

## Closure of welfare office has effect on 'Angel Tree'

The story is alarming, but entirely predictable.

No one was signing up for the Oberlin Jaycees' Angel Tree, which puts people in touch with kids who might otherwise not get much for Christmas. These "angels" buy them gifts and the Jaycees make sure they get delivered.

In the past, the Jaycees said, they'd leave word at the county office of the state welfare agency, the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services. The workers there would get word out to people whose kids might qualify for the tree.

Last year at this time, the Jaycees reported 53 kids on the tree. This year, it's barely a dozen so far.

This year, there is no welfare office in Oberlin. It closed a couple of months ago.

The state centralized the work at a regional office in Colby. Apparently, no one there knows or cares about local charity efforts in Oberlin. At least, though the Jaycees contacted state workers, they apparently didn't tell many families about the Angel Tree.

One reason may be lack of contact day in and day out with the agency's clients, who are now forced to call "800" telephone numbers answered God-knows-where for help. State workers have been clustered in regional offices where supervisors can keep an eye on them.

When Gov. Kathleen Sebelius was here last summer, she seemed surprised that people were not happy with the change. She pointed out that the state will have more "points of contact," or places where workers can meet clients at scheduled times.

What the state won't have is anyone who lives or works in or cares about Oberlin, Atwood, St. Francis, or soon, Goodland and Norton.

Welfare workers will be moving into expensive new buildings leased in Colby and Phillipsburg, where they will have less con-

tact with clients and communities.

The latest reports are that 35 new jobs will wind up in Colby alone, jobs that used to be spread out around northwest Kansas and elsewhere.

Is this plan working?

The Angel Tree says no.

What we're seeing is the opening round of a battle to centralize not just state, but county and federal services in rural areas. Lucky towns like Phillipsburg will become "super county seats," with regional state and federal offices, and eventually, Topeka will try to get counties to follow suit and merge in clusters around these towns.

It's not anyone's wild imagination. It's already happening. Extension districts are merging. Other offices will follow soon, unless rural people take a stand.

Do we want to drive 50-60 miles just to get license tags? Or call some "800" number that may be answered in Indiana, or India, to get answers about state government?

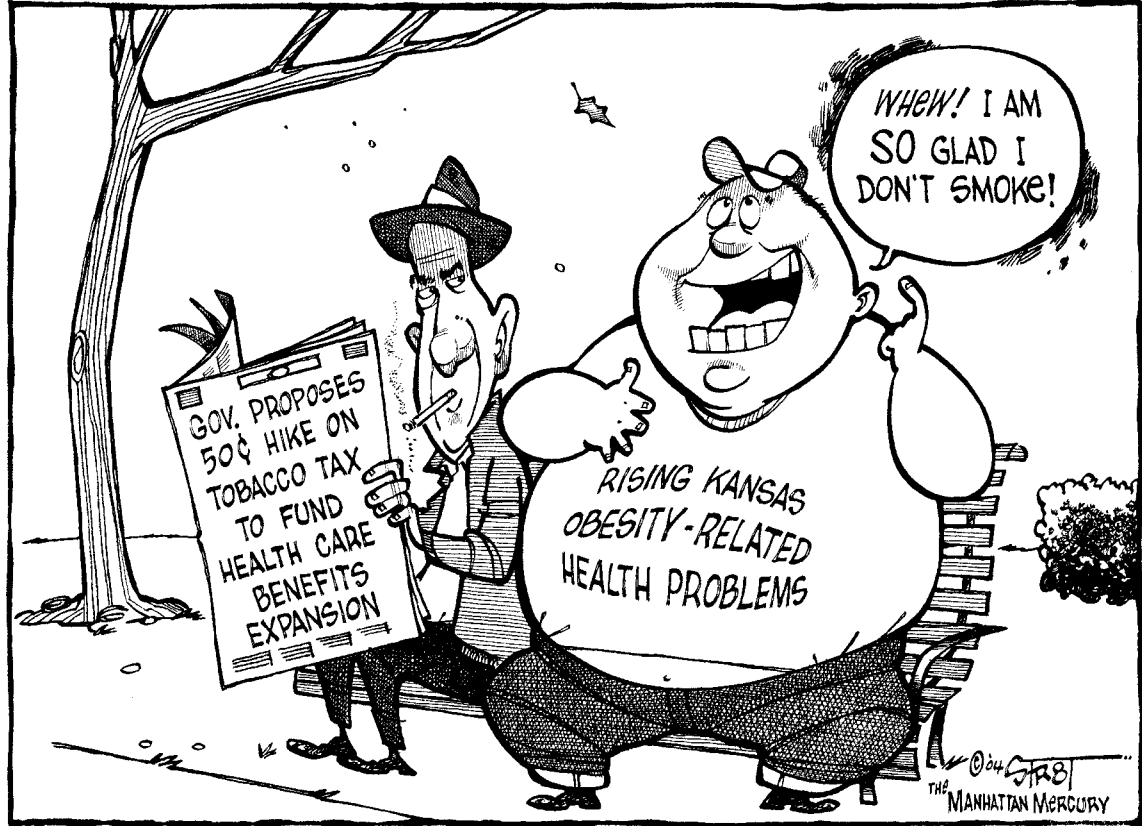
There's one consolation, though.

The architect of the welfare consolidation, former Secretary Janet Schalansky, disappeared from state government last month. After telling people for months that she'd stick out the governor's first term, she took a quick and hastily announced retirement.

A holdover from the administration of Republican Bill Graves, Schalansky may have fallen from favor at the Statehouse.

The consolidation scheme arose before Gov. Sebelius, but she has done nothing to stop it. Instead of taking jobs out of rural counties, the state ought to be putting some in, and not just in Colby. Instead of building new central offices, it could have spread them around the area and gotten the same, or more, impact.

And its employees would know about the Angel Tree and a dozen other projects around rural Kansas that won't ever be noticed in Colby or Phillipsburg. — Steve Haynes



## Cooking up the family favorites

Kim, the editor, was in atwitter. She was supposed to cook Thanksgiving dinner for about 10 people.

Kim got married in July, and this was the first Thanksgiving she has had with in-laws, friends and assorted family members.

"I've never cooked a turkey for a lot of people before," she confided. "I'm going to make my Mom's stuffing and homemade rolls and pies, but I don't know what I'm going to have as a vegetable."

I suggested green beans. That's what I was cooking for Steve and our son Lacy, who would be driving in from Lawrence for the holidays.

My recipe for green beans is toss two or three cans of French-cut green beans in a pan. Add an onion, cut in half, and a couple pieces of bacon. Then you let it cook a couple of hours until the liquid in almost gone and the beans are about to burn. Add water to make more liquid, and you can serve them as soon as the rest of the meal is ready.

This sounds a little slapdash, but it makes great green beans.

However, my son wanted me to fix his grandmother's green-bean casserole.

I told him no. I don't fix my mother-in-law's green-bean casse-



## Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes  
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role. His sisters fix that, and they're in Georgia.

Then we found out that Lacy would be late getting to town, so we decided to have lunch at the community Thanksgiving meal and I decided to make the green-bean casserole.

If I took out a serving for Lacy, he could have one of his favorite dishes and I wouldn't be serving a side dish with more calories than the pie.

The casserole was a hit and three people asked me for the recipe. The fourth one suggested I just put it in the paper.

That seemed a good idea, so here it is:

### Mom Barb's Green Bean Casserole

- 1 can French-cut green beans
- 1 can white corn
- 8 ounces sour cream

- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- 1 can sliced water chestnuts
- 1 can cream of mushroom, chicken or celery soup
- 1/2 cup diced onion
- 1 tube Ritz crackers, crushed
- 1 stick melted margarine.

In a greased baking dish, mix the drained corn and green beans. In a bowl, mix the sour cream, cheddar cheese, water chestnuts, soup and onion. Layer that over the beans and corn. Mix the crackers and margarine and sprinkle over the top. Bake at 400 degrees for 30 to 40 minutes or until crackers are browned.

I made a double batch and had enough left over that Lacy had it for Thanksgiving and took some back to Lawrence with him.

It's a good Thanksgiving when you can make the family's favorite dishes and have leftovers.

## Try this next Thanksgiving

I've discovered a way to get out of cooking Thanksgiving dinner. Do not try this at home. This should only be attempted by a professional.

First, arrive at one of your grown children's home with an overabundance of luggage. You know, make them think you're moving in.

Second, try to pull the chain on the ceiling fan in your assigned bedroom without asking for help. When you fall off the bed onto the floor, don't tell anyone, either. This prolongs the inevitable until you really have to tell them what happened.

Third, use your back pain as an excuse to get out of cooking.

That's what happened to me this Thanksgiving, but I don't suggest you try it.

I fell Saturday night at Kara's, but the pain didn't catch up with me until Tuesday morning. It was downhill after that. No position was comfortable. Getting up and down was almost impossible. Muscle spasms would take my breath away — and walking wasn't much fun, either. But, like most things, time heals all wounds, and I am on the mend.

Everybody learned something from this experience, though. The



## Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts  
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girls, Jennifer, Kara and Halley, learned they can get a big dinner on the table if they have to. We were expecting 13 people for dinner. They had to.

They divided up the responsibilities, and everything turned out beautifully. They made pies, salads, vegetables and baked rolls. We had turkey, ham and dressing, mashed potatoes, gravy and deviled eggs. It was a real family effort. The little girls, Alexandria and Taylor, set the table and did a fine job, too. It was a beautiful meal. And a beautiful day.

The trip home was an event in itself. They made a bed for me in the back of Jennifer's big, comfy sport utility. Getting in and out was the only problem. I developed a low crawl style that enabled me to navigate entry and exit. Not too pretty,

but it worked.

We made it home just ahead of the storm, so I haven't even felt very guilty about staying in and sleeping round the clock. I see a doctor this afternoon and I imagine he will say the same thing the doctor in Texas said: "Stay off your feet, rotate ice and heat packs, keep your knees higher than your hip, and don't do anything stupid like that again."

Okay, Doc, I get the message.



Only an echo on the line gave away the distance, about 7,100 miles, nearly a third of the way around the globe.

But here I was, sitting in Kansas, talking with Randy McHugh in Kuwait.

That's the first clue that this is not your grandfather's war.

Just a couple of generations ago, soldiers on another continent might send a letter home every week or every day.

These might arrive in some sort of timely fashion, but more often not. There were no telephone links to North Africa or Normandy. No cell phones on the Rhine.

A man's family might hear from him once a month, when a bundle of mail arrived, holes cut out by the censors. Or they might not know where he was for months on end.

Few came home from Europe on leave. Soldiers were there for the duration, unless they came back wounded, or worse.

Today, they can get on a plane and fly home, then be back at the front next week. That doesn't lessen the sacrifice of men like Randy McHugh, who has been away from his job, his wife and his kids for most of a year now on active duty with the Army.

Randy didn't want anything for himself. He wanted to thank everyone who's been kind to him and his family since he was called up. He wanted us to know that a lot of good has happened in Iraq since Ameri-



## Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes  
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cans invaded the Middle Eastern country and captured the former dictator Saddam Hussein.

He wanted people to know he was there because he cared.

People like Randy make the all-volunteer U.S. Army the best in the world. Like thousands of men and women across the country, he's a career National Guardsman. This is his second call to active duty.

Though he missed the first Gulf War, he spent weeks guarding Nebraska airports after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. Now he's overseas. He talks about two tours "up north," escorting truck convoys into Iraq.

His job was to sit atop a truck with a .50-caliber machine gun, just waiting for the convoy to be attacked. In fact, it seldom happened. And that's one of the truths that often escapes our bomb-blast conscious media.

If it wasn't for the willingness of highly trained non-coms like Randy McHugh, a small professional army wouldn't work. It's the citizen-soldiers of the Guard and the active Reserves that give the volunteer force its punch, that allow the army to go with just a handful of regular

divisions.

He has a cell phone. He can call home when he has time, talk to his kids, hear what his wife is dealing with.

Still, he says, it's hard to miss their games, their birthdays, their little triumphs and losses. He'll be glad to be home.

And we'll be proud to have him.

## From the Bible

And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth. To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. Luke 1:26-28

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## Watermelons great in November

To the Editor:

Flowers and watermelons agree with each other, apparently.

I could not believe it when during the last of August I saw unfamiliar greenery growing with my flowers. Almost overnight, the plant produced a small watermelon, and later two others showed up. They mat-

## Letter to the Editor

tered into twenty-pound watermelons.

I didn't plant them — but I'm not complaining.

They were sure delicious to eat in November.

Elsie Wolters  
Oberlin

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