

Opinion

A Kansas Viewpoint



Finding the right way to fit in

From the Parsons Sun
When young professionals in metropolitan areas complain that they have a difficult time meeting others outside of their office, there's no question that the problem is exacerbated in small communities. That's also one of the biggest problems in trying to attract young professionals to more rural areas.

Other than going to a bar, there may be a limited number of places to meet and get involved with others. For many, especially women, going to a bar alone isn't the kind of image they want to present.

The Parsons Chamber of Commerce deserves kudos for starting a young professionals group that will offer the opportunity for these people to meet each other, find networking opportunities, perhaps identify areas where they can volunteer their time and talent, as well as simply socialize.

Parsons may offer great employment opportunities to young people who move here, but the reality is that weekends can be very long and unsatisfying when there aren't others with which to socialize. Regardless of how much one might like his or her job or the employer, it takes a lot more than that to keep young professionals happily living here and not just using this as a stop on their resume.

Chamber members should encourage their employees to attend the upcoming events, and they should use news of the organization in their recruitment of new employees. The potential for this group is limitless. As with everything, though, the success will depend on the willingness of those attending to make it work.

Just as with any party or gathering, if people come expecting to have fun and find opportunity then they likely will. If they go someplace anticipating they will have a bad time, the odds are pretty good that will be the case, too. And as a new group, the Chamber is open to suggestions about what kinds of events it should host.

The first was a gathering at a chili feed before a Labette Community College basketball game. Will the next be a movie followed by discussion at an area watering hole? A rotation dinner where each course is held in a different restaurant? What about a musical chairs dinner so that table mates vary, as well as the conversation?

The possibilities are endless.
And the potential is great.

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail jvannostrand@nwkansas.com or pdecker@nwkansas.com.

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A lost generation?

About 30 years ago the family vacation went through Dodge City. I don't remember it. Fast forward 30 years from that time and I learned more about Dodge City. The weekly paper I worked for at the time closed on Friday afternoons. With wife Jennifer working most of those days, I spent those afternoons at my grandparents who lived nearby. Most of the time it was us in recliners with popcorn a Coke in hand and Matt Dillon in front of us.

My grandparents were big fans of "Gunsmoke," the big-hit Western-themed television show that lasted 20 seasons and set in Dodge City. They loved watching reruns on cable.

At the same time, I visited Dodge City in person. Jennifer's grandparents were longtime residents of Dodge City before their deaths. We went to Dodge City a few times and Jennifer showed me all the sites.

Jennifer was not a big fan of Boothill, the tourist attraction that portrays what Dodge City was like in its heyday in the 1870s. She went during her youth. Jennifer said Boothill was not as authentic as it should be. Jennifer and I never went - it was in the middle of winter when we visited Dodge City, not the prime tourist season for Boothill.

Jennifer's grandmother acted as our own tour guide one evening as we drove across town. I liked the town - the boardwalks, cowboy boots and hats for sale in many stores, art museum and mile-after-mile of feedlots. Funny, the best Oriental food I've ever had was in Dodge City. My favorite steak wasn't in Dodge City - as I was



John Van Nostrand

Line in the Dust

expecting. Last year was not a good one for Boothill. It nearly died with its boots on. Dodge City officials, who want to keep the town as attractive as possible to tourists, scrambled and found a few bucks to keep Boothill open a little longer.

Officials just may be delaying the inevitable. My theory is no matter how action-packed Boothill's reenactment gun fights are, how pretty the saloon girls are or how much the restaurants improve their steaks, niche tourist towns, like Dodge City, are part of a fading generation.

Like World War II veterans, those young parents who watched Miss Kitty and Chester Goode, are declining in numbers every day. Today's younger generations just don't have an interest. Knowing the details why Brad Pitt and Jennifer Aniston split is more important.

People, like me, only know of "Gunsmoke" via their grandparents and anything related to American history makes them think of boring high school history classes. Yes, "Gunsmoke" was only a television show, but it implied Dodge City's place in United States history. The show

deserves some credit, considering how important Dodge City was in the development of the western United States.

Today's younger families take their kids to Disneyland-like places because they have seen Buzz Lightyear. Or they go to the grocery store where an "American Idol" star was once spotted purchasing toothpaste.

History can be entertaining, in addition to educational, but we have difficulty seeing it that way. If there is no glitz or neon signs, we don't comprehend the message.

Another niche tourist spot, I highly recommend, and also not far from Colby, is the Archway Monument straddling Interstate 80 near Kearney, Neb.

The museum highlights America's westward progress from the Oregon Trail, Pony Express to today's railroads and highways. It's high-tech, but gives you the feel you are reliving those moments in American history. (You will swear they stuffed a train in there - but won't see it.) I've visited the Archway several times.

Not even 10 years old, the Archway has also struggled supposedly because high gasoline prices have made fewer people travel across Nebraska.

Finding the dollars to keep the doors to Boothill and Archway is not the biggest problem. Finding people wanting to walk through those doors is.

John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Free Press

Wanted: \$1 billion for Kansas

Finally legislative activity is beginning to move discussion of issues and "normalize" committee functioning.

Please visit www.kslegislature.org/hhhs or www.kslegislature.org/hhhs/ to follow the activity in my House Health and Human Services Committee. You are now able to download the same information we have as it becomes public as well as watch and hear the meeting.

Soon you will also be able to interactively participate in the committee by delivering testimony from the comfort of your home rather than having to travel to Topeka to appear before the committee. You also will soon be able to interact in real time with committee members during live testimony suggesting questions and comments regarding conferee answers to committee member questions.

The interactivity will be complex and may just not work but I really believe that if the public is better able to participate, question and oversee (legislator accountability) what we do, the process and outcomes have to be better than today. You will hear much more about my attempts to better open the Legislative process to the public and make more of our meetings open rather than effectively closing them because you must be in Topeka to participate.

As you well know we have a debit problem in Kansas. The Legislature has sidestepped the "cash basis" constitutional requirement by classifying bonds as revenue bonds rather than general obligation bonds. That simple change now has created a Kansas credit card debt so high that we now pay \$429 million on the debt interest where in 1992 our TOTAL debt was 424 million! That really stresses our ability to deliver services.

Add to that the very real probability that we



Jim Morrison

Capitol Review

will need about one billion MORE during the next three years just to support schools and you will begin to see the enormity of our situation. The problem most vexing to me regarding schools is the near certain loss of our low enrollment weighting. I hear that we will have a "hold harmless" clause in legislation but that only holds us to our current levels and does not allow for future increase in budget so all future increases must be from local (property taxes) effort. I am trying to help stop that concept from becoming reality.

Eminent domain will be discussed during this week and probably next week as well. In reality what the US Supreme Court did was to actually clarify and narrow the current use of eminent domain. Too many jurisdictions have been abusing application of eminent domain such that the appearance is one of improper "taking" of private property for another individual's gain. Unless this issue is clarified some of my communities may be unable to properly utilize their authority to improve blighted neighborhoods. We just might find ourselves unable to obtain grants for neighborhood improvement programs or to attract new business.

Most of you will be happy to hear that we are likely to phase out all franchise taxes and taxes on machinery and equipment. There also is legislation to restore the demand transfer that was

taken from counties a few years ago.

Health care access, affordability and availability are also gaining more attention. You will hear a great deal more about fraud and misuse of Medicaid and Medicare dollars by providers and consumers. In part fraud questions were generated by massive problems created by Medicare part D implementation and the resultant attention on the care and drug delivery system.

Some "whistle blowers" contacted me a few years ago with some interesting information concerning fraud and abuse.

Investigators looked at the information, further investigated and confirmed problems were present in our health- and drug-care delivery systems.

This may amount to several tens of millions of dollars per year in Kansas, maybe in the hundreds of millions.

Many of you visited with me as you came to testify on legislation and participate in the Kansas Birthday week activities. I really appreciate your taking time to visit when you are in town. Please let me know if you will be here for any reception for a group that has a legislative reception or whatever so I will be sure to attend your activity.

I generally do not attend activities unless I know some constituents will be present and would have time to talk with me. Otherwise I need the time to study legislation of importance to us.

Thanks again for your tremendous communication and support this session. I really appreciate your input on issues. I will continue to work hard for you.

If you have any question please email me at jmorrison@ink.org or call at 785-296-7676.

Doonesbury

• Gary Trudeau

