

Consolidation: Let's be prepared

A statewide conference last week on local government consolidation drew a lot of interest, and out here in rural Kansas, we should be listening to what was said.

The first thing to mark down is that consolidation is coming, like it or not.

Kansas has more local government employees per taxpayer than most states, and sooner or later, people will get tired of paying them. There's only so much money to go around.

With pressure for consolidation building, though, we have time now to decide what kind of local government we want.

One model would merge Kansas' 105 counties to form "supercounties" with larger populations and a single, presumably less expensive, government.

That could mean joining two or three adjacent counties, but in northwest Kansas, you could easily see a nine-county cluster with a single courthouse and branches in the eight former county seats.

Another model joins city and county governments to provide the same services we have today with a single bureaucracy and governing board.

That's the model used by populous Wyandotte County (157,461 people) and tiny Greeley County (1,503, the state's smallest).

Other counties have consolidated a service or two, including law enforcement under a professional chief in Riley County or under the elected sheriff in Cheyenne County.

Any way you look at it, consolidation is a fight because somebody will lose power, position and influence when counties, cities or agencies merge. Farmers suspect city folk won't pay to grade their roads anymore if cities and counties merge, and employees fear for their jobs.

Many questions need to be answered, many fears are valid, but consolidation is an idea whose time has come.

Today, though, consolidation is next to impossible. Wyandotte and Riley counties had to get special bills passed by the Legislature. Greeley has to follow the same path.

A bill last year to allow government to consolidate without a special law failed. Farm Bureau opposition to a single vote of all county citizens was critical, because most people assume a consolidation measure would never pass that way.

If the summit last week is any indication, the subject will come up again and again until it does pass. Farm Bureau is fighting a rear-guard action here.

We think citizens should have the right to decide how they'll be governed. If that results in a patchwork of different solutions, all the better. If people are happy with a plan, and willing to pay for it, let them.

The question we should ask ourselves is this: how do we want to be governed in this century?

By separate county and city governments with overlapping functions? By megacounties, where it might be an hour's drive to the courthouse to get tags for the car or pay taxes?

Do we want separate three-person sheriff's departments and city police in a lot of little counties, regional law enforcement or joint city-county departments?

We have our ideas. You may have yours. One thing is for certain.

If we don't decide how to do things, someone will decide for us. And that's wrong.

Our centuries-old system of city and county government is changing, and we, the people, ought to decide how we want the new system to work.

— Steve Haynes



Now that we've moved, hunt begins

We've been in the house for a week now, and I still can't find my electric hand mixer. Moving day, Jim was putting things away in the new house while I was packing up and cleaning out The Sunflower Inn. Consequently, I can't find anything and his answer to every inquiry I have about an item is, "Uh, I remember seeing it in a box."

Like I said, this will be the last move we ever make. Jim and I both have too much "stuff." We know this about ourselves, but these things have memories attached to them.

Some people don't have any trouble throwing away their children's drawings that hung on the refrigerator; that sweet card their husband gave them for no apparent reason; or phone books from 20 years ago. We can't do it. We're too sentimental - Jim perhaps more than I.

The main difference between us is his

Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



"stuff" is bigger. He has two tractors and three old cars that had been his grandfather's. You can't keep stuff like that in a scrapbook.

-ob-

We buried a good friend today.

Larry Lyon was a good friend to lots of people. He was a carpenter, a mechanic and a man of many talents.

There's probably not a home in this part of the country that Larry hadn't done some work for.

Years ago I remember asking him to

use his high-pressure sand blaster to remove the old peeling paint from this house. He said, "Carolyn, I could do it, but you wouldn't have any siding left if I did."

Talking with friends of his at the funeral home last night, everyone recalled work he had done for them. Without exception, they spoke of his pleasant nature, friendly teasing and good-heartedness.

In this little town where we all lived, fund raisers are a common occurrence. Soup suppers, pancake feeds and bazaars. Larry was always the first in line to help set up, tear down, cook, clean and drop a twenty into the collection box.

He was just coming to the place in his life where he could begin to enjoy his retirement. He was never going to quit working, but he was looking forward to slowing down. Now, there's a big hole left where he used to be.

We'll miss you, Larry.

Here's how to handle holiday stress

High Plains Mental Health

Karen D. Schueler

It is no wonder that people feel stressed out this time of year, especially when the anticipation of the holiday season begins months before the actual events. For several weeks, television and other media portray holiday settings in advertising and programming, often unrealistically.

And, the stores are stocked early with decorations and numerous items for any event. Families begin to plan get-togethers, and expect those celebrations to be full of love and harmony. To help feel less stress, and reduce the hustle and bustle of the season, consider the following:

• Plan ahead: discuss the holiday schedule with other family members and ask for help.

• Keep it simple and stay within a budget: people tend to overextend themselves during this time of year, not realizing that traditional meals and simple gifts are just as appreciated.

• Try something new: families change as time goes by. Be willing to establish a new tradition, and keep the old as a special memory.

• Be realistic: not all family members will get along well with each other, or appreciate getting together.

It is also important to practice good stress management in order to maintain both mental and physical well-being. Watch your time commitments and make sure there is opportunity to rest and relax.

Eat healthy, especially when there is the temptation of all those holiday goodies available. Exercise; get outside for some fresh air and sunshine, or spend some time at your favorite sport.

Lower your expectations and accept that not everything will work out as planned. And, when things don't happen as desired, keep a sense of humor. The unexpected quite often becomes the best memory of the season!

By Karen D Schueler, High Plains Mental Health Center.

FROM THE MAILBOX:

Program's goal is to keep tobacco out of kids' hands

To the Editor,
A new initiative underway in Kansas is designed to limit Kansas children's access to cigarettes and other tobacco products.

Called "Reward and Reminder," the goal of the program is to reduce tobacco use among youth, by eliminating access to tobacco products by minors.

The program aims to educate and inform retailers about Kansas laws restricting tobacco products to anyone under 18 years of age.

Underage youth ranging in age from 15 to 17 years of age will be accompanied by an adult sponsor and the youth will attempt to purchase a tobacco product. Re-

ward and Reminder rewards retailers who refuse the sale of tobacco to the minor and reminds retailers who would have sold tobacco to the minor to do the right thing.

Every time the rate of illegal sales of tobacco to youth drops a percentage point in our state, thousands fewer tobacco products will be easily available. When less tobacco is used by kids, the present and future will be changed in our community.

The Reward and Reminder program complements the compliance checks completed by Alcoholic Beverage Control; however, Reward and Reminder is strictly an educational awareness pro-

gram, no citations or violations will be given if a sale is made.

This initiative is sponsored by the Kansas Social and Rehabilitation Services/Addiction and Prevention Services and the Regional Prevention Center of Northwest Kansas and authorized by the Norton County Attorney.

For additional information on the Reward and Reminder program, please contact the Regional Prevention Center at (785) 625-5521.

Janae Talbott
Community Prevention Consultant
Regional Prevention Center
Hays

You can make foster child's dream become a reality

To the Editor,
Each Thanksgiving, we gather together to give thanks for our families and the good things in life. For thousands of children in foster care, this cherished celebration is just a dream.

In the United States, there are approximately 118,000 children in foster care who need permanent, loving families, and many of these kids have been waiting years to be adopted. The Saint Francis Academy currently cares for over 200 children who are waiting to find families

to call their own.

Let November, which is National Adoption Month, draw attention to the children in Kansas who are eligible and waiting for adoption, as well as highlight local families who have chosen to expand their families in this special way.

If you know someone who is already an adoptive parent, please thank them for making a difference in a child's life. If you are interested in learning more about becoming an adoptive parent, please contact The Saint Francis Academy at 800-898-

4896.

Let's give the children in foster care who are available for adoption, a big reason to be thankful this November. You can be the dream come true for one of The Saint Francis Academy's children!

Please contact us today for more information.

Sincerely,

Judy L. Hawk
Director of Adoption and Kinship
The Saint Francis Academy
Salina

Don't forget Friday's the day to give a 'Thumb's Up' to someone you think deserves the honor

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