

Opinion



Free Press Viewpoint

Thank you, Rod Run volunteers

By John Van Nostrand

Congratulations to the group of volunteers who put the “rev” back in Colby’s Rod Run engine.

The event comes back to life Friday through Sunday.

For years, Colby had a Rod Run that had become well known in western Kansas. But, how most volunteer-based events run, as the energy, drive and focus fades away the volunteers don’t come back. Unfortunately, that is what happened to Colby’s Rod Run last year. It didn’t happen because nobody made it happen.

Months after the Rod Run would have been held last year, there was a discussion among certain people about bringing it back. Some longtime Colby residents said, “It’s just not a Colby summer without a Rod Run.”

Comments like that are what motivated a new group of volunteers to take the lead. Since late last year, that group of people have met on a regular basis putting together everything from the actual car entries to a church service Sunday morning (nice touch, by the way).

The Rod Run volunteers are a classic example of the good in the people of Colby and Thomas County. There was a need and some people joined forces to make sure that need was met.

That is also reminiscent of the response from our people who donated cash and goods to victims of storms from Bird City in late March to the massive Greensburg tornado last month.

But it’s not just the big stuff, or fun stuff like Rod Run, we care about.

We probably all know somebody who has volunteered to mow somebody’s lawn, shovel the snow off their sidewalk, watched their kids, provided a meal or helped with a loan payment because some sort of emergency happened. You could have even been the recipient of such acts.

Again, congratulations and thank you to the Rod Run volunteers for doing what you did — show the rest of the world how good it is to live around here.

— John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press

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@nwkanas.com or pdecker@nwkanas.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the Free Press.

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Words of wisdom

We’ve all seen them — those signs that hang in cubicles or office spaces that hang there as jokes, but are really intended to say something the owner would dare not speak out loud in the workplace.

For instance, there’s the sign that can be posted to warn people the business owner will only go so far before turning the reader over to the collection agency.

That sign states, “To Our Past Due Credit Customers: When you die, please let us be your pallbearers. We’ve carried you so long that we would like to finish the job!”

Then there’s the sign that lets the reader know the person with whom he or she is dealing is not quite playing with a full deck. That sign reads, “I have gone to meet myself. If I return before I get back, hold me here because it is important that I see myself when I get back before I get confused. Thanks!”

Whew, I’ve dealt with a few people like that before, and I’ll bet there are a few people who say I’m like that, especially those who disagree with what I’ve written in the confines of this column now and then.

How about the one that lets the reader know the person to whom he or she is speaking or doing business could easily metamorphous into someone he or she may not like.

“Don’t rush me! If you don’t like this speed, you certainly won’t like my slow one.” The word certainly is underlined so the reader knows to keep a generous distance or become prey to whatever the other person is eating or drinking.

Speaking of drinking, how about the sign that shows a blender with two fish swimming in it and



Jan Katz Ackerman

• From Where I stand

one screams out, “I can’t stand the tension!”

We’ve all, at one time or another, felt like that screaming fish. Come on, admit it, tension is like dealing with the person who defines the term expert. You know what an expert is, don’t you? An ex-SPURT is a former drip under pressure.

OK, I’ll move on.

One of my favorite graphic signs is the one with the rugged cowboy walking away from the viewer with a week old growth on his face, sagging cowboy hat that’s a couple sizes too large, plaid shirt draped over baggy pants with his backside showing and the letters T.G.I.F. posted below him. I can relate to the T.G.I.F. portion of the sign.

I’ve been involved in a family matter for the past couple months that leaves me feeling like I’m dragging despite nine to 10 hours of sleep. I wonder what the old cowboy and I have in common?

Then there’s a sign that we in the newspaper industry can all wear as a badge of honor. “If it isn’t written down it didn’t happen.”

Sure, there’s John Q. Public who picks his evening paper up off the porch, finds his way to his easy chair and reads it, never once thinking

about the fact that a newspaper is a piece of history.

History?

Yes, history.

Each and every article written or ad created documents something in the life of someone else. For instance, a sports article documents an individual or team effort at a sport, just like an article about a school, city or county commission documents the board members’ actions. An ad documents the opening or closing of a business, just like a birth or wedding announcement documents a family’s changes.

See what I mean?

It’s history.

Yes, the one about things needing to be written down as proof they happened is a favorite one of mine, but my all time favorite is this one, and no, I did not pose for it. The sign is one of a gruff, snaggle-toothed woman sitting at her desk, which has two large stacks of papers on it, and between the papers the viewer can see that she’s pointing a pistol and saying, “Go ahead. Lay something else on my desk.”

That could be my phrase of the day most days.

No, I won’t hold a pistol on anyone who drops something on my desk, but one never knows the repercussion of having done so. Signs and sayings, aren’t they great? Signs and sayings make life more interesting and at the same time more tolerable. Signs and sayings are those little things that can brighten the day of not only the owner, but the viewer.

— Jan Katz Ackerman is a reporter for the Colby Free Press

No Hollywood cowboy

The afternoon was gentle, the breeze cool, and cotton fluff drifted through the grove shading a few hundred hardy music fans waiting for Michael Martin Murphey to come on stage.

There’s something right about watching Michael, who bills himself as “American’s No. 1 Cowboy Music Singer,” from a seat where you can see the range, not some city auditorium.

“Murph” has come a long ways since the days of “Wildfire” and “Carolina in the Pines,” leaving Nashville for ranches in Taos, Colorado and Texas and, strangely enough, Wisconsin, where he lives today.

He’s into old-time cowboy ballads, and he had a haunting version of “Streets of Laredo” for the crowd at Lake Atwood Sunday.

Wearing jeans, chaps, spurs and boots, a vest and an old cowboy hat, Murphey bounded onto the stage — really two flatbed semis parked back-to-back — after an opening set by Erica James, an Oklahoma father-and-daughter duo who do original music on violin and guitar.

He opened with “The Long and Lonely Ride to Dalhart,” a sad and lovely ballad about a cowboy coming off the summer range. Michael is no Hollywood cowboy, though he said as a kid, he dreamed of being the next Roy Rogers or Gene Autry.

He grew up on his grandfather’s place in the Panhandle and still calls Texas home. He raises horses and runs stock, and the farther he gets



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

from Nashville, the more cowboy he is.

He’s also a heck of a nice guy, an entertainer of some means who takes time to sign everything offered and talk with each fan in a long line after the concert. He’s done benefits, like the one Sunday, for restoration of the old Shirley Opera House in Atwood, for years.

Back in the days when southern Colorado ranchers were fighting a Canadian billionaire who wanted to sell their water to California, Michael would drive up from Taos each summer to do a benefit for the water war. He never failed to draw a crowd to the rodeo grounds in Monte Vista.

He left New Mexico for Colorado a few years back, he told the crowd, when yuppies cooking steaks behind their condos started to outnumber the elk he could see from his porch. He didn’t want to wake up to a forest fire, he added, and it was getting a little crowded. There was an attitude.

And at 10,000 foot elevation, it was pretty

poor range anyway.

He started something called “Michael Martin Murphey’s Cowboy Experience” in central Colorado, where dudes could live in the bunkhouse and ride horses all week on vacation. Maybe the real cowboy life wasn’t for most city folks, but he gave that up a couple of years later — for love.

His new wife, he said, has three girls who can’t leave Wisconsin, so that’s where Michael punches cows these days. He doesn’t seem any worse for the wear.

We hope Jeff and Alice Hill and their supporters made a few bucks for their project Sunday, but we know they made a lot of music fans happy. Michael, too.

He gave the crowd a heavy dose of new and old cowboy tunes, teasing them a little about his Nashville life.

But when they stood and cheered, he rewarded them with “Wildfire,” his first and most enduring hit.

The song came to him in a dream, he said, and interpreting dreams is God’s work.

“I don’t know how to tell you,” he said, “but I don’t understand this song. I don’t know how to explain it.”

Nobody really seemed to mind.

— Steve Haynes is president of Nor’West Newspapers including the Colby Free Press.

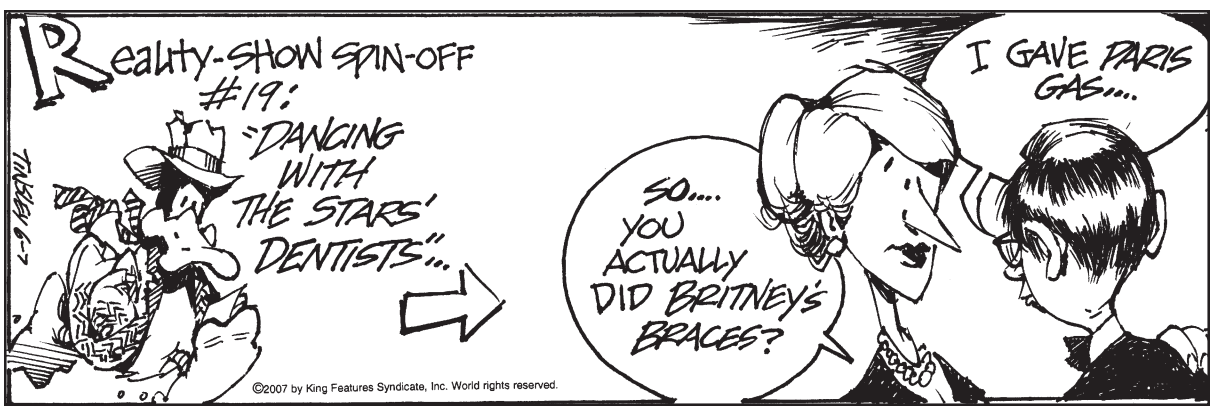
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