

from our viewpoint...

Small things show community spirit

Several recent happenings in Goodland show progress can be seen in small events as well as large ones.

- Our hat is off to the Northwest Kansas Technical College on its 40th anniversary, and the wonderful alumni celebration held weekend before last. The range of events and the many attendees show the depth and importance of the college in the history and future of the community.

- By lighting the Van Gogh painting, the Goodland Rotary Club completed a part of its Century Project celebrating Rotary International’s 100th anniversary. The lighting really makes the monumental painting stand out after the sun has gone down. The improvement to its visibility along I-70 is wonderful and adds a dramatic element to this unique attraction.

- The city crew gets kudos for getting the lion fountain in Chambers Park into operation. The family of Craig Mann can be proud of the fountain they helped refurbish several years ago.

Sunday afternoon we saw a family with two young boys playing around the fountain and taking advantage of the benches.

- Completing the sidewalk on the north side of the courthouse gives those who like to walk a way to circle the whole two block area of Gulick Park and the courthouse. The new sidewalks, along with the new sprinkler system, have been wonderful improvements to a great community asset. The rains of the last week have helped bring forth the new grass around the edges.

These may seem like small things, but they are signs that life goes on and progress continues to move our community ahead. — *Tom Betz*

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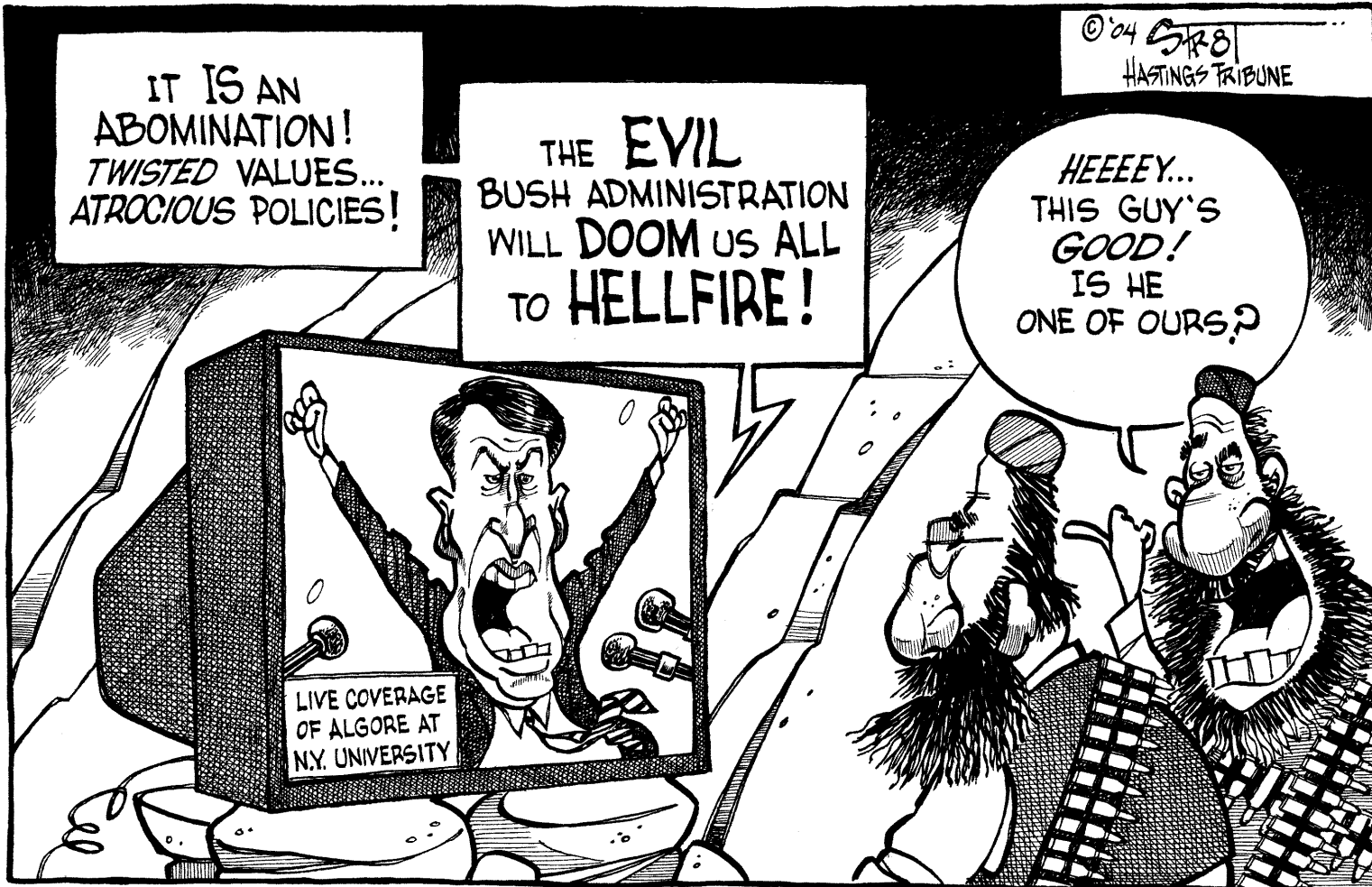
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Treed bear interrupts visit, lunch

We had just finished our lunch and were admiring the art and artistry of old friends and new acquaintances when word of the bear reached us.

We were in Creede, Colo., the little town we lived in when our children were young. Creede is an old silver-mining town in southern Colorado. There are only about 700 full-time residents in the county, and most of them are our friends.

It’s a bit of an art colony, with world-famous watercolorist Steve Quiller leading the pack of weavers, wood carvers and painters. It is also the home of the Creede Repertory Theatre, where dozens of young actors and actresses show off their talents each summer.

It was Memorial Day weekend, and time for the annual Taste of Creede festival. All up and down the two-block Main Street, vendors were cooking up tasty dishes and artists were showing their wares.

We had been visiting with two old friends, Rick and Teri Inman. Rick is a chef turned wholesale food distributor and Teri is a weaver of scarves and sweaters. She dyes her own wool, which she gathers from her herds of rabbits and mohair goats. Her products are soft,



**cynthia
haynes**

• open season

downy and expensive.

Rick and Teri weren’t interested in the bear, which had been treed at the end of the street. They live 17 miles upriver and have to keep close watch over their livestock to make sure the stock doesn’t provide a meal for the wildlife.

I grabbed Steve’s hand, however, and dragged him up the street. We’d seen bears before in downtown Creede, but it had been a while.

The young black bear was up a tree at the end of the street as a crowd of onlookers stared and a reporter for the local newspaper snapped away. I was rather surprised we got so close to the action.

Deputy Billy Fairchild leaned over and whispered, “I’m letting the press get close, so maybe he’ll get eaten.”

He asked the photographer and all the rest

of us to move back.

“If the bear eats all these people,” he said, with a grin, “I’ll be in real trouble.”

Having seen the bear, we moved on — there was still food to taste and friends to greet. Steve saw the game warden leave town with his bear trailer.

Later, the newspaper ran an article saying the bear, a year-old male, had been tranquilized, removed from the tree with a cherry picker, tagged and taken off to the far mountains, where he would have to make his lunch from berries and grubs instead of hamburgers and city trash.

They tag the bears, and they’ll give them two free rides. If one comes back a third time, he’s toast.

Bears have been a problem in the mountains the last few years. It’s been dry and the state dropped the spring bear season several years ago. The double whammy of more bears and less food has forced many a bruin to go looking for lunch in a trash can.

I hope that is our only bear of the summer, but I’m not counting on it. And I’m not putting the trash out back when I visit Creede this summer.

Reward farmers for conservation

Farmers tend to personalize comments made about farming. If you suggest to Farmer Jones that he might be using too much fertilizer, he will respond: “What did you say about my sister?”

I am not criticizing farmers, who are caught in a system and doing what they believe necessary to succeed. But farming has been the biggest cause of erosion, wildlife habitat loss and water pollution by fertilizers and pesticides in this country, and mending it with conservation will require remaking attitudes among the public, on the farm and in government.

We can do this, and without more tax dollars. Here is an example to follow. Nearly hidden among federal farm programs is a conservation tool called the narrow grass strip. In fields where you would expect earth terraces sculpted with heavy equipment like massive speed bumps to slow runoff and erosion, substitute grass strips 30 to 60 feet wide. Follow the land’s contour with alternating bands of crop and grass, contrasting color and texture. Wildlife love it. I like to boast that every raindrop that falls on these fields of mine is filtered at least once by a grass strip before it can leave the farm. This is a cropping system good for the eye and the soul.

The farsighted programs for this and other conservation are examples of American government at its best.

But they are undermined by the major, multibillion-dollar farm subsidy programs. These narrow-mindedly tie payments to production. Additional bushels equal additional subsidy dollars.

At first glance, this appears sensible. But what naturally follows is destructive. Farmer Jones plays crop lottery: Double up on fertil-



**prairie
writers circle**

• charlie melander

izer and pesticide, pray for extra rain, and wait to hit the crop jackpot covered with subsidy dollars. Bulldoze the tree line on the south 80. New acres coming into production equal more potential bushels, which equal more subsidy dollars. Sink an irrigation well. More potential bushels equal more subsidy dollars.

What does the taxpayer get for those billions of subsidy dollars? Artificially cheap supermarket food, falling water tables, fewer farms, synthetic chemicals in the drinking glass, and nitrogen fertilizer runoff that flows downstream from all over the Midwest, feeding a process that sucks oxygen and life from the Gulf of Mexico.

Production is something we don’t have to worry about. Farmer Jones is going to do his damndest for that anyway. But our subsidy system encourages him to go overboard. This frenzied maximum input, maximum production is insanity.

More of these crop dollars chasing crop production must be used instead to stimulate resource conservation.

We know what the average farmer spends on inputs. We could have a simple program. Government could target these inputs and reward conservation based on consumption standards.

Imagine this: Melander, your itemized Internal Revenue Service statement shows that you used \$2 an acre less fuel than our consumption standard. That’s important. We’re going to

write you a check for \$2 multiplied by your crop acres. Your fertilizer and pesticide costs were \$12 an acre less than our consumption standard. Reducing these has become so critical to health, we’re going to award you \$25 an acre.

It makes more sense to put subsidy dollars on this side of the road than on the other side.

To do so would radically alter the thinking of everyone in agriculture. It would excite creativity on the farm and do more to protect land and water than pages and pages of regulation and red tape. With American ingenuity running wild in a new direction, there would be an explosion in responsible farm strategies.

There are no stand-alone solutions to complex environmental problems. How we till the soil, how we plant our crops, and how we use grass strips and numerous other concepts are parts of the puzzle. When put together, they can be a powerful force in maintaining the beauty and productivity of this great land.

Charlie Melander farms near Salina, home of the Land Institute. This essay for the institute’s Prairie Writers Circle was adapted from the organization’s magazine, the Land Report.

Letter Policy

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garfield

