

from our viewpoint...

Flatlanders delivers fantastic family fun

The Flatlander Fall Festival committee and the groups that participated can be proud of their first effort, which brought a lot of people to Goodland for the weekend.

Last year, there was talk about establishing a Flatlander committee with representatives from all the participating groups to guide the festival. Early in the process of organizing the committee, there was some frustration, and some jockeying to determine the structure of the overall group.

As the date drew near, the committee members began to focus on the importance of bringing off a successful festival, and the plans began to move ahead.

Not having any money to handle the startup, the new committee sought help from civic organizations as well as the Sherman County Economic Development Council and the City Commission. Without being asked, the Sherman County commissioners put forth \$1,000 to help fund the festival, and the committee was well on the way. The development council added \$500 to the pot, and when the group asked the city commission, the city kicked in the final \$1,300. That covered the a budget of \$2,800

Walking Main from Eighth to 17th, there were a few open spots, but along the nine blocks there were games, food vendors and lots of places to buy souvenirs and antiques.

The motorcycle show continues to grow, with 195 bikes registered and more than 40 that showed up, but had not registered. The motorcycle games – held on the Bankwest parking lot – drew a good crowd, and this year they added a “roll the barrel” game for two-wheelers and three-wheelers.

The evening parade of the motorcycles is a highlight, and this year 141 bikers rode from Eight to 17th and then back north in an impressive show which delighted a good crowd lining Main.

Departments of the Northwest Kansas Technical College planned events for kids of all ages. The pillow joust was a crowd pleaser, as were the face painting and the traditional rope ladder. Kids and adults took turns pounding on a car with sledgehammers and were happy when they could chip a piece of the bumper off or make a large dent.

The car show brought in about 175 classic vehicles. There were some that have been coming to the show for years, and there were some new arrivals from Centennial, Colo., that usually went to a different show and felt it was time to try out the Flatlander Festival they had heard so much about,

Two nights of excellent racing at the Sherman County Speedway did much to add fun and thrills to the weekend.

Civic organizations including the Knights of Columbus, Rotary and Kiwanis Club helped with various parts of the event, and provided people to help man booths and work the car show.

Despite the shaky start for the Flatlander committee, the proof of their success demonstrates what can be accomplished when people come together and focus on a goal.

We are looking forward to a bigger and better festival next year, and know that the organization is in place to keep the festival moving ahead and getting better every year. – *Tom Betz*

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Listening to the sound of Mother Nature

It was one of those nights when we got to Sappa Park on Sunday.

The sun had just set, after popping out briefly at the end of what had been a gray and cloudy day.

The fog was so wet, you had to use windshield wipers earlier in the day. By the time the grass dried out, the mower wouldn’t start, and there was no way I could cut the grass.

That wouldn’t be so bad, but I’ve got no other day off to cut the grass, and it could be a bear by the time I get back to it.

Cynthia was out front pulling bermuda grass out of the flowers. Or trying to, anyway.

It didn’t take much to talk her into an early walk.

So there we were, alone in the park with about 7 million mosquitoes and just one bottle of Off.

I looked up; there was a swarm over our heads. I soon realized, though, that they weren’t following us. The whole sky above the park was full of mosquitoes.

As we walked, though, we seemed to get out from under the cloud. The western sky was beautiful, in shades of blue, purple, red, orange and



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yellow. As we walked on down, we could see mist rising off the old lake bottom.

Then an great horned owl hooted and I looked up. He was high in a old, dead cottonwood west of the youth ranch, regal and big, surveying the entire park. Rabbits and mice, I’d assume, were one their guard.

Later, still awed by the afterglow and the mist, we heard turkeys calling to each other and, off in the distance, coyotes howling. A late-season cicada chirped in a tree.

It was one of those evenings when Mother Nature makes a lot of noise, quite beautiful and oh so entertaining.

Our DEET held out, and we made it back to the car with at least some blood left.

Celebrating Constitution week

Interview with Ken Gormley

By Bill Steigerwald

Happy Constitution Week.

Sept. 17 was the 218th birthday of the longest-running constitution in world history.

To help us celebrate, we called up author and Duquesne University law professor Ken Gormley, who specializes in constitutional law, the First Amendment and the American presidency. Gormley, who wrote “Archibald Cox: Conscience of a Nation” in 1998, is working on a major book about the constitutional and legal highlights — and lowlights — of the Clinton presidency.

Q: How is our Constitution holding up at 218?

A: It really is holding up remarkably well when you stop and think about what in the past five or six years we’ve been through as a country: the impeachment trial of a president; a contested presidential election; an attack on U.S. soil on 9/11; a war in foreign territory; the death of our chief justice; the flood and destruction of a major U.S. city, which we would never have imagined. And despite all that, we’re still standing and working together and resolving legal issues that flow from all of these things through the three branches of our government.

Q: Sen. Robert Byrd, a big fan of the Constitution, and a promoter of Constitution Week, has said that it defines Americans. Do you have any sense of what he means by that?

A: I suppose that he is primarily referring to the Bill of Rights, because there are lots of provisions in the Constitution that don’t apply to many of us unless we are the president or a United States senator like him. Having a written constitution, of course, was a revolutionary idea at the time. Great Britain’s constitution was unwritten. France’s was really just a statement of general purpose. Having this Constitution and adding the Bill of Rights to spell out the rights and liberties we have was rather a dramatic thing itself. When you look at those rights, they talk about equality and equal protection and due process under the law, and really it’s all of



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the best virtues we consider exist in a just society, and that’s what we hope to be.

Q: Do you think Supreme Court nominee John Roberts is likely to change the court in any substantial way?

A: Well, we have to see who gets appointed along with him. That’s a bigger question. But I think he has the ability to have a great influence on the Supreme Court. He’s a remarkably talented, gifted individual, and he seems to have the stuff of a person who is going to be really good at building consensus and respecting the court as an institution. That you can call “conservative” in the old-fashioned sense. You can also call that a “judge’s judge,” someone who is looked upon highly by others in the profession because he or she is able to put the institution of the courts first. I think he is going to be in that mold.

Roberts is really young, so he is going to have the ability to nurture people along with him as he goes. People forget this, but by definition, a chief justice tends to moderate himself. They have to do that in order to bring harmony to the body, in order to get opinions through when you have a lot of justices working together. I think the John Roberts we’re going to see as chief justice is actually going to be more of a centrist than the John Roberts we might have seen as an associate justice, and he is going to be good at pulling the court together.

Q: If any of the Framers were to return to Earth, would they be appalled or pleased by the growth in size and power of the executive branch?

A: I don’t think they’d necessarily be surprised that the president was a very powerful figure in our system, because I think that is

what they envisioned. And I certainly don’t think they would think the Supreme Court would be more powerful than the president. But probably the greatest surprise would be the president’s power in relationship to Congress, because most likely they would have envisioned that Congress would have ended up being the most powerful branch. The Framers were leery of returning to an aristocracy, which is what they had fought a revolution to get rid of. So I think they would have been wary of presidents gathering up too much power for themselves, certainly at the expenses of other branches of government.

Q: What should we average, non-law professor citizens know about the Constitution’s role and its importance to preserving our freedoms?

A: One of the most important things I saw in law practice and you see in these debates over the Supreme Court confirmation processes is that you can’t use the Constitution as a political ball to kick around and use for political purposes. It applies to everyone, and everyone gets to use it in the same way. You have to remember this Constitution *really* is designed for everyone. In the abstract, it is easy to try to take it away from some people, but when you apply it to real cases that touch your life, all of a sudden you see the great importance of why we have it.

The Constitution is not something that is meant to be left to a thumbs-up or thumbs-down vote of a group of Americans at one time. It’s designed to protect us from ourselves. Just because a majority of people at one time may say blacks shouldn’t go to school with whites, that doesn’t mean that is what the Constitution tells us.

The most important thing is that the Constitution is supposed to last for a long period. It’s lasted for 218 years and to get us to another 218 years, it has to be treated with respect. We can not allow ourselves to start taking USAToday polls on every issue and think that should trump the Constitution.

Bill Steigerwald is a columnist at the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review.

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