

Opinion

Kansas can build

By Ron Wilson, Director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

What does Kansas do well? Many things, but here's one: Kansas can build. Our state has lots of people who work hard at building things. Today, we'll meet a company that builds homes and other facilities. The company's very name says it all: KanBuild. This company has a remarkable history of building and rebuilding itself.

Meet John Samples of Osage City, Kansas. John told us the remarkable story of the company KanBuild Inc.

KanBuild Inc. is a producer of modular, factory built structures for homes and office buildings. The company's history really begins with a couple of major developers in Kansas City. Apparently some of the key principals in those development companies were talking about the possibility of a manufactured housing business in eastern Kansas.

They decided to start it up and they located the plant in Osage City. The first employee of the company was none other than John Samples.

He was with the company from the very beginning. The business was launched, but then ran into the tough times of the 1980s. In November 1988, the Kansas City businessmen announced that the plant was going to close.

But the entrepreneurs and citizens of Osage City didn't want to lose this business. John Samples worked with local investors to purchase the company, and on Feb. 12, 1989, a new company was formed. Its name was KanBuild.

KanBuild was a locally-owned homegrown business in a rural setting. The company's specialty was producing custom made, modular homes. It began with 25 employees. These employees worked hard, and under the leadership of John Samples and the other owners, the company progressed dramatically.

In 1994, KanBuild was selected as Entrepreneur of the Year for a turnaround company in the states of Kansas and Missouri. The company continued to grow. By 2001, the company had two plants in Colorado plus the plant in Osage City, annual sales of 30 million dollars, more than 275 employees, and was the largest producer of modular homes in the state.

In fact, the business was so successful that it attracted outside investor interest. The company sold in 2001 to an out-of-state business. But this ownership did not work out for the company either. In August 2005, the out-of-state owners announced the closure of the Osage City facility.

Again the local citizens rallied. John Samples and other investors stepped up to the plate, and as of Jan. 1, 2006, KanBuild Inc. was reborn.

Once again, it is a locally owned company built on rural people. Quintin Robert, the manager, is a native of Osage City. John Samples is originally from Matfield Green, population 60 people. Now, that's rural.

John Samples is proud and supportive of his employees. He says, "They have a high level of skill. Many have worked for me for 20 years. We're going to do an employee stock ownership program in a couple of years so that they own the company."

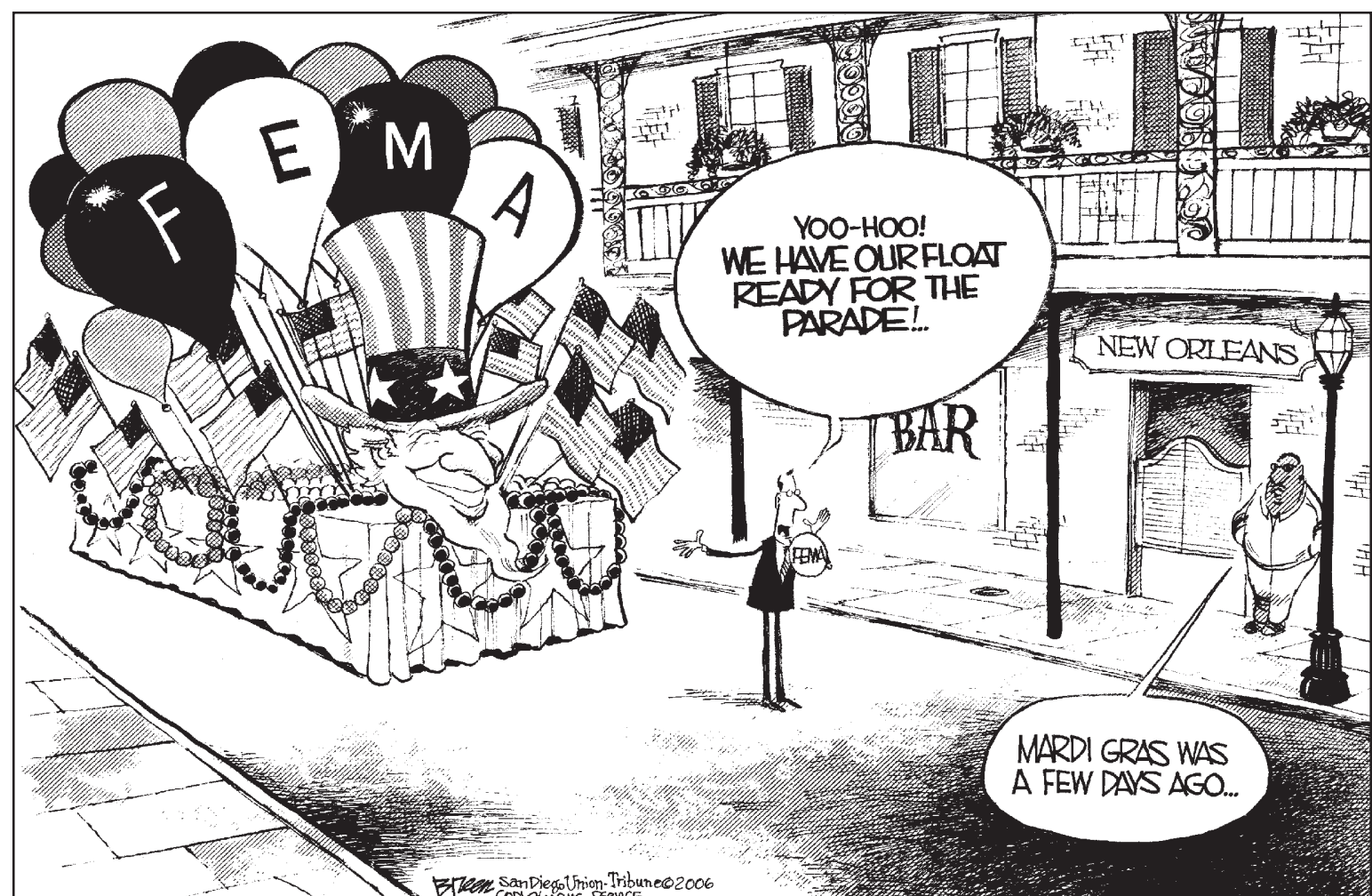
John says, "I believe we make the best house on the market. We specialize in doing custom stuff. If we can ship it down the road, we'll build it to suit the customer."

Sixty percent of their business is residential, but the company produces a remarkable array of buildings for other uses. KanBuild Inc. makes commercial buildings and multifamily dwellings, relocatable classrooms and permanent school buildings. They've built banks and medical facilities, optical and dental clinics, and even four-story apartment buildings.

KanBuild structures are found throughout the central U.S., border to border from the Dakotas to Texas. The company even has a contract with the U.S. Post Office to build postal buildings for small communities across the country. Post office buildings made by KanBuild can be found from Washington state to Tennessee, and all the buildings were built in Osage City, Kansas.

What does Kansas do well? Kansans can build. We salute John Samples, Quintin Robert, and all the people of the KanBuild Inc. company for making a difference with their hard work and entrepreneurship. When it comes to creating a positive future, I believe it is something that committed Kansans can build.

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.



It's around here somewhere

Doggone it, I missed "National Clean Off Your Desk Day" in January, but I suppose something like this holiday could be practiced any day.

If memory serves, the first time I heard about this particular day was from a colleague who brought it to my attention.

She saw it in her Earth calendar and secretly was probably trying to give me a hint that my desk could use help.

I would like to justify my messy desk by saying that it goes with the territory of newspapering, but then one of my former colleagues, was extremely neat and orderly, so there goes that theory.

It's not all my fault, though. Sometimes it just happens and, in my own defense, there are so many ways that new releases and other items can end up on the editor's desk. Unfortunately, many times the placement of these items are beyond my control.

For example, someone might drop something off when I am away from my desk, or a co-worker leaves a phone message, or whatever and — voila! — more little notes.

Oftentimes it's those little messages that are quite important for that day's newspaper and as part of my organizational system I prioritize them to special areas or corners of the desk. It's not the best system, but most of the time it works. I suppose it could be likened to the logic at Three Mile Island — when it works, it works great, but when it doesn't...uh-oh — and that's what happens when I forget one of those important things.

To avoid mishaps like that, I have gone to great lengths in the pursuit of being organized and there's lots of things I've tried.

One of the more aggressive campaigns in organizing myself was buying a Franklin planner. It never ceases to amaze me how fired up I get after attending a workshop, but within a couple of weeks, the enthusiasm dwindles.

After diligently using the planner for about two or three months, which should have been sufficient time to form the habit, I started sloughing off and before long I wasn't using it at all.



Patty Decker

● Deep Thoughts

Have you ever had something that is forgotten, but somehow keeps returning to consciousness? For me, although I tried to forget about the planner, it somehow continued to haunt me. I think the Franklin planner people know that.

After four years of my planner collecting dust, my dear friend decided it would be a perfect birthday present for me.

She bought the 2006 pages and bought me a new booklet with a zipper. So, I am all set again — now I will try to make it stick.

Another way I am trying to stay better organized, which I believe is synonymous with a clean desk, is using a "white" board to prioritize what needs to be done in the newsroom, complete with names and assignments we currently are working on. Glancing up at the board just now, I noticed it needs to be updated again. It's a never-ending battle.

Like people in most offices, I do have an "in" and "out" box with four levels, and it's a great way to tidy up my desk, allowing for storage of reference material or follow-up papers. That's probably one of the better ways I can keep things neater. The only drawback is that if I put too much stuff in there, it makes it tougher to wade through it later. And on those occasions when I purge the files, it never fails that a couple of days later I could kick myself for having thrown away something that would have been helpful for an article.

My computer has been a mixed blessing in the quest for a "clean desk." While it has replaced those good old manila folders and huge file cabinets for storing things, it also brought with it a whole new set of nightmares.

What do you bet the next national day of recognition will be "Clean Off Your Computer Desktop?"

Being aware of a clean desk at work could also translate to tables at home. When I clean all the school papers, junk mail, catalogs and other stuff off the dining room table, my family always notices. The problem is the way they notice. Within minutes after finishing and I'm off to another chore, I will walk back into the dining room and the table is full again. Maybe not with papers, but something else is occupying the majority of the table. It might be a bunch of books that someone has decided to move from one room to another or a model airplane or car under construction. Wonder what my family would have done had I not cleaned the table at just that exact moment?

Even though I've been joking around about a clean desk, I think it's an important part of any job in keeping things straight. I can remember one company I worked for years and years ago that demanded everything be off the desk before we went home at night.

I'm not kidding. We couldn't have anything on our desk when we left, not even family pictures. In some ways, it was comical to watch and listen as people were shoving things into desk drawers right at 5 p.m. Sometimes when I lost track of time, I would be reminded immediately with the noise of the nightly ritual.

I suspect the reason for this practice was to make cleaning easier for the custodians at night. It was sure a sterile-looking environment, though, and lacked any kind of individuality. In that respect, I almost think it was too much the other way. Yet for many years, I continued the practice of stuffing things in the desk drawers before I left work at other jobs too and then one day I realized I was the only one doing it.

I want to thank my friend for the planner pages and new booklet. Maybe it will take this time.

Decker is editor of the Free Press.

Opening the door on government

From The Kansas City Star

The Kansas Legislature is thwarting people who wish to know more about decisions by public officials and law enforcement officers.

Lawmakers should change their course and advance two important bills. One would require public boards, commissions and councils to audiotape closed sessions if a member thinks the discussion should legally be open to the public.

The other bill would allow the public to view statements in which law enforcement officers summarize the evidence they use to seek arrest or search warrants.

The proposal to record some closed sessions is a modest attempt to make sure elected bodies

comply with the open-meetings law. It calls for judges to listen to the tapes and decide whether a law has been violated.

Elected officials ought to welcome that sort of record. Instead, they have whined bitterly to lawmakers. Republican leaders prevented the measure from reaching the House floor for a vote.

The other bill, intended to give Kansans the same scrutiny of law enforcement work as residents of all other states, hasn't even cleared a committee. Its sponsors properly want the public to have access to probable-cause affidavits.

As long as these records remain sealed, it can take weeks or even months to learn what evi-

dence is used to charge people with crimes.

Lawmakers, however, appear reluctant to stand up to prosecutors, who contend that the release of this information could jeopardize investigations.

That hasn't happened elsewhere. Most states allow prosecutors to block out sensitive information or to ask judges to seal documents in certain instances.

Kansas shouldn't become known as the state that allows its elected and appointed officials, as well as law enforcement officers, to conceal information from the public. Legislative leaders must find a way to resurrect these two attempts to provide a more open government.

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