... on tuition costs:

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The fees were justified as a way to ensure students in certain majors have the up-to-date equipment and top-notch faculty necessary to succeed in their careers.

However, the tie between higher course fees and majors that lead to higher paying jobs is undeniable.

It’s worth noting that even this year’s entering freshmen, who will pay the much-touted four-year “guaranteed” tuition, must pay course fees.

The evidence that low-income students are avoiding majors with additional course fees may be anecdotal, but it is nonetheless disturbing.

Acquiring a well-paying job may be one goal of a university education, but universities shouldn’t be in the business of placing a relative dollar value on various fields of study.

It’s also unsettling for university officials to point to scholarship programs that are funded by the additional fees. That amounts to having students who pay full tuition and fees actually subsidizing the education of some of their classmates.

Too many students already are being left behind because of the rising costs of higher education.

There’s nothing wrong with being a history major, but it doesn’t serve the state of Kansas and its economic future to push people into liberal arts majors rather than encouraging those who are interested to pursue professional degrees.

If even anecdotal evidence that course fees are having that effect doesn’t worry KU officials, it should.

— Lawrence Journal-World
Bergman
Mt. Oread Scholar

The annual walk up the hill for Mount Oread Scholars was held Monday, August 13. The walk signifies the beginning of a higher education journey for the 189 Mount Oread Scholars whose ultimate goal is to walk down the hill upon graduation.

Established in 1996, the Mount Oread Scholars Program is designed to facilitate academic connections on campus and is part of KU's University Advising Center. New first-year students are invited to become Mount Oread Scholars during their first years at KU if they graduated in the top 20 percent of their high school classes and received an ACT composite score of at least 28 or a minimum SAT score of 1,240.

Area students making the walk were Emily Ann Boeckman, daughter of Jim and Jean Boeckman, Pre-Journalism Freshman Mt. Oread Scholar Frankfort High School; Emily Elizabeth Bergman, daughter of Stephen and Sheril Bergman, Pre-Education Elementary Freshman, Mt. Oread Scholar, B & B High School.
The Chabad Jewish Student Center at KU hosted numerous events welcoming new and returning students to KU. From distributing hundreds of Challot for Shabbat during move-in at Naismith Hall to the grand FalafelFest Kick off Party at Chabad. Pictured are Craig Rosenberg (from left), Rabbi Zalman Tiechtel, Jonathan Sonino and Dan Burnstein after enjoying the large buffet of falafel and other Israeli foods. For more information on programs and events offered at Chabad at KU, visit www.JewishKU.com or call (785) 832-TORA (8672).
Oppose boycotts of Israel

We were pleased to report last week that the presidents of all three of the top state universities in Kansas and Missouri had signed on to an American Jewish Committee ad repudiating a British teachers’ union’s proposed boycott of Israeli universities.

MU Chancellor Brady Deaton, KU Chancellor Robert Hemenway and K-State President Jon Wefald responded with admirable speed to entreaties to sign the ad, whose text featured a spunky retort to the Brits by Columbia University President Lee Bollinger. Their instincts are in the right place: To stand with a beleaguered Western democracy under attack by Islamist forces.

We can hardly say the same for the leaders of Britain’s University and College Union, who proposed the boycott, nor their fellow travelers in the effort to demonize the world’s lone Jewish state. A British rabbi quoted in the New York Jewish Week Aug. 10 attributed the UCU boycott push to a throwback communist group (literally the Socialist Workers Party) active within the union.

Of course, the AJC and others who oppose moves to boycott Israel risk raising the public profile of such efforts far beyond what would otherwise have been. But, like the all-out effort that resulted in an about-face by the Presbyterian Church USA on the same basic question a couple of years ago, Israeli and American Jewish leaders see this as a red-line issue.

We agree. The campaign to demonize Israel and whitewash her opponents continues apace, even in the Kansas City area. It must be opposed at every turn.
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Derby student begins college as Mt. Oread Scholar

Derby News Report
janderson@derbyreporter.com

The 11th annual walk up the hill for Mount Oread Scholars was held last week at the University of Kansas (KU).

Adam James Hefel, a freshman in biochemistry at KU and a Derby High School graduate, was among those participating in the walk.

The walk signifies the beginning of a higher education journey for the 189 Mount Oread Scholars whose ultimate goal is to walk down the hill upon graduating. Established in 1996, the Mount Oread Scholars Program is designed to facilitate academic connections on campus and is part of KU’s University Advising Center.

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Hefel is the son of Anthony and Lori Hefel of Derby.
Rock Chalk ‘roadshow’ will visit Dickinson County Friday

LAWRENCE — For the fifth year, University of Kansas staff will take the “Rock Chalk Roadshow” to 60 high schools and community colleges in central and western Kansas.

The roadshow will be in Dickinson County Friday. Stops are planned at Chapman, Herington and Solomon high schools.

Students attending may enter a drawing to win prizes such as a $250 textbook certificate when the student enrolls at KU, free registration for a KU campus visit, KU football tickets and KU gear.

“Our visits in these communities are an opportunity for students and their families to meet with KU early in the school year,” said Lisa Pinamonti Kress, director of the office of admissions and scholarships.

The roadshow receptions allow time for families to meet university staff, learn ‘why choose KU’ and details about the admission and scholarship application process.
LAWRENCE — The University of Kansas’ Learning Communities program announces its 23 peer educators for fall 2007, including an Abilene High School graduate.

Peer educators are KU students who serve as academic resources and mentors to help first-year KU students adjust to campus life.

AHS graduate Rachel Berry, a sophomore in pre-business, is one of the peer educators.

Among the benefits of Learning Communities are key interaction with faculty as well as a supportive network of other students, peer educators and professors and supplemental learning opportunities in the classroom and Lawrence community.

The Learning Communities program began in fall 2003.

Each group typically consists of about 20 students enrolled in two courses and a seminar that focuses on a particular theme. Each group has its own faculty facilitator with coordination assistance from the peer educator. Students enroll, then are assigned to specific Learning Communities based on their major, courses they take or experiences related to the overall theme of the communities.

Berry serving as KU peer educator
Meatpacking Remakes Rural U.S. Towns

BY ROXANA HEГEMAN
Associated Press Writer

DODGE CITY (AP) - This is the home of Wyatt Earp and Bat Masterson, of Boot Hill and the Long Branch Saloon, of cattle drives, buffalo hunters and the romance of the American West.

But that's the Dodge City of yesterday.

Today, downtown has Mexican restaurants and stores more reminiscent of shops south of the border than Main Street Kansas. The city of 25,176 even has a new nickname: "Little Mexico."

Signs advertising "Envios a Mexico" -- retail outlets where workers send hard-earned wages back home to Mexico and other countries -- hang outside many Dodge City stores. Houses occasionally fly Mexican flags, whipped hard by the prairie winds.

Dodge City ... Cactus, Texas ... Fort Morgan, Colo. ... Postville, Iowa: For more than a hundred years, this region provided a bucolic idyll and a ready example of American life and values. Today, iconic farm towns struggle with a new economic model, one that requires a workforce that is poor and overwhelmingly Hispanic.

It's not easy. The immigrants who have flooded these communities are stretching schools and law enforcement. Still, at a time when other rural towns are slowly dying, Dodge City and meatpacking towns like it boast thriving economies.

"If these people can get past the gauntlet of the border, we welcome them here with open arms," said Ford County Sheriff Dean Bush, Dodge City's modern-day counterpart to Wyatt Earp.

But many of his fellow citizens seem lost. Randy Ford and his wife, Betty, have lived in Dodge City for 35 years. They no longer attend the city's Independence Day events. They can't understand what the singers -- Spanish crooners singing Latin favorites -- are saying.

"We don't go anymore because we don't want to be Mexican," he said. "We want to be American."

In Washington, the debate over immigration sometimes seems to be a clash of extremes. But here, in the wide-open spaces where one-dimensional economies stoke small towns, there is plenty of room for ambivalence.

HOW IT GOT THIS WAY

Just as the arrival of the Santa Fe Railroad here in 1872 brought white settlers to populate the dusty towns and farms of a fledgling country, the relocation and consolidation of the meatpacking industry has transformed these icons of the American West. The result: diverse, multicultural communities that challenge breadbasket notions of wheat fields, white fences and even whiter demographics.

The transformation of the nation's meatpacking industry began in 1960 when plants began moving out of cities in favor of their livestock sources in right-to-work states like Kansas. The first big slaughterhouse came to Emporia in the 1960s, followed by plants near Garden City and in Dodge City in the 1980s.

For Dodge City -- famed as the "Queen of the Cowtowns" during its cowboy heyday -- the advent of the slaughter plants seemed a natural fit. Locals have long recognized that the odor of manure here is the smell of money.

"They are a major hub of business and economic activity and a huge employer," said Ted Schroeder, agricultural economist at Kansas State University. "You can't go into those communities without sensing the presence and importance of those large economic facilities. Everything around there is either working with, complementing or part of that industry."

Eventually, mom-and-pop meatpackers were swallowed up by giants like Tyson Foods Inc., Cargill Meat Solutions Corp., Swift & Co. and National Beef Packing Co.

Their massive slaughter plants today routinely sit on the outskirts of rural towns. Huge feedlots stretching at times beyond the horizon now dot the wind-swept prairie where buffalo once grazed.

When the wind blows just so, the stench can be overpowering.

WEIRD ECONOMICS

Arturo Ponce is a U.S. citizen now -- coordinator of the HIV/AIDS prevention program run by the United Methodist Mexican-American Ministries. But it wasn't so long ago that he lived in a dilapidated trailer, just down the street from the Cargill plant in Dodge City.

This, he recently told his 14-year-
old son, was where your parents got their start in Kansas. Here, he said, it crowded with 13 other people, four families, into three bedrooms.

"The beef industry is hard work," he said. He would come home to the trailer after each shift drenched in sweat from trying to keep up with the production line. He and his brother-in-law each lost 25 pounds during those first three months on the job.

Now, almost 20 years later, the same trailer remains cluttered with meatpacking workers coming to and from their shifts.

"It is a cycle that continues to repeat itself," Ponce said. "It is the same story.

The same story: Decent wages are a magnet for poor immigrants. And the wages paid by the meatpackers are decent, though far from extravagant.

The poverty rate in Dodge City plunged from 28 percent in 1980 to 14 percent in 2000. The poverty rate also was halved in Guymon, Okla., where there are an estimated 600,000 head of cattle on farms within 25 miles of the Seaboard Foods plant.

But no one is living high on the hog, or cow. Dodge City's per capita income of $15,538 in 2000 may be an improvement, but it still remains far below the $21,587 national average.

In Cactus, the average per capita income has increased, but only to $8,340. Many who work at the Swift plant in Cactus live in former military barracks or in dilapidated rental trailer homes where yards contain little more than dirt, weeds and rocks.

"A lot of people are working, but working at jobs that don't pay well," said Don Stull, a University of Kansas anthropology professor and industry expert.

It's a hard life. In Cactus, the population is more than 90 percent Latino. There are no doctors or banks. Most plant workers deal only in cash, making them easy targets for theft. As much as 70 percent of offenses in town relate to alcohol use, especially on weekend nights when cars cruise up and down the main drag for hours.

Dodge City grapples with drug trafficking as narcotics flow in across the Mexican border through the Hispanic community. Gangs are a problem, too. But there is some equanimity in a town infamous for its lawless Wild West history.

"Dodge City has always been a pretty wild Western town," said Bush, the sheriff, "and there are days when it still lives up to its name."

GOING TO SCHOOL

Alfredo Villegas was clearly frustrated as he struggled to read an English-language book in a small newcomer class in the Dodge City high school. Villegas, 15, has been in the U.S. for five months and his father works at Carpillar.

"I don't know what I want to be," he said, in Spanish. "I may not even graduate."

Just as he struggles with his new language, the public schools are struggling with the new students who have come with families drawn to work in the meatpacking plants. Educators have found themselves grappling with language barriers, academic gaps and poverty.

School districts once troubled with aging and tax-resistant local populations and dwindling school enrollments suddenly had to deal with the crowded classrooms that came with young migrant families; Villegas' modern, sprawling school was built five years ago as enrollments boomed.

Dodge City school officials count 23 different languages spoken by immigrant families, though the town is overwhelmingly Latino.

About 44 percent of students in Dodge City have limited English proficiency, prompting the district to establish a "newcomer program" for immigrant students geared heavily toward language acquisition, and includes help from Spanish-speaking assistants.

Just a decade ago, about 70 percent of Dodge City students were English-speaking whites. Today, that statistic has flipped: about 70 percent of the 5,800 students who now attend Dodge City school are Hispanic, with non-Hispanic whites now comprising nearly 25 percent.

There has been some success; an analysis of high school graduation rates at meatpacking towns nationwide shows improvement between 1980 and 2000: up 9 percent in Dodge City; up 5 percent in Cactus; up 6 percent in Crete, Neb.

Still, graduation rates were below state averages. For example, the graduation rate of slightly over 17 percent in Cactus, Texas, was still well below the state average of nearly 76 percent or the national average of more than 80 percent.

In Postville, Iowa, visitors to Coza B's/Darling elementary and middle school are greeted with a world map adorned with red-and-gold foil stars pasted on Russia, Ukraine, Slovakia, Israel, Peru, Costa Rica, Mexico and other nations. Each designates the home country to some of the school's 370 students.

"The biggest population coming in right now are from Guatemala."
Postville principal Charlotte Tam
tmel said, "The challenge for us is
finding teachers who speak all these
languages."
Earlier this year, Dodge City
teacher Debby Chipman gathered a
small group of her second and third
graders for an English lesson. Three
of them speak Spanish, one boy
speaks Vietnamese, the other boy
speaks only Quiche, a Guatemalan
dialect.

Even as the schools spread Ameri-
can culture to newcomers, the im-
igrants reciprocate, infusing their
schools with their own cultures.

Everyone on the high school soc-
ccer roster in Liberal, Kan. -- players,
coaches, trainers and managers -- is
Hispanic, and during soccer season
in the fall, the ambiance around a
Liberal game takes aim at the
American stereotype of sweater-clad
soccer moms in SUVs.

Though Friday night football still
matters in the heartland, soccer
clearly has a home here. Shouts of
"Aqui, aqui!" blend easily with
"Here, here!"

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CULTURE CLASHES

On the high plains of northern
Colorado, the latest wave of settlers
to hit Morgan County has some wor-
rried that the character of its largest
city -- Fort Morgan, with its neat
lawns decorated with gnomes or
holiday ornaments -- would be al-
tered beyond recognition.

Cargill operates a slaughterhouse
here, employing about 20 percent of
the town’s population and processing
4,300 head of cattle per day. Morgan
County saw its Hispanic population
double in the 1990s -- jumping to
8,473 by the 2000 U.S. Census.

More than a century before the
meatpackers consolidated and Car-
gill Inc. set up shop in Morgan
County, Germans who had settled
the Volga region of Russia arrived
here after Czar Alexander II took
away their autonomy and made them
subject to the military draft.

"It's been a German town for a
long time, every morning at 5
o'clock, 5 or 6 o'clock, it's like a
cuckoo clock, German ladies out
sweeping their sidewalks," said
longtime resident Perry Roberts.
"And now they're (immigrants) not
mowing their lawn, and so they're
trying to pass laws to keep people
from keeping their lawns and not park
their car on them."

In 2004, community leaders and
businesses began work to establish
a group called OneMorgan County, to
help newcomers learn about health
care services, community resources
and law enforcement -- and to ease
fears among longtime residents.

Postville, Iowa, had long been a
meatpacking town, but the old Hy-
Grade slaughterhouse had been shut-
tered for seven years when New
York butcher and entrepreneur
Aaron Rubashkin bought it in 1987.
The city has been in transition ever
since.

A stream of Hasidic Jews soon fol-
lowed, providing the executive staff
to run the operation and the rabbis
needed to slaughter animals, in ac-
cordance with strict kosher rules.

The first wave of workers required
to augment the locals on the payroll
were eastern Europeans, immigrants
from Bosnia, Poland, Russia; and
former Soviet Republics who had
initially spent time in bigger East
Coast cities before moving to Iowa.

But in the last decade, Hispanics
have become the majority. The re-
sult is that a town that barely covers
two square miles is home to people
from 24 nationalities speaking 17
languages. In 1990, Postville's popu-
lation was 1,472; now, it is esti-
ated at more than 2,500, nearly 33
percent foreign-born.

Last year, councilman Jeff Rein-
hardt caused a stir by taking aim at
two of the city's ethnic groups in a
letter to the local newspaper. With-
out naming any group, his targets
were clear.

"One group wants to isolate itself
... and wanting a different day for
the Sabbath," he wrote. Another
"sends money back to foreign coun-
tries and brings a lack of respect for
our laws and culture, which contrib-
utes to unwed mothers, trash in the
streets, unpaid bills, drugs, forgery
and other crimes."

That's bigotry, cried local religious
leaders -- but understandable, they
said, in a time of wholesale change.

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HERE TO STAY

Shift change at the National Beef
complex in Dodge City, and Martin
Rosas and his crew are passing out
flyers at the entrance, recruiting col-
leagues to join a union. A plant se-
curity officer sits in a nearby vehi-
cle, with a camera.

Rosas, secretary-treasurer of the
United Food and Commercial
Workers local, seeks a better deal
for workers at the nonunion National
Beef. "We can no longer witness this
kind of treatment for our people," he
said.

Rosas, 36, is himself a Mexican
immigrant, and now a naturalized
citizen. He has watched Dodge City
grow more accepting of its Hispanic
newcomers.

"We feel more welcome -- we feel
at home now," he said.

And more willing to assert them-
selves.
In Cactus, Hispanics dominate politics. The town's population became predominantly Hispanic by the 1990s, and by the end of that decade, Hispanics began to be elected to the city council.

Now, all but one member is Hispanic.

"Without this plant I don't know what would happen," said Mayor Luis Aguilar, who slipped into the country illegally from Mexico 30 years ago, later became a U.S. citizen, and now owns the town's only grocery store, numerous rental properties and a 575-acre ranch.

Some immigrants come to the American prairie for the jobs, but end up staying for something else. Jose Flores, who calls himself a "Mexican hillbilly," never felt at home in Los Angeles. He was drawn to a meatpacking job in Dodge City because he wanted to raise his growing family in a small town.

When he arrived in 1987, the only Mexican-owned business in town was a secondhand store. Today the town brims with thriving Mexican shops; Flores owns a restaurant in nearby Spearville and a real estate office in Dodge City.

But Flores is most proud of his children. They've either gone on to their own successful careers or are in schools and colleges preparing for them.

"The packing house brought us here," Flores said. "But our families have surpassed that."
Going to War

Three young soldiers from Emporia prepare for Afghanistan, Iraq

BY SCOTT ROCHAT
rochat@emporiagazette.com

It’s almost time for Spc. Marie Vernon to return to Afghanistan. She’s ready. But it’s still not easy.

“I love what I’m doing over there and I’m proud of what I’m doing,” said 19-year-old Vernon, who leaves Emporia on Wednesday after a brief leave. “But it’s hard to see my family for so little time and then says ‘Goodbye, I’m going again.’ That’s the hardest part — saying your goodbyes.”

The Bright men can understand. They’ve got some more time to get ready — Cpl. Matt Bright doesn’t leave for Iraq until October. His older brother, Sgt. Caleb Bright, goes back to training in October and will be redeployed to Iraq in December. Eventually, goodbyes will come and duty will call.

“I support what we’re doing there,” their father, Jeff Bright said, looking at his two young Marines. “But it’s tough, knowing both of them are going to be there. It’s a dangerous place.”

Joining up

Both of the Brights have known they wanted to be Marines since they were chil-

Please see War, Page 12
Spc. Marie Vernon, 19, shown here at the All Veterans Memorial, is returning to Afghanistan after home leave. She joined the Army when she was 17.
dren, especially after the Sept. 11 attacks. So it wasn’t too much of a shock when Caleb joined up five years ago and Matt just two years later.

Vernon’s enlistment in the Army in November 2005, however, was a little more of a surprise to her folks. Just a year before, she had been competing for Miss Teen Kansas City. Now, she was asking permission to join the military at 17.

“Mom and Dad were a little shocked,” Vernon said wryly.

“Not to mention Grandma just about fell out of her chair,” added her mother, Anita Vernon.

At the time she joined up, Vernon knew of only one other living relative who had served, an uncle on her dad’s side. She had noted it as an option when she was a freshman at Emporia High School but started thinking about it more seriously at a college job fair.

The more she thought about it, the more the Army sounded like a way to build a future.

“I knew she had made up her mind when she said ‘Mom, I haven’t made up my mind, but ...’” Anita Vernon said.

Going into the Marines, both Caleb and Matt Bright knew there was a strong likelihood that they’d wind up in the thick of things. But both had relatives who had served. And both were more than ready to take their turn.

“Your adrenaline’s pumping,” said Caleb Bright, who was sent to Iraq in 2005. “It’s what you live for, basically. They get it instilled in you. That’s what you’re training for — war. You just want to get out there and do your job.”

Shipping out

Still, that job can come more quickly than anyone expects. Vernon finished her basic training in August 2006 and her individual training as a supply specialist the following October. By November, she was being mobilized. She was at a dental appointment when she got the call.

Her first thought was to call Mom. Maybe it should have been the second one.

“I messed up,” Vernon admitted sheepishly. “I told Mom I was being deployed while she was at work.”

“For a long time, people would ask me how she was doing and I couldn’t speak without getting all teary,” her mother said. “But I’m getting better with that.”

It’s a moment every soldier trains for. But for all the training, it only really became real for Caleb Bright when he heard the whistle of mortars attacking his unit.

“I had no clue how hard my job was going to be until I started doing it, and then I got a big eye-opener,” he said. “You see the movies about it, but it’s a whole different experience out there.”

Matt Bright at least had some stories and accounts from his brother to help ready him. But even that only goes so far, he said. Every soldier has a different experience. His was formed in Guantanamo Bay and later in Beirut and Cyprus, helping Americans evacuate from Lebanon during that country’s war with Israel in 2006.

“I remember one of the ladies was having a problem, she couldn’t make it up the ramp,” he said. “We had to carry her up. She told us ‘Thank you so much for coming. God bless the Marines!’ I thought that was kind of nice.”

Familiar faces

Even as they get ready to serve halfway around the world, reminders of home can crop up at the oddest times. When Vernon began to mobilize with her unit, she realized that a couple of faces looked familiar.

“There were two guys in my unit that I went to high school with and I didn’t know they were going with me until I was getting mobilized,” she said. “That was neat to have a little piece of home with me.”

The two were Brian Gerriets and Jose Martinez, both of whom held specialist rank at the time. The two had each had a class with Vernon, but graduated a couple of years ahead of her. Now it seemed the time had come for an impromptu reunion.

Matt Bright also found a bit of home unexpectedly, again in Beirut. Two of the evacuees were young women from the University of Kansas. Both were thinking about shifting to Emporia State University.

“It was wild,” he said.

Doing the job

All three of the young soldiers soon became familiar with the war that didn’t always make it on the TV. For Caleb Bright, the war itself is just one half of the story, the one that gets the ratings for the networks.

The other half, he said, is a story of cities that have been liberated and aid that’s been supplied to those who need it.
“What you see is part of it, but it’s not the whole thing,” he said. The fighting in Iraq has often been described as a war without boundaries. Caleb Bright doesn’t dwell on that. For a noncommissioned officer, he said, it’s better to focus on doing the job, looking after your Marines and bringing them safely home.

“You never look at the big picture,” he said. “You look at the big picture, you just get lost. You just do your mission for that day and you’re done. And then you do it all over the next day. And then you can joke about how dumb they are when they’re done.”

As a supply specialist, Vernon is not to be directly in the line of fire — though you quickly learn, she added, that there are no guaranteed safe spots.

“You can’t get complacent over there, thinking everything’s fine,” she said. “That’s when you’re at your weakest. ... There’s really no ‘safe zone’ over there.”

But there are compensations. Because of her specialization, Vernon also gets to be part of supplying clothing and toys and other items to the Afghans.

“There’s a lot worse places I could be,” she said.

**The folks back home**

In the modern military, it helps to have e-mail. Vernon writes home pretty regularly, though not always as frequently as Mom would like. And since one of her older sisters doesn’t have e-mail, there’s still no substitute for the call home.

“When I call her, it’s ‘Thank goodness you called home -- I’ve been SO worried!’” Vernon said with a laugh.

Jeff Bright and his wife, Mickie even got a little unexpected reassurance last summer when a CNN report on the evacuation showed a familiar face on the screen.

“I was glued to the TV and Jeff was coming in every now and again and he said ‘That’s Matt!’” Mickie Bright said. “And of course they never showed it again.”

Still, there’s no substitute for having them back home, even if it’s just for a little while. And it is. There’s just too many other responsibilities for it to last forever.

“As soon as you make it to NCO, you stop thinking about yourself and start thinking about the guys underneath you,” Matt Bright said. “...You have to be accountable for everything you do. And you have to have your guys accountable for everything they do.”

Vernon feels the responsibility, too. In fact, she’s feeling it from an unexpected direction — the home front.

“She’s become a role model for a lot of other girls thinking about military careers,” Anita Vernon said. “They say ‘I want to be just like Marie. I want to be an Army girl.’”