

Prairie dog fight out of character

This editorial, published Nov. 29, 2006, won third place among smaller weekly newspapers in the National Newspaper Association's annual Better Newspapers Contest. It was written by Publisher Steve Haynes.

Government agents enter land against the owners' will, spreading poison.

An armed officer stands guard, keeping the landowner away.

The government plans to send the landowner the bill for killing his animals.

This happens in Communist China, perhaps? Soviet Russia? Fidel's Cuba?

No, western Kansas, where the deer and the antelope play, and the skies are not cloudy all day.

It's a high-stakes game of prairie dog eradication, and the script just drips with irony.

The land in question is owned by Larry Haverfield, a maverick rancher who touts unorthodox grazing ideas and thinks that deep down, prairie dogs might not be so bad. He's convinced there's a place for all of God's creatures and he *sure* doesn't want the county telling him how to run his ranch.

His neighbors don't see things quite that way. They share the average western prejudice against prairie dogs. They read all the stories about how we've killed millions and millions of the little critters, reduced the range and driven them near to being listed as an endangered species.

And they think that's a pretty good start.

Most of them, if they could push a button and eliminate every single prairie dog from the face of the earth, they'd do it. In a heartbeat.

Larry Haverfield thinks you should leave some, maybe not all, the rodents around. His neighbors think he's nuts — maybe worse.

Other landowners want Haverfield's dogs eliminated. They have the Logan County commissioners and the weight of the law behind

them. Commissioners, under pressure from other landowners, refused to approve any plan from Haverfield that includes keeping prairie dogs around.

What really rankles many landowners is that Haverfield and a couple of friends have invited the federal government to help them "manage" the prairie dogs by reintroducing the black-footed ferret on their land. This rare, endangered species lives among and eats prairie dogs. How well it can control them remains to be seen, since only a few hundred of the cute little devils remain.

Commissioners and landowners fear if the endangered ferret is let loose in Logan County, they'll never be able to poison prairie dogs again. Opposition is at a fever pitch, and you can almost see the villagers gathering, pitchforks and firebrands in hand, to confront the evil that lurks.

On any given day, we're sure, most of the farmers, ranchers and county officials of Logan County are decent, conservative types who support the National Rifle Association and belong to the Farm Bureau. They likely espouse the freedom to own guns and private property.

Property rights, however, go just so far, and in Logan County, they apparently don't cover harboring vermin — or cute little endangered ferrets.

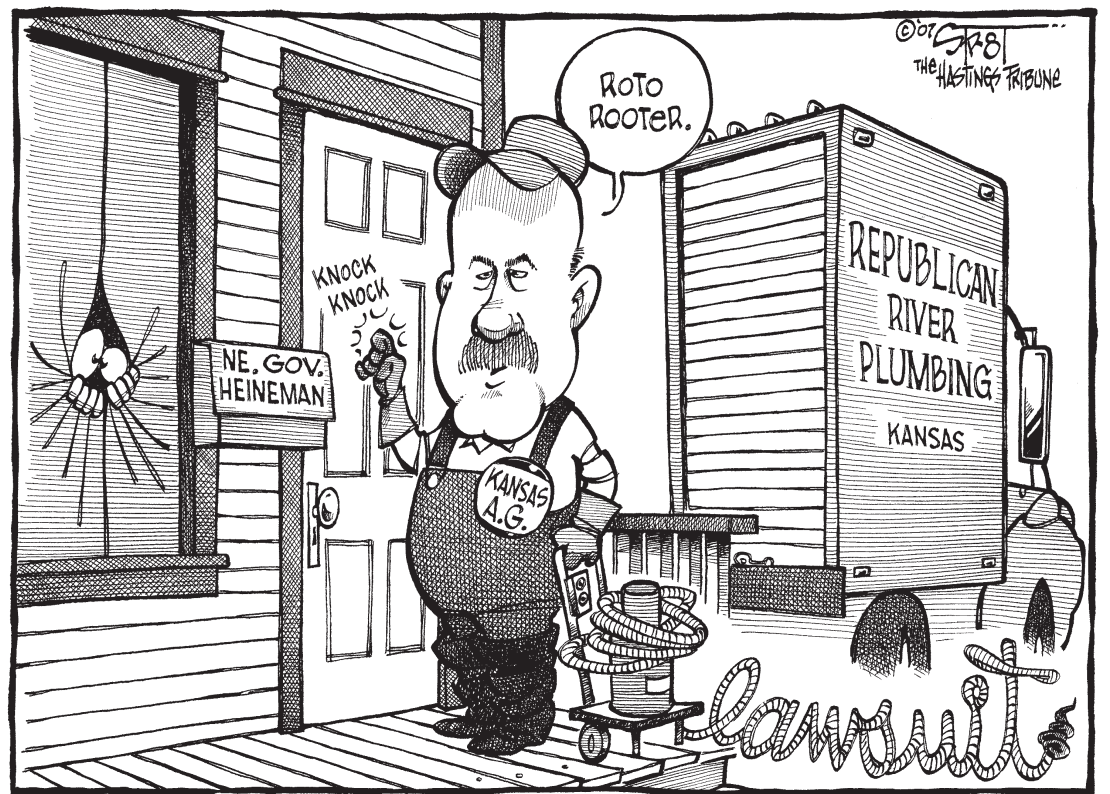
How else can you explain the county sending exterminators unannounced onto private land and an armed officer to keep landowners from interfering.

Sound sort of un-American to you?

Apparently, property rights are only for those we agree with.

With all due respect to the feelings most ranchers and stockmen have about prairie dogs, maybe this is carrying things just a bit too far.

— Steve Haynes



Weddings make you introspective

There's something about a wedding that makes you introspective.

After our daughter was married earlier this month, we drove out to Creede, Colo., the spot we called home for a few years and the place we thought we were putting down permanent roots.

We lived there for five years. It's funny how impermanent those roots sometimes are. On the other hand, we go back there every summer and plan someday to be buried there. Last summer, we picked out the plots, with a sweeping view of the Rio Grande valley.

I guess we were too young and dumb to be scared back in 1980. Steve and I were both 32.

The children were 6, 3 and 6 months. The oldest had just started first grade.

We were tired of the city. We're both small town kids, and we wanted to return to small towns like our homes in Emporia and Concordia. We were tired of working nights and not seeing our children and we wanted to have our own businesses.

However, we didn't have that much money, and newspapers are expensive.

A friend told us about Creede, a tiny mountain community in southern Colorado. The newspaper was for sale and the price was right.

We sold our home, quit our jobs and packed up the kids and houseplants in two vehicles and headed



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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west. It took two days to get out to Creede and most of the houseplants froze. It was mid November.

We arrived from the city to find a town, not a county of 800 people.

There were no morning and evening newspapers. No diaper service or milk delivery. There was no drug store and the grocery and gas station closed at 5 p.m. on weekdays and all day Sundays and holidays.

And we had no place to live. We stayed in a one-bedroom summer cabin at a guest ranch for about three weeks — long enough for all three children to come down with the chicken pox.

But things got better. We bought a half-finished house and finished it with the money we got from the home we sold in Kansas City. We learned that the newspaper business wasn't quite the same in small town America as it is in the city. I learned to write, sell ads, make up pages and clean clothes covered in ink.

They were hard years in some ways. Creede was a mining town, and when the mine closed, times

were tough for everyone.

But we branched out, opening a paper in the nearby community of South Fork, a ski and resort town, and purchasing

The Conejos County Citizen out of bankruptcy to add several farming communities to our economic base.

Still we struggled, and when we had the opportunity to buy a partnership in our biggest competitor, we grabbed the chance and moved down the mountain to Monte Vista.

A lot has happened since then. We lived in Monte for seven years and our oldest daughter graduated from high school there. Then we got the opportunity to return to Kansas, and with two children, two dogs, three cats and a rabbit, we came east again.

We've been here for 14 years now — longer than we lived in Kansas City, Creede or Monte Vista. We hope to stay, but we know that someday we'll return to Creede to stay on the mountain top forever.

Setting time causes problem

See if I ever let Jim set the time to get up on a mission trip again. We crossed into Mountain Time late in the afternoon and everyone set their clocks back an hour. Bedtime rolled around and it was decided to get up at 5:45 a.m. to be able to leave by 7 a.m.

I awoke and saw Jim was already up. He said the alarm was about to go off, so he pulled the plug on our air mattress and got up. As I stumbled toward the bathroom, I noticed a clock on the wall. I took a second look and asked Jim if we were operating by Mountain Time or Central Time.

Rather indignantly, he said, "Carolyn, we're in Mountain Time — everything from now on is Mountain Time!"

"Well then," I said, "you need to



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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know it's a quarter till 5 a.m."

No one else was awake, but with the air out of our mattress, there was no going back to bed. Nothing to do but get up and dressed.

So we were back on the road ahead of schedule. Now, we are sitting in the parking lot of the church in Ruidoso, N.M., waiting for services to start at 9:30 a.m.

Half of the fun of a mission trip is the travel time. It's been non-stop talk and laughter. Imagine that! Jim and I laughing and having fun.

It's almost time for church to start so this will be short. We've been here before and a woman from the church will fax this to my office.

Hope you have as good a week as we're going to.

Letter to the Editor

To the Editor:
To all in our community: When something says it is free, don't count on it. Nothing in this world is free,

no matter what anyone says.
Rose Riffle
Oberlin

From the Bible

Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.
Psalm 63:7

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Fascination can be costly

She was fascinated by the vending machine, and she's not that much for gadgets.

No soda. No snacks. No airline insurance. No tickets.

In a space smaller than one of those closet-type sandwich stands so popular at airports today, this little machine was selling electronics.

Not the cheap stuff, either. Sony headphones for \$50. Apple iPods for \$300.

Not to worry about exact change. The machines take only credit cards.

You swipe your card, push a button and a new iPod drops out the bottom, all wrapped in plastic.

Just choose your color.

I can remember when buying a \$300 piece of equipment was a serious decision, to be talked over with a knowledgeable clerk at the electronics counter.

Now, apparently, people buy an iPod on the way to Seattle.

I'm not sure where you get music to stock it. From your computer, I guess. Transfer the tunes in flight. You could be listening to the Beatles over Boise.

We were marveling at this ingenious little beauty when I notice the woman standing next to us. She was even more perplexed by the



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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electronic age than we were.

Cynthia and I were merely bemused. She was kinda lost.

She was, in fact, trying to stick a phone card into the automatic teller machine next to us.

When the machine rejected her card, she turned to us for help.

"Where do you put the card in this phone?" she asked.

It dawned on me what she was trying to do. We had to explain that you just don't find many pay phones in America these days, now that every teenager and grandmother carries a cell phone.

Her English was pretty good, far better than my Danish, which is, even though I am genetically half Danish, not so good. My mother was a full-blooded Dane, but third generation, born in Kansas and the genes alone don't help me much with language.

It turned out our friend and her husband were on the way to Florida

to visit her daughter, who works for one of the Danish cruise lines there. She missed her connection and Delta thoughtfully had given her a couple of five-minute phone cards to call her daughter.

They just failed to tell her where to find a phone. And despite the terminal's electronic advances, there was no sign of one nearby.

I just offered her my cell phone. I have so many minutes, I'll never notice. From Atlanta, the call itself would be free.

Call complete, she smiled and thanked us. Her daughter made arrangements to meet a later flight. She and her husband were off to their gate, and we headed for our connection.

I never did see a pay phone in that airport, either. But I almost — almost — bought an iPod just to try out that machine.

ICE campaign good idea

In case you haven't heard about the "In Case of Emergency" (ICE) campaign, this is a really good idea...

We all carry mobile phones with names and numbers stored in their memory, but nobody, other than ourselves, knows which of these numbers belong to our closest family or friends. If you were to be involved in an accident or become ill, the people attending to you would have your mobile phone but wouldn't know who to call. Yes, there are hundreds of numbers stored in your phone, but which one is the contact person in case of an emergency? Hence this campaign.

The concept of "ICE" is catching on quickly as a method of contact

Letter to the Editor

during emergencies. As most people carry cell phones today, all you need to do is store the number of one or more persons who should be contacted during emergency under the name "ICE" (In Case of Emergency). The idea was thought up by a paramedic who found that when he went to accidents, the patients always had mobile phones, but the emergency workers didn't know which number to call. He thought that it would be a good idea if there was a nationally recognized name for this purpose.

In an emergency, rescue workers and hospital staff would be able to quickly contact the right person by simply dialing the number you have stored as "ICE." It could save your life or put a loved one's mind at rest. For more than one contact name, simply enter ICE1, ICE2, ICE3 and so on.

This is a great idea that will make a difference! Let's spread the concept by storing an ICE number in our mobile phones today.

Helen Gee
Oberlin

