

Storm spotters, radar save lives across Kansas

Recent storms show the value of modern weather radar, the storm spotter network and the entire warning system which protects Kansas from tornadoes.

Loss of life has been minimal compared to the damage, and the populated areas struck, by some severe twisters. The loss of even one person is tragic, as the family of Crystal Bishop, a young woman with relatives here, would tell you.

But it's impossible to estimate the lives which might have been lost without the work of so many people who watch and track storms, and the technology which makes it all possible.

The 1942 storm which struck Oberlin, for instance, killed 15 people at farm homes though it did not touch the town. It struck at night, with little warning. There were no spotters, no radio station, no radar.

In contrast, the Greensburg tornado last year, actually a smaller storm, killed only 11 though it leveled the town. Spotters gave the town time to get to shelter, though not everyone made it.

Doppler weather radar allows forecasters to issue timely warnings today, where in 1948 radar was primitive and not used for weather observation. Newer radar sometimes can spot storms capable of dropping a tornado before spotters see one.

This year and last in Kansas, spotters gave towns warning before storms struck. That accounts for a lot of the lives saved, for in just a few minutes, most of us can scurry to safety.

Spotters, mostly volunteers, include fire fighters, weather enthusiasts, off-duty forecasters and even professional storm chasers with training to identify dangerous clouds. They are worth their weight in gold, and the

more in the field, the better.

Law officers often join the spotters, and they, too, help spot storms before they strike.

The National Weather Service has put a lot of effort into growing the spotter corps, with beginner and advanced classes each year before the tornado season opens.

Nearly every town has a tornado siren these days, and local officials take this system seriously. Oberlin's has worked well when storms appear. It got a good workout last month when tornadoes bracketed the town, missing most homes but downing many farm outbuildings.

The new emergency director tests the system weekly, and plans to keep on testing throughout the year. That's good, because tornadoes appear in Kansas as late as Thanksgiving and as early as February, though they're not common in the winter.

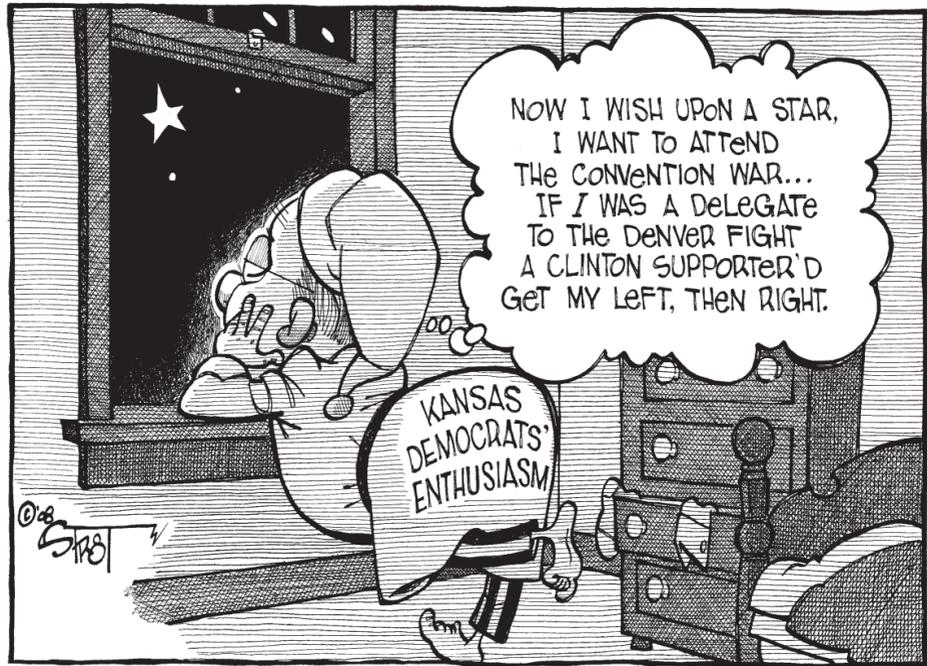
Even so, we need to be ready to blow the sirens whenever a storm strikes, and it never hurts to test them, even at Christmas.

We know there were complaints when the sirens did not sound last week as a hailstorm approached, but the take-cover should be reserved for killer winds, not hail. Dispatchers have to sound the alert often enough when no storm actually appears. It's not good to have people too used to the sirens, or they won't take them seriously.

The storm alert system, fallible as it is, is saving lots of lives. We can't know how many, but the figures suggest it's dozens every year, if not hundreds.

Here's a round of thanks to everyone — spotters, forecasters, firemen, police and sheriffs, storm chasers and citizens — who keep us safe when weather threatens.

Keep it up, guys. — Steve Haynes



New traffic cop in Santa Fe?

So there I was, directing traffic in downtown Santa Fe.

It's not a job I'm well trained for — or trained for at all, if you must — but it went pretty well.

It all started when our tour bus got stopped in the traffic jam near the square. It was blocking the whole street, with dozens of cars behind us. Cars full of unhappy, impatient people.

So while the driver and others went to negotiate with security, I went back behind the bus to see what could be done about the traffic.

Cops? Not when you need one. Nowhere in sight. A couple of security officers sat on a nearby wall, talking and watching the mess on San Francisco Street. Not doing anything, mind you. Just watching.

That left the traffic jam to me. It seems the city had blocked off the plaza downtown for an arts and crafts fair the next day. Vendors were setting up their tents and the streets around the busy square were all closed.

We'd been touring all day in a 53-passenger over-the-road bus, but on the last leg home, we got stuck in this mess. With a car illegally parked near the corner, the driver was afraid to turn right and get out of the jam. She couldn't back up without a lot of work clearing cars, so the only way to go was forward — to the square.

A few drivers had spotted a route around the bus, through a bank's parking lot. I started sending them all



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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that way, and actually got the street moving. Of course, people still had to find a way around the square or a place to park, but strictly speaking, that wasn't my problem. Not that I could help them anyway.

And they were all pretty nice about it. No abuse, no horns, no shouting.

Eventually, the driver came back with word that security would let her turn around on the square. A couple of us moved the barricades and "road closed" signs so she could get the bus out of the middle of the traffic. Then we scooted them back just as quickly so no one would follow us to the square. That was all we needed, a bunch of cars down there.

Once we got to the corner, the driver tried to turn left as the guards advised. The bus headed straight into one of the art tents. It wasn't even close. She backed up. The only way out was straight east.

And it looked like she might make it, except for the trailer being unloaded on the square. Still, there might be room if we could move the animated sculpture of a bull which partly blocked the left lane

as it bobbed.

I went to look. The bull, eight foot tall if it was an inch, was made of rusty-looking quarter-inch Cor-Ten steel. It would have taken an army to move it the required three feet.

Then the guy driving the pickup appeared and said he'd move the trailer in 10 minutes. Said the same thing 10 minutes later. But finally, his crew was done and he did move.

We got the bus out of there. The driver had been on duty off and on since 4:30 a.m. and still had to make it home to Albuquerque. She was trying to smile.

Last I saw of the bus, she'd turned left at the cathedral and had a sharp right yet to get out of downtown. We'd gone that way in the morning, so I figured she'd make it.

Ask me again how I got into this. Oh, yeah, I just wanted to get back to my hotel and go to sleep.

Goes to show how interesting life can be, though. How many people can say they directed traffic in Santa Fe last week?

Thought so.

Dad, 91, slowed by the gate

At 91 years of age, you'd think my father-in-law would be slowing down a little. But, he still does chores every day, with feeding and watering calves his No. 1 priority.

Last week, though, his "go-get 'em" attitude got him into some trouble. He was on his way to the calf pen to care for his bovine charges and had to climb over a gate. He's done it that way for years, but this time, he lost his balance and slipped.

As he put it, he got "hung-up" and couldn't extricate himself. It was about an hour before Jim's brother Gene found him and got him down.

An evaluation at the hospital there indicated he needed more treatment than they could give and he was flown by helicopter to a larger facility in a neighboring state. There, surgery relieved pressure on his right leg and he was hooked up to every monitor and tube you could imagine.

We've been to see him a couple of times, and he seems to be responding to treatment. Even though he's not always the most patient of patients, he likes his nurses and we think he's getting the best treatment in the world.

-ob-
I've said it before and I'll say it



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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again, "If you think there's nothing to do in a small town — you've never lived in one."

Two weekends in a row, I've been gone to one celebration, parade, auction, jubilee, show, benefit or another. My social calendar is full and running over. A weekend to myself would be a dream come true.

I better find some time pretty

soon or all the bedding plants Jim has brought home to me will wither in their containers. I'm so lucky, though — he likes flowers as much (maybe more) than I do. One time, I asked him, "Do we have enough money to buy some flowers?"

He gave me the answer I'll never forget: "We always have money for flowers."

Honor Roll

Welcome and thanks to these recent subscribers to *The Oberlin Herald*:

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Ex-teacher praises Oberlin

To the Editor:

In some places in this world, leaving a community that has given so much to a person and her family may not be met with kindness. You can be sure you do not live there!

Here I am, leaving great kids and a good job, placing my district in a delicate position to find a replacement and what happens? Administration and colleagues are phoning in outstanding recommendations on my behalf, sharing tears with me in the concern of finding the "right" job and reminding me things happen for a reason.

Students whom I will miss terribly are cheering me on as I head off to interviews, telling me things like, "They'll be crazy if they don't hire you Mrs. Will!" Members of the faculty and staff are donating precious minutes of their time to provide information and answer

Letters to the Editor

questions for my personal curriculum assignments.

Why all of this thoughtfulness, assistance and giving if I am leaving and taking away?

Because Oberlin is the Real Deal — as genuine a place as you will ever find.

We talk to our kids about making friends with others who really care about their well-being, those who will look out for them rather than act according to selfish interests or expectations: genuine, true-blue friends; the kind of students, faculty and staff who make up the Oberlin School District, a learning community driven by a true concern for one another's best interests, a model of

agape love, the very type of love that allows us to let go of those we have come to care deeply about, trusting that change is for their benefit and not our own.

Know that this affection is shared in the decision to begin another chapter in our family's life. We — Trevor, Heather, Chad and I — wish you only the best always and hope that you will continue to focus on your strength as a genuine school and community and overcome the obstacles that may pop up along the way.

Tina Williams
Oberlin

Motel here in a wait-and-see mode

To the Editor:

Your opinion piece in the current edition of *The Oberlin Herald* contains significant information, addressing many of our concerns as owners of the Frontier Motel.

We have done some cosmetic renovation over the last two years, which included the exterior painting, updating some of the landscaping, carpeting in some rooms, interior painting, tile work and the like.

About three weeks prior to the first story about the new motel, we were discussing additional updating to include room-by-room carpeting, painting, mattresses and bedding and tile work as needed, or resurfacing of all tile and tubs with a company that does epoxy refinishing. This renovation would require that we seek financing.

Our census is down this year compared to the same time last year. Last year was our best year, but rising costs, such as 10 percent combined sales and transient guest tax, and the continued increases in public utilities such as gas, electric and water give us cause for careful consideration of spending.

Our state and local taxes last year

were \$28,000. If the Frontier could get the same type of 10-year tax consideration that may be offered to the new developer, we could make some serious improvements to this property. Yes, we too could add new furniture and flat screen televisions. We already offer wireless Internet through a router in the office. It also would be nice to improve some of the restaurant equipment. We would like to proceed immediately with our current improvement plan, but feel it best to wait and see what the city and (the Nebraska) developer decide to do.

The front-page story identified us as unhappy about the new development, when actually we are simply concerned about staying in business and wanted to let the "powers that be" know what is "real" regarding how often Oberlin needs additional motel room accommodations. The Frontier has many very faithful patrons but we are full to overflowing a limited number of days per year.

We hope for continued dialog and appreciate the city's consideration of our input.

You are absolutely correct when you wrote that it is difficult for "re-modeling" to pay for itself. It has

definitely always been our desire to improve this property as much as was financially possible. It is a matter of pride to present the best possible product. This is an old property, but it is sound and has lots of potential with a great location. Anyone who regularly travels U.S. 36 knows about the Frontier Motel and Restaurant.

Ron and Alinda Brown
Elizabeth, Colo

From the Bible

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:

That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

John 4:14,15

