

## Why scrap old car tags while they still work fine?

In Topeka, where spending your money is always a priority, the state Department of Revenue is issuing new license tags which, eventually, will replace the ones you have at a cost of several million dollars.

The department, known as KDOR, is proud of the new tags, which feature a slice of the Great Seal of the state — with the words Ad Astra and a field of stars visible in the pale blue back ground.

The “Ad Astra” tags are going out now to people who buy a car or need a new tag, but the state won’t require people to have a new tag for another three years, in 2010.

By then, everyone will have to switch over, though it’s likely more than half the tags on the road will be the new type. The state claims this will save money, but that’s not likely.

The new tags are different, though many would argue that the present design, which features an image of the Statehouse in Topeka in pale blue and yellow, is prettier. At least the old tags have a little color; the new ones don’t stand out much.

The three-year switch obviates the main reason the state has always used to justify changing tags, with all the incumbent cost. Always before, the department has said that changing the tags brings in more revenue because people have to pay renewal fees at least every time a new design comes out.

With a three-year switch over, though, that won’t happen. Thousands with the new tags will be delinquent by 2010.

Someone has to pay for all the aluminum and plastic used to make the new tags, and if you can’t figure out who that is, just think.

In switching to the new design, the department apparently abandoned the old number-



letter series, “wasting” the unused Y and Z series. New tags have the three numbers first, with the letters last, the reverse of the old ones. The new series starts right off with 000 AAA.

Maybe nobody wanted Y or Z tags? Hard to say.

For our money — which it is, come to think about it — we see no reason for the state to recall perfectly good license plates. Why not just let people use them until they’re too dim to read?

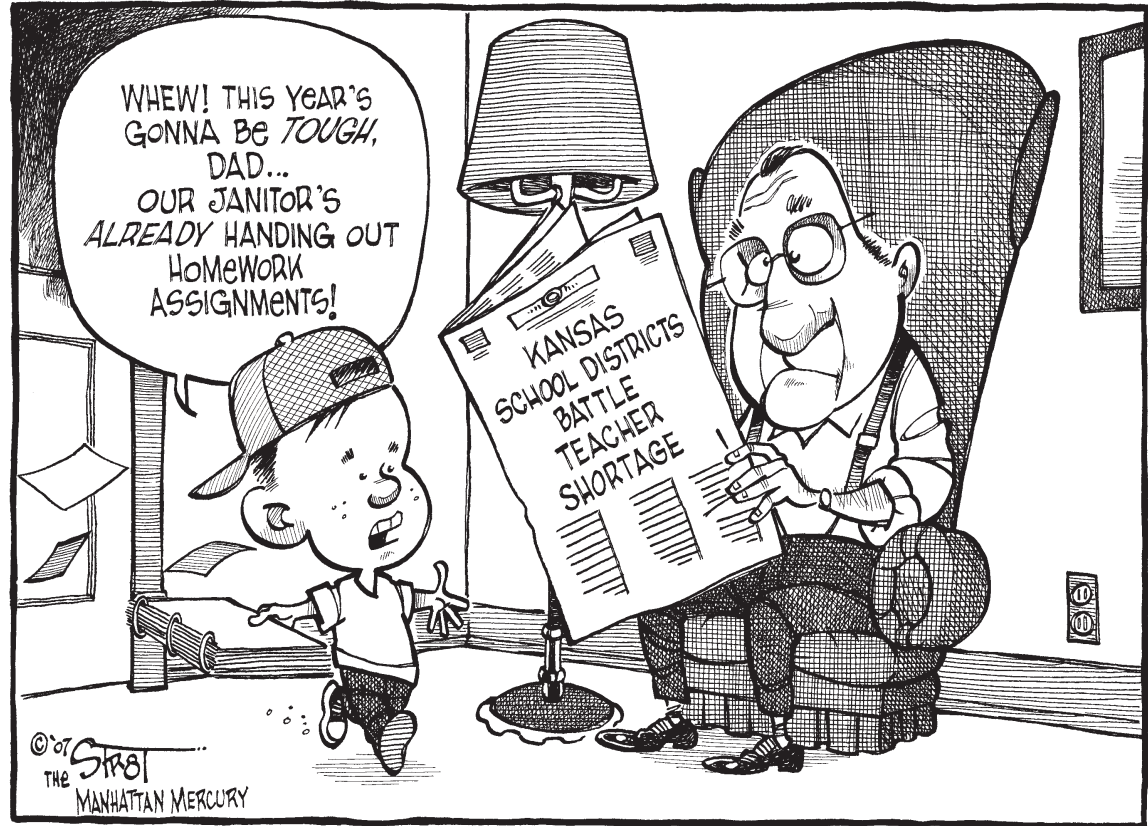
Kansas, like most states, used to issue new tags every year. It switched to “permanent” tags to save money, but kept the idea of issuing a new design every so often.

Having taken that leap, why not just go all the way and let two or more designs coexist? California and Colorado have done that.

And if the Revenue Department wants to increase collections and bust people who don’t pay to renew their tags, why not double the size of the year and month stickers so the cops could read them?

That’s likely to bring in more money than new tags, at a lot lower cost. But it’s probably too logical to fly in Topeka. — *Steve Haynes*

PS: If you like the new tags, KDOR sells samples for \$5.50 each. Information is available on the department website, but sorry, at that price, you can’t put one on your car.



## Red Wing has more products

I got into trouble with my column on going to Red Wing, Minn., and it didn’t even have one single mention of cat.

One of our antique dealers took me to task for not mentioning one of the community’s more famous products — Red Wing Stoneware. I can see why he thought maybe I hadn’t seen any or heard of it. He has a shop window full of the big old crocks that the famous firm used to make.

Actually, I not only have heard of this product; I have some in my closet. My father used the crocks to make wine. After his death, Mom gave the stoneware to my son, who is still moving every year or so as he tries to find out what he wants to do with his life.

So, like his sister’s cat, the stoneware has been left with Mom and Dad. And while I don’t expect his sister to ever take back her cat, I hope son will one day settle down in a place of his own and take all his stored stuff out of the closet and basement.

According to the current producer’s web site, the Red Wing Stoneware Co. started production in the 1878. The company joined forces with another local firm and changed its name to the Red Wing



## Open Season

By *Cynthia Haynes*  
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Stoneware and Sewer Pipe Co.

It was just one of several pottery firms busy in the Red Wing area in the late 1800s. Others included the North Star Stoneware Co. and the Minnesota Stoneware Co.

In March 1906, the potteries merged into the Red Wing Union Stoneware Co. In 1936, the name was again changed to Red Wing Potteries, but that firm closed its plant in 1967.

In 1984, the technical records, name and legal rights were purchased by new owners and the Red Wing Stoneware Co. resumed production in a new facility down the road from the old factory.

On my visit to Red Wing, I stopped by the new pottery and purchased a tiny crock, just large enough to keep next to the stove for spoons and spatulas. It’s not an antique, but it’s pretty and more use-

ful to me than six huge wine crocks in the closet.

The old factory buildings have been turned into a fancy shopping and eating area called Pottery Place Mall. I didn’t feel the least need for baby gifts, antiques, bath products or other assorted junk, so I stayed away.

An equally famous and historic product from the area is made by the Red Wing Shoe Co.

I remembered Red Wing shoes and went looking. I didn’t really need any, but I figured they’d have all the latest styles and maybe some real good prices. It was worth a check.

What I didn’t remember is exactly for what line the company is famous — big, heavy, steel-toed work boots.

I stuck with my piece of pottery.

## But does the lawn need water?

The epitome of foolishness may be watering your lawn during a rain shower, but that’s exactly where I found myself Monday morning.

I was out before 7 a.m. watering trees and flowers. Suddenly, a crack of thunder shattered the quiet, but I surmised it was merely an anomaly and nothing would come of it. The forecast didn’t call for rain until Thursday. I kept watering.

Boy was I wrong!. This storm didn’t even bother to sprinkle as a warning. It just dumped water out of the skies and I got soaked before I could shut off the hose.

The good news is everything got a thorough soaking and perhaps I won’t bother watering tomorrow.

-ob-

Jim is working in a nearby town today. He left the house about 6:30 a.m. to get an early start before it got too hot. He’s helping a friend build a small barn and they’re both smart enough to know that they’re too old to work outside during the heat of the day.

-ob-

We went to a church supper Sunday night. A group of high school kids from our congregation had gone on a mission trip this summer called “Destination Unknown.”

They had no idea when they left where the trip would take them. The purpose was to see where God would lead them; to let them trust that God would take care of them;



## Out Back

By *Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts*  
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and to bring people into their path who needed help. They borrowed hand tools, loaded the church van and trailer and packed work clothes for a week.

The contents of two containers determined their destination. One held slips of paper with directions: north, south, east, west, northeast, northwest, southeast and southwest. The other container held drive times: one hour, two hours, three hours, 1.5 hours, 3.5 hours.

The morning of their departure, a member of the team drew “south” from their direction container and “3.5 hours” from the drive-time container. Every day, they drew a new direction and drive time.

We followed the kids’ progress through a blog written by our youth minister, who accompanied them. The trip took them south and west, eventually to New Mexico.

Hearing the kids tell, in their own words, how the experience changed their lives was impressive. They cleaned up a woman’s yard who had

no one to help her; they ministered to an alcoholic man and his mother; they visited residents of a nursing home and patients in a hospital; and finally, cleaned up a woman’s house and yard that was in a condition the kids had never seen.

That woman wrote the group a thank-you letter and called them “angels on earth.” It was humbling for them and they are forever changed.

We don’t have to leave town to find someone to help. There is plenty of need right here. But is anyone, actually, doing anything?

Perhaps you might be the one to organize a monthly “mission trip” in your home town. I heard one senior citizen say she sure wished someone would come help her get her house ready for winter. And if there’s one, there’s bound to be dozens more.

This is my continuing challenge. If everyone would just do one little thing to help someone else, we could accomplish great things.

We could all be “angels on earth.”

## School steps do need work

Seen here and there around town:

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The steps in front of the high school really do need to be replaced. Some say the Oberlin School Board has made a major production out of what should be a relatively minor decision, but there *are* a lot of factors to consider.

School officials proposed ripping out the existing sidewalk, steps and porch and putting in a ramp from the street to the front doors, making the building more accessible.

That is a good idea, but then there’s a possibly conflicting request to have the beautiful old school listed on the state’s registry of historic buildings. Built by the Works Progress Administration during the Great Depression, it is a fine example of the architecture of that time.

Would replacing the steps conflict with historical designation? How can the project be handled? Is there grant money for a “historically correct” change to the steps? And what about companion plans to use old-fashioned street lights out front or replace the (presumably historic, if somewhat rusty) doors?

No, it’s not as easy as it seems, but the district ought to hurry up and at least patch the sidewalk and steps. They really are falling apart.

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Downtown, apparently, it’s legal to make U-turns now that city work-



## Along the Sappa

By *Steve Haynes*  
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ers have removed the no-U-turn signs. The police department isn’t too happy about that, but the old signs were faded and the city crew says they were damaging the traffic light standards.

Opinions will vary on this. My inclination is the less regulation, the better. The city might just want to see whether not having the signs actually causes accidents.

Several years ago, after the city judge ruled that turning left into a parking space — known as a “J” turn — was legal, some predicted a rash of accidents. That hasn’t happened. So far as we know, there have been no accidents caused by J turns.

Sometimes, it’s the fear of problems that gets people going, not the reality. If the city waits to see what happens, we’ll know.

Anyone who’s tempted to make a U-turn downtown should remember that while U-turns are legal in Kansas unless there’s a sign prohibiting them, the law (and city ordinances) require the person making the turn to yield to *all* approaching

traffic. Downtown during the day, it might just be quicker to go around the block. Safer, too.

Middle of the night, who cares?

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Kudos to the city crew for the new, highly visible school speed-limit signs posted this month around Oberlin Elementary School. These signs, which restrict drivers in the school zone to 20 mph when kids are present, show up a lot better than the tiny ones they replaced. They probably cost the city some bucks, but it’s our kids they’re protecting.

Good job. This would be a good time to think about newer, larger signs for some of the school crossings, too.

□□□□

With school back in session, it’s a good time to remind people to slow down and watch for kids, near the schools and around town. They may or may not be careful crossing the street or walking up the alley, but drivers need to be aware all the time.

# THE OBERLIN HERALD

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## Drinking age unfair to young vets?

To the Editor:

There is something bothering me that I just have to get off my chest.

Everyone in this town probably knows where I stand on underage drinking. I believe we could save our police force and sheriff’s department many hours of work and untold amounts of money if the age were moved back to 18 to purchase and consume beer. This does not include hard liquor.

The reason for this can be told in a short story. Tommy, Becky and Jimmy join the Army when they are 18. Within eight months, they are in Iraq and Afghanistan. Tommy is seriously wounded by a sniper two weeks into his tour. He is shipped home a short time later.

Becky is a medic working in a field hospital that is attacked by insurgents and loses a leg to a rocket-propelled grenade that rips through her compound.

## Letter to the Editor

Jimmy is riding in a 2 1/2-ton truck that takes a direct hit from an improvised explosive device and is killed. Others him are wounded.

After Becky and Tommy return home, they go to the local American Legion or Veterans of Foreign Wars to meet with other veterans. During this meeting, they are offered a beer by some of the other veterans, but have to refuse because they are not old enough to drink.

Sad, isn’t it? At age 18, you are old enough to join the military, old enough to be sent to war, but not old enough to have a cold beer with other veterans.

I do support our age limits on alcohol, but I fervently believe that if you can vote for President, and he

can send you to war where you can be maimed or killed, you should be old enough to have a beer with him.

Until this law is changed, I will support the current law, not because I want to, but because it is the law — no matter how wrong it is.

John Stanley, Oberlin

## From the Bible

If we have forgotten the name of our God, or stretched out our hands to a strange god; Shall not God search this out? for he knoweth the secrets of the heart.

Psalms 44: 21, 22