

State looking for ways to make our roads safer

After years of complaints from sparsely settled rural counties, Kansas highway officials finally have the idea.

People out on rural two-lanes want shoulders on their roads, and they don't care whether the end result meets federal safety standards. They just want the roads safer than they are today, and they don't want to wait for a gold-plated fix.

At a meeting in Salina last month, Jerry Younger, an engineer for the Kansas Department of Transportation, said the agency is looking for ways to add or widen shoulders without bringing roads up to fancy, current federal specifications.

Many state roads, mostly rural secondary routes like K-23 through Hoxie and Gove, or K-25 between Colby and Atwood, lack shoulders. That's most any secondary route built before the 1960s.

These roads haven't been rebuilt to current standards because they have little traffic and few accidents, but that doesn't help much if your wheel slips off the pavement in mud beside the road. It's just a quick trip into the nearby ditch.

Mr. Younger said people at "local scoping" meetings held to kick off planning for a new state transportation plan made it clear they want safer shoulders on these routes, and they don't want to wait.

Part of the problem is that the prevailing wisdom has been that if you touch a road, you have to bring it up to full standards. And that, Mr. Younger said, would cost \$2.6 million or more per mile.

The state just doesn't have the money. In planning for the current 10-year highway

plan, officials rejected shoulder projects on rural roads. Even a special request from Sheridan and Gove counties for K-23 fell on deaf ears.

Today, with new top officials, the department seems to have a different attitude. This group is listening.

"If there's anything new in this," the engineer said, "it's that we're willing to do something that's not up to standard."

Mr. Younger said highway maintenance crews are trying several approaches to widen shoulders or flatten the slope on ditches to make them safer. They're looking for something short of a full reconstruction, he said, because the money just won't be there for that.

Each of the six maintenance districts is trying an approach, he said, adding that the department still isn't sure how it will pay for the work. One problem is no one is sure any federal money can be used for this kind of work, since the road won't be meeting standards.

"If we're going to have some kind of minimal shoulder project," he said, "that money's going to have to come out of some other pot."

This should be cause for cheer, because more than 40 percent of the rural secondary miles lack adequate shoulders by state standards, and virtually none have been improved in the last 10 years.

This time, the highway plan may include some relief for school bus drivers, cattle truck operators, farmers and others using K-23 or K-25. And that's good thing.

Topeka is listening — finally — and common sense may for once trump federal regulations. We hope. — *Steve Haynes*



Paper will give you needed news

The woman was worried and upset about an editorial printed in an area daily.

The May 21 *McCook Daily Gazette's* editorial warned parents about a new drug problem.

Young people, with less sense than God gave the gopher, have been using a common cold remedy to get high.

The Nebraska State Patrol was warning parents and the newspaper added its advice that people should talk to their children about the dangers of overdosing on this and other medications.

The woman thought that pharmacists should immediately move all the cold remedies behind the counter, as pseudoephedrine products are. She said she felt it was a mistake for the newspaper to have written about this subject because youngsters, especially her grandchildren, would get "ideas."

She had gone on the Internet and found out about over-the-counter medications with abuse potential. She said she believed in freedom of the press, but just didn't see why the newspaper should print this type of information.

Maybe the newspaper is the only way the youngsters get information today. Back in my day, we learned about sex, drugs and rock and roll from other kids — not from the newspapers and rarely from our par-



Open Season

By *Cynthia Haynes*
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ents. I don't think things have changed all that much, except now kids get their information and misinformation from their friends, buddies and the Internet.

The editorial named one brand name and gave the active ingredient that is the problem. The ingredient, dextromethorphan, is one of the most common in cough and cold remedies. It is in hundreds of products. To put it behind the counter and have people sign for it would cost hundreds of thousands of hours of work for drug stores and trouble for customers.

If the problem becomes widespread, like the use of pseudoephedrine products in the manufacture of methamphetamine, that would be a small price to pay.

But, we can't keep our young people totally safe. If they want to do things that put their lives in danger, they will find ways.

There is a stupid game called car

surfing. It's already killed at least one young man in northwest Kansas. Speeding and reckless driving have caused many area parents to grieve for lost children.

Should we lock the cars away? Of course not.

Should we talk to our children about the dangers of overdosing on anything — from Pepsi to Percocet, a narcotic pain pill. Talk to them about alcohol, unprotected sex and the dangers inherent in vehicles and machinery.

We can't keep them safe. We can only pass on our knowledge and values then hope and pray they listen.

And how will we get the knowledge?

I usually find it in the newspaper. I may go to the Internet for more detail, but I get my first hint of most any danger from what I read in the paper, from what is researched and written by people I know and trust to have it right (most of the time).

Cancer claims life of fine man

The call we dreaded but knew was coming arrived Friday. It came from my brother, Dick, to tell us his oldest son, Kevin, had died. Kevin had been sick for a long time. Cancer seems to run rampant in our family and Kevin is its latest victim. He was only 50.

I was about 10 when Kevin was born and his other youngest aunt, Cheryl, on his mother's side, and I would bicker over who got to hold him next. He was one of those babies that melted into you. He was a cuddler.

He was your typical farm kid. He and his brothers played together and worked together like farm kids do. I don't remember them squabbling, but perhaps they did.

By the time Kevin graduated from high school in the 70s his blonde hair and round glasses contributed to his resemblance to the folk singer, John Denver.

He caused a stir wherever he went. He loved music, learned to play the guitar and was part of an elite singing group at his college. His quiet demeanor and charm added to his appeal.

Then he met Debbie, a girl as blonde and blue-eyed as he. They fell in love and got married. They were young but both were incredibly hard workers. Kevin worked for a water softening company and Debbie worked at a hospital. He continued his education and



Out Back

By *Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts*
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changed jobs. He learned about commercial-type building and estimating the cost of projects. He became very good at it and eventually formed his own construction company. His peers must have thought he was pretty good, too, because he was elected president of the Kansas General Contractors Association.

He and Debbie had two sons, two grandchildren, a thriving business, a beautiful home. They had it all. Something like cancer wasn't supposed to happen to people like them. But, Old Man Cancer isn't very discriminating. He is an equal opportunity killer.

We all want to face death bravely. Some of us don't have to wait for it — an accident makes it swift. Others live long and just go to sleep.

But, some have to endure. Like Kevin, he knew for some time that death was impending. He and his family tried every medical treatment — did what they were supposed to do. Hundreds of people lifted his situation up in prayer. And,

yet, he died. However, even in his death he offered a terrific witness. His brother, Kirk, said it was an honor to be with him during his last days. Kirk said he was amazed at the strength of his big brother.

I'm convinced that Kevin's strength and courage came from the secure knowledge of his salvation. I know it gives his family great comfort.

Do you have that knowledge? If you aren't sure, now is the time to find out. Don't wait.

From the Bible

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, external in the heavens.

II Cor. 5:1

Burning books not the answer

A Kansas City bookstore owner did a horrible thing last month, though he said it was for a good reason.

Tom Wayne of Prospero's Books burned a bunch of his stock.

He said he couldn't sell them or send them back, though he did let people paw through the piles and take what they wanted at bargain-basement prices before torching the piles.

The unwanted went into a big caldron and up in smoke.

Mr. Wayne claims people just aren't reading as much as they used to.

Maybe it's the Internet, he said, but his stock just isn't moving like it once did.

"This is the funeral pyre for thought in America today," the store owner told anyone who would listen. He said it was "a good excuse for fun."

And a world-class publicity stunt, as well. Until the Kansas City Fire Department showed up.

Seems the store did not have a burn permit.

What a shame. There are rural libraries that, given the chance, might have snapped up his excess best-sellers.

Third-world countries that could use donations for English readers.



Along the Sappa

By *Steve Haynes*
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Programs in this country for people who can't afford something to read.

Homeless shelters. Literacy efforts. Poor families and battered women, people who don't frequent suburban bookstores. Or can't afford to.

But there wouldn't have been the public attention for that kind of thing, would there?

Shame on Mr. Wayne.

That said, it's a good thing to call attention to the perceived decline in reading, especially reading for pleasure.

If kids today don't pick up the habit, they'll miss one of life's greatest pleasures. And the nation will wind up with a less literate, less thoughtful, less intelligent populace. He's right about that.

What can we do?

I'd suggest starting by giving books to places where people will

read them, not just burning them. It would take more thought and maybe more effort than a publicity stunt, but it would do some good.

The love of reading has to start at home and continue in schools. We need to be sure that happens. A lot of good people — teachers, librarians, parents, interested adult volunteers — do work on that.

Our generations need to be sure we pass literature and literacy on to those who follow.

The Internet is not going to make books obsolete, not in the foreseeable future.

So let's get with it — in a constructive way — and do what we can, here and now, to promote reading books.

That's a real need. But burning them? That's a sin.

No matter how good the reason.

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Family supports Oberlin educator

To the Editor:

After reading previous letters to the editor in support of Duane Dorshorst, we feel compelled to add to the sentiment.

Duane is one of those rare individuals who has dedicated himself to his school, his church and his community. Surely, he could have been given the opportunity to inter-

Letter to the Editor

view for the superintendent job, a job that to us he seems more than qualified to fill.

While this is all in the past, we would like to add our thanks and

support to Duane for everything he does for the Oberlin community.

Wilbur and Jill Reichert and family
Dresden

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.

Mail letters to 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan., 67749, or by e-mail

to oberlinherald@nwkansas.com.

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. We will not publish attacks on private individuals or businesses which do not pertain to a public issue.