adam Babcock of Hoxie, Sergeants Derrick Bailey and Richard Luvender both of Colby, have served since August 2004. All four men came home Thanksgiving Day. All four soldiers support the war in Iraq.

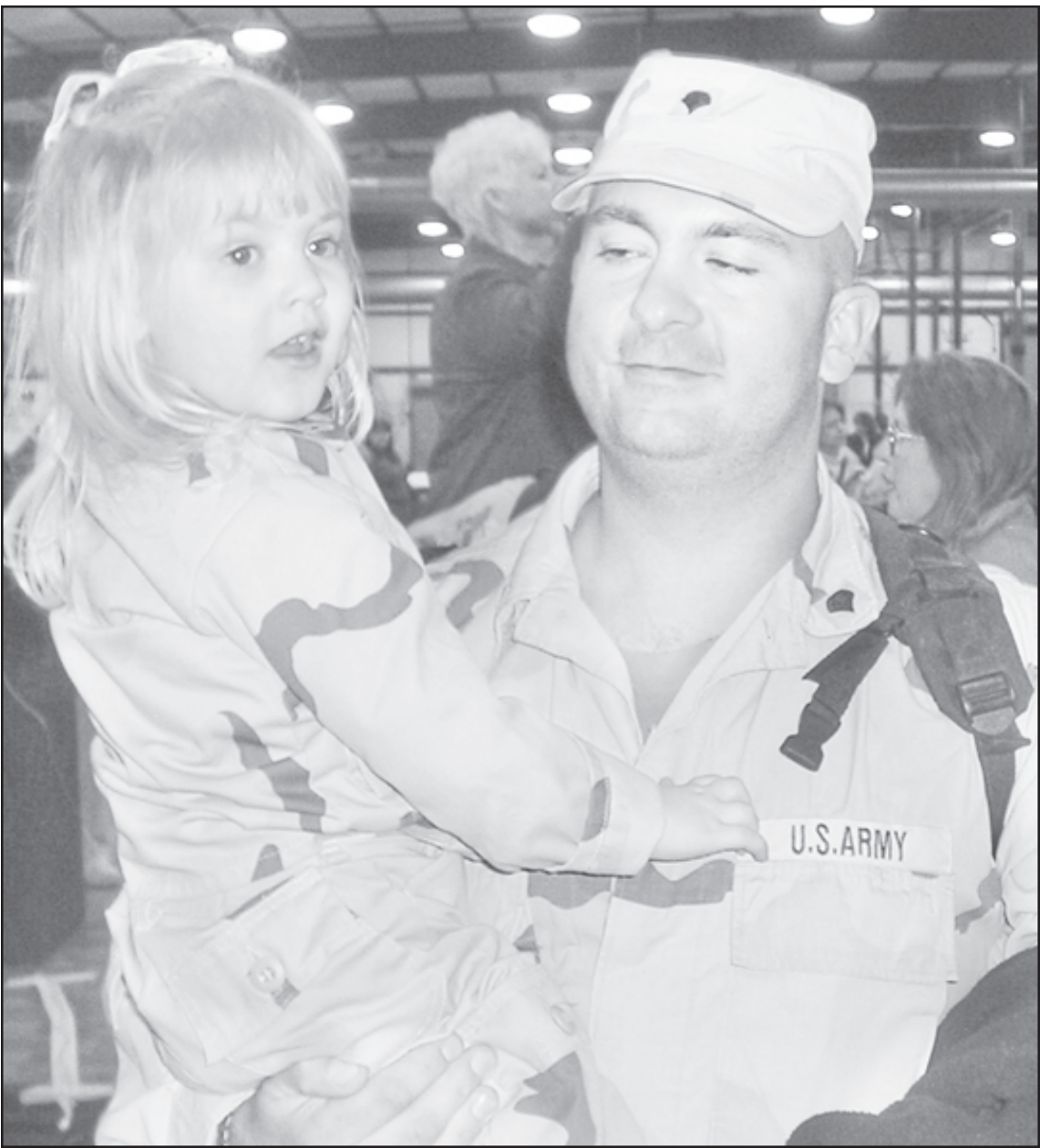
"If it wasn't for my family I'd go right back," Wolf said. "But I'm extremely glad to be home and it's nice to be somewhere I'm

cold again."

All four men are vehicle mechanics from the Kansas Army National Guard 170th Maintenance Company in Colby. Wolf, Babcock, Bailey and Luvender were among the 300 soldiers deployed to Iraq with the 778th Heavy Equipment Transportation Company based in Kansas City.

Wolf was greeted by his wife Stacy and their 2-year-old daughter Ainsley, when soldiers arrived at Forbes Field in Topeka Nov. 24.

See "HOLIDAY," Page 3



Contributed photo

Specialist Brian Wolf held his daughter Ainsley at a welcome home reception Thanksgiving Day at Forbes Field in Topeka. Wolf, along with Specialist Adam Babcock and Sergeants Derrick Bailey and Richard Luvender are wheeled vehicle mechanics assigned to the Kansas Army National Guard 170th Maintenance Company in Colby and were deployed to Iraq as part of the 778th Heavy Equipment Company of Kansas City. They left the United States in August of 2004.

# County commissioners approve voting consolidation

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

Some Thomas County voters will have to vote at a different place next year. Thomas County Commissioners voted Wednesday to consolidate polling places.

County Clerk Shelly Harms said the commissioners approved a contract with Voting Technologies International of Milwaukee, Wis., to purchase voting machines and software.

"I'm going to purchase seven standard voting machines," Harms said. The total cost for the new equipment will be about \$69,000.

The Kansas Secretary of State has allotted \$44,000 for Thomas County to buy voting equipment, to which Harms will add \$25,000 the county budgeted earlier this year.



County Clerk Shelly Harms looking at one of the new voting machines.

The seven standard voting machines cost \$1,867 each and they each come with a booth, touch screen and cables. The county is also purchasing four Help Americans

Vote Act-compliant machines that cost \$4,714 each.

Harms said the purchase cost also includes software, ink cartridges, training, installation and management support.

If they hadn't chosen to consolidate, she said an additional five machines would have been needed to cover all of the voters in the county.

By consolidating, the county is saving between \$10,000-\$20,000 by not having to buy more machines.

Harms emphasized the cost is the main reason for consolidating.

"There's no other choice but to consolidate," she said.

Consolidation will save the county money by not having to buy one of the machines for each of the traditional polling locations.

"Only so much money is available from the state," Harms said.

Residents of Brewster, West Hale and Kingery Townships will continue to vote at Brewster City Hall; Rexford, Menlo, and Smith and Wendell Township residents will still vote at Rexford City Hall.

All other townships and wards will vote at the Colby Community Building.

The new machines won't be used until June, and voters use traditional paper ballots in the spring 2006 election. Voters going to the polls for the August primary and November election will use the new voting machines.

Training poll workers will be scheduled and there will be a test election early next year for anyone who wants to try the machines.

During the budgeting process, a prelimi-

nary budget had \$120,000 allocated for the voting fund for capital outlay to purchase voting equipment. Commissioners eventually decided to put \$25,000 in the fund.

Harms explained in August the state is requiring counties to get voting equipment complaint with the American Disabilities Act.

Advanced voting is still an option. Harms said Sherman County's advance voting increased considerably after they consolidated to one polling location three years ago. She said consolidation could also affect how many people choose advance voting in Thomas County.

During the meeting, Kristy Rubio, who was called up for active duty for six months with the Kansas Army National Guard, was sworn in as deputy county clerk, replacing interim deputy clerk Barb Hopper.

## Holiday Home Tour ready for Sunday visitors

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

The time for the annual Holiday Home Tour is finally here and it promises to be a treat for visitors.

The annual event is being hosted by Kappa Upsilon of Beta Sigma Phi and will feature tours of several homes decorated for the holidays. It will be from 2 to 5 p.m. on Sunday. Homes on the tour will include Vinnie and Tenley Glad, 935 S. Range; Cris and Buzzy Koerperich, 350 E. Plum; Mark and Kelly Miller, 1325 W. Cottonwood; Paul and Jenny Niblock, 1880 County Road 0 (two miles south on Kansas Highway 25 from the Oasis Travel Center, then 1/4 mile west); and Jon and Angie Pope, 20 Cottonwood Dr.

This is the first year for the Niblocks to be on the tour, and Jenny Niblock said she is excited to be a part of the event. She said they were asked to participate, and she has a reason for letting

people come look at her home.

"Reva Eicher came and redecorated my house and she did a great job," Niblock said. "It'll be fun to show off her work."

The home will feature five Christmas trees each decorated with a different theme, and the decorations inside the house will be many heirlooms.

One tree has a musical theme and will stand by the family's grand piano. Another will have "Precious Moments" items and one will feature ornaments made by their children over the years.

Another tree will have a hunting theme and the last will have ornaments and garland tatted and crocheted by Niblock's mother.

Niblock said it's taken a little time to get everything up and they took advantage of Thanksgiving break because her husband and kids helped decorate.

"It was a family affair," she said. She usually puts up three Christmas trees but is looking forward to starting a new tradition this year by



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Jenny Niblock and her children Jillian, Quinlee and Lander decorated one of their five Christmas trees in preparation for the annual Holiday Home Tour on Sunday. Several homes around the community will be featured in the annual event.

being on the home tour.

"It's been a lot of fun to get ready for," Niblock said.

Tour tickets are \$10 per person and proceeds will benefit local area charities, said Lana Johnson, one of

the coordinators. The tickets are available at Peoples State Bank; Donelan's Jewelry; Uptown Style; First National Bank in Colby; at any home on the day of the tour.

## Everybody loves a parade!

# Entries still welcome for Colby's light parade

By Patty Decker

Free Press Editor

With emphasis on shopping in town, this year's Christmas parade theme "For a De-light-ful Christmas: Shop Colby First, Shop Colby Last" says it all, said Mary Ann Downing, Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce.

The Christmas Light Parade begins at 6 p.m., Sunday, at the south end of Franklin at the corner of Second Street and Franklin.

Any groups, organizations or individuals planning to participate are asked to arrive by 5:30 p.m.

Downing also reminds everyone who wants to take part in the parade to preferably call the Chamber office and let them know ahead of time.

Although participants can wait until the night of the parade to enter, Downing is encouraging them to let the Chamber know as soon as possible.

"It's not too late to submit an en-

try and calling ahead will help us when lining up that night," she said.

So far, 32 entries have been received and similar to last year's event, five categories will be judged. Those include: Best Lit; Best Organizational; Best Business entry; Best Youth and Best Religious theme.

All age groups are welcome to enter, she said.

Cash prizes will be awarded for first and second place in each of the five categories. First place winners will receive \$50 and second place winners will get \$25, all in Colby Chamber gift certificates.

The judge's table and stage will be in front of the Homeland Real Estate office and judges are Mayor Warren Hixson, Chamber President Charles Schwanke and Free Press Publisher John Van Nostrand.

To keep everyone warm, hot cider will be available near the stage.

See "PARADE," Page 3