

## Reaping big rewards

A study of widening U.S. 36 to four lanes by the Docking Institute for Public Affairs at Fort Hays State University shows what transportation activists have suspected for a long time: Kansas, and particularly the 13 counties along the northern tier, stand to get a big payoff from the job. The state would invest about \$1.4 billion to widen the road to a four-lane expressway from border to border. The 13 counties would reap benefits of nearly \$2.4 billion in the first 10 years, including \$1.4 during construction and \$1 billion from increased business, new motels and stores and tourism.

More importantly, 898 jobs would be created along the road as new or larger businesses feed on the increased traffic a four-lane road would bring. To an area of the state long accustomed to the economic doldrums, this could be a godsend. The study bears out the fact that a better road would attract far more in business than it would cost to build. Since the opening of Interstate 70 more than 40 years ago, only a handful of new motels have been built along U.S. 36 in Kansas. No truck stops. Few chain or local restaurants. Because the freeway sucked up all the cross-state traffic that once traveled U.S. 36, U.S. 24 and other roads west.

But many questions remain, including:

- Would traffic ever be heavy enough to justify a four-lane road?

Out here, right now, no. Back east, between Wamego and Troy, the road is busy enough today to need four lanes.

Illinois has an Interstate open to the Mississippi River, and Missouri will complete its four-lane road to the river at St. Joseph this summer. Then more traffic will start to flow west. And federal projections show truck traffic across Missouri at 10 to 20 times today's. Congestion in Kansas City and Omaha will send drivers around, not through, these cities, and U.S. 36 offers a fast, straight, attractive route west.

- Will we ever see a four-lane road in western Kansas?

Someday, maybe 20 years from now, maybe longer, traffic will build. In the meantime, the U.S. 36 Highway Association, which paid for the Docking study with help from the Dane G. Hansen Foundation and county commissioners along the road, supports a better two-lane road all across the state.

- Will Colorado ever improve its part of the road, more than 125 miles between the state line and I-70 at Byers?

Not any time soon. But just as Kansas will have to respond to a four-lane path across Illinois and Missouri, so will Colorado have to respond to a four-lane road to St. Francis. It will happen.

- Will bypasses hurt Kansas towns?

No. The study envisions any bypasses being built very close to a town, so business can adjust. Bypasses would be decided by the state and local communities together, after a public scoping process. On U.S. 81, for instance, Concordia rejected the idea of a bypass while Belleville has a road right along its west edge.

- How long will it take to get the job done, to open a four-lane road across the state?

It took more than 30 years for supporters to get U.S. 81 widened north of Salina. U.S. 36 supporters, particularly out west, can expect as long a process. The important part is to begin. And with completion of the Docking study, that has been done. The rest will follow, but it will require a long-term effort on the part of everyone along the road. Our children and grandchildren will reap the rewards.

— Steve Haynes



## Defining courage

I had decided to write about courage after cutting into a piece of breast cancer fabric; it had a number of words printed on it, and courage stood out. I looked up its meaning and discovered it didn't exactly coincide with what I visualized the word to mean. One definition was: "... strength to persevere and withstand fear." I had imagined courage to be equated with doing something heroic, like rescuing a child from a burning house or diving into a frigid body of water to save someone from drowning. The definition was certainly appropriate on that piece of material. It described my friends who are cancer survivors and those who are currently fighting the active disease process.

Last Friday night I was privileged to see courage in action at Relay for Life. It began with opening exercises and then there was the survivors' lap. This was a walk around the courthouse square by everyone present who had received a diagnosis of cancer, wearing their purple tee shirts.

Some were unable to walk and were in wheelchairs or powered seats. Some were without hair as a result of recent treatment. Some proudly held their heads high, with their shoulders erect, and pro-

### Life is Good

Rita Speer



claimed a lengthy period of survival.

Both my husband and I did that walk Friday night, proudly wearing our purple shirts. I would certainly never have chosen to have cancer, but I appreciate what having cancer has taught me. I have learned we have only today, so I feel an obligation to live each day as fully as I can because I have no guarantee of tomorrow. I do my best to be positive and upbeat; nothing is gained by being gloomy.

I have learned to surround myself with other positive people because I draw strength from them that helps when I encounter individuals who delight in putting others down or are mired in unhappiness in their daily lives.

I have learned how important my faith in God is, for it was that faith and the support of friends and family that got me through the tough times after I was diagnosed. I have learned that it is

essential for my physical, emotional and spiritual well-being to live in peace and serenity.

I looked around me as we walked and I saw people who are experiencing recurrences of their disease. Some get angry because of this, but the people I know well who face this situation are realistic about their prognosis and are dealing with it daily.

I don't hear them say, "Why me?" or denying reality. I hear them talking about what the future holds and coming to grasp with their own deaths. I can only stand beside them and support them. I admire them. They exemplify courage.

So it was on Friday night that this column came together for me. Certainly courage is an appropriate word to describe every one of the purple-shirted people making the survivors' lap.

Each of us has had to reach down deep inside and pull from the reserves of strength that we have, stare cancer in the face and say it won't win. Some of us will die of the disease before we find a cure, but that doesn't mean cancer won. Our strength, our peace, our ability to stare down cancer means each of us has courage—strength to persevere.

## Seeing harvest in action

It takes a child to help you see what is right before your eyes.

We had some friends from "the city" visit over the Fourth of July.

They had never been to a farm so I made arrangements with friends Dave and Charla to see harvest in action. During the drive into the country I stated how important wheat harvest is to farm families, and how busy the family would be so we would "just look" at the combine and perhaps get a chance to see wheat being loaded into a big truck. I gave the usual safety speech and trusted everyone was listening.

When we got to the wheat field my friends and their children were "bug-eyed" as the green monster combine rolled up to unload its golden cargo. Charla surprised me when she said, "Who's ready to ride?" Every hand shot up. "Two at a time," she said. And, that began the grand rotation. Everybody had a chance to ride a "round."

Big kids took little kids; moms took toddlers; and grandpa tried to take a grandson who "chickened out" at the last minute. Everyone thought it was "awesome." Some were ready to move to a farm if it meant riding a four-wheeler or a combine every day.

I showed them how to crush a head of wheat in the palms of their hands,

### Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



blow away the chafe and crunch the kernels with their teeth then chew, chew, chew until they had "gum."

It was a grand experience for my "city slicker" friends and showed me, once again, how life's simple pleasures are the best.

-ob-

Grandma's curiosity finally got the best of her. I HAD to know how our 11-year-old granddaughter, Taylor, was faring on her 10-day trip to Canada. A phone call to her parents revealed she had called them the day before and reported she is "having a ball."

I knew it all along. No worries. I've been following her day-to-day itinerary and it looks like they are so busy they might not have time for fun. On closer inspection, however, some of their activities include visiting an Indian village, hiking a mountain trail and riding zip lines in a wilderness camp. So, the fun factor has been figured in.

During the last year the entertainment industry has stepped up its portrayal of agriculture in a negative light. So many of these attacks are based on unsubstantiated information and emotional pleas.

No doubt you've seen some of these television episodes, like the couple who dined at a fashionable bistro and died—one from a fast-moving E. coli infection and the other from botulism.

The show's detectives determined E. coli originated in a water supply on a cattle ranch and ended up in the woman's salad. Her dining companion contracted botulism from genetically engineered corn.

Plenty of other anti-agriculture episodes have aired along with talk-show programs that also target farmers and ranchers, especially on their care and handling of livestock.

One particularly outrageous television show featured a character who tried to convince her friends to help her save a pig from becoming bacon.

Laughable? Hardly. And when another character refused to participate, she was accused of ignoring the "alleged" ugliness of animal production.

What's going on here is "high drama" in the entertainment business. Unfortunately, viewers watch this programming and ratings are high. Hollywood has taken irresponsible liberties with the truth and turned farmers and ranchers into villains.

It is a travesty that Hollywood celebri-

## High drama

### Insight

John Schlageck

ties and activists are given time or have the money to promote their anti-agriculture agendas with little or no regard, or understanding, of what occurs on farms and ranches across this country.

The real shocker is that so many viewers know little or nothing about farming and ranching. They've never been to a farm and never learned about the care and feeding of livestock.

Farming and ranching are a family's livelihood and way of life. When the entertainment industry airs falsehoods about the food supply, this negatively impacts the entire community.

Raising livestock on today's farm or ranch is a dynamic, specialized profession that has proven one of the most successful in the world. Only in the United States can less than 2 percent of the population feed 100 percent of our population—and other people around the world—as efficiently as we do.

Today's animal husbandry is no accident. Because our livestock are the best cared for, we can provide such efficiency.

Farmers and ranchers work hard, long hours to care for and nurture their livestock. They are neither cruel nor naive. A farmer/stockman would compromise his or her own welfare if animals were mistreated.

Livestock producers will tell you they

love their animals. They spend their lives producing healthy animals that will one day feed others.

These animal caretakers understand the cattle, swine, sheep, chickens and other livestock are living creatures. They understand and take seriously their obligation to care for each and every animal's welfare. Farm animals are generally housed in barns or other buildings with the exception of beef cattle.

This is to protect the health and welfare of the animal. Housing protects livestock from predators, disease and bad weather or extreme climate. Housing also makes breeding and birthing less stressful, protects young animals and makes it easier for farmers to care for both healthy and sick animals.

Modern animal housing is well ventilated, warm, well lit, clean and scientifically designed for the specific needs of the animal. Inside these facilities, livestock receive plenty of fresh water and nutritionally balanced feed.

As U.S. livestock production grows and changes, farmers' methods for ensuring welfare of their cattle, hogs, sheep and other animals also progresses. Farmers and ranchers are dedicated to providing the highest quality and safest food in the world—their livelihood, and that of their family, depends on it.

John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

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