

from our viewpoint...

## Regional programs proven successful

Working together on a multi-county or regional effort has proven to be a good way to stretch the political capital of north-west Kansas.

Developing regional extension districts, travel and tourism promotion, economic development, business consulting, emergency planning and police and fire cooperation has drawn the people and communities of the area closer together as well.

For the past seven years, Goodland has been part of a regional effort to combat drug trafficking. That five-county effort, known oddly enough as the Quad County Drug Task Force, has been paid for in part by the cities and counties of Sherman, Thomas, Wallace, Logan and Cheyenne County, which match a \$60,000-a-year federal grant.

Chief Ray Smee and the Goodland Police Department have worked with the task force to investigate, arrest and convict more than 200 marijuana, methamphetamine and cocaine cases.

Chief Smee presented figures showing the number of cases and how many have been worked for Goodland at a city commission budget workshop in July. In the first year alone, 64 percent of the cases handled by the task force were from Goodland, and 12 of those resulted in arrests. In the next three years, the task force helped Goodland police arrest more than 60 people, bust 10 meth labs and confiscate more than 500 pounds of marijuana.

Smee said in the past two years, the case load has leveled off. With the change in the access to cold pills used to make meth, the number of labs is down, he said, but that just means meth is being hauled into the area rather than made here.

The commission listened and asked questions about the worth of the task force. After the chief assured them he felt the \$5,000 was well worth the price, he left the workshop.

Later in the meeting, the city administration and commissioners decided to pull the plug on the task force. When Smee learned of the cut, he said, he went to each commissioner and explained that having the city be a part of a program like the drug task force helps not only in investigating crime, but is an important connection when the department applies for grants.

When the city budget came up for hearing Aug. 6, Smee asked to have the task force money restored. He said he had heard that not only was the money for next year being cut, but the \$5,000 promised in this year's budget was to be held as well.

None of the city commissioners had a comment. When Mayor Rick Billinger asked for a motion to approve the budget, the room went silent. After a long pause a motion passed to approve the budget without change. None of the commissioners would look up as they voted.

People are reacting to the cut of this regional program with disbelief, partly because Smee and officers from Goodland helped reorganize the task force seven years ago. Without the money promised for this year, the chief said, the task force may have trouble meeting the matching-fund obligations agreed to when the grant application was made in May.

Smee says he has not given up. He hopes he can find a way to restore the money either through a change of heart by the city administration or through the efforts of people who have told him they would contribute to keep the city in the program.

Compared to many of the regional ideas — such as school and county consolidation — coming out of Topeka, a voluntary program like the Quad County Drug Task Force is the policemen and sheriff's of northwest Kansas banding together to better serve their citizens.

Spending \$5,000 to keep Goodland in the task force for next year — and standing by the obligation for the \$5,000 this year — appears to be more than worth the effort. — Tom Betz



## Software change creates adventure, work

I'm off on another adventure and Steve is a tiny bit jealous.

We bought new software for our business computer and we're having trouble getting all the bugs worked out. We got the bills out, the suppliers paid and the paychecks cut, but the general ledger isn't talking to the accounts receivable, which hasn't acknowledged the existence of accounts payable.

We needed to get either some computer help, either that, or a family counselor for our system.

The program is from a company called Red Wing Software in, strangely enough, Red Wing, Minn., home of Red Wing Shoes, and to Red Wing I went Sunday afternoon for three days of intensive training and, I hope, a miracle.

Steve was fine with this until he found out that my hotel is on the Mississippi River and right beside the railroad tracks. I get about three trains an hour. He's soooo jealous. He loves trains.

The drive to Denver was uneventful. Leaving off my car and getting on the plane for Minneapolis was a breeze.

On the plane I looked around to plug my earphones in for music. No plug, no music. Oh



**cynthia haynes**

• open season

well, I had a window seat and I'd brought my book.

Just then the cabin attendant brought a woman with three small children up and asked me to switch seats. No problem.

Now I was in a middle seat between two other women, so I decided to take a nap. We got to Minneapolis in no time.

I'd never been to Minnesota. It's an interesting place. They have water around all over the place — lakes, rivers, ponds.

I followed the airport signs to the rental car area. However, Thrifty didn't seem to have an office. A call to their 800 number left me on permanent hold, so I asked a nice Avis employee where to find them. They were tucked away in a corner on the other side of the huge room, about a block from the signs pointing to rental cars.

Once there, I got my car — a bright red, two-door Chevy Cobalt. Is it just me or does it seem strange that a car named Cobalt (which is blue) is painted red?

My directions were to take I-494 east until I got to U.S. 61. I was to follow 61 to Red Wing. I am directionally challenged and Minnesota is sign stinky. I lucked out and found I-494 east and followed it until it turned into I-694. This wasn't in my directions. I got off and checked my map.

Yep, I'd gone too far, so I backtracked and took the road marked U.S. 10 and 61. (I'd spotted the 10 but missed the 61.)

Garrison Keillor tells us they do things slower up here. Well, he's right. Four-lane highways have 60 mph limits and two lanes are 55, if you're lucky.

While traversing the highways of Minneapolis and suburbs, I crossed the Mississippi on two ancient bridges, something I didn't find very comforting this week.

I found my way to Red Wing by luck and frequent stops to check my map. Now all I have to do is find the software company.

Steve wants me to find out what kind of trains are going by. All I know is they are noisy.

## Reflecting on today's big houses

Boy, houses are getting huge these days. I offer a solution.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the average new home grew to 2,434 square feet in 2005 from 1,660 square feet in 1973. Houses of 3,000 square feet and well beyond — "McMansions" — represent a quarter of all new home construction.

That got me to thinking about the house I grew up in.

As it went, in 1964, we'd been living in an 850-square-foot ranch, one built with GI Bill money after World War II. I was two then, the youngest of three, and my mother was pregnant with my sister Lisa. We were in dire need of a bigger house.

One day as my father (the Big Guy) drove home from work, he noticed a house was being built in a new housing plan. He stopped the car and paid a visit to the builder.

The house hadn't been sold yet, he learned. The builder was eager to sell, and the Big Guy, relying on the same "I'm-broke-as-hell-buddy" techniques he used to buy cars, negotiated several extras as part of the deal.

There must have been a rule in the early 1960s that every house built in the suburbs should have a brick facade on the bottom and white aluminum siding on the top, and our box-shaped house was no exception. It had four bedrooms, one full bathroom and one half-bathroom.

It was all of 1,500 square feet. My parents began improving the place right away. The Big Guy planted grass, trees and shrubs, while my mother painted and wallpapered. They built a family room in the basement. They added a concrete porch with roof out back, a porch that never wanted for a cool breeze.

By 1974, we had six children and the house was bursting at the seams. The Big Guy sold some stock he inherited and added on a fifth bedroom and full bath on the first floor — creating a 1,700-square-foot house.

We did a lot of living there. For 34 years the front door was never locked, and friends and relatives came and went at all hours. We had a million birthday parties and family gatherings there. Every emotion under the sun — love, anger, joy, sadness — took place there.

I remember how the Big Guy loved to nap on his favorite recliner on the back porch. And how Jingles, our dog, rushed out from under the shrubs to greet me. And how sometimes



**tom purcell**

• commentary

after dinner Sunday nights, my five sisters and I sat around the kitchen table laughing and sharing stories.

The modest size of the house forced us to live together — there was simply no way to avoid each other. We had to learn how to share — certainly how to negotiate — and how to get along, all valuable skills to have in life.

And never once did we feel our home was small.

I don't understand how so many families do it now. They have fewer kids and much bigger houses — houses that are sometimes so large

their inhabitants don't often come across each other.

Maybe that's the difference. When we were kids, our parents made their decisions based solely on what was best for us — our education, our values, our future. They didn't measure themselves so much by the things they had but by how well their children turned out.

But today too many folks are caught up in the material trap — the need to build giant homes to impress. Sure, there's always been a need to "keep up with the Joneses" but, man, if today's houses are any measure, it's all we're thinking about.

The little house I grew up in may have been modest by material measures, but it was a mansion by the measures that really count.

I can't think of a bigger place to grow up in.

Tom Purcell is a nationally syndicated humor columnist. For comments to Tom, please email him at Purcell@caglecartoons.com.



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e-mail: star-news@nwkans.com

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**nwkansas.com**

N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services

(ntbetz@nwkans.com)

Evan Barnum, Systems Admin.(support@nwkans.com)

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