

Schools beginning to see consolidation as choice

Consolidation. Rural schools have been avoiding the "C" word since the 1960s, when the Kansas Legislature pared hundreds of little districts down to a few dozen consolidated entities, fewer than 300.

But now, its time has come. And the state isn't having to force anyone to consolidate. Rural schools are beginning to see the handwriting on the wall.

Lenora closed its schools and pays to send the kids to Norton. Bogue shut down and merged into its larger neighbor, Hill City. In Ness County, small schools banded together to form a larger, more solvent district.

Out here, Herndon, its enrollment under 90 and dropping, is shopping for a merger partner.

As the rural population continues to drop, we'll see more schools fall by the wayside. But that won't be the end of it.

In this new century, we may find that we just can't afford to go on doing things the way we've always done them.

Why, for instance, do we need four cities, 25 townships and a county government in Decatur County?

When there were hundreds of families on the land, it made sense, but not today. Many townships can't get people to run for office. Some draw only 5-6 voters in an election. Smaller cities have trouble filling city councils. And city residents wind up paying twice for services like roads and law enforcement.

Do we really need a three-man police department and a three-man sheriff's office? If I live in town, why do I pay for the police and the sheriff? It's an interesting system.

Some Kansas counties have experimented with consolidation, notably Wyandotte, where the county and Kansas City, Kan., merged, and Riley, where the Manhattan police and the sheriff's office stepped up to the altar.

There's been talk off and on of merging the city and the county, or merging the police and the sheriff's office. There are many ways either goal could be accomplished. We could, as Wyandotte County did, allow the smaller towns to keep their independence. It's an interesting system, where one government is a city and a county with small cities within it.

In Sherman County, where Goodland is the dominant municipality, there's been talk of some sort of merger. One thing that gets people going is the fact that the city and county often seem to work at cross purposes. On issue after issue, they fail to be on the same wave length until people start saying, why do we have both?

Consolidation of school districts, high schools, cities and counties, or law enforcement won't solve the world's problems. It might save some money, but these services will still cost something.

Some schools, and some cities, just get to the point where, like a person in the last stages of a good life, they just give up.

And maybe that makes sense today. Why should we keep paying for all this duplication? Can a county with fewer than 1,500 people, for instance, afford to keep up a full-service operation?

These are questions we're going to hear more and more about. It's an issue that's come of age. — Steve Haynes

Woman goes book crazy in mall

The National Newspaper Association moved its offices from the District of Columbia to the City of Columbia last year, and I like it a lot better.

If the meeting that Steve needed to go to recently had been in Washington, I would have stayed home. It's just too expensive to fly to Washington for a meeting I'm not even going to attend.

Columbia, Mo., is another story. The only extra cost was my food — or so Steve figured. Silly boy.

The hotel room was a double. It didn't cost any more gas to get both of us there, and I had to eat anyway and if he were out of town, I'd probably eat out.

I encouraged Steve to think about all this.

I never used the word "shopping" until we got there.

Now, you have to realize I don't mean clothes shopping. I don't really like to go clothes shopping, and I see no reason to go all the way to Missouri when we have some very nice shops right here in western Kansas. There is very little in clothing I cannot buy at home or in a nearby town.

That doesn't mean I didn't look while walking through Dillard's and past Lerner's and a dozen other shops in the mall. It only confirmed my suspicion that there are more ugly clothes in this world than I want to think about.

Who in their right mind would



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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buy a pair of lime green slacks with black polka dots the size of saucers on them?

Of course, these things are the Christmas leftovers, and like all leftovers, they get a little much after awhile.

Another problem I noticed about the clothes in most of the boutiques I passed — no one over 25 years old or 100 pounds can wear them.

I was 25 once. I was even 100 pounds once, but not since before I was 16. (My first driver's license listed my weight as 119 pounds.)

My husband always thinks I should be able to wear these outfits that have no middle. I bless his blindness, but I refuse to wear anything that would show that I have NO belly button and NO tattoos.

I spent all day at the Columbia Mall and spent about \$100 on books. That's right, 20 minutes strolling through Dillard's to get to the main hallways, another hour walking up and down the halls looking in windows with an occasional excursion inside, and six hours in the bookstore.

It was heaven.

I'm addicted to books. I love to read.

If I had lived in the Middle Ages, I probably would have tried to join a monastery so that I could have been around the books they wrote by hand.

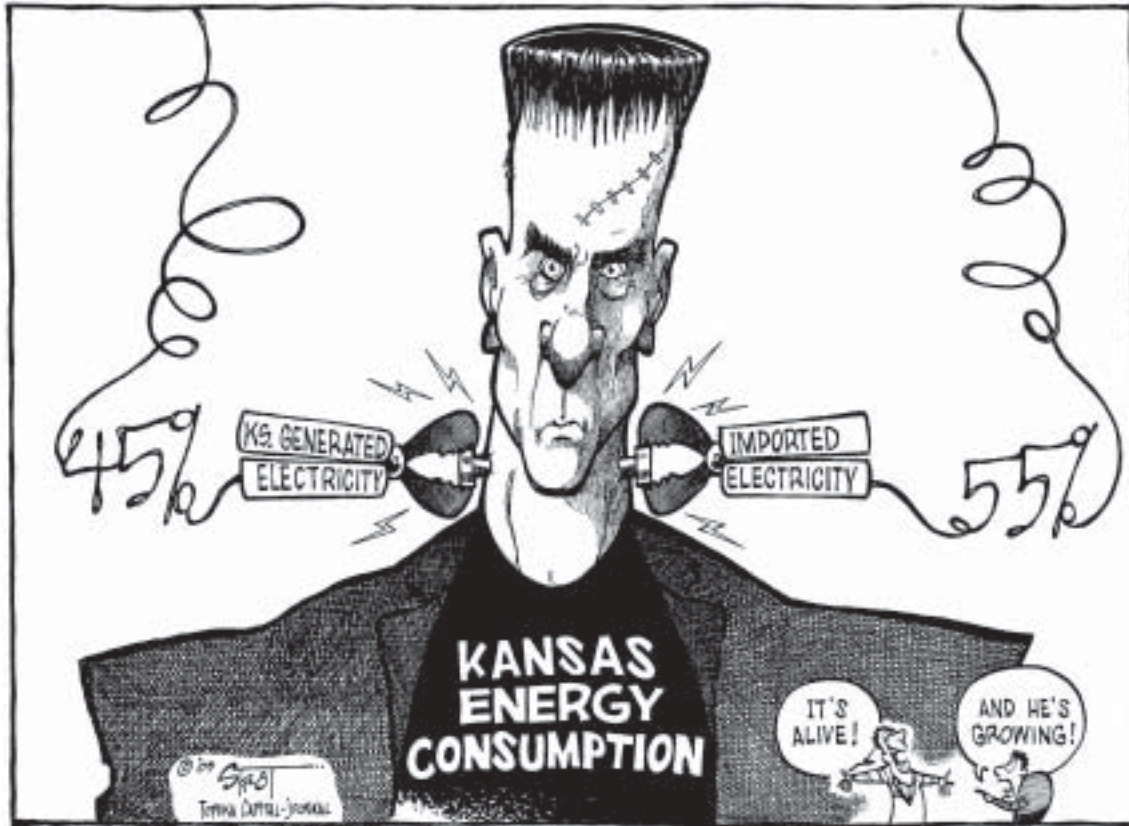
As it is, I just bide my time and when I'm somewhere with a bookstore — the Columbia Mall has a Barnes and Nobles — I go nuts.

I have books upstairs, books downstairs, books stored in spare bedrooms, books beside my chair, beside my bed, under the stairs, in bookcases, behind doors, on shelves, on the floor, in the corner, on the television and in the bathroom.

I've got books I read as a child, books I've read in high school and college, books I've read since I've been an adult and books I'll never live long enough to read.

I love them all. And now I've got another dozen to add to my horde. Steve says I'm a bookaholic.

Maybe I'll buy a book on the subject.



Couple brushes up on Spanish

Buenos dias, Senors, Senioritas y Senoras!

It's hard to believe a year has passed since our last trip to Mexico on a mission trip. But it's time to dust off the Spanish/English dictionary and brush up on the few basics we know. Every year we do this, we vow that we're going to take Spanish classes and become more conversant. And every year comes to find us still searching for simple nouns and verb conjugations.

This will be the fifth house we have helped build for a needy Mexican family. The brief family biography tells us "our" family is a single mom with two boys, ages 10 and 12. We learned that she barely makes \$50 a week working in a factory and they don't have a home. How humbling it is to help give someone a home we would barely consider good enough for chickens and have them consider it a mansion.

What an interesting team is assembled for this trip. We have an insurance salesperson; a retired commodities broker; a chemical company sales rep; a probation officer; a manufacturing company manager; a city employee; a health food store owner; a music store owner; a carpenter (Jim); a socialite and gad-about (me); and a 13-year-old boy named Wesley who, on his own, has obtained the "Jesus"



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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film in Spanish, a lap-top to show it on, and Spanish tracts to distribute to the neighborhood children.

I don't have any special talents so when I wonder what on earth I'm doing, going off to Mexico, I try to remember that God doesn't necessarily call out the equipped; he equips the called out.

We've been "toasty" with our corn burner for about two weeks now. My only complaint is that you can't turn it to simmer when you don't need as much heat. It's great on cold days, but it'll run you out when the temperature is mild. I found myself opening doors one day last week just to release some of the heat.

Weekly maintenance has sort of fallen to me because every time Jim cleans out the ash drawer or the fire chamber he gets soot on his clothes. Finally, I told him he wasn't allowed to play with the stove anymore. I'd

rather clean it myself than keep laundering sooty clothes.

Hm-m-m-m-m, I wonder if he had that figured out to begin with.

—ob—

Got a cute e-mail from a couple of sexy senior citizens I know. They were pondering the current state of affairs where if a chef slices his finger at work, he sues the restaurant. Or if a smoker dies from his habit, his family sues the tobacco company. If a drunk driver slams his car into a tree, he sues the bartender.

Their theory is: if they die while sitting in front of their computer, somebody should sue Bill Gates.

From the Bible

For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Galatians 5:14

Did you hear the one about...

Goodland attorney Ron Vignery writes that I pick on lawyers too much.

"I have read with interest and concern several of your articles through the years regarding attorneys. It is pretty obvious to me that you don't have a particularly high regard for my profession. It is a free country, and you are entitled to your opinions.

"...Such is the free press. I don't have to like the articles you are writing, and you can certainly continue to write them. Just thought you would be interested in this article."

He forwards a column by a law professor pointing out the good that trial lawyers can do in our system. We'd like to run it, and are trying to get permission from the author.

You're right, Ron. We need lawyers.

My dad, whom I admired greatly, was a lawyer, a good one. He never took offense at a good lawyer joke, not when he was poking fun at his friends who were doctors, undertakers and car dealers.

Today, I get most of my lawyer jokes from my attorney. He collects them. I clip lawyer cartoons for him.

But the law is no joke. The legal system, good as it is, is full of absurdities and contradictions, no more perfect than any of our institutions. Maybe, though, as a body, it has less of a sense of humor than some.

But while I have been critical of that system at times, I have respect for the lawyers I know, most of them anyway. They are good people, trying their best to make the system work. And it does, after a fashion. Does that put it beyond reproach? I hope not.

What's right with the legal system? Most things. It works (most of the time). It's fair (most of the time). It's a lot better than most countries.

What's wrong with the legal system?

I could cite chapter and verse. The system can be hellaciously expensive. We once sued a manager who had stolen \$35,000 some odd dollars from the company before we took over. It cost \$12,000 to get an injunction and an agreement from him to repay the money, but he defaulted. Never paid a dime. Then he took bankruptcy. I asked the lawyer, and he said it might cost another \$5,000 to get the debt exempted by the bankruptcy court. It would have been good money after bad.



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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Sometimes you have the right to all the justice you can afford.

Or why is it that some poor saps go to trial with inexperienced public defenders, cop a plea and do hard time, but O.J. Simpson is playing golf in Florida?

If you have been wronged by Firestone and Ford, or injured in a wreck, yes, you can get a big-bucks trial lawyer to take your case. They often do us a real service. But if there's no money in it, if the state is taking away your rights or your family, how much justice can you afford?

I've been in lawsuits where we were winning with one judge, then lost when another took the case. Is that justice? I didn't think so.

Then there is the absurdity which goes along with product liability law, the kind of thing I wrote about this month that ticked you off, Ron. It seems like Americans sue at the drop of a hat today, and lawyers have enabled that. It might be good to stand back and take a look at the system, see what makes sense and what doesn't.

But we're no better off in the press. People gripe about us all the time, and sometimes with some justification. We're all saddled with the

excesses of some of our peers, especially the television reporters and the Washington press corps. I admit it.

I also think we, like lawyers, serve a vital function in society.

We are criticized for running too much "negative" news, yet often as not, that's what people want to read when they vote with their quarters. Which master are we supposed to serve?

Ah, but I digress. It's your profession we're talking about today, not mine.

The very fact that people pick on lawyers so much may be a measure of the law's importance to society. Grocers and retailers are important, but you don't hear many jokes about them. Same for dentists and government clerks. Or reporters, for that matter.

There's the majesty of the law, the honor of the court, the tradition of justice. Some problems and a smattering of complaints, a few cartoons and wisecracks thrown in.

It's not a perfect system, but it's a good one, and it takes good lawyers to make it work.

Good lawyers. I think I heard a joke about that....

Man praises hospital

To the Editor:
I thank God and our community for the health-care facilities here in Decatur County and the City of Oberlin. We are indeed blessed to have three excellent doctors, nurse-practitioner, and anesthetist; skilled lab and x-ray technicians; caring, experienced nurses; dedicated friendly administrative staff; and all the other employees it takes to operate a great facility.

The hospital also schedules specialty clinics for doctors to treat patients with special needs. Extensive diagnostic testing is available, saving local patients many dollars and miles of travel.

With great appreciation,
Donald E. Meints
Oberlin

Letter to the Editor

Having been a patient in larger hospitals where care has been excellent, I feel the care here in our local hospital has been even better! Everyone knows and respects each other, and I believe that makes for a happy workplace, creating a friendly, comfortable place for patients to be treated and recover.

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