

## States, cities should plan for Katrina-type disasters

A telling comment the other day: In a report on how Hurricane Katrina evacuees were faring, the speaker noted that "FEMA has turned care of the refugees over to the Red Cross, and things are starting to happen."

Imagine that. Government falters. Private charity has to step in and make sense out of the situation. Time after time, people are saying, "The government has let us down. The government has failed."

Troops take days to move because governors and colonels need to sign paperwork. A Red Cross convoy is turned around because city officials are not ready to supervise them.

Michael Brown, the deposed disaster chief, trying to explain why he failed to help people at the New Orleans Convention Center: "No one told me they were there."

The list goes on. Of course, the response will be, "We need better leaders. We need to spend more money."

As if doing more of the same is the answer. Instead, maybe we need to take a look at how we handle disasters.

FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, has proven it can't manage anything, certainly not a major disaster.

The agency is run by political hacks and petty bureaucrats. It's not capable.

That's not saying that all government agencies are incompetent. Our military has acquitted itself well on this mission: The Coast Guard, National Guard and the regular Army, all topnotch, despite the old saw about "military efficiency." These units are competent and capable. They are pretty much in charge now. The Army may be bureaucratic

in peace, but under fire, it's a different story. The Corps of Engineers warned that the levies needed work.

Listen to Mayor Ray Nagin blaming the feds for his city's problems.

Contrast his bleeping performance with Rudy Giuliani in New York just four years ago.

Contrast his city's feeble, unstructured response with New York's.

New Orleans, and Louisiana, may be facing their own crisis of leadership.

Since when is it the federal government's job to get them ready for a local disaster?

When this is said and done, we need to rebuild our posture for handling the next disaster, at the hands of Mother Nature or some terrorist sect.

Maybe we ought to give the Red Cross a lot more say, and the political hacks and bureaucrats a lot less. Maybe we should scrap the FEMA bureaucracy and build lean, mobile leadership teams with good communications and decision-making ability, ready to move at a moment's notice.

That's not all the answer. This is not just a federal problem. Every state and every city should be ready for the next disaster — fire, mudslide, tornado, bombing, hurricane or earthquake.

Every state, every city should have trained people ready to take over and plans for how to proceed. Then it won't matter so much if the feds are incompetent.

The real question, though, is "Why are we surprised?"

It's the government, after all. They're here to help.

— Steve Haynes

## Gift produce ready for winter

There's something satisfying about jars of canned food lined up on your countertop.

This is the season. Gardens are maybe just a little past their peak, but homemakers are trying to utilize every bit of their bounty. They are canning everything in sight, though the weatherman is already predicting the first frost.

Me? I'm just trying to do something with the excess from other people's gardens, since mine sure didn't do anything.

Last night about midnight, I finished "putting up" a box of tomatoes my friend Melba gave me. They look so pretty on the shelf. This winter they will be good in chili or goulash or Swiss steak. The tomatoes are right next to the elderberry syrup. It was supposed to be jelly, but it didn't jell. I told Jim he would be enjoying gourmet elderberry syrup on his pancakes this winter.

I suppose that whole canning thing has to do with the story about the ant and the grasshopper. The ant gathered food and stored it away for the long, cold winter while the grasshopper fiddled his time away, always saying, "I'll do it tomorrow."

The difference between "us" and the ant is if our neighbor was hungry, even if it was his own fault, we would share what we had.

Since Hurricane Katrina hit the southern coast, we have seen that



### Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts  
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displayed over and over: Volunteers leaving the comfort of their own homes to go help others. Children donating their teddy bears so other little kids can have something to hang on to. Citizens by the thousands digging into their wallets to help out.

The worst of times brings out the best in people.

—ob—

I know nothing about the game of soccer, except what I've learned watching "Wide World of Sports" and seeing the girl on the American team take off her shirt after winning the gold medal at the Olympics a few years ago.

My 6-year-old Texas granddaughter, Taylor, is in a soccer league. I called their house Saturday morning to say "Hi," and Taylor answered. She sounded so grown up, I asked if it was Kara.

"No, Grandma, it's Taylor," she said.

Of course, caller ID.

Without taking a breath, she

immediately said, "Guess what." Not waiting for my reply, she went on, "Today is my first soccer game."

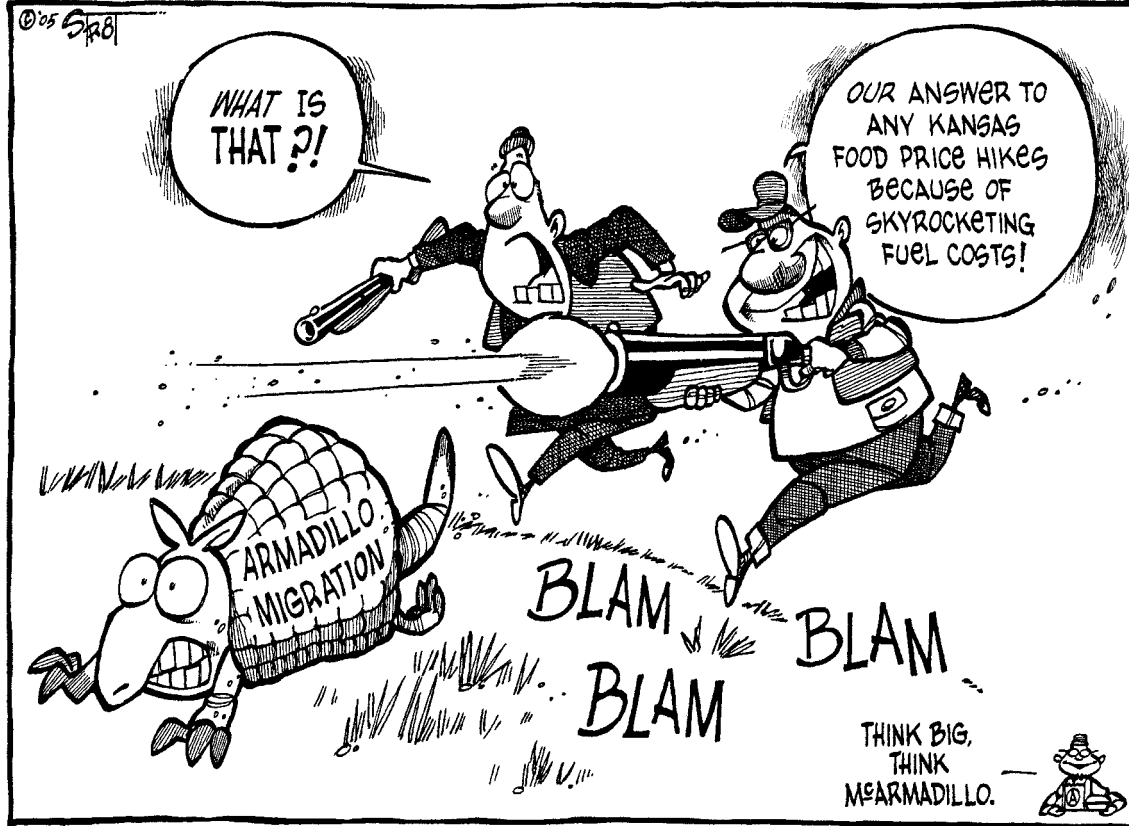
After the perfunctory oohs and aahs, I asked, "What position do you play? Are you the right wing, the left wing or the goalie?"

"Gra-a-a-ndma-a-a," she said, as only a 6-year-old can say it, "I don't play a position. I just play."

### From the Bible

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

Colossians 3: 1, 2



## Race safety should be first priority

To the Editor:

Those of us who attended the sprint car races in Oberlin on Saturday evening, Sept. 3, were treated to an action-packed event that was exciting to watch. Oberlin is fortunate to have that caliber of racing on the local track.

However, the evening could have ended tragically when someone on an all-terrain vehicle got in the center of the track between turns 1 and 2 with eight sprint cars hurdling full-speed into the first turn vying for position at the start of the race. Only God knows what prevented one of the race cars from colliding with this vehicle. It is a credit to the maneuvering ability of the drivers that they avoided an accident that probably would have killed some-

### Letters to the Editor

one.

The driver was the person who should have been overseeing the safety of all the operations on the track. This incident points to a lapse in safety procedures and a lackadaisical approach to safety in general at these races.

I don't know the particulars on who really gives the permission for the races, whether it is the County Commissioners or the Fair Board, but that government entity needs to step up to the plate to insist that safety be a priority at the raceway.

This is not a time to "tip-toe"

around the issue because of who was involved in the near mishap, as the next time he might not be so lucky. The announcer's joking comments about checking underwear were an attempt to minimize a near-tragic accident. This was not very funny. Let's hope the racing in Oberlin can continue as it is exciting entertainment, and brings people to Oberlin. However, the safety aspects of the races need to be led by someone who makes safety a priority.

Jim Wesch  
Traer

## Debris removed for driver safety

To the Editor:

This is in response to Mr. Wesch and his concerns over my priorities for safety at the sprint car races.

First of all, it was my priority for safety that had me on the racing surface in the first place. The large piece of tubing I was trying to pick up was dangerous to all the drivers.

Running over it would have either blown a right rear tire and sent them tumbling, or worse yet someone running over it might have hurled it at the next car behind him. This could possibly hit a driver in the head, causing severe injuries as no helmet is designed to be hit by steel tubing being thrown 100 miles an hour backward when the car is going around a track 100 miles an hour forward.

In hindsight, I will admit to mistakes that created the situation and I do apologize to anyone who was upset by the incident.

I will never again take for granted that my radio to the flagman and

corner workers is always operating correctly, as I called for "no green" several times while going from the center of the infield where I was positioned when I saw the piece laying out there on the track. Only after the incident did I find out that my radio was receiving but was not transmitting.

I also will not take for granted that it was the flagman I heard calling "yellow, yellow" which led me to make the decision that it was safe to go out on the racing surface to retrieve the piece of debris.

Believe me ... I was not out there trying to prove to the fans the skill of the drivers who I had brought in here for your enjoyment. I learned from the incident and can guarantee that procedures will be implemented to insure it never happens again. That is, if I attempt to provide our community with another event where the risk of financial loss is way more than can possibly be gained, let alone the hours and hours

of work put in by myself and the many volunteers who made it all possible.

To be accused of being lackadaisical when it came to overseeing the safety of the event saddens me and makes me wonder if it was worth it. Although I will try not to let one person's complaining about one thing that could have happened ... but didn't ... detract from all the good things that actually happened. Otherwise, I have heard nothing but good things from not only the fans, but all the racers who competed.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the fans who attended, the businesses who supported it, and everyone who helped me and Brenda make this event a success, and again apologize to anyone who was upset by the incident that could have happened due to my total concern for the safety of my drivers.

Rick Salem  
Oberlin

## Great to have sprint cars in town

To the Editor:

I wanted to write in support of Rick Salem and his first annual Oberlin City Shootout. It has been brought to my attention a certain someone was a little peeved about an incident which occurred that evening. Isn't it just like clockwork that someone has to complain about something in an almost-perfect event?

Although I am a bit new to sprint car racing, I have been to quite a few shows this season. The one thing I have learned in a hurry is that an "all for one" attitude is shown everywhere I go. The racetrack assistants, drivers and crew are all working together to have a safe race and put on an "edge-of-your-seat" event for the fans.

That is exactly what Rick did. We

had local boys racing and the stands were packed. Those who might not usually attend the racing events were there to support the hometown drivers. We all were able to enjoy a great American Sprint Car Series show right in our backyard.

I have heard nothing from the fans to say that they were disappointed in the fact that Rick got caught out in the middle of the race track when the green flag was waved. I have heard nothing but praise for the race and thankfulness that everything turned out all right.

Rick did his job as the promoter, and race car driver that he is, by getting that debris off the track. One of the drivers could have been injured or killed if that debris was kicked up and thrown back into one of them.

To that certain someone who was peeved, you may want to think twice about questioning the fact of whether or not Rick should get the racetrack again. Many people patronized Oberlin when they were here. Throughout the day, I saw many drivers and their rigs, fueling up and gathering food and supplies to get them through the long weekend. This race was one way to bring people to our great town and show them our hospitality. That is something that all of us want.

My thanks go out to Rick, all the volunteers and all of the drivers for attending. I look forward to the second annual Oberlin City Shootout.

Sarah Carter  
Oberlin

## Small-town teamwork appreciated

To the Editor:

I want to express my appreciation for small-town teamwork.

The Decatur Health Systems Golf Benefit was held Aug. 20 at the Oberlin golf course. We had 26 teams, half sponsored by businesses or people from the community.

All the teams had or were provided with a golf cart, some lent to us at no charge by golfers from the area who were not participating.

Merchants from Oberlin provided us with silent auction items or supplies needed to put on this event. Those items are donated, so any money received from the silent auction was money donated to the cause.

The Gateway staff did an excellent job fixing dinner for us. I touched base with them frequently, asking to add more people even at the last minute. They are always willing to let me keep adding. And the food — there is no place you can get a better prime rib and all the

extras like Oberlin, Kansas.

Numerous people in the community put on this benefit, not just those from our facility but from several different avenues of Oberlin and surrounding areas. There is no way it could be successful without the help of the people and businesses of Oberlin.

So whether you participated by playing golf, lending us a golf cart, providing supplies or auction items,

attending the dinner or donating a monetary gift, we could not have done it without the help of the community.

The benefit raised approximately \$9,500 to buy equipment for Decatur Health Systems.

Living in a small town does have its benefits!

Lynn Doeden  
Chief Executive Officer  
Decatur Health Systems

### Write

The Oberlin Herald encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of public interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

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We do not publish anonymous

letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise.

We do not publish form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous from this area should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality.

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