

Extension merger plan could end county's role

Decatur County commissioners exhibited skepticism over a plan to merge the county's Extension program with the one in Norton County under an independent board.

As well they should.

While Extension-district plan may not be a bad thing, it would mean the end of local control for extension programs and likely represents the first step in what could be a regionalization of state programs to cover "super counties" clustered around Kansas.

The bureaucrats in Topeka and Manhattan know Kansans will cling to their counties as long as there are a few of us out here on the prairie. But they can't stand the supposed inefficiency of having 105 separate little units to deal with across the state.

So they look for regional "solutions." Top officials in the K-State Research and Extension program must want this pretty bad; they're offering to double the amount of money Extension puts into county agents' pay to get it.

The merger idea appears to be short on advantages, though, and long on dangers.

Pressed for details how it would be better, one K-State official said agents in the two counties, working together, might send kids to camp in one van rather than two.

But couldn't they do that today? Both are part of the same statewide organization, after all.

The first impact of the merger will be a complete loss of county control — or influence — in what once was called "cooperative" extension, a program joining state, county and federal dollars and goals. Commissioners in both counties would appoint members

to a joint board, with their replacements to be elected in a bi-county vote. After that, the board would make all decisions.

Commissioners would lose their say in setting extension tax rates and in appointing extension board members. Control would pass to the regional board and to regional officials working with K-State. The counties would provide office space, at least for a time, but have little or no say in the programs.

K-State promises to keep agents in each county, but draw on the "strengths" of each to form a stronger program in each.

The truth is, though, with declining population, and a declining budget, extension already has cut many services. It's not so long ago that every county had two agents; today it's one, with regional experts to cover some subjects.

Maybe regionalization is the wave of the future. We doubt it.

People like their county government and county services. We don't think Kansans will let these go easily.

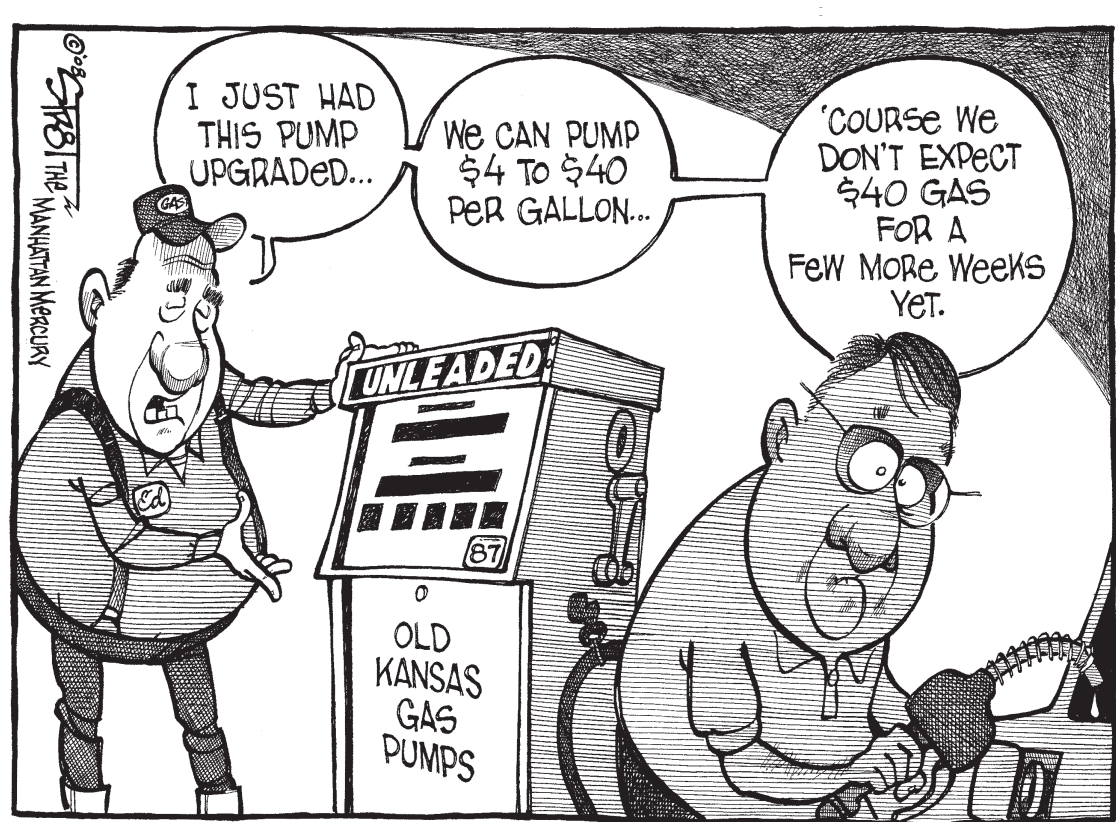
But state officials keep chipping away at the integrity of the county system.

The commissioners will have to decide if they want to give up their involvement in Extension. People will have to decide if they want local control or if they want to be part of increasingly larger regions providing what used to be county services.

Sure, today there would be an office in every courthouse. But tomorrow, or next year, when the budget pinches?

No one can say, but we can guess.

— Steve Haynes



Beck-and-call job not for her

There are many jobs I wouldn't care to have. Being an association manager is one of them.

While some organizations call them executive directors, they are at the beck and call of every member of the group, whether it's a bunch of dentists, publishers, lawyers, teachers or sanitation engineers.

Last month, we got to see how a new manager handled his first convention.

Layne Bruce took over the head job at the Mississippi Press Association from a long-time manager last year. He worked for the association for a year before being handed the reins, and the members I talked to said he was doing very well.

But then the true test is the first convention, when many of the members get together to find out how things are going, learn about the latest in the industry, — and party.

The Mississippi Press Association holds two conventions each year. One is in the winter, at the state capital of Jackson. The other was in June at the Beau Rivage Casino in Biloxi, on the hurricane-ravaged Gulf Coast.

The group always has one convention on the coast. It's when many of the members get their annual vacation — a chance to relax, enjoy the company of their peers and get a little business done. When you're an owner/operator, sometimes a working vacation is the only kind you ever get.

So besides working with his board on association business, the manager gets to make sure everything is good with the hotel, meals, guests, entertainment, side trips, programs, visiting dignitaries and on and on and on.

The first rumble of trouble was



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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rain for the opening reception, a picnic in the park. They set up a couple of tents, and hotel shuttles got everyone to the event.

The next problem came when it was discovered that the contest-winners newspaper had not been printed. The contest bulletin, a 60-page full-size newspaper which contained the names of all the annual award winners, had not arrived.

The printer had no other time to do the paper and, although there were a dozen convention goers with presses available, most did not have one big enough to handle the project.

I could appreciate that. Our press would need five runs to do the section, with manual stuffing to put the parts together. I would not have volunteered to take it on; the crew would have shot me.

Layne had 24 hours to find a press and get that baby printed and back to Biloxi. He made it. It looked great.

Of course, it didn't help when all the lights went out during the awards program. The whole hotel was blacked out for a few minutes. In an inside room with no windows, that can be pretty scary.

Later, someone said that they thought maybe a plane had hit the hotel. However, there was no panic or undue excitement, the lights came back on and the winners got their awards.

Things were almost over and

Layne was sliding toward the finish.

Then on Saturday, everyone was scheduled for a schooner ride. We headed for the boat to find the captain scanning the skies.

Layne ferried beer, pop and chips to us as we sat on the boat watching the skies. As the first raindrops started to fall, we all repaired to shelter on the dock. Layne, however, was stuck pulling a huge beer cooler in.

"He's either going to make a fine executive director," someone said, "or we're never gonna see him again."

We both enjoyed our visit to the Magnolia State, our opportunity to meet old and new friends and our chance to see how a professional manager works under fire.

Which brings me back to my first statement — better him than me.

Cherry harvest jams gift jars

Wheat isn't the only crop being harvested around here.

Everyone with cherry trees is reporting a bumper crop. We took some young friends with us last week to a generous neighbor's place in the country to raid his cherry tree. It was absolutely loaded. Every branch was laden with clusters of ripe, juicy cherries. In record time, we had about six gallons of cherries picked.

Here's the catch. Six hands picking cherries is much faster than two hands operating the pitter. I did it in shifts, though, about three gallons at a time, and it wasn't too bad.

Over the three-day weekend, I turned into a jam/jelly factory. I even made a cherry cobbler. I've gone through about 20 pounds of sugar and the end is not in sight.

What I didn't have time to work up landed in the freezer. Just be prepared — if you are on my Christmas list, you're going to get cherry jelly or jam for a present.



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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-ob-

We have some good news to report on Jim's dad. He is improved and one of his nurses said the ultimate goal is to fit him with a prosthesis. That is our hope, too. A prosthesis would give him the independence and mobility he needs.

He has really enjoyed all the cards and letters he's received from old friends, neighbors and readers. They add a bright spot to his day.

-ob-

Perhaps it's irony — perhaps it's just bad timing. Nonetheless, I've been quite verbal about how we hadn't yet turned on our central air

conditioning this season. Bragging about how the house stays cool for so long.

Temps climbed into the triple digits this weekend, and I headed for the thermostat. I heard that reassuring "click" and it kicked on. The unit ran and ran and ran — but, the house did not cool down. Air was coming out of the vents, but it was as warm as ever.

A call is in order to my friendly neighborhood appliance repairman. Next year, I won't be so cocky until I've tested the unit to make sure it works.

Laurence A. Stanton
Windsor, Colo.

Writer says local motel sub par

To the Editor:

I have heard that an issue has arisen regarding whether the Frontier Motel is adequately serving the needs of the Oberlin community. In my experience with the Frontier Motel, I don't believe so.

Last fall, I spent two nights at the Frontier and was disappointed with

the condition of the motel. I grew up in western Kansas and always try to spend my money with the local establishments. After spending my second night at the Frontier, I

sadly decided to drive to McCook to search for a motel I can stay in whenever I am in the Oberlin area.

Letter to the Editor

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Garden chores define year

You can divide the year not into months, but times of the garden plot.

Last week, we realized it was Time to Stake the Tomatoes.

That's a distinct celebration, as regular as harvest or the Fourth of July.

It comes on that day in late June when you realize if you don't stake the tomatoes and tie them up, they're going to be ground vines, and the zucchini and cucumbers already are mess enough to deal with.

So I spent a sweaty Wednesday morning driving eight-foot stakes in the garden. Cynthia tore an old sheet into strips — old T-shirts work almost as well, as long as their not red. Any color but red.

We tied foot-tall tomato plants to the stakes, one at a time, gently so as not to bruise any of the tiny fruit.

The next Wednesday, we tied them again, a foot taller. Now we are in the Season of Tying Tomatoes. It lasts four to six weeks, until whenever the tomato vines overtop their stakes. That'll be sooner this year than last, because the stakes are veterans. A lot of them are not quite eight feet anymore, nature, termites, the hammer all having taken their toll.

About that time will come the celebration of The First Tomato, followed closely by The Season of Picking Tomatoes. That runs from late July into October, whenever it freezes.

Somewhere along the line will come the Corn Harvest, which is short but sweet. Corn stalks come out as their ears are eaten, making more room for the squash vines underneath. That's one of the annual rituals.

Cynthia likes to get a lot of garden in a little space, so she plants squash — yellow, spaghetti and cucumber — under the corn and tomatoes. Sometimes this is so efficient you can pick cucumbers right out of the tomato vines. One



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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year, she had huge spaghetti squash hanging from tomato plants and the dog-pen fence.

Running concurrently with all the tomato seasons is Daily Harvest, peas, beans, zucchini, whatever turns up. She takes care of that in the mornings.

It's like magic, almost, watching the garden morph from fresh-tilled soil to the Season of Salad — spinach, lettuce, green onions — to tomatoes and corn and green peppers, which dominate the summer skyline.

Then, one by one, the plants will disappear or die out. The spinach already has bolted and been pulled or eaten. The lettuce is nearly gone. The peas have bloomed their last, but the green beans just keep going.

There are little green tomatoes on all the plants and one big green pepper already. The asparagus has gone

to seed, but it's made some great stir fry with the peas and beans.

Soon enough, the season will change again. After weeks of seemingly endless tomato picking, giving away zucchini and squash and beans, we'll wake up one day to a hint of frost, and it'll be the Day to Pick Tomatoes. Covered and stored in the basement, they'll ripen over a month or two.

After the first frost, it'll be Time to Pull vines, leaving the garden bare except maybe for some fall spinach.

And when that's gone, and the fall leaves mulched and spread on the plot, the Days of Dormant Ground will come, lasting from November to March. Soon enough, it'll be time to till again, plant lettuce and get started again.

And if we do get bored over the long, grey season, well, there's always the seed catalogs.

Motel disappoints man

To the Editor:

I've been coming to Oberlin to hunt during the pheasant season for the past 25 years. The people are wonderful, the hunting great, but accommodations are sub par.

The Frontier Motel, in my opinion, just doesn't measure up to other Kansas communities when it comes to a simple thing like a comfortable, clean room with a hot shower.

I hunt all season near Dodge, Garden, Leoti, Lakin, Colby, Hoxie, Ingalls, Ulysses and Oberlin.

Letter to the Editor

When it comes to dining, they are all comparable. As far as a good motel, Oberlin ranks dead last in my book.

We'll be staying in McCook when we hunt. See you in November.

Jim Vaneek
Greeley, Colo.