

from our viewpoint...

Advertiser deal won't save the mail

Small-town retailers face yet another competitive hurdle, thanks to a new deal penned by the United States Postal Service. No, not the good folks at our post office; this threat comes straight out of Washington.

The Postal Regulatory Commission recently approved a multimillion-dollar deal granting deep discounts to Valassis, one of the nation's largest direct-mail marketers.

This deal will allow national advertisers to force-mail their advertising flyers at steep discounts that no other postal customer can get.

Nationally, this deal will hurt many big-city newspapers across the country at a time when these newspapers are already under extreme economic pressure.

And, in the interest of full disclosure, it could also have a slight negative impact on this newspaper, as national chain-store advertising makes up a small percentage of our annual sales. The fact that our prices for inserting advertising flyers are lower than the discount rates given to Valassis will also limit any negative impact from this deal.

However, the impact on independent Main Street retailers that cannot qualify for these discounts is far more chilling. National chains will have a distinct advertising advantage over Main Street retailers that just isn't fair.

Don't think this will affect us? Think again.

Stores like the Raye's Grocery, Stanley Hardware and Dale's Fish 'n' Fun work hard to compete against national chains like Wal-Mart, Home Depot and Cabela's. They already provide better customer service, pay city and county taxes and donate to our charities in an effort to distinguish themselves from their national chain competitors.

Now, in an attempt to reconcile its staggering losses, the Postal Service is going to help national chains compete against our downtown merchants.

And that, quite honestly, just isn't fair.

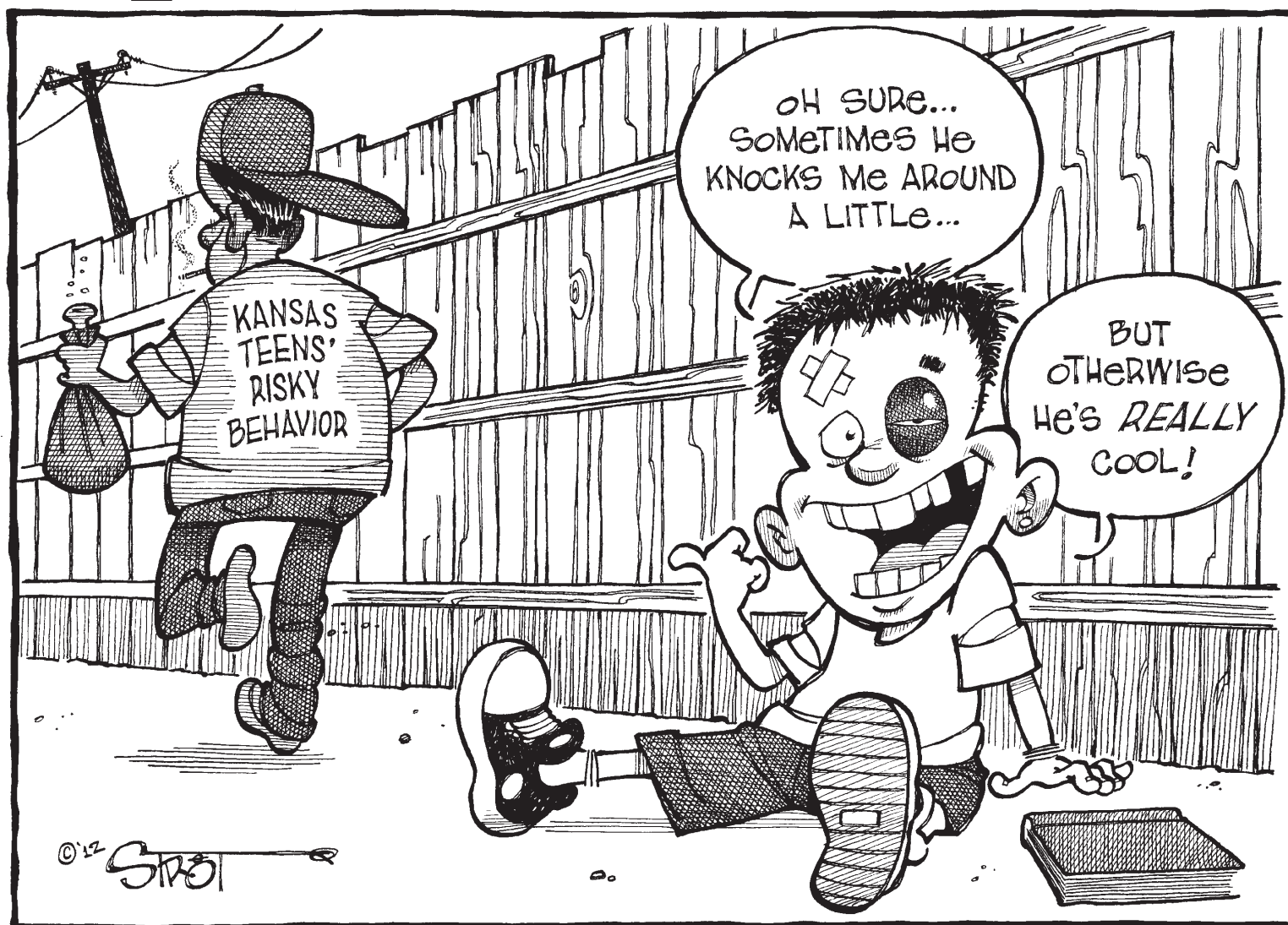
We certainly understand the dilemma that the Postal Service faces. It has run up losses of over \$11 billion in the first three quarters of the current fiscal year. But under the best-case scenario, this new scheme with Valassis is only expected to bring in a paltry \$15.6 million in profits during a three-year contract.

At what cost? No one knows, exactly. But the damage to local economies could be far more than the benefit to the Postal Service under these bargain rates.

Bottom line:

It is not the Postal Service's job to choose winners and losers in an already tough economic environment. — Rob Hicks

Rob Hicks is publisher of the Buffalo Bulletin in Wyoming and principal stockholder of Frontier Newspapers, which owns publications across the West and Midwest.



Attractions important to small towns

"We're so lucky to have had the fathers we did," Willa said. "They gave us all this."

We were sitting at a picnic table near the swimming pool, looking out over Oberlin's City Park. Our topic was the upcoming election to see if voters would approve a sales tax to pay for a new pool.

Willa had just told me the stories of her father working to get Oberlin's iconic canopies put up, and I had responded with stories of mine carrying petitions, when I was in high school, for voter support of the new community college.

Our parents and theirs had put their time, money and resources on the line so that we could have the benefits of parks, a swimming pool, community buildings and a college close to home. They hadn't been rich or famous, but they left the whole town a legacy that endures today.

I think Willa supports the pool project partly because she's a supporter—one of those people who see good ideas and put their heart into them—and partly because she's a mother and grandmother and wants her descendants to



cynthia haynes

• open season

have the same chances she did.

Me? I guess I support the idea because it's a good idea. I supported the idea of a new pool the last time it was brought up, and I've never used our swimming pool. My children never used the pool, and my only granddaughter is too young and lives too far away to use it in the foreseeable future.

But I remember being young in the summertime. I'd walk or ride my bike to the city pool, and after several hours of baking in the sun, return home via the library. Those two community facilities were my world.

I want to pass that on to others.

But I have other more selfish motives. I'm a businesswoman. My livelihood depends on the success of this town. I want and need to see Oberlin thrive. To do that, the town needs

to keep moving forward—even when that's tough.

This is a beautiful town. That's one of the reasons we moved here and bought a business here. We loved the parks, the canopies, the brick streets and old-fashioned street lights.

We appreciated the advantages of The Gateway, swimming pool, library and movie theater. Although none of them is ever going to be a money-making operation, we have to have them to draw and keep people here.

So, I'm willing to put my money where my mouth is. And I will be. I buy everything I can in town—groceries, hardware, clothes, toys, gifts and gas. I will be paying 15 cents more for everything for each \$10 I spend.

I think what I get out of it is well worth the money.

I'm voting in favor of the new Oberlin pool—although I might never use it—because it's as important to the landscape of our community as the streets, water and sewer system—and a lot more attractive.

A bright future lies ahead for newspapers

By Caroline H. Little

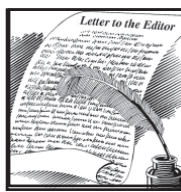
There's an excessive amount of gloom and doom being spread around these days when the talk turns to the future of newspapers.

In fact, the mere mention of the future of newspapers suggests that there might not be one. There is no question that the newspaper business has been disrupted. And yet, what the doomsayers fail to see is that the nation's newspapers are well on their way to ensuring that a bright future lies ahead.

It has been painful to bring costs in line with revenue and recast the product to reflect the realities of the new media world. But one thing that has not changed is our historic mission of informing and enlightening, agitating and entertaining, protecting and defending the public's right to know.

Without question, the newspaper of tomorrow will not be the newspaper of yesterday or even the newspaper of today. Change and innovation are pointing us toward a very different future, one that cements our unique role in the communities we serve.

Just a few years ago, we were a print business with digital on the side. Today, we are bringing together print, web and mobile, and opening



from other pens

• commentary

the possibilities for even greater advancements that now may be only dreams in a young innovator's mind.

Our digital products are growing fast, and our websites have taken the market lead. Indeed, newspapers are the Internet, or at least a vital and sought-after part of it. Aggregators such as Google News rely on newspapers as their primary source for content. Search engines refer people looking for content back to newspaper websites. Among adults 18 and older, our web audience exceeds those of Yahoo/ABC, MSNBC (now NBCNews.com), The Huffington Post, CNN and CBS.

Newspapers reach more than 100 million adults—nearly 6 in 10 of the U.S. adult Internet population—during a typical month. Consumers age 25 and above still are the core audience for our print product, but newspapers also reach nearly 60 percent of the critical 18-

to-34 demographic in print and online during an average week.

In an era where anyone can say anything and call it news, it is newspaper content that consistently gets the story right and keeps it in context. And a critical part of the industry evolution is the recognition that if you want to separate the serious from the sludge, it might cost you a little money.

Newspapers have proven they can function in print, on websites, in digital partnerships and as part of the social media scene. But they also can do what no one else can do. We are at the heart of our communities. We generate the information and track the local developments that are vital for an informed, engaged citizenry. We offer clarity and perspective, and we provide content that our readers can trust.

Getting to the point we are at now has not been easy. Genuine change never is. But we are far closer to our future than our past, and that future is bright.

Caroline H. Little is chief executive officer of the Newspaper Association of America in Arlington, Va.

Give the people what they want



Insight this week

• john schlageck

want, and demand, more information about how food is produced. It will be up to farmers and ranchers to help provide such information.

These customers should be viewed as friends of agriculture who are interested in buying products that keep farmers and ranchers in the business of producing food, fuel and fiber.

We should welcome their input and feedback. And once we understand what their needs are—provide for them.

It makes smart business sense for Kansas farmers and ranchers to connect with their customers. In larger communities and next to urban areas across Kansas, farmers and ranchers are carving out niche markets by providing meats, dairy, fruits and vegetables directly to customers who live there.

By doing so, farm and ranch families have developed the kind of direct, personal relation-

ship with people that eat what they raise. These buyers become friends and in some cases part of an extended family.

Such customers not only have the opportunity to buy and enjoy quality products for their families, they become more knowledgeable about the product and they know exactly who is producing it.

Customers can find out about a specific animal and how the livestock man raises it and why they care for, and do the things the way they do.

Kansas farmers that connect with their customers will have an advantage. When buyers of farm and ranch products have questions, they will know where to find the expert with an answer—Kansas farmers and ranchers who care for their crops, livestock, land and customers.

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau has been writing about farming and ranching in Kansas for more than 25 years. He is the managing editor of "Kansas Living," a quarterly magazine dedicated to agriculture and rural life in Kansas.

The Goodland Star-News

(USPS No. 222-460. ISSN 0893-0562)

Member: Kansas Press Association

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Published every Tuesday and Friday except the days observed for New Year's Day, Memorial Day, July 4th, Labor Day, Thanksgiving and Christmas Day, at 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

Periodicals postage paid at Goodland, Kan. 67735; entered at the Goodland, Kan., Post Office under the Act of Congress of March 8, 1878. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Goodland Star-News, 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

TELEPHONE: (785) 899-2338. Editorial e-mail: star-news@nwkansas.com. Advertising questions can be sent to: goodlandads@nwkansas.com.

The Goodland Star-News assumes no liability for mistakes or omissions in advertising or failure to publish beyond the actual cost of the ad.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: In Sherman County and adjacent counties: three months, \$29; six months, \$46; 12 months, \$81. Out of area, weekly mailing of two issues: three months, \$39; six months, \$54; 12 months, \$89 (All tax included). Mailed individually each day; (call for a price).

Incorporating:

The Goodland Daily News

1932-2003

The Sherman County Herald

Founded by Thomas McCants
1935-1989

THE SHERMAN COUNTY STAR

Founded by Eric and Roxie Yonkey
1994-2001

Nor'West Newspapers

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