

Emergency help needs to begin at local level

Government officials say it'll be different the next time.

When a big disaster strikes, they'll have all sorts of plans, crews ready, command structure, transportation, you name it.

Sure.

"We're FEMA. We're from the government, and we're here to help."

Sound familiar?

The truth is, in a disaster, as in battle, *nothing* goes according to plan.

It makes no difference how well the feds plan, the volumes will go on a shelf somewhere to be forgotten.

When a disaster the size and scope of Katrina comes around again, the bureaucracy will have settled in. No one will know what to do, and there won't be time to dust off the plan.

As one area official said, the thing he'd learned is all disasters have to be handled first by local officials, city and county. It takes hours to get help from the next county, and a day at least to have state troops on the move.

Local workers need to be trained and practiced for emergencies.

There's just no substitute for that kind of preparation, but all too often, it doesn't happen. Katrina and the threat of a terrorist attack have many people working on the problem, but interest is apt to die down in a year or two.

It shouldn't.

Every county ought to have a disaster plan and hold a disaster exercise every year, focusing on what is most likely to happen and on the unpredictability of combat. You just never know what will happen. You might prepare for a tornado, then a tanker-load of chemicals explodes the next week.

Every agency should be practiced to work together. Commanders should be trained, but they earn their stars by dealing with the unexpected. Everyone must be able to communicate with everyone else — radios that talk to only one team will be useless — and did we say, practice makes perfect?

That's why only the Army seemed capable of making sense out of Katrina. The same was true after the San Francisco earthquake and fire a century ago.

It's because the Army trains and drills for combat, and good officers know how to make decisions and deal with the unexpected.

If we want results, we probably ought to hand preparation for real disasters, like a multi-state hurricane or nuclear explosion, over to the military and relegate the bureaucrats to some lesser role.

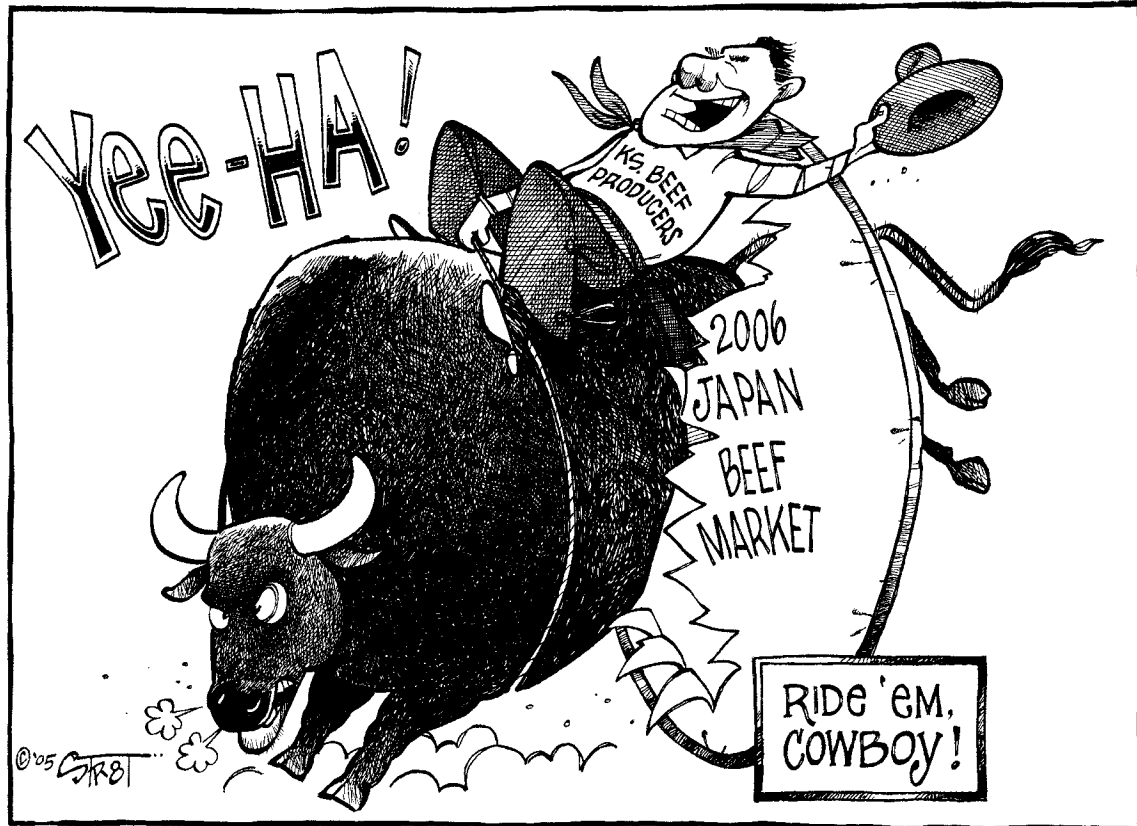
A Kansan, Gen. Fred Funston, was in command at San Francisco, and he led by all accounts a sterling response to the devastation there. The same was true in New Orleans. Nothing much happened until the Army rolled into town.

Perhaps no one could have been prepared for the awesome power of Katrina, but we need to learn some lessons from it.

One should be that every town and county needs to drill, practice and be prepared. The effort will pay off when it is needed.

The other is that when the big one comes, we should rely on professionals trained for the task, not on a bunch of bureaucrats with dusty plans. Leadership must be bold and move quickly.

Federal Emergency Management Agency indeed. Just call the Army. — *Steve Haynes*



Here is great idea to help needy

Sometimes a news story or a magazine article tells you about a wonderful idea.

The *Denver Post* had one of those last month.

It was on the inside — really on the inside, Page 24A jumping to Page 27A. But it struck me as a great idea and that could be modified for northwest Kansas.

The story told how the food bank in Boulder posts a little white sign on its door telling people what it needs the most.

"The little white sign sitting modestly in front of the Emergency Family Assistance Association's office is like a catalog of community need," the story says. "Corn. Toothpaste. Toilet paper."

What a great idea. Just a little notice telling people what people need.

People in this country are incredibly generous. They give to help hurricane victims, terrorist targets, cancer sufferers, sick children and homeless cats and dogs. They give food, money, bedding and support, whenever someone asks for.

But, they have to know there is a problem and what is needed.

Now, it probably wouldn't do much good out here to put a note on the food pantry's door. Most of them are run by churches and a note on the door will only reach a small congregation.



Open Season

By *Cynthia Haynes*
cahaynes@nwkansas.com

However, if the people who run the food pantries and the people who run the groceries got together, they could help each other and lots of others.

How about if the food pantry organizers gave the grocers a list of their most-needed items each week? The grocery could put that list on a small table with those items so that people could pick a couple of things up when they do their shopping. Then they could put the purchased items into a box at the store, take them to the pantry or leave them at the newspaper office. We'd be happy to help. Heck, we could even print the list if someone brought it to us.

If the grocery doesn't have room for a table, a note on the door would help those wanting to help others know what is most needed.

If the grocery wanted to go even further, it could put out bags of needed items with prices on them —

\$5, \$10.99, \$17.29 — so that people could just pick up a bag of most-needed products and pay for it with their other purchases.

The stores would benefit from the additional business and the food pantries would get restocked on stuff that go quickly.

It's a win-win situation, but it will take cooperation and someone making the first move.

From the Bible

... behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

Matthew 2: 1b, 2

People make up town's soul

As we start the new year, it's a good time to stop and take stock of all the things we have that make this such a nice place to live.

Oberlin is a great town, and Decatur County people are among the nicest anywhere.

Don't believe that?

Look at the response to the food drive at Stanley Hardware last month. The window fairly bulged with cans, bottles, boxes and packages of food and dry goods.

Such generosity, all to help people the donors may never meet or know.

I'm thankful for all the people who keep working to make Sappa Park a better place.

The Pheasants Forever group has done great things, opening up the park, rolling up the fences, mowing, clearing dead wood, planting food plots and planning for some fine hunting.

Their work makes the park a better place for everyone, not just for hunters. How can we say thanks?

And the group working on the pond and wetland project deserves our praise and support. A fishing hole, a place to watch wildlife, a little water in the desert. What a great idea.

If I had my way, we'd dredge and fill the lake tomorrow, but there are problems with that. No water rights.



Along the Sappa

By *Steve Haynes*
schaynes@nwkansas.com

No money. No equipment.

Still, a pond is a great way to start. Let's encourage them.

It's important to remember that nothing much gets done without volunteers. All the people working on the park are volunteers. There's a limited supply of good workers, and sometimes they get discouraged.

Take the Fest-of-All group. They worked hard for a few years, but then eventually the task wore them down. They threw in the towel after losing some key leaders. The event wasn't making it.

And that's too bad.

But if you look around Sappa Park, that group left a lasting legacy of improvements which later volunteers have built on. Pretty neat, huh? They should be proud.

It takes people to get things done. Jack Benton led the effort to start restoring the historic shelter house for years. It took a lot of effort, but

he and those working with him got a new roof on, saving the old WPA building.

Oberlin has Christmas decorations on the main streets mostly because of Rusty Adleman, who saw a need and kept pushing fundraising for the lights. He's still at it.

Almost single-handedly, Rusty revived Fourth of July fireworks in this town and raised the money to pay for the annual show. He's still at it there, too.

There are dozens more like the ones I've mentioned, too many to name here. They're the people who give this and every town its soul, make it a better place to live, keep it ticking.

Each of us has a part to play in that, a little piece of the town's soul. We need to give back, as all those before have done, a little of what we receive.

And in large measure — witness the food drive — people here do that. That's what makes this such a great place to live.

Calculation causes confusion

Women of the world — unite!

After Saturday's final regular-season games, men across America are beginning to calculate what team will be playing what other team, when and where. The possibilities are endless. This morning my husband began "explaining" the intricacies of how the teams are seeded. He was talking about the best records vs. the worst records.

I summarized it by asking, "You mean the worst of the best records, don't you?"

He countered, "Well, the advantage goes to the teams with the best record."

"Yes, but it's still the worst record of the best team, isn't it?" I asked.

"Yes, but you don't understand," he replied.

I know I don't understand, and I probably should have left it at that. But, you know, that's so hard to do.

I had to push the envelope, just a little by saying, "No, I don't understand. Here's a quarter, why don't you call someone who cares?"

Now, that was wrong. I admit it.



Out Back

By *Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts*
cplotts@nwkansas.com

And, I tried to apologize almost as soon as I had said it.

I do care. Sort of. If a certain team from our neighboring state to the west is playing, I care. Well, at least, I watch.

So, girls, guard your words.

—ob—

This e-letter has been circulating for a while, but it has some merit. The writer said a friend commented on the drug problem in our country. The friend then asked, "Why didn't we have a drug problem when you and I were growing up?"

The writer answered, "Oh, I had a drug problem. I was drug to church every Sunday. And, I was drug to

every family reunion and social event in the community.

I was drug to the sink and my mouth washed out with soap if I used foul language. I was drug to our elderly neighbors to mow their lawns or shovel snow from their sidewalks if they didn't have anyone to help them.

And, if I had even tried to accept a 10-cent tip for doing so, I would have been drug to the woodshed again."

The writer concluded by saying those drugs were still in his veins. Perhaps, if today's youth had this kind of "drug" problem, America would be a better place.

This 'friend' can ruin, kill you

Editor's Note: The following was submitted by a 15-year-old resident at the Sappa Valley Youth Ranch, whose name has been withheld at the ranch's request.

Dear Friend:

I have come to visit once again. I love to see you suffer mentally, physically, spiritually and socially.

I want to make you restless so you can never relax. I want to make you jumpy, nervous and anxious. I want to make you agitated and irritable so everything and everybody makes you uncomfortable.

I want you to be confused and depressed so that you can't think positively and clearly. I want you to hate everything and everybody, especially yourself. I want you to feel guilty and remorseful for things you have done in the past and you'll never be able to let go of.

I want you angry and hateful toward the world for the way it is and the way you are. I want you to feel sorry for yourself and blame everyone for the way things are. I want you to be deceitful and untrustworthy and to manipulate and con as many people as possible. I want to make you fearful and paranoid for no reason at all.

I want you to wake up at all hours of the night screaming for me. You know you can't sleep without me. I am even in your dreams. I want to be the first thing you think about every morning, and the last thing you think about before you black out. I'd rather kill you, but I'd be happy enough to put you back in the hospital, another institution or jail. But I'll be waiting for you when you get out.

I love to watch you slowly go insane. I love to see all the physical damage that I am causing you. I can't help but sneer and chuckle when you shiver and shake, when you freeze and sweat at the same time, when you wake up with your sheets and blankets soaking wet.

It is amusing to watch you ignore yourself, not eating, not sleeping, and not even tending to your personal hygiene. Yes, it's amusing how much destruction I can cause to your internal organs while at the same time working on your brain, destroying it bit by bit.

You are sacrificing for me. The countless good jobs you have given up for me, all the friends you deeply cared for and have given up for me. And once more, the ones you turned yourself against because of your inexcusable actions.

I am eternally grateful, especially for the loved ones, family and the more important people you turned yourself against.

You threw even them away for me. I cannot express in words my gratitude for the loyalty you have for me. You sacrificed all the beautiful things in your life just to devote yourself completely to me.

But do not despair, my friend, for on me you can always depend. After you have lost all of these things, you can still depend on me to take even more.

You can depend on me to keep you in a living hell, to keep your mind, body and soul.

For I will not be satisfied until you are dead, my friend.

Forever yours,
Your Addiction

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E-mail: obherald@nwkansas.com

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