

Opinion

Free Press Viewpoint



Home is where the heart and fun is

By John Van Nostrand

Every so often one of the major holidays falls in the middle of the week which probably forces people to stay home, since time off from work is limited.

The Fourth of July is just like that this year. It falls on a Wednesday.

But with what is planned to happen in Colby that day, there is no reason to leave anyway.

For the second year, Colby's Kiwanis Club and Lions Club are putting together a combination of food and fun for families and whoever else shows up at the 4-H Building at the Thomas County Fairgrounds.

Organizers have said they have more sponsors and help for this year's events. Families will enjoy a slice of America — figuratively and literally — from hot dogs to a slice of watermelon. There will be activities for kids and a great fellowship time for the parents.

It's yet another sign of how people in our area can come together for the good of the community. A big thank you goes to those groups. Those service clubs want to make the July 4 fun an annual event.

That enthusiasm rubbed off on the Colby Free Press and we too will add to the fun on July 4 (see front page story and June 20 Country Advocate).

This is also another opportunity for us to thank the Colby Fire Department for their efforts to shoot the fireworks we all enjoy. Fireworks is probably a nice change of pace for them. Rather than the stress and tension of battling a house fire, they can enjoy this kind of work. Donations are still being taken for the fireworks show.

Next year is a leap year — which means July 4 falls on a Friday.

Thanks to our good people in our service clubs and what they do for the communities they serve, why would anyone want to leave anyway?

— 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@nwkansan.com or pdecker@nwkansan.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

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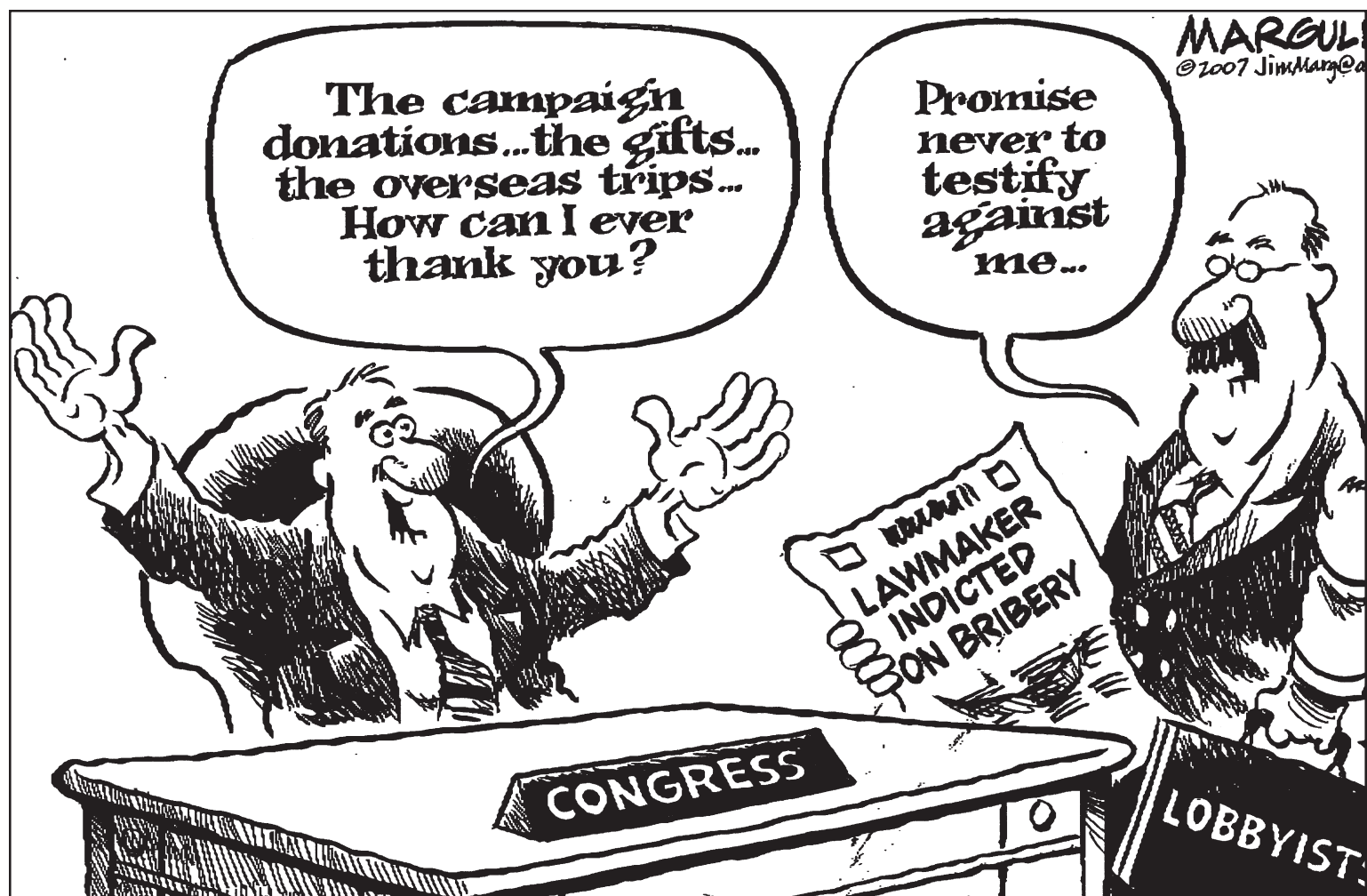
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Father's Day brings back memories

For many of us who no longer have our dads, Father's Day brings with it a mixed bag of feelings.

My father died just over 25 years ago and not a day goes by that I don't think of some silly joke he told or some words of wisdom he may have spouted.

Like many fathers, my dad was the bread winner, the protector, the peace keeper and so much more.

As the youngest of three children and the only daughter, being daddy's little girl had its advantages.

When I was 5, we lived in Kansas City and my dad was comptroller for Yellow Transit Trucking. It's hard to remember a lot of details from that young age, but what I do recall was when he would take me to work with him, I loved it.

As I got older and even into my teenage years, I still enjoyed going places with my dad. In fact, the thought that someday he wouldn't be around was too much to bear in my teens.

Although my dad had some wonderful qualities, he also had his shortcomings. He wasn't a patient person and sometimes it was easier for him to do the work rather than show others how it needed to be done.

Case in point was when he helped me with my high school algebra homework. My father liked math and was a good student. His major in college was math and he graduated from Benedictine College in Atchison cum laude (above average grades). Yes, I know, I am bragging a little about him, but I am very proud of him because he also had his family, a full-time job, and was a full-time student.

He knew his algebra quite well and while explaining to me the proper way to solve this or that equation, he worked out the answers on paper while I sat there thinking about what I was going to do over the weekend.

It was a great arrangement until I took a test over the material and failed it miserably. While I loved his help, I realized I needed to make more of an effort to do the work myself.



Patty Decker

• Deep Thoughts

Seriously, though, one of the more memorable moments involving my father happened not long after I started driving a car.

For about six months, it seemed like every time I got in the car, I would have an accident. A fender-bender at the shopping mall, a telephone pole that magically appeared out of nowhere, weaving in and out of traffic or hitting a driver pulling out of a parking lot.

With each accident, I remember going home and expecting a lecture, grounding, and worse.

After the third or fourth accident, I figured I was doomed. I remember walking in the house and having to explain to my father yet another time that I had hit something — this time it was in his car and not mine.

He took the keys from me and didn't say a word. I was mortified.

About an hour later, though, he asked me if I would do him a favor.

"Sure dad," I said. "What do you want me to do?"

He looked at me with a somewhat stern face and said, "First of all, Patty, I want you to know that you are the worst driver I have ever seen."

As I held back the tears, he then smiled and tossed me the keys to his car saying, "Oh, by the way, would you please pick up some ice-cream for dessert."

I have no way to describe how that felt. It was like falling off a horse and being told to get back in the saddle. He refused to give up on me, though, and that's something I have never forgotten. By the way, I haven't had an accident since.

On the flipside, my father could sometimes not be sensitive enough (in my opinion).

One example was with my first full-time summer job at Ben Franklin Insurance Company in Springfield, Ill.

After about one month on the job, I went to my dad basically to whine about being unappreciated by my supervisor. It seemed like she was quick to criticize, but failed to ever compliment the "extra effort."

My dad listened to me for a few minutes and then asked, "Did you get a paycheck this week?"

My response was, "Yes, but what does that have to do with anything?"

His reply, "That's your thank you."

I never forgot that one either.

Following the birth of my first child in 1980, my dad was already sick with cancer.

During one of my monthly visits home so that he could see his granddaughter, I noticed how weak and fragile he had become. This once strong, burly man who had a bit of the "Archie Bunker" look, had lost so much weight and had become so frail that I couldn't help but stare in horror. While he fought the cancer, I recall one visit when my face must have shown more than I wanted it to because when my dad saw his expression turned serious.

"Patty, nobody lives forever," he said.

Talk about feeling like someone threw a glass of cold water in my face — he was right, of course, but until that moment, I wasn't prepared to hear it. My dad was special to me and I would welcome others in the area submitting stories about their fathers, too. I think it would be a great column for next week to have a stories about what makes a great dad or what special attention was given to dads this Father's Day.

To all the dads out there — Happy Father's Day — and remember you have an awesome responsibility and you are appreciated!

Decker is editor of the Free Press. Her column appears on Fridays.

Food price jump unlikely

By John Schlageck

Listening or watching the latest news spots would lead today's consumer to believe this country's farmers are one of the main reasons for the recent increase in food prices at the supermarket.

"This is simply not true," says Jeff Grossenbacher, Nemaha County farmer.

Like many grain producers across Kansas, Grossenbacher understands that higher food price, although small, are the result of increasing costs of processing, packaging and transportation — especially with the high cost of fuel.

Farmers don't share proportionately in this increase at the grocery store, the Nemaha County farmer says. The amount a farmer receives is only pennies or two to three cents per loaf of bread.

While a backlash has not yet occurred among U.S. consumers, national news exposure appears to be ramping up, and consumers could one day call for reigning in of higher milk, produce and meat prices.

Still food prices are a great buy and without question, the wise shopper must be knowledgeable when spending her or his hard-earned dollars. Take the example of Battle Creek, Mich., where the cost of cereal has increased while the size of the boxes are smaller.

Looking even closer at this food product requires a look at the ingredient cost. A box of corn flakes may cost more than \$3, however there is only approximately 2.2 cents worth of corn in that box, according to Terry Francl, American Farm Bureau Federation economist.

Even if the price of cereal doubled, there would only be a miniscule increase in price, Francl says.

"The average U.S. consumer is only looking at maybe a two-tenths of 1-percent increase in food," the AFBF economist notes.

U.S. consumers spend less than 10 percent of their disposable income on food products they eat. The price they pay for home supplies, cigarettes, videos and just about anything else you can cram into a shopping cart is another matter and should not be confused with food.

It has become fashionable to bash ethanol for causing food prices to increase. Although corn-based ethanol production is expected to increase 58 percent in 2007, retail food prices are not expected to increase substantially during the same time period. U.S. food prices have increased about 7 percent so far this year, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

This can be attributed primarily to bad weather that harmed fruit and vegetable production, as well as small Australian wheat crops.

Retail food prices, particularly for poultry and beef, will be slightly higher during the next few years due to growing renewable fuels production in the United States.

The American Farm Bureau Federation tracks retail food price trends through its quarterly 16-item market basket survey. AFBF's most recent informal survey revealed a 4 percent increase in retail prices from the fourth quarter of 2006 to the first quarter of 2007.

One producer believes doubling the price of food in this country would still be a bargain when compared to what other countries pay for food. He also mentioned that when he starts hearing horror stories of people dropping cable television, high-speed internet, building new homes with only two garages and eating honest-to-goodness, home-cooked meals, he'll start worrying about consumer spending for food.

Yes, this country remains blessed with the most affordable, healthy food anywhere on the planet. We are fortunate to spend as little disposable income as we do on the food we feed our families.

Editor's note: John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce

Tinsley

