

## Watering rules worked, so leave well enough alone

Oberlin's watering rules worked pretty well last year in the face of a near-record drought and a beastly hot summer.

First, the city asked people to water only at night. That makes sense, because during a summer day, a great deal of the water coming out of a sprinkler just evaporates.

That didn't reduce water use enough, though, so the city added an odd-even restriction. That worked for the most part, though a lot of people were mildly confused about which day to water and a few, apparently, were openly defiant. Still, there was no record of any tickets being issued, and water use dropped to a bearable level.

This summer, the city may face the same problem. However, it will have another well available as soon as the mixing system now under construction is turned on.

There is no reason to believe that the same rules used last year won't work as well this year. However, some councilmen want to change things. One suggested an east-west split of the town (the engineers quickly said that wouldn't work). Others want to designate one "no-water day," though there's no particular reason to do that.

The truth is, the odd-even system worked, and there's no other scheme that would be as simple or as effective.

Getting people to remember which set of days was "odd" and which was "even" would

be impossible. And whatever day was picked as the no-water day would work a hardship on many people.

If the system worked last year, and there'll be more water available in a pinch this year, why change it? At least until we see how the summer is going?

On another issue: The council made an unfortunate decision when it gave the go-ahead to replace the town's street signs with the same product used in previous years.

The stamped-steel signs are cheap, but they don't last. Within a few years, they're rusting through the paint. Just look around town.

Newer aluminum signs with reflective backgrounds have been available for years. These are the standard for most cities as well as for state and county highways.

Their biggest advantage is that they can be read at night, but they will last years longer than the steel signs.

With the budget pinch, the city probably can't afford to replace all the signs this year with good-quality material, but it could make a start. Otherwise, it'll face the same problem in a few years.

The decision may save a few bucks this year, but in the long run, better signs would be a better buy.

— Steve Haynes

## Corn stove definitely a \$ saver

The proof, as they say, is in the pudding.

We have been using our corn-pellet stove for several weeks now, excluding the eight days we shut it down during our trip to Mexico. Our previous month's heating bill was about \$150; the last bill was for \$98. I'm impressed. And since my last remark about not being able to damper down the heat during mild days, Jim has gotten the hang of adjusting thermostat settings and air intake to allow for a lower burn.

To me, a corn-pellet stove is lots easier to operate than a traditional wood stove. And, if you don't get too excited about the occasional kernel of corn underfoot, it's even tidier.

We're still working on ideas for storing the corn. I'm not crazy about a trailer parked in the side yard, but for now, it will do. Eventually, this whole outfit will be installed in the basement of the other house.

Last weekend, Jim and I took part in a marriage enrichment seminar with about 25 other couples from our church. It was a "WOW" moment. With a great deal of humor, gentle nudging and love, the instructors led us through the minefield of marriage.

Since each one of us is raised differently, when a couple marries, they are bringing those divergent backgrounds into the mix.

There are the "Trivial Triggers," such as the cap left off the toothpaste, that set off an out-of-proportion argument, that escalates to non-related issues, often including the taboo, "you always" or "I never."

Then there are the "hidlers" and the "hurlers." Most marriages con-



### Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts  
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tain one of each. The hurler is the one who hurls out those sharp barbs while the hider is (emotionally, at least) out the door.

Probably the best technique we learned was "Time Out." Stop an argument before it gets to the hurling and hiding stage.

Our old cat, Max, is doing quite well, thank you. Since his diagnosis of diabetes and beginning his regimen of insulin injections twice a day, he has improved dramatically.

I know some people think, "It's only cat." But, you know, Max was a great companion to Jim after his son died, and he accepted me into the household with no reservations. Max did nothing but give love and acceptance. He was even tolerant of my cat, Snuggles (who has a definite attitude), when we merged our households. Max eventually won over Snuggles and now, the two, are buds.

So when we learned that Max's condition was treatable, we didn't hesitate. It was the least we could do for our old friend. He's getting up there in cat years, but that's no reason his remaining time can't be comfortable.

Snow, snow, beautiful snow. Don't have a clue how much

moisture we can expect from this light, fluffy stuff, but it's more than what we had before.

Driving in it yesterday made me think of the girl who took her father's advice. He had told her to wait for a snow plow and follow it so she wouldn't risk getting stuck.

Leaving her job one evening, she found a heavy snowfall had occurred. Remembering her father's words, she waited for a snowplow and pulled in behind the first one she saw. Following close behind, she had no difficulty with drifts, but after a very long time the driver of the snowplow stopped and got out.

He came back to the young woman's car and asked why she was following him. After she explained her father's advice to him, the driver told her, "You can follow me if you want, but now that I'm done here at Wal-Mart, I'm heading over to clear the K-Mart lot."

### From the Bible

He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears.  
Proverbs 26:17



## Couple overcomes early marriage

He was wed at 16 — a marriage arranged by his parents to a neighbor girl. She was 14.

He was a good catch, Caesar Moyron Verdugo said, with just a little brag in his voice. He had a job in the tourist industry, had been to the United States and could speak English.

Caesar was showing us the country he grew up in — the back country of the Baja, where ranches are tucked into the barren landscape next to streams that give them life.

This was not the Mexico we had been seeing in our five-star hotel with two swimming pools, a restaurant and exercise room. This was not the ocean front property that goes for astronomical prices.

This was the land of proud people, who live pretty much like their ancestors have for centuries.

As he points out the flora and fauna of the Baja — cactus, palm trees, birds, lizards and spiders, Caesar talks about his life and the lives of his family and friends.

He was born on a ranch and walked many miles to school. Eventually, he moved to the dormitory the church in Todos Santos had for ranch children. He studied hard and earned the attention of his tutors, who pointed him out to an American couple.

The couple arranged for him to go to the United States as an exchange



### Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes  
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student when he was in the seventh grade.

When he returned home, he finished the eighth grade and went to work to help the family. Soon he was a married man and not too long after that, a father.

But he wanted more. While his marriage has worked out, he admits he was scared to death. He definitely did not want to get married when he was 16.

Over the years, he has gone on to complete his high school degree and is going to college via the Internet and community colleges. He has helped his wife go back to school and complete her education. Their eldest, a son, is at the university in La Paz.

Their other child is a girl of 11, and Caesar has vowed that she will have her chance. She will not be forced into marriage as soon as she becomes a woman. She will go to high school and college, if she chooses.

In fact, he said, he got into trouble over that issue with his wife.

His daughter asked if he was going to arrange a marriage for her, he recalled, and he said vehemently that he would never do that. That's what had happened to him, and he wouldn't force either of his children into an arranged marriage.

"I won't ruin your life," he said.

His wife overheard the exchange, he said, and he was in the dog house for days.

Not that he thinks marriage ruined his life. He says he fell in love with his wife, and today she is his best friend.

So life is changing in the Baja. Slowly to be sure.

Now the ranch children have a high school within running distance. They run because it's an hour's walk, and if they run, they can sleep later in the mornings.

That sounds familiar. And they say it makes for a good track team.

## Merge cities and counties first

Consolidation.

While the Legislature is busy arguing bills that would force school districts to consolidate, small districts across the state are getting ready to merge or die.

The state won't need to force consolidation, just make it as easy and painless as possible.

The most prominent proposal, a plan put forth by four administrators from large districts, is nothing more than a foolish power grab. The evidence shows that the authors' districts often have higher costs than their smaller neighbors.

The truth is, school consolidation isn't likely to save the state any money. The savings would quickly disappear into the bureaucratic maw.

But quietly growing is interest in local government consolidation — consolidations of city and county services, or even cities and counties, and consolidation of whole counties into bigger units.

I think consolidating cities and counties is a logical idea. It would greatly simplify local government while keeping decision-making close to home.

We should start by eliminating townships, which have no functions left that the county couldn't handle with less expense. Some counties already have consolidated their townships, but others, like Decatur, have way too many.

In wagon-road days, townships may have made sense. Today, they just cost money. Many can't fill their



### Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes  
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boards or gather a dozen votes for a meaningful election.

Then, get rid of any independent, tax-levying districts such as cemetery or fire boards. Let county commissioners make those decisions with the help of advisory boards running the districts.

And then merge city and county services. Why have, as many counties in western Kansas do, a three-man sheriff's department and a three-man city police department? Why not merge them into one efficient unit where the officers can have a day off now and then?

Merge street and road departments, clerk's offices, treasurer's operations, whatever is duplicated. Wyandotte County and Kansas City, Kansas, set a model for this type of merger.

They even allowed the smaller cities in the county to retain their independence as long as they pay their own bills.

Riley County showed us how to successfully merge police agencies under an appointed chief. It works there.

Would we save money? Probably not much. But government would

work better, and it would end the unfair practice of taxing city dwellers for rural services.

Why should city people pay for grading county roads they don't use, and pay again for paving city streets? It's a system which makes little sense today.

At the same time, I can't get excited about merging counties.

Would you want to drive 60 miles to get tags or pay your taxes? Would it be OK to have to drive that far to complain to the county commissioners? I think not. The same argument applies to plans for area-wide school districts.

Some of the really small counties, like Wallace or Greeley, might consider merging with a neighbor or two, but that would eliminate many of the best jobs in Sharon Springs and Tribune. Do people there want that?

My guess is, as long as they can afford it, people won't give up their courthouse or their schools. Merging services within the counties has a lot more merit, and a lot more appeal.

And the movement is growing.

## Dumping at fair grounds dangerous

To the Editor:

On behalf of the Decatur County Fair Board, I'd like to make the public aware of a recent problem discovered on the fair grounds. The "storage area," over the hill on the west side of the fair grounds, has become an unauthorized community dump.

## Grandparents unhappy

To the Editor:

We are disgusted with the Wednesday, Feb. 19, Section B, about the kindergarten play.

This was a cute play; there should have been a group picture and all their names, not just a select few.

How do you think the other kids felt? Is this what they have to look forward to the next 12 years?

Left out...  
Al and Betty Cressler, grandparents, Jennings

money to clean up.  
Sonya Gillespie, chairman  
Decatur County Fair  
Advisory Board



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