

Debating over where mail should be sorted

On the
Prairie Dog
Steve Haynes



If the U.S. Postal Service decides to ship our mail to Denver for sorting, sending it back a couple of days later, it'll be a huge mistake for several reasons, but most of all because the service has not taken into account either the weather or where our mail goes.

The service claims it will save a whopping \$14,000 by hauling mail now sorted in Colby to Denver, where it would be routed through massive machines, sorted down to delivery "walk sequence" and sent back out, ready for carriers to take on the route.

The paltry amount is mostly because our mail is being sorted in Salina already, or most of it. Today, postal workers at each office are supposed to separate the "local" mail, for their town and for the 677 ZIP code area, before sending the rest off.

In-town and area mail is kept here and delivered overnight, as is the custom. Under the new plan, though, the service wants to send every letter to Denver for sorting. That will cut out the cost of separating the mail, get carriers out of the office an hour or two earlier so they can deliver to more homes and end the traditions of next-day service for letter mail.

There's real money in eventually reducing the number of carriers, of course, the real driver for this change is the chance for the service to use its expensive sorting machines up to 20 hours a day, rather than five or six.

Today, these machines can be run on the overnight shift only. They start up as the trucks bring mail in during the evening and must finish in time for trucks to go out and carriers to get their mail. If the service gives up the goal of overnight delivery, though, the machines can run day and night.

Whether that is a good idea is another thing. Most people who've heard this plan believe the service is shooting itself in the foot by lowering service standards. The loss of business could easily exceed the savings as banks and other businesses flee the mails for internet billing and payment. The Postal Service seems to feel that business will be lost anyway.

Sending in-town mail out for sorting defies logic, though. It's mostly collected in separate bins, so the cost of sorting it shouldn't be much. Nor should the cost of sorting it to routes. The penalty in lost goodwill could be much more.

In any event, northwest Kansas mail should not be sent to Denver. If it has to be sorted someplace, send it east to Wichita. It's nearly 50 miles farther, yes, but the weather is much better. Interstate 70 is closed several times each winter west of Goodland — sometimes for days — but rarely east of there.

Add to that the fact that most of us do a lot more business between here and Kansas City than in Denver, and it's easy to see sending the mail east would be more efficient.

We'd rather see the Postal Service re-evaluate this whole scheme, which is now on a six-month hold to give Congress time to help the service avoid bankruptcy. But if something has to be done, let's hope our letters will move east, not out into the howling blizzards of the plains west of here.

— Steve Haynes



Lessons learned through everyday life

Out Back
Carolyn Plotts



The vanilla trade is booming. I've already sold two cases. Don't worry, though. I still have about 30 bottles left. Just call me and I'll get it to you.

I don't carry them in the vehicle with me anymore. At least not in the wintertime. That's a mistake I won't make twice. I had a bottle freeze and burst once. And even though the van smelled good enough to eat, it's not a mess I want to clean up again.

—ob—

Jim's ability to slip into our secret language is uncanny. We call it "dislyxese" because we take the first letter (or syllable) from each word and reverse them.

Driving home from church a pheasant flew across the road in front of us. Without hesitation Jim said, "Rook out looster!"

I thought it was so funny and laughed 'til I cried. Okay, maybe you had to have been there.

—ob—

Speaking of wildlife. One of my Christmas presents this year was a set of "deer whistles" for the car. With all the deer we've hit (or have hit us) and the raccoon, the kids thought it was a good investment. I think they work, too. We've approached deer on the highway, their heads jerk up and then they take off.

Anyway, Jim tried to talk our insurance agent into giving us a discount since we've installed the whistles. I told him to "shoosh". With all our claims, I just pray they don't raise our rates.

—ob—

Our friend, Bob, is a cowboy poet. He's a quiet-spoken man, and like E.F. Hutton, when he talks you listen.

Bob shared a conversation he had recently with an acquaintance. The two men were talking when the conversation turned to the subject of death and dying.

They were both expressing themselves on the topic when his friend said, "You know, no matter how much money you make or how famous you are, when you die, the number of people who come to your funeral is determined by the weather."

When I tried to roll out of bed this morning I thought I would break. That's how stiff and sore I was. That'll teach me to talk Jim into helping me move furniture.

But, I had one last piece to come downstairs and I wanted to work on it while he watched a football game. I promised him a huge snack tray of crackers, cheese, olives and pickles if we could move the desk before he turned the television on.

So up the stairs we went and down we came with this ultra-heavy desk. Jim took the downside and I took the upside (thinking it would be lighter). Perhaps it was lighter, but it was also the most awkward. It's not a pretty picture, but envision me trying to hold a big desk back from crushing my husband while, at the same time, trying to straddle the end piece and take a step downward.

The desk is in the living room on a plastic drop sheet receiving two coats of paint, but I ache all over. It's funny. I worked way harder than this for three days in Mexico building a house, but didn't hurt half as bad.

—ob—

I feel like some hillbilly bootlegger. And it looks like it too. Most Mexican vanilla comes in tall, one liter bottles that look just like a fifth of whiskey.

Moderation and balance is the key to dieting

Insight
John Schlageck



It's the new year and like so many, I have vowed to shed those extra pounds. Losing weight is no easy task. Expectations often exceed the will to lose the weight gradually during an extended period of time.

Today, there are as many diets out there as there are people who attempt to stick to them. What it really boils down to is watching what we eat, caloric intake and exercise. If we have the discipline to do that, each of us can meet our goals.

Still, when it comes to exercise and diet, myths are as plentiful as the calories in a piece of pecan pie — one of my favorites by the way. To clear up some of these misconceptions, I visited with a nutrition specialist during the holidays to set the record straight or at least point me in the right direction.

One common myth and core ingredient in several popular diets today involves eating extra protein to build strong muscles and rev up your metabolism. Today, most Americans, whether they are weekend warriors (athletes) or not, take in plenty of protein from a normal diet. Protein powders and amino acid supplements are unnecessary. That is unless you want to bulk up and look like the former governor of California whose most famous movie line was, "I'll be back."

The only healthy and safe way to

increase the size and strength of muscles is to work out. Too much protein, if not burned as energy, turns to body fat.

Another myth would have us believe that sugary foods provide quick energy. While a candy bar, energy bar or soft drink before exercising may trigger an insulin response, that causes a rapid peak and then fall of blood sugar.

The most efficient source of energy comes from complex carbohydrates. That includes whole-grain breads and cereals, pasta, fresh fruits and vegetables.

So what about the popular diets that suggest staying away from carbs altogether?

Not such a good idea. The real key to a healthy diet is moderation and balance. It also includes a diverse, complete grouping of foods.

As for the so-called energy drinks and I won't mention even one of those flooding the convenience and supermarket shelves, most of these are caffeine, speed or some other stimulant. And we all know that speed

kills, maims or throws your body out of whack.

Vitamins and minerals do not contain energy. However, some vitamins help the body use energy.

Unless there is a deficiency, supplements will not help performance. Taking unneeded supplement may do more harm than good. Too much vitamin A or D can lead to side effects such as liver damage.

Another myth suggests thirst is a good signal it's time to take fluid.

Wrong. Vigorous exercise can blunt the body's thirst mechanism. Drinking plenty of liquids, especially water, is important during exercise to prevent dehydration. For every pound of weight we lose through sweating, we need to drink two cups of water, whether we are thirsty or not.

The last myth, but one we cannot forget, suggests that milk causes "cottonmouth." Nervousness and fluid loss, not milk, make the mouth feel dry before a game, match or other competition.

Drinking milk, water or other fluids before exercising is essential. The body needs to maintain its fluid levels during a workout. Cold drinks, with the exception of those containing alcohol, are the ideal beverage during physical activity because they help cool our bodies.

Dear Editor,
On October 28, a fund raiser was held for the benefit of Lacy Zillinger who was seriously injured in an auto accident. I was responsible for collecting the funds received that evening and sending them on to Lacy. To date I have sent Lacy \$5611 in donations plus an additional \$1500 from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans through its Care Abounds in Communities program, for a total of \$7111. On behalf of Lacy and those who organized the fund raiser, thank you for your generosity.

Rick Rostek
Treasurer of Smokey Hill Chapter of Thrivent



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