

911 dispatchers need to tell caller their location

Emergency service in rural America gets better all the time.

New computers and global positioning equipment can track calls and pinpoint an accident site.

Ambulances are better equipped and crews better trained than ever. Hospitals are more prepared for emergency cases as air ambulances rush victims to city trauma centers.

The national 911 system integrates response and saves lives. There's one little detail that's often overlooked, though, a flaw that could be easily fixed.

The dispatch system still relies largely on local county dispatch offices. Dispatchers in hundreds of locations across the country take 911 calls and route them quickly and efficiently.

Most have not really adjusted to the era of cell phones, however. Most still answer the phone with something like, "911 emergency."

That's fine if the caller is right there in town. It's not so great when you're out on the highway and have no idea who you are talking to.

At thousands of points across the nation, a cell-phone call might be routed to as many as a dozen different towers. On any given day, a call from the same hill might go to one county dispatcher one time and another county the next.

Callers simply can't tell what dispatcher they will get, and most aren't thinking clearly enough to ask.

One night this spring, a group from Texas wrecked a car a few miles south of the Nebraska line. A local man pulled up and asked if everyone was all right. Some were hurt, none

seriously.

"Have you called for help?" he asked. "Yes."

He called the county emergency center just in case. Sure enough, the dispatcher had no idea there was a wreck just north of town. He called a deputy from home and sent an ambulance.

While it seemed to take forever, the deputy, ruffled hair, wrinkled pants and all, arrived a few minutes later. He was followed closely by the ambulance, manned by volunteers also roused from bed.

Five minutes later, a sheriff's deputy and a fleet of fire trucks from Nebraska roared up to the scene in a blaze of red and blue.

The original call had gone to a Nebraska dispatcher. He had sent his troops, not knowing the wreck was well into Kansas. Not finding anything in their state, they kept going — to their everlasting credit.

The whole thing might have been avoided had the dispatcher been trained to identify his location to callers. That's not the case in most counties today.

When you call 911 from a mobile phone, you have to ask the dispatcher where he or she is and what county will respond. Dispatchers are trained to probe and find out where an accident or fire is, of course, but it doesn't always work.

Someday, the new satellite technology may make all this past tense, but it could never hurt for dispatchers to identify their location. It could only help.

And it might save a few lives.

— Steve Haynes

'Birds and bees' lecture due?

In the blink of an eye, we have gone from being independent, free-wheeling, do-it-on-our-schedule, semi-retired, long-distance grandparents to hands-on, responsible, make-sure-we-get-to-bed-on-time grandparents.

Our 7-year-old granddaughter Taylor arrived Saturday evening, and suddenly our house has little-girl ponytail holders, flip-flops, bathing suits and coloring books from one end to the other. An occasional table we normally use to stack video tapes becomes her play table and pillows and blankets on the floor become her bed.

She was delighted to find she still fits in the little rocking chair we have had for her since she was 2. And, she always enjoys re-hearing the story about how her mother used to use the footstool we keep in the bathroom. It is painted red with a verse on top that reads, "This little stool is mine, I use it all the time. To reach the things I couldn't, and lots of things I shouldn't."

Taylor has always had a sense of humor, but this year she has turned into quite a joke teller. Jim was driving us home from church when she asked, "Pa-Pa, have you heard the one about the three little pigs that went out for lunch?" She delivered the punch line with such aplomb and deadpan delivery I thought he was going to drive off the road, he was laughing so hard.

There's a huge difference between last summer's 6-year-old and



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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this summer's 7-year-old. Her mother warned me that she has been asking lots of questions about where babies come from; especially the "how" aspect. Her mother used to ask me some questions that made me catch my breath and I imagine her daughter will do the same.

One thing I did learn with kids is to be certain of what they are actually asking. When a child asks, "Where did I come from?" you want to be sure that they aren't asking if they came from Chicago or Cincinnati before you launch into the "birds and bees" monologue.

Her fascination with babies is often revealed through her play. I was filling water balloons when I tied a "bubble" into the knot. In her imagination it immediately became a

baby. So, my assignment was to make knots with babies. I got pretty good at it.

I make no apologies; the next four weeks will be a series of "Life With Taylor."

From the Bible

Declare his glory among the heathen; his marvellous works among all nations. For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised: he also is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the people are idols: but the Lord made the heavens.

I Chronicles: 24-26

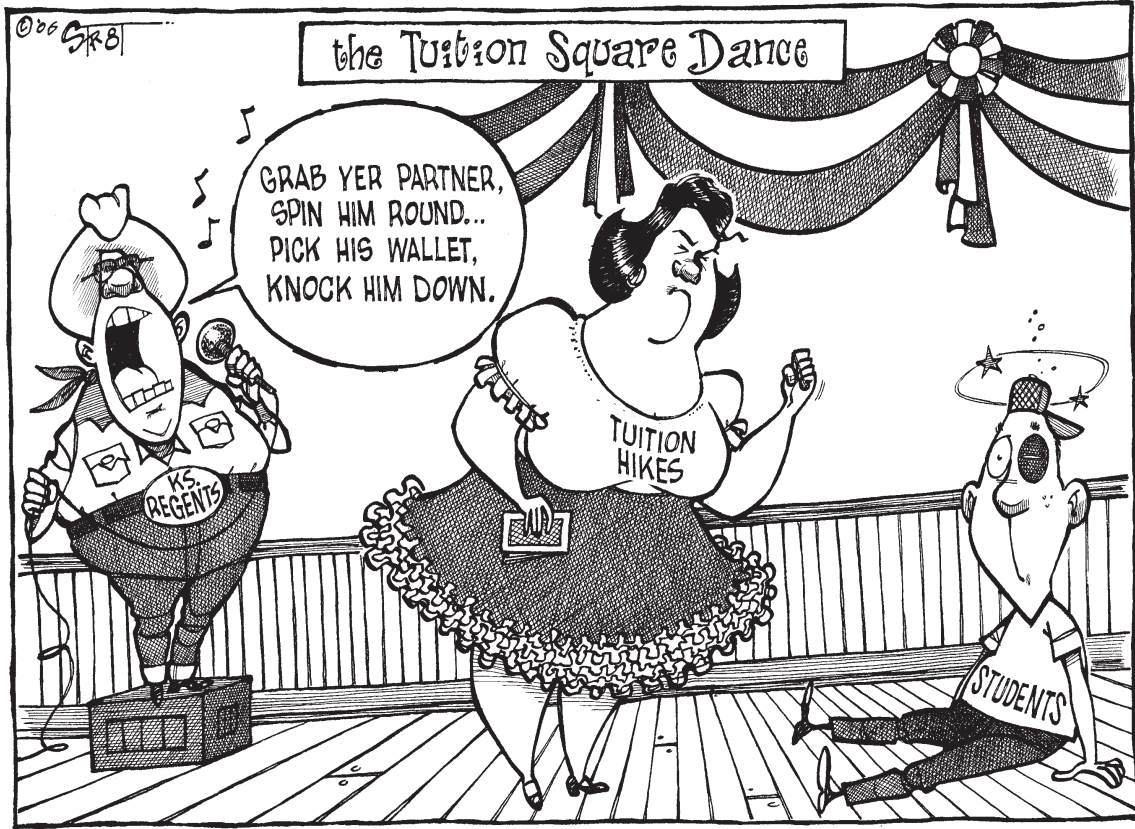
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The Oberlin Herald encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of public interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point.

They must be signed and carry the

address and phone number of the author.

Mail letters to 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan., 67749, or by E-mail to obherald@nwkans.com.



Felines come, go rather quickly

To paraphrase Dorothy in The Wizard of Oz, "Animals come and go so quickly around here."

First there was son's cat Frank. Frank was evicted from his Lawrence apartment and ended up living in our garage. At least he's supposed to be living in the garage. As a house cat, Frank is firmly convinced his place is in the house — or wherever the humans are. He's very much a people cat.

Then there were Toadly I and Toadly II.

Each year we seem to have at least one large toad living in the garden. I name this monster Toadly each year as he hops out of the weeds onto the patio and under the garage lights in search of his supper.

This year, we've got not one large toad but two, which is all the better for garden protection. It also affords Frank unlimited pleasure watching and eventually chasing the toads back into the shrubs.

In the evenings, our back deck is decorated in spider webs and cats as our felines and their assorted neighbors and friends take over chairs, tables, railing and trash can lid. It's



Open Season

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all quite decorative, and if you want to sit down, they'll let you. Then, of course, there are cats on the chairs, tables, railing, trash can lid and your lap.

But, we seem to have gone from five cats to four.

Rupert is missing. Rupert is youngest daughter's soft gray female.

She's a friendly cat but tends to take off for a day or two at a time. When she had been gone most of a week, though, we started to worry.

We waited a full week before calling daughter in Augusta, Ga., to tell her that her parents seem to have misplaced another cat.

Rupert is the sixth cat that has disappeared on us and the second be-

longing to youngest daughter. We lost her Baby, a beautiful Siamese, about 10 years ago.

Earlier this year, our son's other cat, Jules, disappeared out of our garage, and about five years ago we lost his Pomeroy. (I don't think we would have gotten Frank if he could have figured anyone else dumb enough to take him.)

Over the last dozen years, we've also lost Dixie and Khan, a couple of Siamese mixes we got to replace Baby.

Where do they go? Were they washed down the sewer after heavy rains, eaten by coyotes, stolen by strangers, arrested as vagrants?

Sometimes, they come and go so quickly around here. Who knows?

Statistical bunk still bunk

Benjamin Disraeli, a 19th century British diplomat and prime minister, once said, "There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies and statistics."

Then there are letters from Postal Service public relations men. One of those wrote a response last week to our May 31 editorial warning of planned steep increases in postage.

Wrapping himself in the cloak of Founding Father Ben Franklin, our country's first postmaster general and also a noted newspaper publisher, Postal Service Vice President Azeezaly S. Jaffer tried to make light of rate increases planned for newspaper subscribers.

It's pure bunk, backed up by statistics.

If you look past the breezy references to poor old Ben, you'll note that the writer does not deal with the arguments about declining mail volume, diversion of profitable first class traffic to electronic delivery and the death spiral initiated by ever-increasing price increases on the remaining mail.

Because that's all true. Soon, the service will be delivering mostly what we call junk mail. Soon, it will be hauling a letter you mail to someone across town to Wichita to be sorted at an "efficient" automated center and hauled back across the state.

The letter does not deal with the horrible service out-of-area readers get, because the Postal Service hasn't done anything about that so far. Higher prices for worse service, that's been the rule.

Then come the statistics. The edi-



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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torial warned of a coming 24.2 percent increase on newspapers mailed in the county where published.

Why, that's a bargain, he claims. Those rates haven't gone up, they've gone down. The rate would be "only" 9 to 11 cents a paper — which is true.

It's also true that the rate today averages about 8 cents a paper, and 2 cents is a 25 percent increase.

The writer claims a dime to deliver a paper sounds like a bargain. He claims newspapers are getting "Express Mail" service for just pennies.

Except that no one pays Express Mail rates to get a letter across town overnight. That's what we expect from the Postal Service for ordinary mail — next-day delivery in town.

Uh-oh. Does that mean we'll soon have to pay \$14 for Express Mail just to get a letter delivered to a neighbor?

The fact is, newspaper readers are facing an unwarranted 25 percent increase in delivery charges. It'll cost them a buck or two a year. And they can expect more and more to come.

A dime to deliver a paper might seem like a bargain, but the current rate is a fair price. Publishers sort

and deliver papers in walk-sequence order so carriers don't have to "work" them. They just open the bundle and pass them out.

Newspapers, one industry spokesman points out, don't use much of the postal system's infrastructure — just the carrier:

"Not the blue boxes, not the transportation, not the mail processing plants nor the machines nor air freight nor rail nor most of the rest of the huge infrastructure. Most of this mail does everything but tie the carrier's shoelaces."

Postal delivery is preferred by publishers and readers, but it costs just 5 to 6 cents apiece to hire carriers to deliver the same paper. That's an alternative many publishers will have to consider.

Is a 25 percent increase in costs a bargain, as Mr. Jaffer says?

I don't know anyone who'd buy that statistic. Publishers' experts says the Postal Service doesn't have valid cost data to back up that rate.

Newspaper readers will have to swallow it, though, unless something changes.

And we all better get ready to pay more and more for other postage, too.

Reader grateful for cart drivers

To the Editor:

We, the alumni of Decatur Community High School, owe a special thanks to the fellows who bring their golf carts to The Gateway on Alumni Banquet night.

They give people rides to the door before dinner. After the banquet, they are there to give us a ride back to our cars.

Letter to the Editor

This saves us a long walk, and as I am one of the older alumni, I appreciate that very much.

They tell me they enjoy doing this and I am sure they do. We do have

caring people in our community and I appreciate that. So, "Thanks again, fellows."

Edna Mott Oberlin

Honor Roll

Welcome and thanks to these recent subscribers to *The Oberlin Herald*:

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