

Opinion



Another Viewpoint

Help Colby

Carolyn Armstrong and Chris Bieker
Colby

Most areas in Northwest Kansas are struggling to maintain population. Thomas County is the second largest of the 20 counties in Northwest Kansas, and our citizens can help fight the battle of shrinking population. The spirit which has made us a growing, caring community can continue if we will do our part!

Thomas County and the City of Colby are sponsoring a cleanup effort to improve the visual image we project throughout our County. Our image conveys a powerful message to prospective new residents and businesses, and reflects the type of people we are. We are asking you to *Clean Up Colby/Thomas County* during the week of May 5-9 by giving the area a needed spring cleaning and by planting trees, shrubs, and flowers to enhance the first impression of visitors to the area.

In Colby, service organizations are being asked to make an extra commitment to help *Celebrate Colby*. Please call the city office at 460-4410 and tell us which park or area you will "spring clean".

All of us can help our city by making an effort to clean and dispose of those unsightly items cluttering your yards, removing vehicles which no longer have a purpose, and pulling those weeds which detract from the beauty of our City. Whenever possible, help neighbors who can't manage the entire cleanup for themselves.

Business owners can help by cleaning the alleyways behind their buildings as well as the areas easily visible to everyone.

We can all help by planting at least one tree. All trees planted on public grounds must be approved by the Tree Board, so should you choose to plant a tree in one of Colby's public areas, please submit the idea to a Tree Board member first.

Let's give Colby the best look ever!

— Carolyn Armstrong is the city manager for Colby and Chris Bieker is the public utilities director.

Where to write, call

- U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts**, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-4774
- U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback**, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-6521
- U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran**, 2202 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. 202/225-2715 or Fax 202/225-5124
- State Rep. Jim Morrison**, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St. Rm. 143-N, Topeka, Kan. 66612. 785/296-7676 e-mail: jmorrison@ink.org web: www.morrisonfamily.com
- State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer**, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th St., Rm. 128-S., Topeka, Kan. 66612, 785/296-7399 ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

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. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

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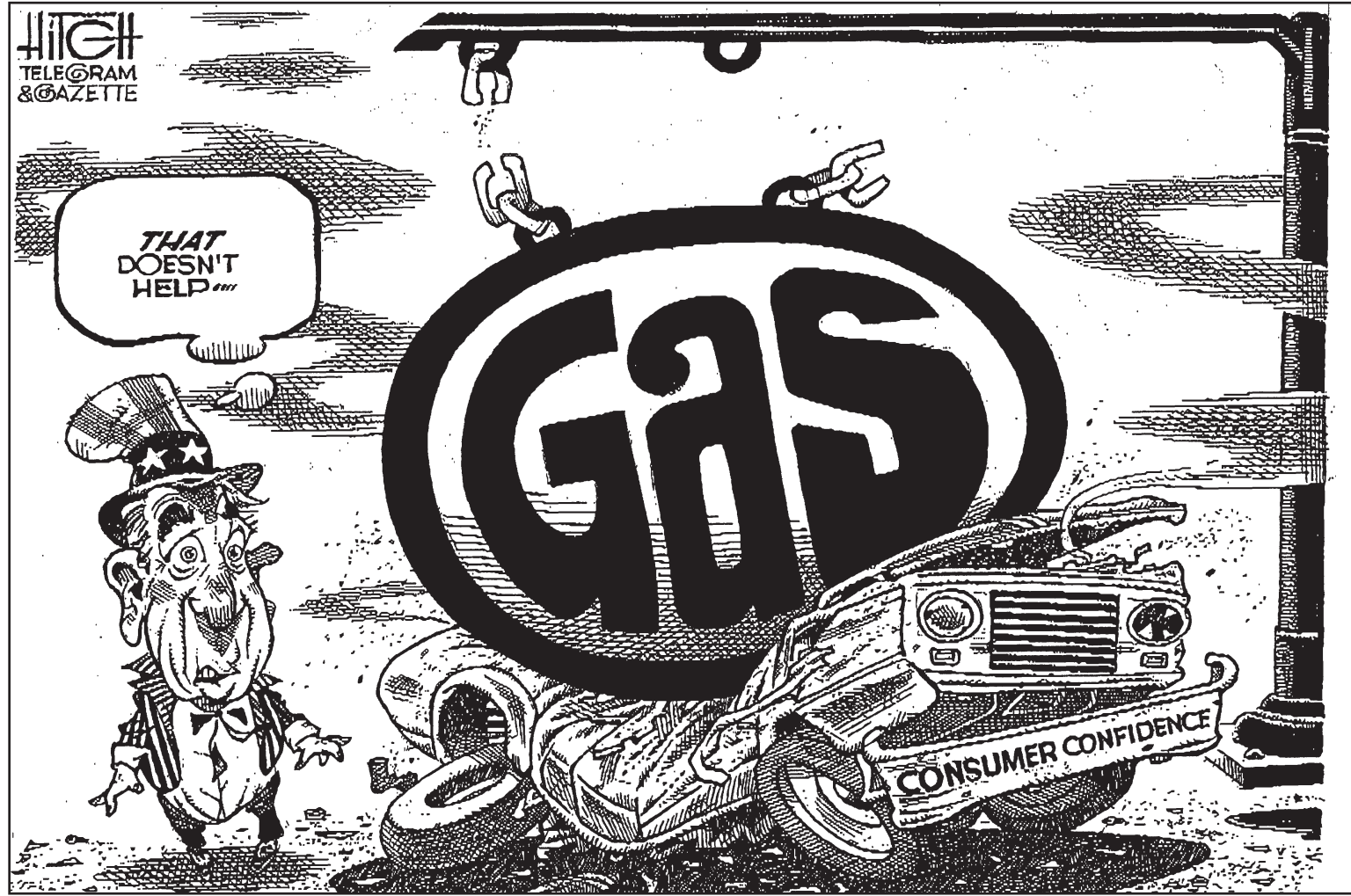
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A work in progress

We here at the Colby Free Press have been discussing ways to improve our web site. For quite a while we have offered what are called pdfs. I define that as a computer-term stating it's a "picture" of something.

We take pdfs, or pictures, of our actual pages, then post them on our web site so viewers can get a feel of what the print version of the paper is like. That has had some drawbacks.

The past two summers, I've received e-mails from potential, out-of-town Colby Community College students who wrote it was easier to drive across the state and purchase a copy of the paper from one of our racks in town to look for a place to rent rather than scroll through the classified pdf online to look for the same thing.

I knew where those writers were coming from as I remembered looking online to learn a little more about the paper and town before I knew I was moving to Colby.

As the people who view our web site have learned, our web site is free, so complaints should be minimal.

Some papers' site charge to view the content and others offer various stories for free. It just depends on the paper's web site purpose and motives. We have not got to the point to determine if we will charge for our web site in the future.

At a previous paper I worked at, the paper



John Van Nostrand

Line in the Dust

decided to include the online version of the paper with a subscription to the print version for the "local" people. That had some success as some people told me they glanced at the paper online at their work. If they saw a story that interested them, they knew it would be on their front porch at home, so they could continue with their job.

That online format was great for the out-of-state subscribers who had to wait days for the print version in the mail.

Web sites can also be another tool to get the news out when the print version can't. Say, Air Force One makes an emergency landing at Colby's airport late on a Friday afternoon after the print version has been done. We could easily include a story and photos on the web site until we had the full story for the print version the following Monday.

I was part of that kind of situation at a previous paper. A dramatic incident at a grain elevator happened on a Friday and we didn't have

the time to get in the print version that day. But papers also take a risk with their web sites. Years ago, at a previous paper a fellow reporter wrote a brilliant, two-part series about a local soldier's injury during the Iraq War. Days after the print versions ran, the reporter was flooded with comments and compliments from readers.

One of the readers said she was surprised at how fast the information about that soldier spread and developed. The reporter was not quite sure what she meant. The reader went on to explain how a web site about injured American soldiers included this particular soldier.

We looked at this web site and her story was virtually copied from the paper's web site and placed into this one, but the "creator" of this web site took all the credit for the information. Pretty easy to look for certain information in a search engine and take what is needed.

That's the risk you take with the Internet. Information can be easily lifted by viewers and used for whatever else. But in this computer-crazy culture, it's risky not to have a web site.

Again, we are in the early stages of web site improvements.

We would love to hear from you about what you think our web site should be like. Please send us your thoughts.

—John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press

Your turn

County bites the hand that feeds them

Vera Sloan
Colby

There is an article or two in the Colby Free Press from time to time that just does not cease to amaze me. The latest being the "hassle" between the county and Dan and Shirley Bourquin who are business people in this community trying to make a living by working hard and minding their own business. Yes, their business.

I'm quite sure if there was another privately owned campground in town, the competition would seem more fair and public bantering would not be an issue. I personally feel the Bourquins, own a piece of the fairground camp sites because they too pay into the county tax coffers that support it, and yet it is allowed to compete with them in their private business. We would probably be shocked at just how much private business contributes to county tax coffers.

I am of the opinion there is no way the county should ever, and I do mean ever compete with private industry. And the fair board should not have to be reduced to running a competing business to make up the part of the budget the Commissioners agreed to support them with over 20 years ago.

As a county commissioner in the 1980s I

worked hard (with then fair board President Larry White's help) to get a full mill levy (allowable by state statute) into the budget to run the Thomas County Fair.

Until that time, the fair board received 1/2 mill for their budget. I'm unaware of how long the fair board got the benefit of a full mill levy. To my understanding there have been commissioners since who have allowed only the same dollar amount to support the fair from year to year instead of keeping up with the county's current valuation to reach a full levy amount. Also as I recall, in the 1980s the commissioners were in agreement that county camp sites at the fairgrounds should not and would not compete in the public market.

As a past commissioner I know how difficult it is to stretch county dollars and as a past fair board member, I also know how expensive it is to put on a fair. I do however feel as I stated earlier, the county should never compete with private industry.

I personally feel county parking spots should be used only as overflow when there are not enough private spots in which to park. I believe county fees should at least match or be higher than privately owned camp sites in this community when it's not regularly scheduled fair activities. I also feel it is Mr. Bourquin's business what he charges and to whom he directs

those charges. When I pull up to a gas station I have two choices: pay it or walk. Those owning camping equipment also have two choices: take it or leave it.

The current fair board seems to be doing as good of a job as possible on a limited budget in throwing a party every year for the entire county.

And they so deserve their allowable share of the budget. And as evidenced by the numbers of campers parked at the Bourquin Campgrounds it seems like Dan and Shirley are probably right in the middle of their harvest now. Who among us has the right to take a portion of their harvest?

The county most likely will always be here. Unfortunately, private business sometimes comes and goes, and has a tougher time making it.

Wouldn't it be nice if we could all get along and help to make it both pleasant and possible for existing business to run their business as they see fit as long as it is neither illegal nor immoral and then be glad for them when they are successful?

The more successful businesses a community has, the better the community looks to outsiders who may want to locate here. It just does not seem right for the county to take a bite out of the hand that helps to feed them.

About those letters . . .
The *Free Press* encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, if at all possible, and should include a telephone number and an address. Most importantly, all letters must include a signature. Unsigned letters cannot be published.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

