

from our viewpoint...

## The changing face of downtown

The decision from the J.C. Penney Co. to close its Goodland store despite pleas from people here was no surprise. Going into the collaborative effort to save the store, everyone knew it was a long shot.

The people of Goodland and the surrounding area came together in that effort, and tried to go the extra mile to convince the corporate management to give northwest Kansas another shot at keeping a major clothing store within driving distance.

Penney management said despite the assistance offered by the town — a package proposed by the city, county, Economic Development Council and the landlord — the store would not meet the company's goals.

For about six weeks, the store will be in business as the liquidation process empties the floor. Then the name will come down, leaving another hole in Main Avenue.

In the process of trying to keep the store, open ideas and suggestions were tossed around. People talked about problems the store has had for several years, including losing the display windows because of company policy — making the store look as though it was already closed — and a lack of floor space to properly display clothes and give shoppers room to get around.

At least Penney's gave us the chance to rally together rather than the abrupt closure we saw a few years ago from Alco, when they announced and closed the store on the same day.

As stores change and move around on Main, a pattern has emerged, with the large retailers moving out and more service and professional offices moving in.

The same day the closing announcement from Penney's came, the Homeland Real Estate office moved from around the corner on 12th Street to remodeled office space that was formerly Mr. Jim's His and Hers clothing store. That's good for the real estate firm, but it points up the continuing loss of retailers.

Tonight at 5:30 p.m. the Sherman County Economic Development Council will meet at Western State Bank. Members have invited both the city and county commissioners to discuss the future budget and where the group should focus its efforts.

The council is about five years old, and the city and county have each put \$50,000 a year into the office. Over that time, the group has had three executive directors, with the last one lasting less than six months.

The periods without an executive director did allow the council to build a reserve that gave it the ability to offer \$25,000 to Penney's.

The council needs a solid financial base that gives the office long-term stability and assurance the budget will not be cut off in the next city or county fiscal crisis.

Suggestions have been thrown out for a countywide property tax or a small sales tax to be earmarked for economic development. In other parts of the state, cities and counties have used these means to provide money for economic development.

A key to success is having the cooperation and involvement of the city and county in supporting and financing the effort.

Penney's decision was a disappointment, but as Commissioner John Garcia said, the town made a good effort. We can learn from the experience and use the base of cooperation for the next prospect. — Tom Betz



## Kansas City detective was one of a kind

The first time I met Bert Cool, he was a homicide detective in Kansas City, and I was a young, green reporter for *The Kansas City Times*.

The boss sent me with a photographer to a Safeway store near 48th and The Paseo, where robbers had shot the place up in a botched heist.

I said I was with a photographer. I was just along to gather some information. The photographer actually knew what he was doing. I soon found out, I did not.

The store was only a few minutes from the office, and we got there ahead of most of the cops. No one had set up any barriers. We got inside and the cameraman started taking some pictures. I looked for someone to talk to.

A hand grabbed me as I strolled through the store.

"Kid," the detective said in a gruff voice, "at least watch where you're walking."

"Oh, I said, thinking the shooting had been up by the office. "there isn't any evidence out here, is there?"

"Look down," Bert said. He was dressed in a plaid sports coat and slacks, tie undone in the heat.

There on the floor was a copper-jacketed fragment of a .22-caliber slug.

Oops, sorry.

Later, I got to know Bert when I was assigned to cover police headquarters one or two nights a week. Even then, he wasn't much on giving out information. That never changed.

My job at headquarters, mostly, was to listen to the radios — Kansas City had six or seven channels for just the city police in those days — read reports and get a few quotes from the detectives for someone writing a story from



steve haynes

• along the sappa

out on the street.

It could be boring, though I suspect there were more stories "downtown" than I found. I was young and self-important. I wanted to be out on the street, where the action was.

Still, it was good to know the guys working at the cop shop, especially the detectives in Crimes Against Persons, who handled homicides, robberies, rapes and assaults. They were the cream of the police crop, the top of the food chain, and they knew it.

And they knew some stories. About crime and criminals, about cops and politicians, about reporters. Most of it, you couldn't print.

One of my predecessors, they said, had borrowed a young detective's gun one night, then popped a cap at the equestrian statue of Andy Jackson in front of the courthouse across the street. No way the kid could turn him in, not and face the chief.

Maybe it was even true; I never climbed up to see if Andy had any scars. But these guys knew things. One night, several of them called me aside to show me vice arrest records for one of my bosses, who had a habit of frequenting the men's room at Union Station. It didn't much change my opinion of him — he was a great mentor and teacher and a brilliant newsman — but after that, I stayed out of that men's room.

Times change. Bert retired from the police

force. I moved to Colorado to buy a newspaper. Our paths didn't cross again until Cynthia and I bought *The Oberlin Herald* in 1993.

Bert had just retired again, as Decatur County undersheriff. He already had started back full time as head jailer and a dispatcher, and still did emergency management work for the county.

Often, we'd talk about those days in Kansas City. Bert complained that all the old gang was gone, retired or deceased. The city took back the department, which had been under the governor's control since the corruption-ridden days of the 1930s, and uniforms changed.

Bert liked to talk about those guys in homicide — Gary McCready, always well dressed, and Gary Vanbuskirk, big and stern, and Sterling Ford, the half-blind old chief of detectives — but as the years passed, so did they.

Sometimes, I'd drop by the courthouse when he had the overnight shift on weekends. Though supposedly retired, he'd work 12 hours or more from Saturday to Sunday.

He came back to work after his heart attack and open-heart surgery. He came back after a couple of prisoners nearly beat him to death one night with a sock full of batteries.

It seemed he could survive anything, but of course, none of us gets out of this life alive. This spring, his infirmities forced him into the hospital. At last, he had to retire.

I was thinking I'd go see him once more, for old time's sake, but I was out of town the night he passed. I can still hear his voice, see the twinkle in his eye.

"Hey, kid," he'd say.

I don't think they make 'em like that anymore.

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## What do we want in our district judge?

To the Editor:

In a recent campaign ad, Andrea Wyrick of Colby is trying to sell the notion that being a nonresident is an advantage for being Sherman County district/magistrate judge.

Is she kidding? The state law requires each county to have a resident serve as judge, and it works everywhere else in the state.

Now she is saying that to know the community, the people and history will somehow prejudice the outcome of court cases.

Oh really! If she is correct, why not have all the judges come from Topeka or Kansas City? They know what we need, don't they?

I don't think so!

I am tired of candidates saying they are from Goodland when they haven't lived here and don't plan on it when they lose.

Vote for Scott Showalter.

I've known him for a long time. He is a fair and impartial man. He has been open and honest about his place of residence.

Isn't that what we want in a judge?

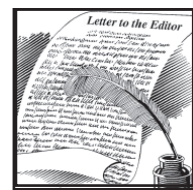
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Goodland

To the Editor:

### Letter Policy

The Goodland Star-News encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, and must include a telephone number and a signature. Unsigned letters will not be published. Form letters will be rejected, as will letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive. We reserve the right to edit letters for length and good taste. We encourage letters, with address and phone numbers, by e-mail to: <star-news@nw-kansas.com>.



from our readers

• to the editor

As commander of the Goodland American Legion Post, I would like to thank our baseball team for a job well done.

It was an honor to watch you play. You truly lived and played up to the code of sportsmanship. You kept a stout heart in defeat and pride in victory.

I have witnessed a politeness in these young men that is sorely needed in our young people today, and a respect for our flag and country.

Thank you Coach John Dautel and all your team for a job well done!

Good luck in the year ahead.

Commander Mary Lycette

Goodland

To the Editor:

Northwest Kansas Domestic and Sexual Violence Services has received \$1,000 from Sherman County to help provide direct services to victims of domestic and sexual violence.

It is a fortunate community indeed whose government officials recognize the needs of all of its citizens.

Jennifer Follis

Hays

