



Other Viewpoints

Leadership gaffe mean-spirited, too

It was a simple postcard, designed to focus a spotlight on the positives that leadership training – such as that offered by Leadership Lawrence – can bring to Kansas cities and counties.

The postcard featured two photographs: One, a community in celebration. The other, a downtown block that's seen better days. The postcard asked: "Which community would you rather call home?" The postcard said the difference between the two towns could be traced to effective leadership.

Apparently, the folks who put the postcard together didn't realize that the stock photograph of the downtown block was taken on a real Kansas Main Street – in Effingham, a community of about 650 people 50 miles northwest of Lawrence.

Understandably, Effingham residents are not pleased by this slap in the face, inadvertent or not. Consequently, Leadership Lawrence, operated by the Chamber of Commerce, has egg on its face. The postcard actually was paid for, designed and mailed on behalf of Leadership Lawrence and eight other community leadership programs by a Wichita-based nonprofit, the Kansas Leadership Center.

Officials at Leadership Lawrence and the leadership center say the mailing was a mistake. And they say they wouldn't have knowingly used a real image from a real Kansas town. They've apologized, and Ed O'Malley, the president and chief executive officer of the Kansas Leadership Center, planned a trip to Effingham last week to apologize in person to Mayor James Potts and other community residents.

Potts, by the way, says he doesn't hold any ill feelings toward the leadership center, which was founded in 2007 with a \$30 million investment from the Kansas Health Foundation. The premise of the leadership center is that effective leadership in Kansas communities will have a positive effect on the health of our state's residents.

The postcard was shortsighted and mean-spirited. Let's face it: That photograph could have been taken in any number of communities in any quadrant of our state. It was a slap to each of these towns, where Kansans make their homes. It's never a good idea to try to elevate oneself on the backs of others.

In addition, to suggest that effective community leadership is the sole difference between a robust town and one that is experiencing difficulties is a simplistic view. Many factors play into a town's successes and failures.

Perhaps some good will emerge from this gaffe by forging a relationship between Effingham and the center. Let's hope the agency will take this embarrassing moment and turn it into an opportunity.

— Lawrence Journal-World, via The Associated Press



Quiet Christmas still satisfying

Christmas was quiet at our house. We had our traditional dinner, just the two of us: steak, twice-baked potatoes, green beans cooked with onion and bacon. Didn't even think to pour a glass of red wine.

Did the dishes, killed some time. Cleaned up for "midnight" mass at 11. Went to church. Drove around a little, looking at Christmas lights.

Cynthia started whining: "Can't we just go to church. Do we have to do this? It's cold out here."

It's an inside joke, a little nostalgia: We always drove around and looked at Christmas lights. The kids always complained.

It's always a beautiful service, welcoming the birth of Christ, though Cynthia grouched that we didn't get to sing "Joy to the World." (We did "Go Tell It on the Mountain" instead. It's not a bad substitute, but I agree, it's not "Joy to the World.")

I told her we'd do that Sunday.

We went home and opened up our presents. There wasn't much: a couple of packages each from Lindsay, one each from my sister, and big boxes for me from Amazon, a little one for Cynthia. (Felicia the webster always orders



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

online.) I set Cynthia's windows out by the mantle. She said she hadn't noticed them in the dim light when we left for church, but admitted later she had heard me dragging them out of the closet. Sharp ears, that one.

We didn't even make a mess, hardly enough wrapping paper for the cats to jump into. Time was when we'd be knee-deep in paper and ribbons, but then there were children. Today, it's just the two of us.

That's not so bad. We have the memories. The time I put coal in the kids' stockings as a joke, for instance. I'm still in trouble for that one.

We've always celebrated pretty much the same way: dinner, church, then presents. We sleep in on Christmas Day. The kids never

seemed to mind, and we got a lot more sleep that way.

Sunday, church started with "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing," and ended with "Joy to the World." Any service that starts with John Wesley and Mendelssohn and ends with Isaac Watts and Handel can't be bad.

Busy as the season has been, I don't think we minded the quiet weekend. We got a lot done, though Cynthia didn't do any baking and I didn't work on the spare bedroom.

A few years ago, we pretty much told the girls not to bother coming home for holidays, what with the high prices, the weather, the airline problems and all the hassles. We meet in better weather.

But still, too much quiet might get to us. Next year, we might just slip down to Augusta and watch the baby open her presents.

But that's for another year. Now, it's back to work.

Steve Haynes is editor and publisher of The Colby Free Press and president of Nor West Newspapers. In his spare time, whenever that is, he likes to ride and watch trains.

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It's been a dramatic year for education

As the year draws to a close, a quick review: 2010 saw dramatic policy decisions and research results in education at both the state and national level. Those with the most impact include:

National "Common Core" Curriculum. On Oct. 12, Kansas was the 38th state to adopt the national "Common Core" language arts and mathematics curricula (now adopted by a total of 43 states and the District of Columbia).

Over \$350 million has been allotted to develop the national assessment tests. Widespread adoption makes it likely that national science and social studies standards under construction will be adopted as well.

New Qualified Admissions. On Dec. 15, the Kansas Board of Regents approved modified Qualified Admissions rules tightening freshman entrance requirements for the six regents universities. The larger regents curriculum includes an expanded "window" for unqualified students (from 10 percent to 15 percent). These requirements are in effect for next year's high school freshmen graduating as seniors in 2015.

For-Profit Universities Questioned for Quality, Recruiting. Throughout 2010, a U.S. Senate committee held hearings and the U.S. Department of Education investigated selected for-profit schools. Some for-profits recruit "students" at homeless shelters, pay recruiters "by the head," offer credit for minimal online coursework, and graduate nurses who had never set foot in a hospital.

Kansas Abandons "Race to the Top." On April 13, the state Board of Education voted 9-0 to not submit an application to the U.S. Department of Education for the second round of "Race to the Top" Awards. Looking at feedback from the initial application, it was obvious that criteria were stacked against rural western states. Final recipients were all east of the Mississippi River (except for Hawaii).

School Consolidation Accelerates. After having held steady at 303 Unified School Districts for decades, the number of districts



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

in Kansas has declined to 293 and will continue downward as more small rural schools are unable to offer a full curriculum to fewer students.

Video-games Cause of "Boy Problem." A 2009 study of 8-to-18 year-olds by Douglas Gentile showed 12 percent of boys and 3 percent of girls were video-game addicted. However, this was only a correlation; there was the possibility that boys who were not academic were attracted to video games. That video-games cause a decline in academics was proven in research by Robert Weis and Brittany C. Cerankosky of Denison University. After measuring the students' academic baseline achievement, they gave half of the boys video-game units and watched their academics nosedive, while academic performance for the control group of boys without video games held.

Girls Texting Addicted. The Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project found that one in three teenagers send more than 100 text messages a day. Texting in school has grown dramatically in the last 18 months and is predominantly by girls.

Value of "GED" Questioned. Several studies released in 2010 indicated the earning power of students with a GED is equivalent to those without a high school degree, hardly the equivalent of a high school diploma in securing jobs, distorts graduation rates, and may promote drop outs.

High Cost of College Drop-Outs. Students who dropped out after just one year of college (between 2003-2008) have cost Kansas taxpayers over \$93 million dollars, according to the American Institute for Research. First-year

college student drop outs cost the nation over \$9 billion in state and federal appropriations and grants.

Pay-for-Scores Fails to Raise Performance. A study of performance-based pay published in September by the National Center on Performance Incentives at Vanderbilt University showed bonus awards of about \$10,000 per teacher failed to have any lasting impact on student scores.

Stimulus Funding Cliff. Federal stimulus money and limited "rainy day" local reserves held staff cuts at Kansas schools to about 1,600 compared to the previous year. With stimulus funds ending in June, and no likely increase in state money, Kansas schools will likely face additional layoffs.

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.

Write us

The Colby Free Press encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of general interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise. Nor do we run form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous from this area should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality. We will not publish attacks on private individuals or businesses not pertaining to a public issue.

Before an election, letters (other than responses by a candidate) will not be published after the Thursday before the polls open.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

