

Read paper back to front: public notices still news

The front pages of our nation's newspapers are more colorful and compelling than ever. From the smallest county-seat weekly to the largest city tabloid, action shots reach out to the reader, trying to draw you in.

We try our best to help you stay informed, even as you blog, GPS and phone-video your way through the world.

But while there's plenty of interesting news in the front, we find the back of the paper even more important. We invite the reader to join us there.

The public notices in most newspapers appear in the classified section. In some states, that is because the law considers them classified ads. In others, it's simply tradition. They've been there for all of our lives. Lewis and Clark used public notices. Most state constitutions were drawn up with the help of public notices.

Now they are so much part of our tradition that we sometimes forget them. These notices are part of the three-legged stool of democracy: open public meetings, public records and public notices.

They let us know about tax increases, zoning changes and property foreclosures — when they are allowed to work.

Washington Gov. Christine Gregoire drew attention to these notices this year when she signed a bill requiring her governments — state and local — to go back to using public notices to inform citizens. The law she signed was a reaction to a state Supreme Court decision involving the owners of a small business whose property in south Tacoma was condemned to make way for a train-station parking lot.

The public notice provided by the transit authority was posted solely on the agency's own Internet website. There it announced condemnation of private property. The property owners never saw the notice. They sued, but the Washington Supreme Court said notice on an obscure website was good enough.

The state legislature thought otherwise. It now requires notices to be mailed to property owners — and a notice to be put back into the newspaper, where people will see it. As the state of Washington has acknowledged, people have a right to know. And notices are meant to be noticed.

Newspaper notices also help get people back together with something they have lost — unclaimed property.

In most states, an unclaimed property fund exists in the state treasury for assets in long-forgotten bank accounts, uncollected insurance claims and personal property, all belonging to someone who has not yet found it or laid claim to it. Not surprisingly, some state governments happily sit on these assets. In the days of more vigorous newspaper notices, readers could pore over interesting catalogues of unclaimed property and uncashed checks — and let their friends know of an unclaimed bounty. Today, in many states, notice of these funds has shrunk to a website page buried in a state computer.

A federal judge in California has stepped into that state's hoarding of these rich deposits. He stopped the state from continuing to rake in the contents of abandoned lock boxes and the like. He demanded a better effort by the state to find rightful owners. (The list of unclaimed property in that case included a Medal of Honor and Navy Cross awarded to a World War II hero who is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.)

One big problem with California's program is the lack of newspaper lists of the property. The public's right to know is served when we can see for ourselves what is going on. Other states should pay attention to this lesson of government accountability: a government website doesn't do the job.

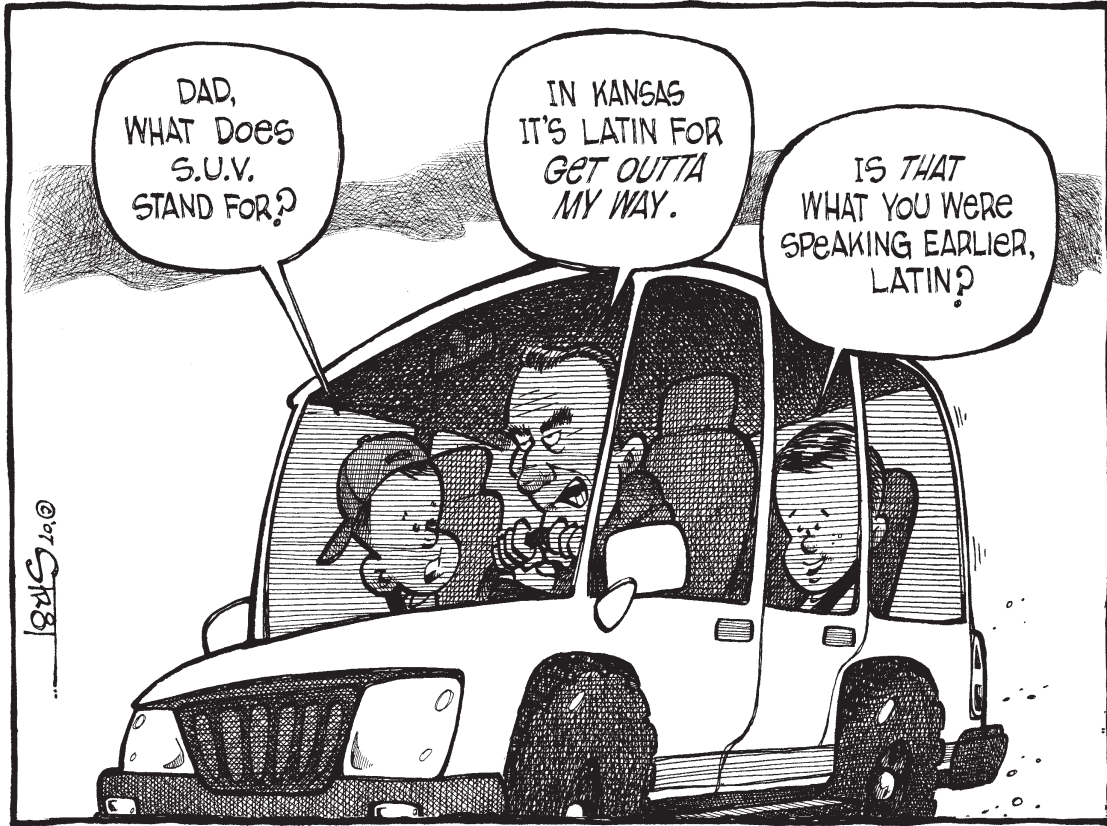
The Internet is going to be an important channel for delivery of newspaper information. It also will help newspapers provide broader public notice. But the Internet must not become a tool of secrecy for our governments.

Washington's governor and legislature understand this principle. The California judge knows visible public notice is important. Newspapers provide public notices week after week where people can see them, not locked away on some obscure website.

That's why so many readers are like us. We read the paper from back to front.

— Steve Haynes

This editorial was distributed to publications across the country for the observance of National Newspaper Week this week. Steve Haynes, publisher of The Oberlin Herald and president of Nor'West Newspapers, which operates six community newspapers in north-west Kansas, is president of the National Newspaper Association.



Perfect day for a perfect bride

Pity the poor bride, Cynthia always says, when nothing goes wrong at her wedding.

Poor Lindsay. She got married Saturday, and as far as I could tell, nothing went wrong.

Maybe she saw something to remember, but I doubt it. The bride is always in kinda of a daze.

But from my point of view, it was a Perfect Day.

My youngest daughter made a beautiful bride.

Kansas beat Kansas State, knocking the Wildcats out of the Top 25 and knocking KU in for the first time in nearly a decade.

The Rockies finished a sweep of Philadelphia to take the first round in the National League playoffs.

I suppose it could have been a better week. We actually had tickets to the playoffs on Saturday. I tried to convince the bride to excuse us for an early flight to Denver.

No dice, Daddy. I e-mailed those seats to a friend who promised he could trade for tickets to the game Sunday, which we could have made.

Had they played. Darned team had to win three in a row.

If the wedding was fun, the rehearsal the night before was funner.

The kids were loose and enjoying themselves. Lindsay was surprisingly calm, even when the preacher (a coworker of groom) came to the part about, "If any man here knows of any cause why these two should



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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not be joined, let him speak now or forever hold his peace."

At the dry run, at home the night before, I'd raised my hand. Cynthia told me not to do that.

"She's too expensive to keep," mother said.

Brad's eyes were boring in on me, but I was good. The entire wedding party, however, raised their hands.

I was just glad to be off the hook. A train had whistled through town as we walked toward the aisle, and I told the bride I'd be right back. Anyone who knows me will understand.

She grabbed my arm all the tighter, clenched her teeth and whispered: "Daddy, that's not really a train. It's just your imagination."

Good things had happened all week. South Carolina beat Kentucky, making the kids happy since they have season tickets in Columbia. The Rockies beat San Diego in an amazing 13-inning tiebreaker game for the wildcard playoff slot.

The day of the wedding, we set up chairs, hauled supplies and listened to radio updates on KU and K-State all afternoon. And pretty much the

entire family, except for a few die-hard Royals fans (and there are a few of those) headed for the bar to watch the Rockies win out.

Well, Lindsay and Brad disappeared. They left Sunday for the honeymoon, and she still didn't know where she was going. The deal was she got to plan the wedding and Brad got to plan the trip. We kidded her all week about garden spots of the Balkans.

Sunday, with mixed emotions, we dragged our feet into Denver, knowing there would be no seats behind home for us that night and not entirely sure, given the passing showers and 43-degree temperature, that we were sorry.

There'll always be another playoff, right? And Kansas will be in a bowl this fall.

A pretty sweet day, a pretty sweet week.

My phone rang. "Daddy, this plane is going to Rome."

I tried to tell her that is where you change planes for Albania, but she wasn't buying it.

Couple decides to re-enlist

Jim and I celebrated our 13th wedding anniversary this week. We agreed to renew the lease and "re-up" for another 13 years.

I'm being a little flip on a very serious subject. We are both totally committed to our marriage and that has been our secret. Each of us knows the other will be there — no matter what.

We've already been through a lot together: my mother's death, daughters' marriages, Jim's mother's death, grandchildren's births, job changes, house remodeling, a son's incarceration, my brother's and nephew's deaths, Jim's semi-retirement.

It is all part of that "for better or worse" clause. And there is no one I'd rather face "the rest of our lives" with.

Our little 1-year-old granddaughter Ani is growing up. She says the usual baby words, but the latest addition to her vocabulary is "who-dat."

When I call her mother, I can hear little Ani in the background saying, "Who-dat? Who-dat?"

We need to see her soon so she



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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knows who-dat is. It's Grandma and Pa-Pa.

After watching the news this morning, I wonder what it takes to shock the American public.

Over the weekend, an off-duty police officer went on what the news media is calling a rampage and killed six people. It was the lead story, but generated no more coverage than coverage of "shock-jock" Don Imus' bid to get back on the radio.

It was in the 1960s when life in the U.S. stopped to learn the details of the deaths of a family of four in southwest Kansas. Nothing like that had ever happened before. People were stunned.

Have we become so immune to senseless killings that it barely ranks

a "blip" on our life's radar?

My theory: We all suffer from "bad news overload." Television has taken us to the front lines of war, behind the scenes at a terrorist bombing in Oklahoma and right into the middle of the carnage following a hurricane that hit Louisiana.

I think that's why I like small-town newspapers. It's mostly good news. We can read about young people's accomplishments at school or in sports, golden wedding anniversaries, births, even promotions.

It's not often we have to report bad news. There are always the obituaries and accident reports. If bad news happens, we have to report it.

We can, however, do it without sensationalizing it. We'll leave that sort of thing to the coffee-shop gossip mongers.

Community service called 'special'

To the Editor:
A huge thank you to the Decatur County Ministerial Alliance for the second annual community worship service last Sunday. It was very special.

Thank you to Principal Charles Haag for opening up the high school cafeteria so we could have the service in spite of the bad weather.

Thanks to Jack Benton for providing such a good sound system so all could hear.

The music was so special. Thanks to Cheryl Metcalf, who played the keyboard, and those who helped lead the singing.

Thanks to the Rev. Doug Hasty and Pastor Doug Mason, who presented very thought-provoking and well-presented messages. The other ministers who read scripture and led the service all did a great job.

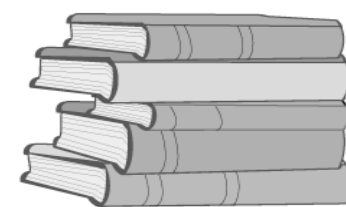
I would hope this becomes a tradition for this community to have at

Letter to the Editor

least one community service a year. I think we need to be reminded that we all worship and serve one God regardless of our denomination.

Thanks again for such a meaningful worship service.

Eloise Smith
Oberlin



From the Bible

For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord God.

Jeremiah 2: 22

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Protect girls from this deadly virus

To the Editor:
How common is human genital papillomavirus?

- Approximately 9.2 million young adults, 15-24, had genital human papillomavirus in 2000.

- Of the more than 6 million new cases of genital human papillomavirus diagnosed each year in the United States, 74 percent occur in those 15 to 24.

- Almost 80 percent of American women will have had genital human papillomavirus by age 50.

About 30 types of human papillomavirus are known as genital human papillomavirus since they affect the genital area. Some are high risk and can cause cervical cancer or abnormal cells in the lining of the cervix that sometimes turn into cancer.

About half of all women diagnosed with cervical cancer are between 35 and 55. What many of these women may not realize is that they were most likely exposed to

one of the high-risk papillomavirus during their teens and 20s.

Anyone who has any kind of sexual activity involving genital contact could get human papillomavirus. Because many people who have had it may not show any signs or symptoms, they can transmit the virus without even knowing it.

Human papillomavirus vaccine is an inactivated (not live) vaccine which protects against four major types of this virus. This includes two types that cause about 70 percent of cervical cancer and two that cause about 90 percent of genital warts.

Human papillomavirus vaccine does not appear to cause any serious side effects, though it could cause an allergic reaction. The risk of any vaccine causing serious harm is

small.

Do everything you possibly can to take care of your daughter, to protect her health and make sure she is safe. Most insurance plans cover the vaccine. If you do not have insurance or your insurance does not cover the vaccine, the vaccine is covered by the Vaccine for Children program for girls 18 and younger. Assistance is available for those who are older through the Merck Patient Assistance Program.

For information, call the Decatur County Health Department at (785) 475-8118 or visit us at 902 W. Columbia, Oberlin.

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