

# commentary

from our viewpoint...

## To save postal service attitudes must change

We need to move fast if we want to save the U.S. Postal Service. It's no joke. The most far-flung of federal agencies is in deep trouble, so bad that the postmaster general has even talked about ending Saturday delivery to save money.

Some projections show the service, which made money a year ago, as running up a deficit as high as \$3 billion next year. It could get worse. What's wrong? You name it.

With the rise of the Internet, e-mail has taken a big chunk of the profitable first-class letter business. The loss will only get worse as more businesses and people figure out how to use their computers.

The bottom line is that e-mail is fast, dependable and, once you've bought the computer and Internet hookup, free. And as a nation, we've only scratched the surface on how to use the Internet.

At the same time that business is down, postal costs are soaring. For years, the service has given its unions pretty much what they wanted and passed the cost on to consumers. If the price of postage goes up every year as predicted, though, there may not be much business left to support the workers.

And while prices have shot up in recent years, we all know that mail service has been declining — not at the local level, where dedicated people still deliver our letters in all kinds of weather, but for sure in the cities and for cross-country trips.

Give a choice of undependable mail or nearly instant e-mail, what are people going to choose? Especially if the price keeps going up.

To save itself, the Postal Service is going to have to reinvent itself. It will have to become customer oriented, not rule oriented.

The service runs on something called the Domestic Mail Manual, a five-pound, four-inch book that not even its own employees can figure out. It's like some sort of cosmic joke, similar to the tax code.

The Postal Service will have to start treating its customers like, well, customers, and focus on what it does well. Today, the service, with its myriad rules and government roots, too often treats its best customers like criminals. Employees read the rule book to see what they can't do, rather than helping customers, and often as not, management attempts at "reform" only make matters worse. Postal "inspectors" come through and "audit" customers, sometimes demanding thousands of dollars in back postage even though the customer was following a postal employee's directions.

The service's primary asset is its ability to deliver to nearly every home in America six days a week, and it needs to preserve that.

But postal workers will have to learn (and they are not going to like this message) that old jobs and old work rules won't survive in the 21st century. As railroad and airline workers and those in dozens of other industries have in the last few decades, they have to learn that the only way to save a dying business is to change.

We customers may have to give up some things, too, maybe even Saturday mail, though we hope not. There need to be changes to make things more efficient. We may lose small, unprofitable offices and services that once made sense, but now just lose money.

Postal people, both labor and management, may not want to hear any of this, but they need to. The Postal Service is a great institution with a glorious history and much to give in the future. But without a new attitude, in the service and in Congress, the next big story is liable to be an obituary. — Steve Haynes

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## You can't go home again because it has changed

They say you can't go home again, and it's true. I tried it this weekend.

Well, I wasn't really going home. I just went back to Concordia, where I was born and reared, for a weekend Rotary conference.

Since my mother still lives at the old homestead — the house my parents bought when I was 6 — I decided to stay with her and both save some money and enjoy a little visiting time.

The meeting started on Friday at the Cloud County Community College on the other side of town. Although the college is more than 30 years old, I had never been inside it.

When I was in high school, I helped to get out the vote for the community college bond issue. My parents were much in favor of having a community college in town, although I was already slated to go the university to start my education in pre-pharmacy.

The college opened the year I was a freshman and was housed in the high school the first two years. Later, the campus on the hill was built. I stayed in Lawrence, married and moved to Kansas City, never once stepped foot within the halls



**cynthia haynes**

• open season

of the college my parents had helped pay for. (My only sister attended Fort Hays State University, so my parents dreams of a college in Concordia were never for their own children.)

More than half of my graduating class enrolled at Cloud County, however, with many going on to four-year institutions and some having two years more college than they would have, had they had to leave town.

That night, we went to the Brown Grand for desert and coffee. The Brown Grand is an old theater which has been renovated and is now used for plays and receptions, such as ours.

It was closed up in the '70s, I'm told. I was gone by then.

I remember when I was 16 and getting my So-

cial Security card and getting my first job selling popcorn at the Brown Grand. I made 50 cents an hour and worked three days a week and half a day on Sunday. By the time I was a senior, I had moved up to cashier and ticket seller. I made 75 cents an hour and, boy, was I in the money. I saved enough to buy a typewriter to take to college.

Then we had our banquet on Sunday at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic church hall. The fancy parish hall wasn't there when I lived in Concordia, but the old cathedral, with its beautiful stained-glass windows, was where I was baptized, made my first communion, was confirmed and finally in 1971, married.

The pews are new, the carpet is new, the whole place has been repainted several times over the last 30 years and, of course, the new parish hall has been added.

But the stained glass windows and the picture of the sorrowful virgin and her child are still there, and the echoes of a thousand Latin Masses still ring in my ears

Maybe you can't go home again. But it sure is fun to visit now and then.

## We need to be better examples for our kids

Dear Editor,

I have a problem. Oh it isn't any thing that all parents don't go through. I have a 14 year-old son who is expecting to get his learners permit so he can learn to drive.

My problem: How do I teach my son to use common courtesy and common sense while driving? He sees so many drivers who speed or run stop signs. Drivers who don't think to use turn signals before getting to an intersection, or changing lanes: Drivers who refuse to slow down for school zones. Drivers who, unfortunately, just don't think while driving.

I don't want to be one of those dads who tells his children not to bother with turn signals, "nobody uses them anyway," and make sure you slow down for those red octagons. Yes, I have actually gotten this answer from men I have asked why they didn't use a turn signal. I have also been told, "Oh, I guess I didn't think about it." Scary isn't it? I should think so.

As a society, we don't always think about how we drive anymore. It seems as if we have become a society of people who are more concerned with what is best for "me," rather than people as a whole.

Why has the society changed so much as to allow the "golden rule" to be distorted like this. Maybe, people just don't know anymore: What is the right thing to do?

I can say this, driving is 80 percent common sense and common courtesy, plus 20 percent knowing the rules of the book; They're pretty easy.

Am I saying I'm a prefect driver, no way. I learned that when I moved to Utah. Nobody's perfect.

I don't know, but the only answer I can come up with is, I need to set the example of what is the right thing to do behind the wheel of a vehicle. My father was very strict, and all I know is I have never killed or mangled anybody while driving any vehicle. I don't care how old I get common sense and common courtesy will, for me, never go out of style.

So, perhaps, with a lot of luck, some prayer, studying the book, and, with the right guidance, my son will use common courtesy and common sense while driving; Hopefully until he is a very old man. Hey, maybe I'll learn something too!

Ronald Asbury  
Goodland

Dear Editor,

I would like to take a few moments and address my concern about the April 23rd issue of the Goodland Daily News. To refresh your memory, the front page caption read in large bold print, "School Board Fires Husband and Wife." This headline created an unjust image of a respectable and well educated couple. Mr. and Mrs. Oss and their family are fairly new to this community.

I am outraged that your newspaper singled them out to print a tabloid headline. This statement has ripped through their lives, and it has been difficult for their children at school. This offensive and in-



**from our readers**

• to the editor

sensitive headline has no place in the Goodland Daily News.

My daughter is a student in Mrs. Oss's freshman English Class and has been so impressed with her knowledge of the course, Mrs. Oss is a super teacher and expects the kids to work to their potential. As a parent, I certainly appreciate this attitude of teaching ethic. Mr. Oss handles his class in the same manner. There is definitely a mutual respect between them and their students.

However, spring is the time of year for all teaching contracts to be reviewed and decided upon by the school board and administration. This procedure is nothing new. It's a difficult time for all concerned about the future of their jobs. Your reporter did not write this article with accuracy. There are others employed by the school as well as teachers that (in her terms) were also "fired" or "resigned" whose names did not appear in this article. Not one word was mentioned about the 30 years of dedication Mrs. Palmquist has given to the students at Goodland High School. This certainly constitutes headline material.

A good reporter is accountable to cover all the facts of a story without bias. It's obvious this article was also written with little knowledge of the terminology used in conjunction with the teaching profession. There is a huge difference between the terms "fired" and a "non-renewable" contract. Mr. and Mrs. Oss are still employed by the school district.

I know your office has received a number of phone calls as well as people visiting your office expressing their personal resentment about this detrimental headline. You have disregarded their concerns with little interest, yet alone apologized for such a negative display of bold print.

I applaud these individuals for standing up for

what is right even with your apathetic attitude. It's reassuring to know this community still has compassion for a stranger, neighbor, and a teacher despite your willingness to abandon the truth and professional ethics for just another headline.

Judy McKee  
Goodland

Dear Editor,

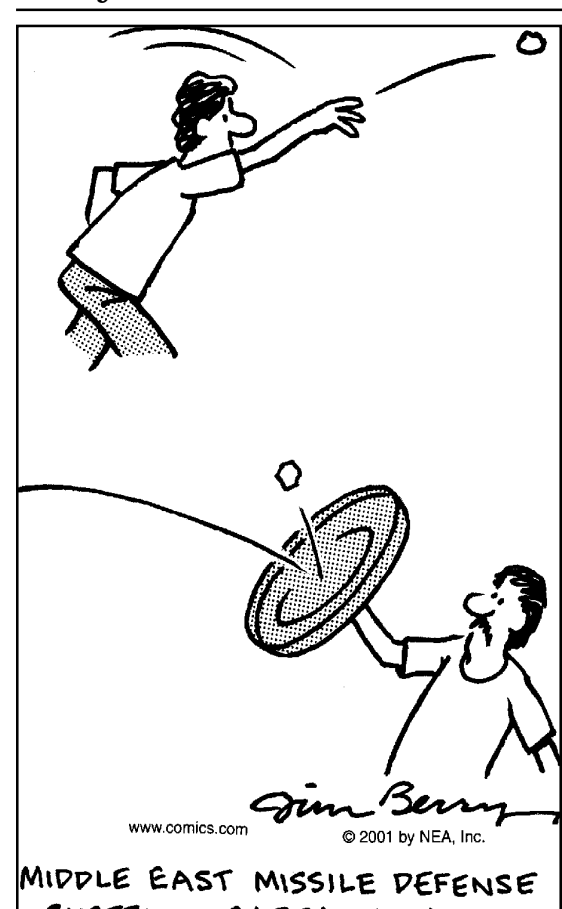
In response to a recent headline, numerous teachers have encouraged this letter. On Tuesday, April 24, a Goodland Daily News headline read "Board fires husband and wife." The term "fire" implies, to many readers, immediate termination of employment. In the education profession, the correct term for the action taken by the Board is "nonrenewal." This means that the teacher will complete teaching for the current school year but will not teach in the school district for the next school year.

This headline was not only erroneous but it also caused undue hardship for the family involved. For some readers, "firing" may imply that an illegal or immoral action occurred. The poor choice of words on the part of the Goodland Daily News has, therefore, created a difficult situation for the family.

In the future, the news writers are encouraged to choose correct terminology both when writing headlines and when writing news articles.

Mary M. Porterfield  
NEA-Goodland, President  
(National Education Association)

### berry's world



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