



Consolidation will not help rural Kansas

What can people in rural Kansas do to fend off the uncaring bean counters back east who would have us drive 50 to 90 miles to get a set of tags for the pickup, confer with the tax assessor or protest to the commissioners?

How can we keep them from forcing our kids to ride a bus for an hour or more to get to an "efficient" school in a town big enough to have a McDonalds and a Wal-Mart?

This is a scary prospect if you live off the Interstate, where distance is measured in time, not miles. Proposals for massive consolidations for both counties and school districts may make sense in the urban east, but not out here where we and our kids would suffer.

Most state officials and even most legislators today have never lived in a small town. They have no idea how life is like west of Salina, which they view as the edge of civilization. If it costs more to run a school out here, they say, consolidate. If counties are small or inefficient, put a few together.

Even if they stopped to consider the realities, it's doubtful most would understand.

In Johnson County, with nearly half a million people, they get by with one courthouse in Olathe. All the counties in this corner of the state don't have a tenth of the people — in nine counties, we have about 37,000 — but maintain nine courthouses with nine sets of elected and appointed officials. And city government of nine county-seat towns.

So, consolidation proponents maintain, just merge a bunch of counties — one proposal calls for 36 in place of 105 — and save nearly \$1 billion a year.

First of all, the savings are dubious. No one really knows how much the state might save by consolidating counties. Many of the "savings" would be paid for by people who would have to drive 50 to 90 miles out of their way to get to the courthouse instead of just going downtown.

Branch offices in the old courthouses? Ah, there go the "savings." Besides, they'd never last past the first budget crunch.

And schools? With one high school serving up to nine counties, some kids are going to be on a bus for nearly two hours each way. With activity routes, their bus might not get them home until 9-10 p.m. after practice.

We're supposed to cheer this? So what do we do? Consolidate. Do it ourselves, but do it our way.

We all need to keep a close eye on Greeley County, where voters agreed to merge the county and the city of Tribune — named for 19th century editor Horace Greeley and his newspaper — into one unified government to serve 1,500 people.

That's one route we might take, combining city and county government to keep decisions close to home while still saving some money. Some counties might like this idea, others might not.

The Legislature should let the people decide. School districts are already doing that.

As it has with school districts, the state should make it easy to consolidate any government units. Today, it's next to impossible because each merger takes an act of the Legislature.

And while the state should not finance gross inefficiency, it should not force every county and school district into a one-size-fits-all mold. It should trust people to make their own decisions about what they can afford and are willing to pay for.

We think most rural Kansans are willing to pay for good local schools and local government within an easy drive.

We must answer the call and look for ways to cut our own costs, but the state must give us have the freedom to do that. It's us, not those back east, who will be driving all over if they do not. — Steve Haynes



www.barrycartoons.com

News From the Past

10 years ago - 1999

Heather Sowers, St. Francis Community High School senior and 1999 Cheyenne County Junior Miss, traveled to Belleville where she competed in the State Junior Miss contest. Heather performed a jazz routine as her talent number and participated well in the physical fitness division.

Leadership Cheyenne County was the recipient of the Huck Boyd Institute for Rural Development award. The leaders were selected from among

those who were featured on the Kansas Profile radio program which is produced and broadcast by the Institute. Representing Leadership Cheyenne County were Traci Neitzel, Gloria Bracelin and Donna Terry.

Jill Dodd, Amanda Jones, Katie Keller and Jessica Raile were named Kansas Honor Scholars and were honored by the University of Kansas Alumni Association and the Kansas University Endowment Association at a dinner pro-

gram in Oberlin. "Looking Fine in '99" will be the theme of the Cheyenne County Fair Parade this August.

Scott Schultz was elected as the new mayor of St. Francis. Filling the two council seats up for election were Roger Jensen and Rick Krieh.

Wind gusts as high as 82-miles per hour uprooted trees and broke electrical poles on April 8. A semi truck was blown off U.S. 36 around 3 miles west of St. Francis.

Reader questions school bids

To the editor:

I am wondering if I missed something or if the full report was not printed. The following was taken from the April 15 Herald.

Remodel projects "Mr. Schiltz had talked to a contractor about two remodel projects at the grade school. The estimate for remodeling the computer lab which included raising the floor to run electricity for the computers came to around \$18,955. He noted that several years ago when the high

Letters to the Editor

school computer lab was remodeled, the cost was between \$15,000 and \$16,000. The remodel does not include computers as there are recently purchased computers at the grade school. The second project was the girls' rest room on the first floor by the cafeteria. This room will be completely gutted and all new fixtures and tile will be installed. The cost for this project is estimated at \$12,000 to \$13,000. The contractor,

Brock McAtee, will have the two projects completed before the start of school next fall."

Who were the other contractors that submitted bids and how did those bids compare to Mr. McAtee's?"

I don't recall seeing any where that these projects were put out for bids.

Rod Zweygardt
St. Francis

Hospice volunteers appreciated

To the editor:

On average, Kansans are very generous and dedicated to their communities. A total of 772,000 Kansans volunteered 97.3 million hours of service per year (between 2005 and 2007). The estimated economic contribution of volunteer hours is \$1.9 billion annually. Kansas is ranked ninth within the 50 states and Washington D.C. in Volunteerism, April 19 through the 25th is National Volunteer Week.

Volunteers are dedicated, compassionate people that give of

themselves to help others and support our communities in many ways.

One small but mighty volunteer group in this County is the Hospice volunteers. They are an outstanding group of people that are trained and educated to provide the best care to those on Hospice Care. you may not hear a lot about

hem because they work quietly behind the scenes to ensure the needs are being met.

This National Volunteer week, join me in appreciation for some of our local heroes, your local group of Hospice Volunteers.

Sincerely Amanda McKenzie
Manager of Volunteers Hospice Services, Inc.

Honor Roll

New and renewed Herald subscriptions: Donald Gamblin, St. Francis; Neitzel Insurance, St. Francis; Timothy and Tema Trumbo, St. Francis; Jess Williams, St. Francis; Bill Bracelin, St. Francis;

GOD SAYS
And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.
Galatians 6:9

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This state is just full of surprises!

Last weekend Lezlie and I joined her family for a nephew's wedding. We stayed in Great Bend, while the ceremony was held in Hoisington.

The drive there was pretty simple: straight east on I-70 to Russell then south to Barton County.

The exciting thing, beside the wedding, was the places of importance along the way. We passed through Ellis, the boyhood town of Walter P. Chrysler, who became one of the most recognized auto manufacturers in America.

Next came Hays, the spot where the old Fort Hays stood as a major outpost to the "wild west."

After that, along the highway we could see the twin towers of the Cathedral of the Plains as we drove past Victoria.

Going through Russell the signs make it clear that this is the home to another Kansas great: military veteran and statesman Bob Dole.

The streets of Hoisington were packed with visitors attending the Cheyenne Bottoms Wetland Festival. This event draws many bird observers looking for waterfowl and good times.

Finally, in Great Bend, where the Arkansas River makes a big arch, stands the large and stately courthouse for Barton County. What sets this county apart? It's the only one named for a woman: Clara Barton of Massachusetts, who founded the American Red Cross during the Civil War.

It seems that on any weekend, just by taking a drive across the state of Kansas, something unexpected and interesting will cross your path.

Lines from the Library

By Pat Leibbrandt
New books at the St. Francis Library include: *What I Did For Love* by Susan Elizabeth Phillips; *Max* by James Patterson; *Corsair* by Clive Cussler; *Pursuit* by Karen Robard; *True Detectives* by Jonathan Kellerman; *Fatally Flaky* by Diane Davidson; *Nightwalkers* by Heather Gra-

ham; *The Geometry of Sisters* by Luanne Rice; *Cream Puff Murder* by Joanna Fluke; *Cursed* by Carol Higgins Clark; *Just Take My Heart* by Mary Higgins Clark; *Where The Heart Is* by Nora Roberts.

The following new books have arrived in the children's department: *Corey Combine And The Great Big*

Mess by Elana Roth; *Picnic! A Day In The Park* by Joan Holub; *Spring Is Here* by Joan Holub; *Thomas And The Treasure And Other Stories*; *Johnny Tractor Saves The Parade* by Dena Neusner; *Snow Day* by Joan Holub; *Thomas And Friends Steam Engine Stories*.

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