

Opinion



Other Viewpoints

Attorney general redeems his office

Kansas Attorney General Steve Six readily admits his office had to dig itself out of a hole when he took over in late January.

The hole, created by the inattentiveness and shenanigans of two previous attorneys general, Phill Kline and Paul Morrison, seems to have been filled in over the last nine months by Six and his staff. That was accompanied by the fresh air of accountability.

Six, a former Douglas County judge, decided to address the needs of Kansans instead of following in the grandstanding footsteps of his predecessors. The attorney general determined Kansans' most immediate needs centered on consumer issues, especially identity theft. Six promoted that effort during a visit to Hutchinson and the Kansas State Fair.

His decision to beef up consumer protection efforts and staff in the office, while still providing advice and support to county and district attorneys' offices across the state, quickly filled the hole Six found himself in just nine months ago. The state's top law enforcement officer is working from the ground floor now and quickly mending the reputation of the office while restoring its credibility and viability.

Six's focus on consumer issues is a win-win for Kansans, especially those dealing with the horrendous aftereffects of identity theft.

"Identity theft is one of the fastest-growing crimes in the nation, and one of the ways to attack it is through consumer education," Six said during a stop in Hutchinson.

The attorney general's office has published a slick consumer guide — the "Identity Theft Repair Kit" — to help victims through the painful process that accompanies identity crimes.

"People often don't know where to start," Six said. "But there are steps they can go through to get back their lives."

Six knows something about taking steps. The ones he took beginning in late January have helped his office tend to the needs of Kansans instead of serving the personal interests of its occupant.

— *The Hutchinson News, via The Associated Press*

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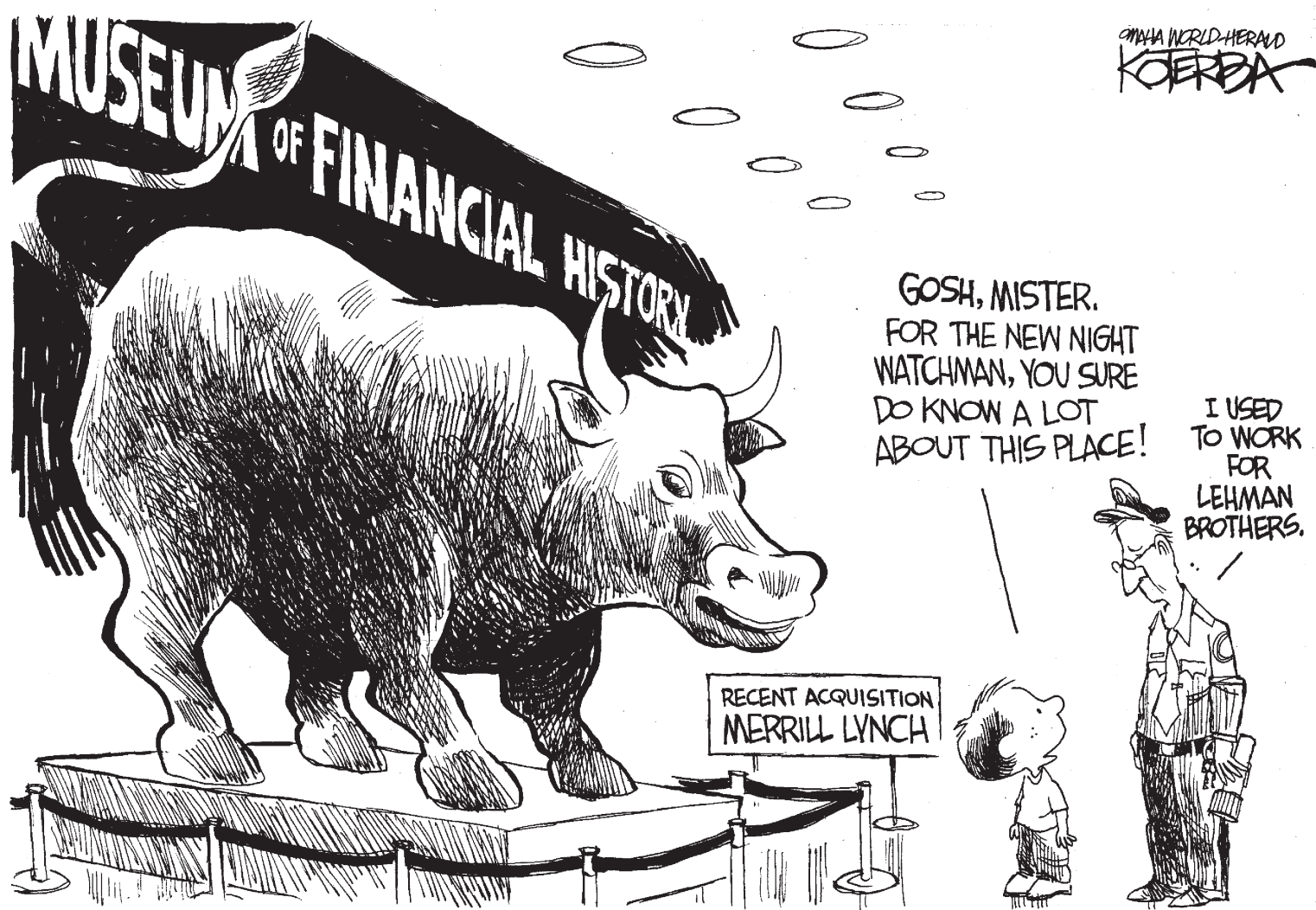
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After 17 years, it's hard to say goodbye

When I moved to Colby to accept the editor's position more than 17 years ago, my daughter Tracy was 11 and my son, Joey, was 4.

I was a single parent, didn't know anyone in Colby and I had no experience working on a daily newspaper. Suffice to say, I was downright scared.

In retrospect, had it not been for so many kind people in Colby providing encouragement and support, I know the transition would have been tougher than it already was.

Two people who really stand out in those first few days after I arrived were Don Phillips and Helen Frahm. Both of them care deeply for Colby, and they helped me feel welcome.

They also wrote newspaper columns each week for many years. Until his death, Don's column was "Mostly Movies" — and that name was fitting. Even though he would critique movies (he owned the downtown theater), he also used the column to debate political issues or take an opportunity to brag about our town. Helen's column, "Now and Then," would review historical items as well as positive accomplishments in town.

I wasn't the only person starting a new job in August of 1991 either. Since Tracy was going to be a sixth grader that year, we wanted to see the middle school. Hoping someone was around, we ran into Robb Ross, who had just been hired as Colby Middle School principal. I wonder if Robb even remembers meeting us that summer.

JoAnne Sunderman, our city librarian for many years, was and still is a good friend. More than once, I called in a panic needing some materials for a program I volunteered to do, and JoAnne always found time for me.

Every once in a while, our library offered amnesty to customers with overdue books. JoAnne and the staff would give borrowers a chance to pay fines on overdue books by bringing in a can of food for the Genesis Food



Patty Decker

• Deep Thoughts

Bank. In one town I lived in, the library would actually take people to court when books were overdue.

JoAnne wanted people to enjoy the library, and she went out of her way to make it as user-friendly as possible. In fact, that friendly atmosphere continues today.

Maxine Nelson was the society editor for many years at the *Free Press*, and when she retired a few years ago, I was devastated. She was there when I arrived, and we worked side-by-side through thick and thin.

Many people might not be aware of how much work Maxine did behind the scenes and how she did her best to keep me out of trouble. Not a day would go by Maxine wasn't reminding me about something or someone needing attention. I learned a lot from her courage, too. Maxine contracted polio in the early 1950s, during a time when doctors had no idea how to treat it. She told me this crippling disease struck three weeks after she was married.

Still a newlywed, Maxine was admitted to the old hospital on Range Avenue, where she was subjected to boiling hot towels on her legs and agonizing pain. Her husband stayed at her bedside, doing whatever he could to make her more comfortable. They went on to have five children.

How can I possibly name all the unselfish people in this community?

My children were educated in Colby schools and each one of their teachers deserve a huge

"thank you."

The volunteers who spent time with my children and others at Vacation Bible School, and the coaches who motivated young people to commit to something and discipline themselves? There were others, many others.

Colby and the surrounding towns epitomize the phrase, "It takes a village to raise a child." Maybe I am being overly sentimental, but I do have a deep affection for the people here and I will miss everyone — of course, some more than others.

Like any other town, there are conflicts, and we have had our share. We even sometimes forgot to follow the Golden Rule.

To our good friend "Grasshopper," I will continue praying for good things to come your way.

Colby has been my home for more years than anywhere else I have been. I met my husband here; my children were raised here and for Joey, he was able to begin kindergarten here and complete his high school education in Colby.

We have a lot of videos featuring his classmates through the years, and I am grateful to have watched these young people grow up. Some have even returned to Colby to begin their own families.

When I came to Colby on Aug. 4, 1991, I wasn't sure how things would work out for me. As I say, "goodbye," I also need to say, "thank you, Colby for these many years!"

My children are good people because of you; I have a wonderful husband and many friends because of you and memories which will occupy a special place in my heart and soul forever.

This community has given me and my family so much. God bless all of you.

Patty Decker's last day as editor of the Free Press editor was Friday, but sometimes it's hard to let go after 17 years.

Children are what it's all about

I didn't expect to see a handful of excited young children in this place, because I wasn't watching these little children play with their trucks and eat their crackers at a daycare, playground or fast-food place.

I was in a café near my campus that had a political bent to its choice in décor and atmosphere. A cardboard John McCain sits in one corner, with Barack Obama to his left (I wondered if they did that on purpose).

As I listened to their little giggles, watched them spin in circles and become captivated by napkins and newspapers, my day became a little brighter. Their presence warmed my soul more than my white chocolate mocha latte.

As I watched this scene unfold in front of me, I was reminded of a video that a friend showed me. It showed a young, dark girl playing with a bouncy ball and discovering that when the ball drops to the floor, it continues to bounce up and down. Almost always she had a hard time retrieving it and would have to waddle across the floor, chasing after the ball.

That's the fascinating thing about kids. They enjoy the simple things in life. They're always learning, always wondering, always being adorable without even trying. The only difference between this girl and the children I was watching in that café was that the girl was in Haiti. She's an orphan, maybe abandoned



Michelle Myers

• A Moment with Michelle

at her birth, but by the grace of God, she was brought to the hands of a loving orphanage.

That thought settled in my mind and my heart broke just thinking about those sweet, innocent, orphaned children. And when I think about the massive task of finding loving homes for every little child, my mind comes to a woman named Amy Carmichael. She was around my age when she adhered to her calling to be a missionary.

She left her home and everything she knew to devote her life serving the forgotten. She spent the majority of her life in India, rescuing girls who were being sold in temples and being a mother to the motherless. She had hundreds of children who tenderly called her "Amma," a native term for mother. Carmichael loved them as if they were her very own flesh and blood.

I am in awe of this woman. But how logical is it to leave everything that makes me

comfortable? Or to take it further, everything American that makes me comfortable?

Many would argue that going to college so far from home is challenging enough. But honestly, my experience has been far from culture shock. I have acclimated quickly to the city and have managed to create a safe, comfortable environment. People like Amy Carmichael put me to shame.

I continued to think about what that kind of life must have been like when a young man walked in with a little boy in his arms. He probably wasn't even a year old, yet as he rested his head against his father's chest, I couldn't help but notice how much the father was preoccupied with that little boy, who had a pair of the most kissable cheeks I have ever seen.

I may or may not be the Amy Carmichael of my generation, and who knows when my life will be blessed with a family. What I do know is that my life will not be complete without children. If I have to rescue them from the evil of human trafficking or from the streets of Portland, I want a joy that can only come from little smiling faces.

Michelle Myers, a Colby native, is a student at Multnomah University in Portland, Ore., majoring in Bible and journalism. She enjoys the 32 Starbucks found within five miles of her campus.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

