



Free Press Viewpoint

Don't miss out on 'living history'

The Kansas-Nebraska Chautauqua is full swing, and if you've never been to something like it before, you owe it to yourself to go.

Chautauqua is a unique opportunity for this area in that it uses the "living history" technique. In other words, using actors to portray historical figures and then telling stories.

Go to historic sites like Fort Robinson in Nebraska or Fort Laramie in Wyoming and you'll see soldiers in uniform or ladies in fancy — and historically accurate — dresses walking around and talking in character. Simply put, it helps history come alive.

We don't have a lot of that around here. Our museum, while excellent, uses the more traditional exhibit style. They are very well-done exhibits, especially High Plains Journeys, but they can be fairly dry. Now if someone dressed as General Thomas told you how the county was founded or someone in Sam Ramey's "Faust" costume sang his life story to you, it would be memorable to say the least.

Not every historical subject would lend itself to living history presentations. Gruesome periods like the Inquisition, the Crusades or the Holocaust might best be left to history books and static exhibits, but a period like the 1930s is perfect, with colorful and memorable characters, not to mention that it was a formative time for this area.

The '30s is also interesting because you have people alive today who lived in Colby at the time. They are getting fewer and fewer, but there are still some around. You have many more people who have heard their parents or grandparents tell stories of the Depression. We all grew up hearing about it in one way or another, and now with the Chautauqua, we have famous people who lived during that time telling us their stories, just like we heard from our relatives. It makes the whole thing quite fascinating.

Which is why it's a shame that this is the last year for Chautauqua, or so we've heard. No one is exactly advertising it, but we've heard that attendance is down. According to the Kansas Humanities Council, in 2008 the Chautauqua got 2,950 attendees in Lawrence, a city of 80,000 and 503 in Beloit, a town of 4,000. These, of course, include out-of-town visitors who attend the events. Compare that to 1,467 attendees in Imperial, Neb. — a town of 1,882 — in 2001 and 3,313 in Arapahoe, Neb., in 2000. In 1996, the Colby Chautauqua got 1,391.

It's a great program, and if this really is the last year then it is a shame to lose it. Maybe Colby or the other towns it's going to will have great attendance and turn the whole thing around. In any case, we should try and get as much enjoyment out of it as we can. Everyone who can, should go to the evening performances or daytime sessions. You never know when a living history program like this will show up in Colby again.

— Kevin Bottrell

Write us

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Marriage memories add up

Yep! That's right — been married 60 years. Not a record, but better than average, so I'm told.

Maurice says he's been married so long, he can't remember when he wasn't married! And I'm thinkin' I don't feel real sorry for him.

Does he want a medal or something? In my opinion, anyone that's never had to worry if there were clean socks in the drawer, a freshly ironed shirt in the closet, a hot meal on the table, someone to wait on him hand and foot, plus a pie or two in the freezer doesn't need sympathy.

I think his favorite memory over the past 60 years is when I made my first ever round steak gravy. I knew how to make it. I just didn't know how much to make. He always embellishes the tale and says I made bowls and bowls of it, because I'd used so much flour that I had to keep adding milk so it wouldn't be like wall paper paste.

I admit, I probably did have enough gravy for a small army, but aren't farm boys supposed to like gravy? He did then. He does now. The reason I think it's his favorite memory is because he's always telling about it!

Then there's the time he sent me to the irrigation field to move pipe with a couple of



Vera Sloan

• After Thoughts

teenage sons. He promised it would be fun. The boys put mom in the middle so we could move two joints of pipe at a time. (All three of them were in on it!) Of course it was heavy — that's where the nozzle pipe was attached, for Pete's sake! (Dumb, gullible me). But where the fun came in was the imprint of mom's tush in the mud when she went to the ground after those "fun-loving sons" tipped the ends. You'd be surprised how fast water runs down hill in two 30-foot joints of irrigation pipe!

It hasn't all been fun and roses — there's the time he hurt my feelings. He told me that for Christmas he'd get me a new setting for my wedding rings. I was thrilled. I went the whole month of December without them, and sure enough when Christmas Eve came, there was that little box under the tree, all wrapped up in jewelry store paper and tied so pretty. It had to

be the "new" rings! I could hardly wait. I unwrapped the box and opened it. There lay my old rings — without the stones! They looked like a corpse! It was totally unexpected and I was horrified! I cried — and he felt terrible. His joke had backfired, and it didn't take him long to produce the real ones.

I'm not the kind of a person to get even, but I have had 60 years to think about it!

And no, I don't know how it feels to be married that long, because I don't know how it's supposed to feel. But the other day, I was amazed at how the trunk of our neighbors tree had grown into their chain link fence. There was no way the tree and the fence could be separated without totally destroying both of them. It was like the fence was a part of the tree and the tree was a part of the fence.

I guess the two of us are sort of like that. It would take more than major surgery to separate two totally different people that over the years have grown into one.

I guess we both deserve that medal.

Vera Sloan thinks life should be fun, and enjoys all the parts of it she sees as Society Editor.

Sales tax will sustain schools, programs

This is the first segment of state Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer's session-end report. Others will follow as space permits:

When I traveled the 40th Senate District during the "turn-around" break, some of the main topics shared by our western Kansas residents were proper funding of our schools, mental health program, programs for the elderly, handicap services, maintenance and reopening of correctional facilities, and heart-felt opposition to forcing taxes to the local level. The thoughts and opinions of my constituents guide me in determining how I vote.

Having voted for the 2005 school finance plan, which schools in my district needed, the choice of further cuts to the school budget was not a viable option. When comparing current average salaries in Kansas schools, we discovered a huge disparity: Grinnell \$34,000, Johnson County \$64,000, Shawnee County \$67,000.

It's differences such as these that make it hard to attract teachers and others to stay or move to our area to raise a family. During the floor debate, I was accused of being selfish because western Kansas counties receive more state aid than they collect. We should not have to apologize, however, because we send our best and brightest to the population centers to work. The Legislature had already cut \$1 billion from the 2010 budget and we would be short \$400 million in 2011.

I felt an increase in state income by raising some sort of taxes would be necessary to balance the budget. I believe my constituents have trusted my judgment on issues before and pray I made the right choice of supporting the 1-cent sales tax increase. Regardless of my philosophy, I needed to put services to my district first. People of western Kansas had already made cuts and sacrifices the past few years, and services were being threatened.

The Senate failed in its override of the governor's veto of a late-term abortion bill that would require doctors to provide the specific



Ralph Ostmeyer

• State Senator

diagnosis that justifies the procedure. Current state law prohibits abortion of viable fetuses during or after the 22nd week of pregnancy unless a physician determines continuing the pregnancy could seriously harm the mother, but the physician does not have to supply specifics. My explanation of vote: "Someday, I hope the unborn will have a voice in these chambers. It's not about a woman, it's not about a man, and I'm convinced at this point, the unborn do not have a choice. We need a change in governor and we will get this passed."

SB 214 — Unilateral Annexation: Prohibits a city from annexing unilaterally, or by consent, a narrow corridor of land to gain access to non-contiguous land. The bill requires the corridor of land to have a tangible value and purpose other than for enhancing future annexations. The Senate concurred with House changes to SB 214 by a vote of 39-0 on Monday, May 3.

SB 300 — Covering a License Plate; Text Message Ban; Protective Equipment for Minors on Motorcycles; Window Tinting of Law Enforcement Vehicles; School Bus Operation: Amends a variety of Kansas laws concerning traffic regulation and enacts two new traffic infractions.

The bill prohibits a license plate from being covered with any material that affects its visibility or reflectivity and sets the fine for this violation at \$60. The measure also prohibits a person operating a motor vehicle from texting with a wireless communications device that writes, sends or reads written communication. Exceptions apply for law enforcement and

emergency-service personnel acting within the scope of their employment; for vehicles stopped and off the roadway; for making or receiving a phone call; receiving an emergency, traffic or weather alert message; or from receiving a message regarding the operation of a vehicle. Exceptions also apply for those who report illegal activity to law enforcement; for preventing imminent injury to a person or property; and for relaying information between operators and dispatchers.

Until Jan. 1, law enforcement is required to issue a warning citation for violations. Fines for unlawful text messaging are set at \$60.

The measure extends responsibility for ensuring that persons under the age of 18 wear protective equipment while riding on a motorized bicycle or motorcycle by making it a violation of Kansas law to allow an individual under the age of 18 to operate or ride on a motorized bicycle or motorcycle without a helmet or on a motorcycle without eye protection.

The bill exempts identified law enforcement vehicles from restrictions that prohibit motor vehicles from having one-way glass or sun screening devices that restrict the total light transmission to less than 35 percent.

Finally, the bill extends the period, from 20 to 25 years, where a school bus could be operated if the bus meets the requirements for design, lighting equipment, distinctive markings, special warning devices and other equipment in place at the time the bus was manufactured.

The conference committee report for SB 300 passed 32 to 8 on Monday, May 10.

It has always been an honor and privilege to serve the people of Kansas. Your concerns and comments are important to me and I welcome your contact. I may be reached at home now that the 2010 Legislative Session is adjourned.

District 40 Senator Ralph Ostmeyer's e-mail address is Ralph.Ostmeyer@senate.ks.gov. His home telephone is (785) 824-3773.

Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

