

Mint keeps making coins the country doesn't need

Proving once again that government knows what's best for us, the U.S. Mint has issued regulations against melting down coins to sell the metal for scrap.

"We are taking this action because the nation needs its coinage for commerce," said Director Edmund Moy. "We don't want to see our pennies and nickels melted down so a few individuals can take advantage of the American taxpayer."

Our bet is someone out there already is taking advantage, given the fact that the copper and zinc in a new nickel cost the government 6.9 cents and the metal in a penny is worth 1.12 cents.

Only your government could come up with economics like that: Making coins that it sells for 60 percent of the cost of production. (The Mint says a nickel costs 8.34 cents to make and a penny 1.73 cents.)

A penny isn't worth picking up at today's prices. A nickel is an executive decision.

So why does the Mint keep making money-losing coins?

Apparently, because Americans hate change in the system and want to hang onto their coins. There are some alternatives.

The government could just stop making pennies and nickels. The ones in circulation would disappear rather quickly, and we'd make do with dimes, quarters and the new dollar coins.

Maybe the Mint could come up with a \$5 or \$10 coin to ease the burden on our pockets. That'd save the Treasury the cost of printing

billions of \$1 bills every year.

That's too sensible, though. Consumers and retailers already know a penny isn't worth counting. That's why stores have a "penny tray": if you're short, just take one.

We already know that a dime today will hardly buy what a penny would get you when most of us were kids. If a dime was the smallest coin we had, people would just make change in dimes. Credit card transactions could still count the penny, but why bother?

Good question.

Tradition, mostly.

Fear that merchants would beat us out of a penny when rounding up prices.

Nothing worth the enormous cost of producing small change each year.

Another plan involves redenominating the dollar: Making \$1 worth \$10 in today's money. Mexico did that a few years back, and it helped stabilize the peso. Of course, they had to trade something like \$1,000 in old pesos in for \$1 new.

Either solution probably is way too sensible for Washington, so we'll continue to drag pennies around — and the government will keep making them — until some smart guy melts them all down.

Oh, did we mention that older pennies, made before 1982, were 95 percent copper? Those, if you can find 'em, are worth 2.13 cents melted down.

What a system. — Steve Haynes

Slow news week ends with leak

The last two have been slow news weeks. Combine the end-of-the-year "blahs" and storm-canceled events, and you have a dull time on your scheduling calendar.

At the newspaper where I work, it has been a scramble to find news. No clubs are meeting, no fund raisers or soup suppers were planned because of the holidays. We've had no babies, no funerals and no engagements. There was a wedding, but no pictures or story yet.

Personally, we haven't done much, either. It's been too cold for Jim to work outside. He did have to climb up on our roof, though, and scoop snow. It looks like we had an "ice dam" on the north slope which caused water to leak inside the wall and run into our closet.

I spent quite a while mopping water and wondering if this would be a regular occurrence. Jim assured me it was most unusual and would probably not happen again for a hundred years.

In a hundred years, it won't be my problem. In a hundred years, it won't even be my children's or grandchildren's problem. Maybe my great-great-grandchildren's problem. In a hundred years, that house would be 220 years old and it might not be anybody's problem.

One member of our family did pass a milestone this week. After 20 years, my sister-in-law, Donna Kelley, retired from the Farm Service Agency.

Her co-workers hosted a banquet in her honor and invited Donna's family and friends. Donna handled everything just fine, even though her



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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co-workers got teary-eyed.

Donna had even prepared a little speech and delivered it with great dignity, style and aplomb. She shared some of the changes she had witnessed at the agency during her tenure, mostly technological. But, she said, the producer (agency speak for farmer) always stayed the same.

She and my brother Dick are going to have so much fun in their retirement — especially if she can get him to slow down his work some.

—ob—

I love it when my children call asking for advice. It makes me feel important and needed. However, this weekend my daughter Kara called for advice on a topic I felt totally inadequate to answer.

Her golden retriever Gracie had swallowed a nut off of a bolt. She had not passed it and was quite ill. She wouldn't eat, drink or move. Gracie was one very sick dog and Kara wanted to know what I would do, not so much about the dog, but about how to handle the situation regarding telling her daughter Taylor in case Gracie died.

I said it would be hard, but Taylor could handle knowing the truth. Death of a pet is a learning experience for youngsters on how to

handle the death of someone they love.

Regarding Gracie, my advice was to call one of our local veterinarians. I figured they had probably seen everything under the sun in regard to animals eating weird stuff.

Also, considering the price quoted Kara by her Texas veterinarian to do surgery to remove the nut, I figured she could bring the dog out here for surgery and it would still be cheaper.

Kara called with an update last night. Gracie seems to be feeling better. She is eating, drinking and walking. All internal systems seem to be functioning and the prognosis looks better.

That's good, because I sure didn't want to drive to Texas for a doggie funeral.

From the Bible

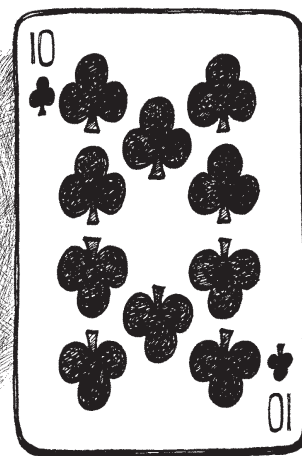
He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind: and the fool shall be servant to the wise of heart.

Proverbs 11: 29

Reading Kansas' Future in the Cards



ECONOMY PROSPERS



DROUGHT SUBSIDIES



LEGISLATURE CONVENES

Take the test: you might be a cat

I don't always like all the noise, so I'll frequently drive by myself without a radio or other form of distraction.

I just let my mind wander.

I know, I know. It's kinda small to be out on its own, but with no music or talking, I can listen to where it's going.

Sometimes my thoughts are deep and sometimes they're just plain silly.

Recent conversations, songs, ideas and pictures get reviewed.

That's how I came up with this column. I'll let you figure out where I got it.

You might be a cat if:

• You stand staring at the door until someone opens it, then run the other way.

• Your idea of fun is to rip people's shoes to pieces as you lay on your back and they try to scratch your tummy.

• No matter how sad, mad, happy, angry or upset you are, a sunbeam can make it all OK.

• If you're light, you only sleep on dark things, and if you're dark, you only sleep on light things.

• The world revolves around you, but some people just don't understand.

• You feel that fresh laundry is for



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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lying on.

• Couches and chairs make perfect scratching posts.

• You show unhappiness by leaving your family "presents".

• Plants are delicious. House plants are especially delicious — the more rare and delicate, the better.

• You have no interest in playing with the family dog, although the dog would love to play with you.

• You're the only one in the house who understands that beds are for sleeping on during the day and playing on at night.

• Travel is bad. Travel to the vet is especially bad.

• If you're in, you want out. If you're out, you want in.

• You adore people with allergies and those who don't like cats.

• You purr.

• You think that birds and small mammals are both toys and supper.

• Newspapers and books are for lying on, especially if someone is trying to read them.

• You use a litterbox, or if you don't.

• You think vacuums are bad and computer keyboards are great.

• You'd be really dangerous if you had opposable thumbs.

• Shoelaces are dangerous and should be attacked at every opportunity.

• You were once a really cute kitten and everyone wonders what happened.

• You think the ancient Egyptians had it right and wonder why people don't worship you anymore.

• You're the furriest person in your family.

If you have a good one send it to me at cahaynes@nwkans.com. I'll try to run some more in about a month.

She leaves him to fend for self

Cynthia has left me for 10 days. The wailing you heard, that was me after I realized I have to do the dishes, the laundry, the cooking and the snow shoveling.

Not that I don't know how. It's just that you develop a partnership over the years, splitting the work. It goes faster that way.

Normally, for instance, I clear the table and put away the condiments and leftovers. She rinses the dishes and starts the dishwasher. We split the cooking.

Now she's off on a junket, and I'm left here to fend for myself. With just one person, there's less work, but not half as much.

So far, I think I've done pretty well, but it's only been three days. I washed three loads of clothes and folded one. I cheated and rehanging the towels from last week so I didn't have to fold them.

I've cooked twice and run two loads of dishes. Put one away.

With Cynthia gone, I can eat whatever I want, so after I put her on the plane in Denver on Saturday, I went to the fish market and bought fillet of sole and fresh shrimp. She eats fish with all the enthusiasm of a girl who went to Catholic schools and won't touch shellfish.

Fixed the fish when I got home Saturday and the shrimp Sunday, saving half for a cocktail tonight. They were good, too.

That may be it for the cooking. We went to dinner a couple of times, and I came home with five leftovers. I



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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could eat those most of the week. I've already made a good start.

Saturday, it took me three hours to unload the car, put stuff away, clean up and fix dinner, sole and fresh asparagus. Then I collapsed. I'd been up since 5 a.m. and driven back from Denver.

It'd been a long time since I'd watched the sun rise on the Rockies — mornings aren't my thing, but I can do them if I have to — and I've got to admit, it was awesome.

I've decided, though, that if you have to go to the airport, 6 a.m. is the best time. No traffic, short lines, and you can nap on the plane. Me, I got breakfast and went downtown to watch the morning trains leave. Then I went shopping.

In fact, I got to the mall so early I had to wait. Didn't find much except some special bread we like, but it was peaceful. Then I stopped by to see my aunt, my mother's sister, who's 87. Talked with her for a while. Got a burger and drove home.

Sunday, I tackled the snow, clearing half the brick patio. (That's an in joke; it's really concrete. Ask Judy.) I chopped at the ice in front

of the garage and shoveled the drift from the deck upstairs, which was dripping bad.

I did some writing and some editing, then started to de-Christmas the house. I unplugged the outdoor lights and hauled most of the inside decorations downstairs, wrapping the wreaths in heavy garbage sacks.

I'm not trained or authorized to pack anything in the green-and-red storage tubs, so I left it all in a heap. The living room looks more seasonable, but I left the big tree with its lights on for Cynthia when she comes back. She's like a little girl about Christmas trees.

I guess the key to not being lonely is to stay busy, and as you can see, I've managed that. I signed up for the Wyoming Press Association on Friday and Saturday, which will eat up a chunk of time — if I can get there.

If it snows, I'm stuck here. Worse could happen. I have projects to do over the weekend anyway, there's another paper Monday and I have to go to Denver Tuesday to pick her up.

And I sure don't want to miss that.

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Voters may decide animal issue

To the Editor:

Let it be known my parents had a cow in the City of Oberlin several years ago. My mother always had a few chickens every year up to the time she passed away. I would call this the "grandfather clause."

It is good to figure out some way to help the people who have such needs. I realize you cannot please everyone.

Sometimes we need to try harder to find a way. There are different statutes that may be found.

Surely no one could expect a toy pony to be on the same level as a farm horse. Therefore, they each should be treated differently and should be approached as a different situation. This is just common sense.

It is discouraging to live in a small town and know that a few individuals have that much control. I would

Letters to the Editor

hope that more respect and consideration could be shown in such issues. After all, it is the people who make the final decisions.

We voted for most of you on the City Council. We hoped you would try harder to please the people. Let

the people help make some of the decisions.

There will be other elections for various members at different times. The people will decide who they want to represent them.

Elsie Wolters, Oberlin

Hurricane strikes city debate

To the Editor:

Of course, Oberlin was not directly affected by Hurricane Katrina. However, the city must now deal with all these fierce and foul-smelling beasts — five or six chickens and one midget horse. No doubt, property values are plummet-

ing. It is so fortunate that Oberlin has no worries such as with Sappa Park, schools, sidewalks, sewage, water, etc.

Rachel Wurm Oberlin