

from our viewpoint...

# Economic council missing the mark

About four years ago, a group of people gathered at Gambino’s for a series of meeting aimed at improving our economic development efforts.

That effort gave birth to the Sherman County Economic Development Council, but to many who were at the original meetings, the focus seems to be a little fuzzy today.

Since December, when Carolyn Applegate was forced out, the council has been looking for a director. The effort doesn’t appear to have gotten to second base.

Kay Younger was hired in January to run the office and respond to outside requests. She has done quite a bit, and the council has recognized her efforts by making her a full-time employee. That will keep the office open and give Younger an opportunity to continue her efforts.

Without an economic development director, though, the council’s efforts have been in the hands of the officers. They have had success in luring Adronics, which held a grand opening on Tuesday at its new auto antenna plant.

The company has created more jobs than first expected and it is likely more will be added by the end of the year.

Expectations about the development spin-off from a new power, ethanol and biodiesel plant have people smiling.

Having an active full-time economic development director will be important to keep us in a position to take advantage of the many companies looking at Goodland and Sherman County.

The fact there have been some developments without the presence of a director is great, but there could be more projects with that person in place. The council members are good, and they can help in many ways, but most have their own full-time jobs.

Without a director, the \$50,000 donated by the city and \$50,000 from the county are not being fully utilized. In the last report, the council had over \$160,000 in the bank.

Taxpayers are aware the city is looking at some large increases in electrical and water fees next year.

The call to action four years ago was that the county needs a good strategic plan for drawing business here and someone to help implement the plan. The council has contributed to the development efforts, but for the past seven months, economic development efforts have been less than they could be.

Younger and the volunteer board are doing their best.

Without a real plan of action or a full-time leader, though, the office is not meeting the expectations of those who helped form the citizen group.

It is time to get off the dime and bring in someone to fire things up. — *Tom Betz*

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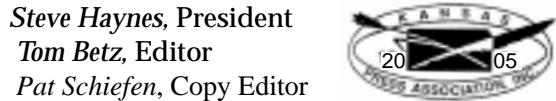
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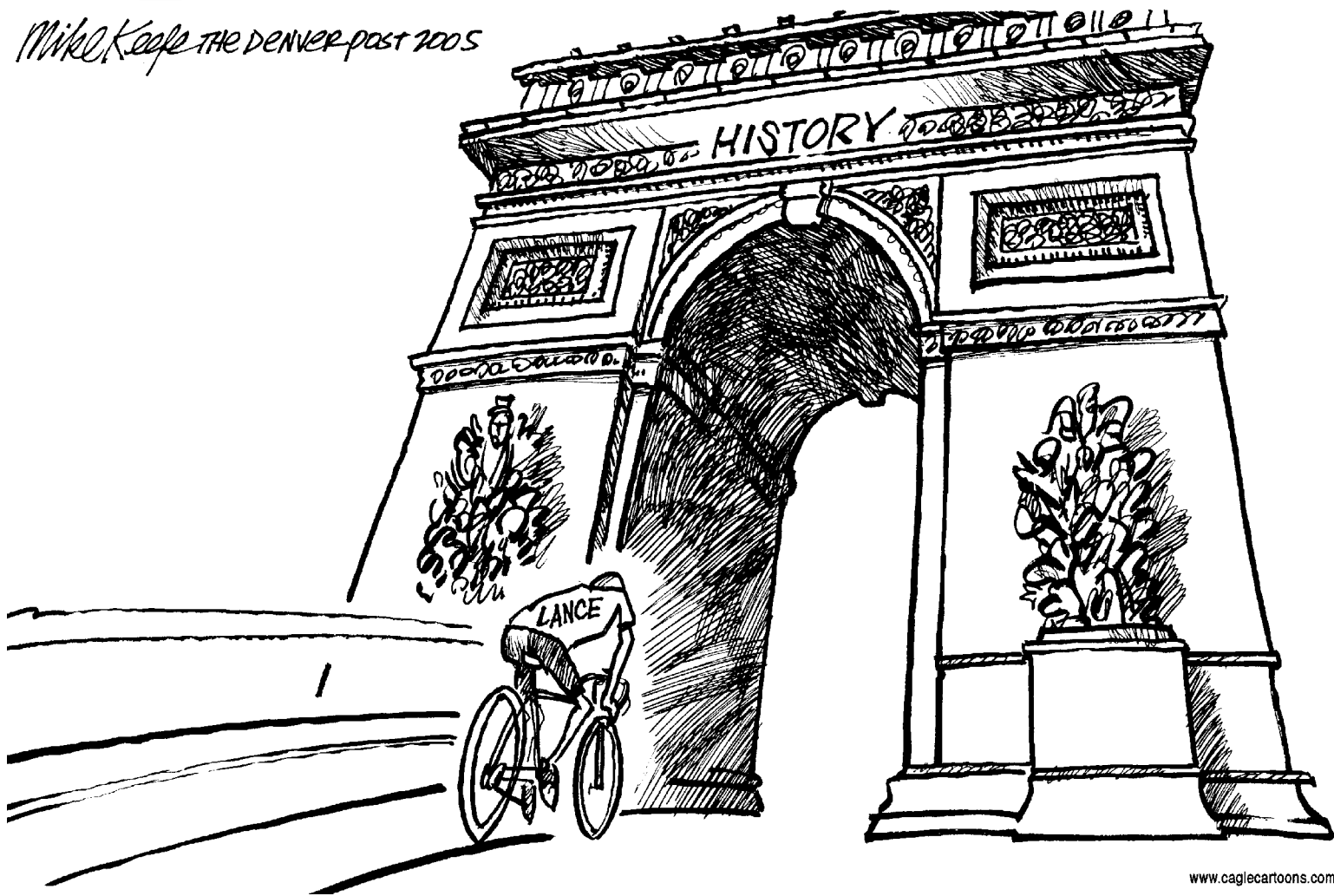
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# The right tree in the right place

Jim Minick

Prairie Writers Circle

Across our country, utility companies spend more than \$2 billion annually to control woody vegetation around power lines, and for good reason.

One falling tree can cause havoc. Witness August 2003, when the failure of a poorly maintained line left over 50 million northeasterners and Canadians without electricity.

But those billions for pruning and spraying could be better spent. Instead of creating straight-edged tornado alleys by cutting trees to the ground, we should be planting smaller trees. The line crews currently work around dogwood, redbud and other low growers. Why not just pay them to plant appropriate trees that fill the space without touching the electric line?

Utilities already understand this logic. They encourage landowners to plant “the right tree in the right place,” and Virginia Tech researcher Bonnie Appleton says the idea is slowly catching on.

In 1994, Appleton created the Utility Line Arboretum. The local power company set up three poles and two spans of uncharged lines. Appleton and a graduate student planted the



## prairie writers circle

- jim minick

right of way. To help others, they created lists of suitable plants, from shrubs like crape myrtle to small trees like saucer magnolia. Ten years later, the arboretum shows how trees can fill the space without crowding the lines, a solution both utilitarian and beautiful.

This practice makes ecological sense as well. Regular maintenance is required until the new trees become established, but once mature, they shade out competitors and reduce the need for herbicides and pollution-spewing chain saws. The plants provide habitat and food for wildlife, and possibly people, if they like eating papaws and hazelnuts.

The U.S. Agriculture Department recognizes planting forests as a method to reduce global warming, so why not plant the acres under power lines for this cause as well?

On our family farm, we’ve planted several acres of abandoned pasture to hardwoods. We like trees and we want our land to be produc-

tive, so we signed up for government programs created to help landowners plant trees. Incentives covered most of our costs. Our power line crosses this land, so we filled the half-mile right of way with a dozen species of shrubs and small trees. We couldn’t have afforded this without the government’s help.

However, these incentives don’t exist for forested or urban landscapes. If landowners want to convert rights of way traversing woodlots to appropriate plants, they must pay for it all themselves. This is wrong. Our government needs to create incentives to encourage planting right-sized trees, and utility companies could help as well with incentives, education and a shift from clear cutting to following their own right tree, right place slogan.

We all like trees, especially when they can grow where others have been cut, especially when we can witness an otherwise barren right of way filled with the vibrant pink of redbuds flowering with their own quiet power.

Jim Minick teaches at Radford University in Virginia and farms. A poet and essayist, his latest book is “Finding a Clear Path.” He wrote this essay for the Land Institute’s Prairie Writers Circle, Salina.

# Interest in ethanol growing

By John Schlageck

Kansas Farm Bureau

Like it or not, the good ol’ U.S. of A. has an energy problem.

We are hostage to our overdependence on imported oil. Look at the statistics: America consumes one-fourth of the world’s oil supplies yet has just 3 percent of global reserves. Fully one fourth of our trade deficit is associated with oil imports.

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries produces 40 percent of the world’s oil and holds 80 percent of proven global reserves – and 80 percent of those are located in the Middle East in Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia.

In the 1970s, when this country experienced its first major energy problem, we imported about one-third of our oil. Today we import 60 percent. This is estimated to rise to 70 percent in 15 short years.

While this does not bode well for our future, there is a road we can take toward energy independenc – renewable fuels. This path has the support of our Kansas congressional delegation and those of our neighboring states.

The Renewable Fuels Standard that recently passed the Senate has the potential to produce 8 billion gallons of ethanol and biodiesel by 2012. This will help bolster our energy independence and just as importantly, it is beneficial for Kansas’s rural communities, consumers and our rural heritage.

American Farm Bureau Federation projections say this plan could create 250,000 new jobs across the country.

Ethanol presents extraordinary opportunity for rural Kansas, where farmers grow corn and milo used to make ethanol. This ethanol provides a vital value-added market thus provid-



## from other pens

- commentary

ing an economic boost to rural Kansas.

Ethanol production is the third-largest use of U.S. corn, utilizing a record 1.26 billion bushels in 2004. The industry processed a record 11 percent of the domestic corn crop and 12 percent of the domestic milo crop into ethanol and valuable feed co-products.

Just after July 4, the announcement was made in Goodland that a new power, ethanol and biodiesel fuel complex was being built in northwest Kansas. This plant is slated to go on line sometime in the fall of 2006. It will produce about 25 million gallons of alcohol for ethanol fuel per year. It is estimated this plant will bring 100 new jobs to the area while providing a new grain market for area farmers.

There’s heightened interest in southwest Kansas, where a consultant has been hired to study the feasibility of an ethanol plant in Seward County. Talk is that an area from Garden City to the Texas panhandle easily could support five to seven plants.

Industry supporters say a plant that produces 50 million gallons of ethanol per year could generate annual pre-tax earning of more than \$8 million. Cattle in the feedlots of this region of the state provide a ready market for distiller’s grain, a feed which is one of the byproducts of ethanol production.

Kansas has seven ethanol plants on line, in Colwich, Garnett, Leoti, Atchison, Garden City, Russell and Campus, near Oakley.

Kansas production capacity is 170 million gallons per year using 65 million bushels of corn and grain sorghum. Other plants, including a 50-million-gallon plant project at Pratt and a 40 million gallon plant project at Phillipsburg, are in various stages of planning.

These plants represent real jobs and real paychecks helping real people in Kansas. Ethanol production helps benefit consumers across our state as well.

At this writing a barrel of oil costs more than \$62. Gasoline prices have jumped 36 percent during the past three years. Ethanol industry types say this fuel is lowering the price of gas up to nearly a dime in the Midwest. Any Kansas family will tell you that can add up.

But probably the single most important benefit is this nation’s environment and the people who live in our communities. Ethanol is one of the best tools we have to fight air pollution from vehicles, and who doesn’t have an ongoing love affair with a car, truck or boat?

Ethanol contains 35 percent oxygen, and by adding this element to fuel, engines have more complete combustion, which reduces harmful tailpipe emissions. Ethanol displaces the use of toxic gasoline components such as benzene, a carcinogen.

Ethanol just makes sense. Ethanol is good for Kansas land and water, good for rural communities and good for consumers. But more importantly, by producing our own fuel, we are moving toward energy freedom.

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

## garfield

