

Houston, we have a problem

The sight of a space shuttle floating past the Statue of Liberty might make a great picture, but surely Houston, the home of Mission Control for more than half a century, was a more deserving resting place for one of the four remaining shuttles.

A little history: The last shuttle flight was on July 21 last year. It marked the end of the 30 year program that brought us the first reusable space vehicle. Even though the shift away from Apollo-style capsules meant we couldn't go to the moon, the space shuttle was still a giant leap forward. It was the most advanced piece of machinery in its day.

But 30 years is a long lifespan for technology, and the shuttles were starting to show their age. They had, in fact, been serving 15 years longer than the designers had projected for their usable lifetimes. The shuttles were often grounded for safety reviews or mechanical problems. And so eventually the program came to an end.

Once Atlantis had made her final flight last year, the discussion turned to the big question: where do we put these iconic spacecraft?

Two shuttles, of course, were lost in flight. Challenger exploded just seconds after launch in 1986, before the eyes of a huge audience who had tuned in to watch the first teacher in space blast off on her maiden voyage. In 2003, Columbia disintegrated in the skies over Texas while re-entering the Earth's atmosphere.

So what to do with the remaining three shuttles? Twenty museums around the country submitted proposals, but there were only so many shuttles to go around.

Atlantis is staying at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla. Certainly the site of every space shuttle launch deserved to have one of the orbiters. Discovery went to a Smithsonian Institution center in Virginia, not far from the nation's capital. That makes sense as well. Endeavour went to the California Science Center in Los Angeles, so at least they're not all on the east coast.

That takes care of the three operational shuttles. But what to do with the Enterprise?

Enterprise was the prototype, the very first space shuttle built, with construction beginning in 1974. President Gerald Ford specifically requested the name Enterprise after the starship from Star Trek, a decision which may or may not have been in response to a letter-writing campaign from fans of the television show.

However, it never flew in space. It was designed as a proof of concept vehicle. In 1977 it took its first flight to test the modified 747 carrier vehicle. Later that year it took its first free flight. It was used in numerous other tests, and was even slated to be refit for orbital flight, but that never materialized. It was used to conduct safety tests after the Columbia disaster, and had been on display in Virginia.

But recently, it was swapped out for Discovery and taken up the coast to New York, where it will be put on display at the Intrepid Sea, Air and Space Museum.

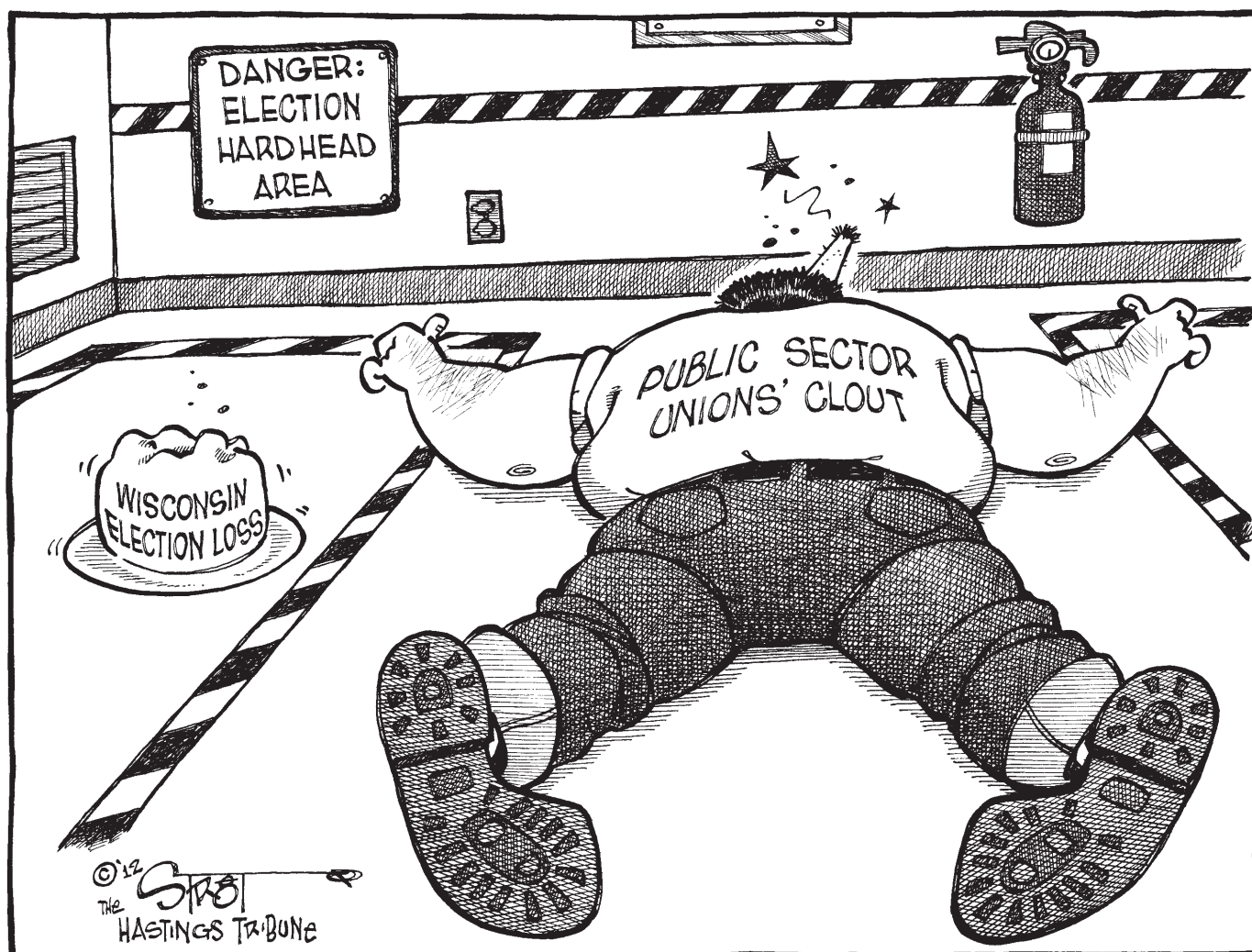
And what does Johnson Space Center in Houston get? It gets the Explorer, a life-size wooden replica. Although it is impressive, many areas, especially the interior, are not particularly accurate.

This seems like a slap in the face to a city that was so integral in the shuttle program. New York has made its contributions to the space program, no doubt about it. But Houston was home to astronaut training, space research and to the hard-working men and women of Mission Control, who spent so much time guiding each mission from Mercury in 1959 to the present day. When Apollo 13 ran into trouble mid-mission, Astronaut Jim Lovell didn't say "New York, we've had a problem."

NASA said the decision was based on allowing the most people to see them. Granted New York gets far more tourist traffic than Houston, but a shuttle would draw its own crowd, which would increase Houston tourism. New York already has plenty of tourist attractions, one more might get lost.

We also have a selfish reason why Houston would be better. It's far closer to Kansas than any of the other locations, and we want to be able to see the shuttles as well. The problem with people who live on the coasts is they often don't realize how far away they are from the interior. The western and southern states deserve a shuttle as much or more than the coasts. And for Star Trek fans, the Enterprise bears a special significance.

The decision isn't likely to be reversed, but we hope that NASA may at least consider moving the shuttles over the years to other parts of the country, to allow those who can't make the trip to the coast to experience these remarkable pieces of the nation's history. —Kevin Bottrell



Finding the time to pick the cherries

It's cherry-pickin' time – and they couldn't have picked a worse time to decide to ripen.

This is my month to host club and every woman who's ever had club at her house knows this is the one time you want to devote solely to getting the house ready.

I was already behind the eight-ball because for at least the last two months my dining room had been the holding area for everything we didn't know what to do with while we installed the hardwood floors. You know, of course, when I say, "we," I actually mean "Jim." I cannot take any of the credit for the installation except for shouting encouragement to my man.

"Way to go, honey! You can do it! They look great! Almost there!"

I told him several months ago that I was "having club" in June. We both work better with a little pressure.

Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



Anyway, here it is the week of club and even though we moved everything out of the dining room, it looks like a bomb went off in the rest of the house. "Stuff" from the dining room has been compartmentalized by its final destination.

Tools going back to the shop are positioned by the back door. Materials on their way to the wood shop are stacked by the front door. Some furniture needing a little repair before it makes a one-way trip to Mexico is standing by in what will some day be the library. And then, there's always the

inevitable "stuff" we have no idea what to do with that seems to have found its way to the kitchen.

Which brings me back to the cherries. This is not the week I want to make cherry pies, cherry jam or cherry jelly. I don't even want to mess with them. But, there they are setting on my kitchen counter waiting to be pitted. I can almost hear my mother saying, "Waste not – want not."

I really can hear my husband saying, "Boy, cherry pie sure sounds good. I can almost taste it. Sweetie, you make the best cherry pie. Just as good as Mom used to make."

OK, OK. Guess I'll be making cherry pie. Might as well make several while I'm at it and serve it at club. Takes the guesswork out of what to serve for refreshments, doesn't it?

Education and awareness are key to farm safety

The dream of many young farm boys and girls is to ride with their fathers on a tractor. For a youngster, the mammoth tractor epitomizes raw power, responsibility and coming of age.

Nothing is more exciting to youngsters than the belch of diesel smoke, the roar of engines and rubber wheels rolling on powerful tractors, combines or silage cutters. They draw children like a moth to a flame and, like fire, can be dangerous. Such equipment can cut, crush or trap children. It holds potential harm for the ones we want to protect the most – our children.

Now that children are home from school, the chance of farm accidents is greater. During the summer months, never invite your children to ride in the tractor with you. Stress that your youngsters stay away from machinery. Never let them play or hide under or around machinery like tractors.

Farms offer children a unique environment to live, play, work and grow up. As a child, I can remember tossing a lasso around the grain auger and climbing into the grain bin of our combine. At the age of five, this giant silver machine symbolized the far away Rocky Mountains and I was scaling their peaks like my legendary (Mountain Man) hero, Jim Bridger.

Safety experts have labeled agriculture a hazardous occupation, and

Insight

John Schlageck



farm children are routinely exposed to the same hazards as their parents who work the farm.

Education and awareness are the key ingredients to help make the farm a safer place for children to play, according to Holly Higgins, Kansas Farm Bureau safety director. Brushing up on some of the potential hazards can also make it safer for parents.

"While you're visiting with your youngsters about safety on the farm, don't forget to stress the positive aspects of farming with the possible hazards," Higgins says.

Describe to children how horses can be fun to ride, Higgins says. Talk about how lambs and baby calves can be pleasurable to pet or feed. Remind them that while animals are fun to be around they can also bite, kick and trample.

"Discuss with your youngsters the signs that show an animal may be dangerous," the safety director says. "Some of them include pawing the ground, snorting, raised hair and ears

laid back."

Animals – even friendly ones – can be unpredictable. Have your children stay away from large ones. Emphasize they stay away from animals with newborn or young. Tell them to remain calm, speak quietly and move slowly when around animals.

While barns, grain handling facilities and big buildings can be fun to play in, falls can occur or children may be exposed to harmful substances like chemicals and electricity, Higgins says.

Wide-open spaces also provide children with ideal playgrounds. This isolation may also lead to difficulty finding help in the event of an emergency.

Explain the dangers associated with stored grain. Stress the principles that grain can entrap a person almost immediately. Children should never play around, or in, grain that is stored in bins, trucks or wagons. Emphasize that it is difficult, or can be impossible, to pull even a child out of grain if he/she becomes trapped.

Remember, it is important that youngsters have a safe place to play. Ask them to identify safe play areas. Talk about areas away from farm machinery, animals, manure pits, silos, etc. Carefully define safe boundaries. Let them know where they can and cannot play.

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OFFICE HOURS:
8 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Mon.-Thur.
8 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Friday
Phone: (785) 877-3361
Fax: (785) 877-3732

STAFF

Dana Paxton..... General Manager
Advertising Director/
email: dpaxton@nwkansas.com
Carleen Bell..... Managing Editor
cbell@nwkansas.com
Dick Boyd..... Blue Jay Sports
nortontelegram@nwkansas.com
Michael Stephens..... Reporter
Society Editor/Area Sports
mstephens@nwkansas.com
Vicki Henderson..... Computer Production
Marcia Shelton..... Office Manager

Nor'West Newspapers
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Letters to the Editor and Thumbs Up:
e-mail dpaxton@nwkansas.com
or to write 215 S. Kansas Ave. 67654
785-877-3361



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