

Tale of two cities tackling need for airport runway

By GLENN STAAB
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County officials. City officials. State, county and city staffers. Community business leaders. School officials. A state senator. All tackling a problem cooperatively. Twenty to 30 people bending the ear of Secretary of Transportation Deb Miller and other members of the governor's administration on the need for an airport improvement.

You see, the Department of Transportation has about three million bucks every year to spend on Kansas airports. I was dropping off Gov. Sebelius' policy advisor, Jeremy Anderson, at the airport so he could attend the meeting. I decided to stick around and check it out also.

What kind of improvement does the City of Hays want for our airport? I'm sorry; I forgot to mention this was for Oberlin's city airport. Over 20 people from Decatur County drove 115 miles to Hays to meet with Secretary Miller, because they need a 2,000-foot extension on their runway.

Why did they drive to Hays? The plane owned by the State of Kansas couldn't land there. The runway is too short. Point made.

But the reason they need the extension is for a bus manufacturing company, Bus and Coach International, that does business in Decatur County. They need to fly folks and freight in and out, and they need more runway for bigger planes to land and take off. This could lead to the company's expansion, not to mention ancillary businesses that have an interest in moving to the area. Oberlin and Decatur County can be quite proud of the presentation their area leaders gave to Secretary Miller.

In gathering a little background, I visited with Connie Grafel at the Decatur County Economic Development office and Oberlin City Administrator Gary Shike. Both were quite helpful and happy to give credit to the entire area for the support of this project. When I remarked to Connie about the 115-mile drive, she told me over 30 people had driven to Kansas City to meet with the

FAA.

She added, "They were impressed, too."

Although some western Kansas towns are in danger of shutting down, Oberlin won't go without kicking and screaming. And if what I saw last week is any indication, they are going to be around for a long time.

Congratulations and good luck.

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On the other side of the coin, I attended a (Hays) Chamber luncheon earlier in the day and Secretary Miller was the speaker.

It was billed that she would outline the duties of her office, allowing time for comments from community leaders for suggestions on the upcoming 10-year highway plan.

This is the person who is going to guide legislation that will hand out concrete for the next 10 YEARS. To me, I would think that would be an important meeting to attend for a city or county official. I know there were representatives from communities from at least 60 miles away.

The Chamber has a custom of introducing the elected officials who attend their meetings. Reps. Dan Johnson and Eber Phelps were introduced, along with Sheriff Ed Harbin. Our state senator, Janis Lee, sent her regrets, as she is recovering from hip replacement surgery, getting ready for door-to-door in 2008. Jerry Haley, 3rd District Commissioner for the Kansas Highway Advisory Commission, also attended and introduced Secretary Miller.

I was a bit surprised that not ONE Hays city or Ellis County elected official (besides the good sheriff) was in attendance. Not ONE Hays city or Ellis County staffer attended.

Was it a communication thing? Just curious.

Glenn Staab, a lifelong Hays resident and former city commissioner there, sells insurance and real estate and is the Democratic Party chairman for Ellis County. This article is part of a longer column first published in Local Voices in the Thursday, Sept. 17, Hays Daily News.

Retreat was a great getaway

I just spent the weekend at a sleep-away camp. It was a camp for grownups — all girls.

Our church is part of a group of churches that use this camp and every year, about this time, there is a women's retreat held. Women from all over the state come. Some have been coming for 30 years or more.

It's an annual reunion and a great getaway.

I have been going for several years, only missing every now and then.

It's something I definitely look forward to, and attend if possible.

The first year, I remember having to prop open the windows to get a little air circulating. I also remember needing a flashlight to make that early-morning trip to the bathroom and shower house. But, every year, we would find some improvements to the facility.

This year the dorms had been divided into 15-bed cabins with air conditioning, and a toilet and shower in the rooms. How cool.

The bunk beds were still there and the mattresses were still lumpy, but when you get as tired as we get at retreat, you could sleep on almost anything.

The first night is registration, settling in, supper, a message and the highly-anticipated "talent" show. You will see normally reserved, dignified women don long, blonde wigs, snap bubble gum and create a character that will have you rolling in the aisle.

I recited my "50 Famous Parental Sayings," a great-grandmother played some tunes on her harmonica, a couple of ladies sang, and



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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there were skits, a violinist, and a woman who signed. A real variety show.

Some of what happens at retreat is just plain fun. This year the feature attraction was "sumo wrestling" with the huge, over-stuffed costumes. There were 40- and 50-year-old women bashing each other around.

But what we're really there for is the spiritual retreat. Some of the lessons were factual and some were insightful. We covered topics like caring for elderly parents, being a submissive wife, understanding your personality traits and becoming mentors to younger women.

There is always a guest speaker and this year she was wonderful. Entertaining while thought-provoking. Good-natured, too. Especially when one of the campers put a "squishy" toy mouse in her cabin Saturday night.

One of the "girls" is a notorious prankster and gets blamed for every pair of pajamas tied in knots, for every hidden mattress, and for every light turned out while you're in the shower.

After a late night of playing "Catch Phrase," I fumbled around in

the dark trying to find the top of my sleeping bag, and not disturb my sleeping (and snoring, I might add) cabinmates.

When I unzipped the bag I found everything I had brought with me stuffed inside. In my mind I thought, "This has Julie written all over it."

She adamantly denied it the next day until finally, the real culprit "fessed up."

All I can say is, "Next year is coming, Janet. You better sleep with one eye open."

From the Bible

Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than an house full of sacrifices with strife.

Proverbs 17:1



State Fair of Colorado a first

Last month Steve and I took a train to the Colorado State Fair.

It was the first time I've ever been to a state fair, not counting a 30-minute visit to a media tent once.

I've seen pictures of the rows and rows of vegetables at fairs in Iowa and Minnesota and I've heard about the monster pumpkin that took first place this year in Kansas.

I've seen some of our 4-Hers top entries that went on to win more prizes in Hutchinson but, I'd never been to a state fair. Never gone through the animal barns, checked out the commercial building or visited the big carnivals.

I still haven't done some of those things.

We skipped the carnival. Who needs it? We have the best carnivals in the world right here in northwest Kansas, where our friends and neighbors run the games and rides. Why give some strangers a chance to fleece you when you can spend less to have more fun at home?

We didn't get to the large animals — no cattle, pigs or goats — but we did see the chickens, rabbits, ducks and turkeys.

The number of different breeds of chickens was amazing, and there



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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were quite a few bunnies for sale. I was really tempted. We had a rabbit for several years and it was a great pet — never barked at the mailman, never messed in the neighbor's yard and never shed on the couch.

Steve was able to dissuade me, however, pointing out that:

- A. We are never home.
- B. We got rid of our rabbit cage.
- C. We came to the fair on the train. He's just soooooo picky.

We also visited the commercial building and watched people doing displays of waterless cookware, indoor grilling, instant-clean floor care systems and air purifiers.

We passed on the magic sham-mies and the floor care systems, since I'm allergic to almost all forms of housework. However, we did tumble to the indoor grilling system.

A friend confessed that she had bought one a couple of years ago and had never used it. Well, ours is still in the box but it hasn't gotten cold enough to grill inside. (That's my story and I'm sticking to it — maybe for several years.)

There were several events going on while we were at the fair that I missed. The racing pigs would have been something to tell the folks back home, I'm sure.

I also missed the tiger show. I may not be from Missouri, but I like a good tiger show. At least, I'm sure I would if I ever get to see one.

Still, our visit to the state fair was fun and educational. I enjoyed the rabbits and I learned that a good salesman can sell some worthless gadget to some sucker almost every day.

Hit the road, Jack. It's all over

I'd never been kicked out of a baseball stadium before.

Theaters, maybe. A high-school dance once. A murder scene or two.

But there was the usher, waving us off like a cop at a bad wreck.

"Time to get moving," he said. "It's all over here."

Boy, was it all over. I looked around, and there was no one else left in the upper deck.

The Rocks has lost 13-2 to the supposedly hapless Florida Marlins. The Fish just seem to find their bills whenever they play Colorado. No catch-and-release here.

Just as well. If the boys in black had to blow a game that bad, and we had to be there, and not, oh say, at the dentist, then this was the one.

We couldn't see much from our nosebleeder seat, just a couple of rows south of the infamous purple line that marks 5,280 feet elevation in upper Coors Field. Just tiny men chasing after an even tinier ball.

And the Marlins weren't chasing many balls that night.

Our friends Merle and Mary had the tickets and asked us to come meet them. They got a couple of dozen from *The Denver Post*, which has a circulation partnership with their newspaper in Colorado.

Merle's had sort of an interesting year. He's gone over the handlebars of his bicycle twice. The first time, a dog tried to catch him. He landed on his face and messed up his wrist. He claimed it was no big deal, but then he's a Marine.

He's kind of a serious biker. He does 700-mile rallies that take 2 1/2 days to complete. Most people



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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would say he's crazy, but then, he's a Marine.

The second wreck, last month, he did a face plant into a car that pulled out in front of him. A chest plant and a knee plant, too, it seems. They flew him into St. Anthony Central with pretty much everything on his left side broken from his jaws, both upper and lower, to his ribs and knees.

We got there two days later, and he wanted to go for a walk. He claims not to remember that now.

Mary said the first day, he'd wake up and ask two questions: Were they going to France for the big rally he'd been training for? (No!) And, "How's my bike?" (You don't want to know.)

She said she got kinda tired of answering the same two questions all night.

Merle is a lot better now. They took most of the wires out of his jaw last week so now he can eat his blended food with a spoon. He feels better. In a month or two, they might take the rest of the wires out and let his dentist work on his broken teeth.

It's a minor miracle, if you ask me, but then, he's a Marine.

After the game, we were sitting around talking when Worm came by. That's what got us in trouble

with the usher, I think.

Worm — his real name is Rick Charbonneau, and he's a Frenchman from Cloud County like Cynthia — is state circulation manager for the Denver Newspaper Agency, the partnership that publishes *The Post* and *The Rocky Mountain News*. He's the guy who bought all those tickets for his "partners," 500 of 'em. And he's the hero of this story.

The night Merle crashed, Rick was reading "his" outstate papers online, checking the headlines, when he saw that Merle had had a bike wreck that morning. He went right over to St. Anthony and started helping Mary, finding her a hotel, sitting up with her during the six-hour surgery.

Stayed until 3:30 in the morning. Came back to check on her the next day. Took care of a lot of details. He said later he'd known Merle for years, but only been introduced to Mary. She says he's her hero.

What a guy.

Cynthia says they're cousins of some kind, but all those Concordia Frenchmen are related some way or another. Whatever it is, she should be proud to have him in the family.

Even if he does buy cheap seats.

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Thanks to all who helped with fire

To the Editor:

I would like to take the opportunity to extend a huge thank you to everyone who participated in any way with the fire we had on Monday, Aug. 27.

I was amazed at how quickly this community and surrounding communities came together to bring this blaze under control.

There were so many entities (city, county, state) and volunteers involved, I couldn't begin to name them all, but wanted everyone to know how much I appreciated everything that was done.

One farmer brought in his own equipment.

The county emergency medical director, Linda Manning, made sure

Letter to the Editor

the crews had water in the 97-degree temperatures and was available for any medical needs that might arise.

Sheriff's Deputy Jay Tate provided traffic control and more.

Road and Bridge Supervisor Tim Stallman and his crews were paramount in providing resources, equipment and manpower to blanket this fire.

High winds made it even more difficult to fight but Bill Cathcart, our county fire chief, and all of his crews stayed through the night to make sure this fire didn't resurrect

itself. Let's not forget, if it weren't for our dispatchers, most of this couldn't have come together.

As the new director for emergency management for this community, it was refreshing to know that all we need to do is ask for help and know it is available to us. Thank you again.

Deputy Patti Skubal
emergency management director
deputy sheriff
Decatur County Sheriff's Office