

Keep federal money for real emergencies

While the jury is out on its performance after "superstorm" Sandy, one thing for sure is that the much-maligned Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA, needs to realign its priorities and pull back from trying to help every time the wind comes up a little.

If you don't think the agency has grown bloated and lost its sense of purpose, consider the fact that last year, right here in northwest Kansas, one of our counties suffered a disaster. Yes. Six inches of water running over a gravel road.

The commissioners, with straight faces, reminded the road boss to get someone out there to take pictures and assess the damage "so we can get some FEMA money."

Every time it snows, every time there's ice, every little local flood now, public officials try to record everything because there might be some federal money.

What ever happened to doing things for ourselves?

Well, if there's federal money out there, officials are going to try to get it. It's only human nature. Still, you'd think we had some pride.

The genesis of the problem, we suspect, goes back to the Bush years. Congress and a president who'd been burned badly when Hurricane Katrina all but washed New Orleans away, just threw money at Emergency Management. Standards were lowered; they had to spend it.

So counties and cities began to add up the cost of little storms.

Katrina and Sandy are the kinds of events that this agency was designed to battle, yet oddly enough, these are the hardest to prepare for. In a real emergency, it's usual that no one is in charge,

no one gets much done at first and confusion reigns.

Go back through history, you'll find that's always been the case. It was as true a century ago in San Francisco as it was in New Orleans.

In both cases, order wasn't restored until the Army arrived. It's not that the civilian authorities weren't properly prepared. Events like those are impossible to be prepared for. The Army, for all its bureaucratic faults, is trained to deal with chaos. They call it combat.

We need an agency to deal with disasters, true emergencies. But if the one we have is ill prepared or spends its time and money replacing gravel washed away by a thunderstorm, we're in trouble.

Emergency Management needs to refocus and remember what the real priorities are: being ready to respond when nature turns right ugly.

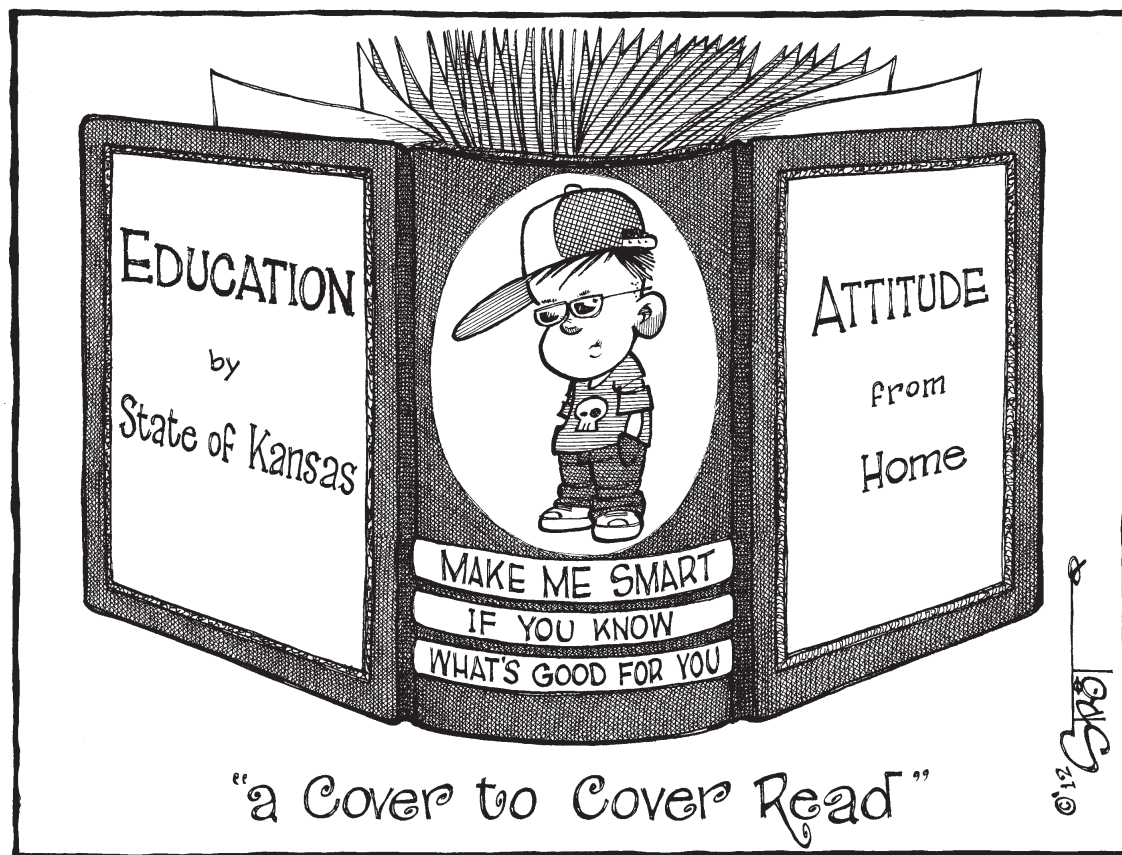
Let the cities, states and counties take care of the little problems, even the big ones. Federal aid should be reserved for when it's really needed, not frittered away on minor problems.

And with the need to cut federal spending, the bloat in this agency ought to be a prime target. We're not talking about Sandy or money held for the next superstorm. Those rightly are federal issues.

But plowing snow, grading and graveling roads, fixing things up after a big wind, those are things a federal agency should never hear about - let alone pay for with money the government has to borrow.

Let's rein this agency in and point it at its real mission.

- Steve Haynes



"a Cover to Cover Read"

Christmas Letters

Christmas seen through the eyes of a child is often priceless.

This year, as in year's past, the special Christmas and New Year's sections will be published before the holidays. The sections will feature letters for Santa, answers

of questions asked of school children, memories and recipes.

The Saint Francis Herald and Bird City Times staffs welcome participation from children to adults. All items must be received by Dec. 5, in order to be published in the special section.

Send letters, special memories, articles and recipes to The Herald at Box 1050, St. Francis, 67756, fax 785-332-3001, e-mail to karen.k@nwkansan.com titling the subject as "Christmas For The Paper."

Open Season

Plantations to the Harbor

By Cynthia Haynes



From its great plantations to the harbor that gave it birth and prosperity, Charleston, S.C., is a fascinating city.

Steve and I got to visit this belle of the South last month during the annual National Newspaper Association convention.

This was not our first visit to Charleston, which is just about three hours from Augusta, Ga., where both our daughters live. During the many visits we've made to the South, we've gotten to see many of her gracious, old cities, including New Orleans, Birmingham, Savannah, Ga., Columbia, S.C., Nashville and Chattanooga, Tenn., and of course, Charleston.

But, this visit was longer and more intense, with tours by horse-drawn carriage and boat of the waterfront area and a visit to a working plantation.

We also got to tour a historic home, built in 1808 for the fantastic sum of \$80,000.

Out in the harbor sits Fort Sumter, where the Civil War began. The Union garrison refused to surrender the fort, hoisting a huge U.S. flag. Southern forces astounded by this affront bombarded the brick fortress for 34 hours. When reinforcements and the expected supplies failed to materialize, the garrison surrendered.

No one was killed in the battle.

Broad Street is one of the main thoroughfares downtown. Anything on the south side of the street is near the waterfront and considered top-notch property. SOB is a popular designation for those business and people living South of Broad.

At the fancy restaurants South of Broad, we found fried green tomatoes, grits, collard greens and crab cakes on every menu. I think Steve tried them all. He dove into the myriad of seafood available in a coastal city.

Personally, I kept looking for a hamburger.

What I came up with was a low-country boil. It's sort of like our cream-can dinners, only with corn, potatoes, sausage and shrimp. This is where Steve is very useful - he eats the shrimp and I get the sausage.

Our tour of Boone Hall Plantation was a visit back in time. The plantation is still a working farm. The land was given to Maj. John Boone in the 1680s. It produced cotton and bricks in the pre-Civil War days. Was a major pecan farm for many years until hurricanes destroyed most of the trees.

Today it exists on tourism and tourist-related agriculture, like

pick-your-own strawberries and peaches and hay rides in the fall.

Beside the big house, where we saw a wedding party getting pictures taken on the front steps, there is a row of small brick buildings - the old slave cabins. I was a little surprised that they were brick, a sturdier building material than you would think would be used, but since that was manufactured on the plantation in the early days, I suppose it was cheap.

The cabins have been turned into a series of museum rooms, each telling a story of slavery and plantation life including a list of the price of merchandise - horses, cattle, corn, whiskey, men, women and children. It was both fascinating and chilling.

Our entertainment for the evening was a storyteller, a woman who told us about the Gullah, a language and culture created by the slaves in the low country, as this area along the coast is called.

I know we just scratched the surface of this wonderful city and I'm hoping to go back again some day. There are more homes, churches, gardens and the aquarium to explore. I want to visit some of the islands and go crabbing.

Maybe next time. Our girls still live just three hours away.

Casey's Comments

By Casey McCormick



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It's official! I can finally be deemed a full fledged Kansan. What so many have done before me has been accomplished in person.

My car had a collision with a deer.

Not that it's much of an accomplishment to have a 21st Century machine altered by a forest (or high plain's) creature, but it sure does happen around here regularly.

The odd thing is that the deer ran into my car as I was traveling home along I-70. Cruising at a good clip, just after dusk, my mind was

on supper and family. The brown and furry blur appeared out of the corner of my eye, tearing off a mirror, denting both doors in on that side and changing my antenna into a question mark. It's amazing how much force came into play as the two objects met at high speed.

As I said, this kind of thing is nothing new. The Kansas Department of Transportation reported 9,199 auto-deer accidents in 2011. That is including two fatalities.

This time of year is especially dangerous for both man and beast as the bucks are more focused on

love than that speeding hunk of metal flying down the road. What is called the "rut" causes mating deer to cover more area than usual. Also, with the corn fields cut and leaves off trees and bushes, they are left in the open.

So be careful and conscious of what's around you when driving. You don't want to do to Bambi what my Ford Taurus did.

Hangin' With Marge

By Margaret Bucholtz



Snow in Alaska

The time for snow is sneaking upon us and for people like me that is a good thing. Especially after the hot summer we just had.

Kurt lived in Alaska for a year or two working on refrigeration to freeze fish when the boats arrived. He had a roommate that lived with him in a small apartment and snow was always part of his life.

One morning as they were eating breakfast the radio announcer said "we are expecting 8-10 inches of snow today. You must park your car on the even-numbered side of the street, so the snowplows can get through."

His roommate goes out and

moves his car.

About a week later the same thing happened, but this time they were to move the car to the odd-numbered side of the street. Once again Jay went out and moved the car.

Kurt is thinking this is great, watching his roommate getting some exercise, and he always thanked him properly.

Only a week later the announcer says, "we are expecting 12 - 14

inches of snow today, you must park..... and then the power died.

Jay was very upset and worried when he asked Kurt "what do I do, which side of the street should I park on?"

Anyone that knows Kurt can just imagine the worried, sober look on his face as he said, "Jay, why don't you just leave it in the garage this time?"

GOD SAYS

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

I John 1:8, 9

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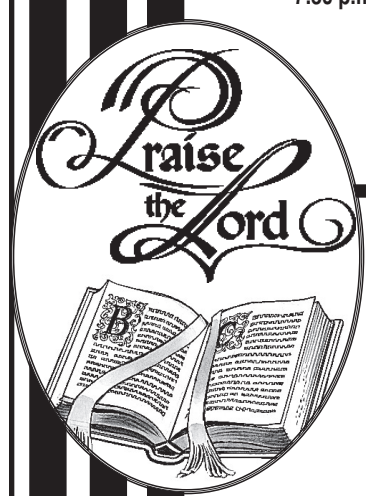
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