

Opinion Page

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Area highway projects done without closing road

One good thing: Most of the highway projects planned for northwest Kansas in the next few years will be done without closing any roads.

Between Norton and Norcatur, for instance, U.S. 36 is being rebuilt from the ground up without any closures. K-27 south of Goodland is to be brought up to modern standards while traffic flows.

That isn't always the case. U.S. 283 between Norton and Hill City has been closed twice in the last few years, with traffic diverted for months at a time. U.S. 83 south of Oakley was closed for most of two seasons. K-27 between Goodland and St. Francis was down for most of a year.

While the new roads we get are wonderful, closing a highway like between two counties can be an economic disaster.

The state Department of Transportation knows closing roads is unpopular, but sometimes it judges the extra cost of keeping a road open — by building detours and shoo-flies, for instance — as too much.

What the state cannot measure, though, is the cost of diverting traffic to business in towns on either side of a closure. When the officials detour is 35 or more miles out of the way, traffic often just keeps on going.

And that can cost businesses a bunch. When most of our businesses are barely hanging on, that's not acceptable.

This issue is frustrating for highway officials as it is for business owners and public officials in the towns affected, we know. Sometimes there could be more cooperation.

Some counties have been willing to have a paved detour on a county road. Cheyenne County did that between Wheeler and St. Francis a couple of years ago, and now has a nice paved county road between the two towns.

Other counties have balked at the shared cost of preparing a detour. That might be shortsighted, considering the sales tax revenue they stood to lose, but commissioners have to look at their bottom line, too.

The best alternative, even when it costs a little more, is to keep the highway open and let traffic flow through a project. That may involve some short detours, as is being done east of Norton, or simply moving the new road to one side or the other, as was done east of Atwood.

Either way, business is not affected and there's no major economic burden on the towns involved. With the economy the way it is, that's all we can ask for.

Better that the state spend a little more than have businesses pay a stiff, and unequal, "tax" while the road is closed.

This is one trend we can applaud.

— Steve Haynes



Pool owners in a stinky situation

What do you do when you find a skunk paddling around in your swimming pool?

We're not talking one of those kiddie pools you buy for the dog. This was an in-ground home swimming pool at a friend's home just outside of Blair, Neb.

The husband said he tried to rig a raft of sorts so that the critter could crawl up over the side and depart the pool and yard.

It sounded like a good idea to me, but he said, the skunk just kept swimming in circles, occasionally bumping into the contraption and not getting the idea.

The couple watched the little stinker as it swam slower and slower and finally went under in a flurry of bubbles.

At that point the husband got the dip net to remove the body and dispose of it. But, as every doctor knows, when death overtakes anything, all bodily fluids held in check are released.

One dead skunk equaled hundreds of gallons of fouled, smelly water.

After taking the dead skunk into the woods, the husband returned the dip net to the garage and started the process of draining the pool.

Even after the pool was drained, cleaned and refilled, it was two weeks before anyone would get near it, let alone in it, the wife said.

And the dip net was contaminated. The garage smelled like it had been freshly sprayed, and the net had to be destroyed.



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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We were in a bar in Kearney, Neb., trading animal stories during a break at the Nebraska Press Association meeting last week.

I really thought the skunk story topped the list.

The man who swore his cat brought a dead raccoon into the kitchen through a basement animal door, came in second.

The cat, he said, always liked to show off its kills, and he and his wife would frequently find dead mice, birds and rabbits in the kitchen. The raccoon, however, was incredible because, not only was it bigger than the cat, the feline in question brought it in twice.

After finding the treasure the first time, he said, he had removed it to a ditch across the road from his rural home.

The cat must not have felt that it got enough praise for its work, because it went and retrieved the dead, headless raccoon and dragged it back into the basement and up the stairs a second time.

Well, that sure beat my dead rabbit story.

I did have a big snake story, how-

ever, As Steve and I were walking along a jogging path a few hours before, I heard a hissing sound and yelled. A big snake was holding its head up and moving as if to strike about 18 inches from Steve's leg.

We both jumped out of the way and turned to investigate.

"You're not a rattlesnake," Steve said.

"Are you sure?" I asked.

"Sure," Steve replied. See, his head isn't triangular and he's making that sound with his mouth, not his tail. He has no rattles."

Sure enough, Mr. Bullsake was weaving back and forth, making a rattling sound and trying to flatten his head.

"I'm a big, bad rattlesnake," he seemed to be saying.

Well, we didn't exactly pat him on the head and say, "Isn't that cute," but we did smile and go on our way.

He wasn't there when we returned.

It's OK to run a bluff, but it's a good idea to disappear as soon as you can. The guy you fooled might be going for a hoe.

When child sick, mom suffers

There are few things that can take the wind out of my sails. It takes quite a bit to rock me. But 12 little words from my youngest daughter knocked the props out from under me.

"Mom, I need to have surgery," Kara said in a phone call last week. "But, don't worry, it's not cancerous."

At first, I was stunned. She went on to tell me her condition was fairly common and her doctor was confident all would be well. It appeared to be pre-cancerous and he wanted to be cautious.

She was convincing, but after we hung up, the tears came. I think they were tears of relief. But every time I think about her being sick or losing her, they come flooding back. Even now, after a week of getting used to the idea, I still get teary.

Kara's fine. I'm the basket case.

The good news is, I'm going to Dallas to be with Kara for her surgery and will bring Taylor, my 6-year-old granddaughter, back for a two-week stay.

She is so much fun and seems to love spending time with us. I'm already "priming" her with promises of a wiener roast as soon as she gets there. It makes it hard on her folks when she goes home, though. She can't understand why they can't build a fire in their backyard like Pa-Pa and Grandma do. Big cities frown on open fires in back yards, it seems.

Taylor's coming will prompt me to get her room ready. The extra bedroom in the Inn, where we're still living, has turned into a "catch-all." Jim's computer desk is in there, plus all my clothes, shoes, scrapbooking supplies, shoes, gift-wrapping sup-



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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plies, plastic totes with Christmas decorations, and did I mention shoes? Then there's Jim's guitars, plus more shoes.

Where do they come from? I have more shoes than two or three women need. And they all seem to end up in the front room or the bathroom at the same time. I tend to kick my shoes off as soon as I hit the door, and one of my worst habits is to not put them away. When I finally do, usually right before Hattie the Hired Girl shows up, they end up thrown into a basket in the extra bedroom. Which brings me back to getting the room ready for Taylor's stay.

It's to the point where everything will have to come out before I can decide what can go back in.

—ob—

I am "kind of" looking for a baby bunny rabbit, or its remains. Right now, I'm not sure which one I would rather find.

Last week Jim came into the house holding a little bit of fluff. A baby bunny had been hiding by the trash barrel and Jim brought him in to show me.

"I bet Alex would like to see him," he said.

He found a deep-sided box, placed said bunny along with some blades of grass and a mayonnaise-jar lid of water inside the box. The plan was to take the bunny to show

our local granddaughter later that afternoon.

However, when I came home, the box was empty except for the lid of water and the grass. Baby bunny was nowhere to be found. And, believe me, I looked everywhere.

"Max, did you do something with him?" I asked the family cat.

Jim wouldn't believe his cat would do something like that. I would.

I just know that I don't want to find part of a rabbit.



From the Bible

And the Lord made you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: To the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints. I Thessalonians 3: 12, 13

Popular trees give no shade

With the trees greening up, it's a good time to take a look around town.

Oberlin is a beautiful city, thanks to early settlers who had the good sense to plant trees. We're blessed with dozens of old elms and other shade trees, arching gracefully over our brick streets and cast-iron lamp posts.

It might not always be that way, though.

By the 1950 and '60s, people had grown tired of shade trees. Fashion changed. Disease attacked elms. Foresters made new recommendations.

Many new areas were planted to ornamental trees that look great in the spring, when they bloom. In the summer, though, they're, well, short.

These trees don't arch over anything, and they don't shade much.

Neighborhoods and campuses built after World War II show the folly of this kind of planting. There's not much shade, no leafy canopy to protect the streets and sidewalks.

Compare, say, the Colby Community College campus to Fort Hays State. Compare most new neighborhoods to old ones.

And, sadly, as older trees have died out, often ornamentals have been planted where shade trees once stood.

This is not, however, a diatribe against ornamental trees. They're



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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beautiful in bloom. They've been spectacular this spring. I'm all for more redbuds, crabapples and pear trees.

This is, instead, a call to plant more shade trees. American elms and hackberry are the most common here, but there are "newer" breeds, like the burr oak, that are well adopted to our climate, grow relatively fast and produce good shade.

Oberlin, like most towns, needs more of these. There are too many places around town where the parking is bereft of trees.

Sometimes that is the homeowner's fault, and sometimes it's the city's. Water projects, disease and change have stripped some streets of shade. For too long, old trees weren't replaced.

The city did a good thing a couple of years ago when it bought 50 trees and used part of them to replace trees cut down for a water line project. (The wisdom of cutting them down in the first place is another matter, but at least the city got the message.)

Many of these trees are shade

trees, and many were planted on the parking. It's a start. But the city, and the rest of us, need to keep working on this project.

We still have a lot of bare spots along our streets.

There are plenty of tree species which can go along the street and provide shade. New varieties of elm resist disease. Burr oak is a good choice. Hackberry can be messy, but they're pretty in summer.

The important thing is to plant big trees along the street and get some shade. Open vistas aren't the goal; a leafy canopy is.

If you have a place for a tree along the street in your yard, plant one. If you know someone who needs a tree, but can't handle the work, offer to help.

The city should buy another round of trees and get them out as well.

The trees we have today are a legacy. We owe it to the next four or five generations to leave them as much.

Appreciate your child's caregiver

To the Editor:

May 6 is National Provider Appreciation Day, set aside to recognize child care professionals, teachers and educators of young children everywhere.

Although she doesn't carry a gun, employ life-saving techniques or wield a door-breaking axe, the child care professional is as much a first responder as a police officer, paramedic or firefighter. She responds to crisis every day.

Many licensed child care professionals have taken training in cardiopulmonary resuscitation and first aid, child abuse and neglect prevention, and child development, to

Letter to the Editor

name a few. Ask your provider what training she has had.

Over the past three decades, the demand for child care has increased. According to a national poll by the Washington-based group Fight Crime: Invest in Kid, 85 percent of teachers said children who had attended quality early-childhood programs were more likely to get along with others and be sensitive to their feelings, follow directions, count and have problem-solving skills, and were far less likely to be disrupt-

tive in class.

Early childhood is the most critical developmental period. We are encouraging parents to take this day to show their child-care provider how much they are appreciated. It takes a special person to work in this field, and these individuals are often unrecognized and under-appreciated.

Maureen Ostmeyer
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Colby

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