

City should evaluate needs of The Gateway

The City of Oberlin has a good chance now to figure out how best to run The Gateway, its beautiful but costly civic center.

The City Council should evaluate the operation and try to figure out why the center has lost so much more money in the last couple of years. This should be done with an eye to easing the burden on taxpayers and electric customers, yes, but also with the goal of making the center more efficient and drawing more events to town.

No one, not even the council members who have objected to The Gateway budget over the years, thinks the city should abandon the center. If anything, it needs better marketing, more support from the council and staff and a better focus on how to make things work.

The city has always believed it needs to run the catering operation at the center, but that generates much of the loss. This is a good time to re-examine that premise. Many area towns with similar facilities — none of which can match The Gateway — rely on private caterers who presumably make money and generate jobs from the business.

It's true that The Gateway has a reputation for good food service, maybe the best in the region, but with the loss expected to hit \$190,000 next year, can the city afford an operation that brings in only about \$53,000 a year?

The council worries that the city's electric fund may not hold out if demand for other services increase, and the city's power grid itself needs work. Even if the city spends the rest of the Bremer bequest to prop up operations, that money will run out in a couple of years.

Many people complain that the city has accumulated too many user-unfriendly rules at The Gateway, perhaps driving off some business. The city once spent a lot of effort trying to bring in events and shows. Competition from new venues, including the new community

and senior center downtown, has drawn off some business, however.

As part of a marketing overhaul, the city can and should review those issues and make the necessary corrections.

The Gateway was seen as an engine of economic growth by visionary leaders who pushed to accept a major gift from an area couple to build the center, but the building and its world have changed in nearly 20 years.

When it was built, the center featured "futuristic" technology, including a room full of computers to connect townspeople with something called "the Internet" and a two-way video communications system billed as state-of-the-art.

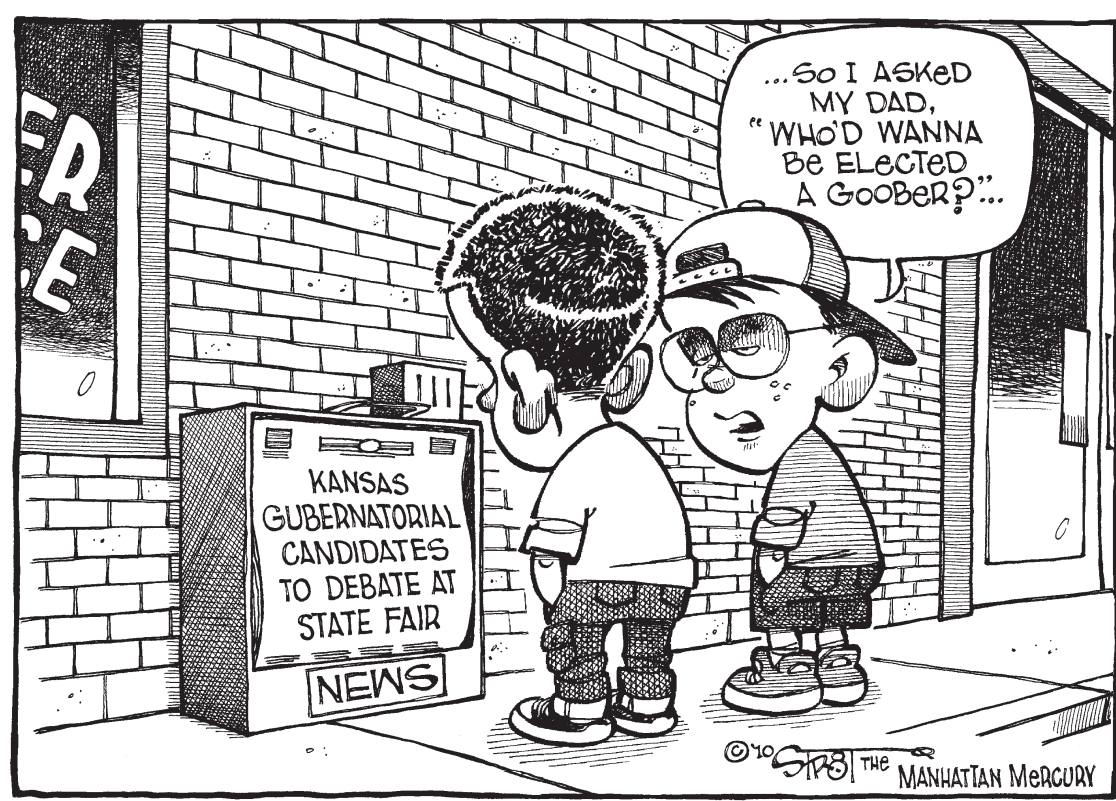
Today, people get to the Internet on inexpensive home computers and, with tiny cameras available for little cost, can do video chats around the world from their kitchens. The Gateway has become home to city offices, but the function of a communications portal has disappeared. Who's to say what else will change?

Now is the time for the city to plan that out, even if only for the next five to 10 years of the center's life. As it has from the start, it should focus on bringing as many events to town as possible. If the center needs a new motel to survive, if it really needs the catering service, if there are other ways to make ends meet, this is the opportunity to get it right.

It may be that we won't all agree on the answers, but everyone needs to have an idea of what the possibilities are. We'd urge the council to gather the best minds and workers available in the town, form a working group and hash this out, then come up with a plan that will both cut losses and increase the return from one of our finest civic assets.

This opportunity is before us, so why not get with it?

— Steve Haynes



Always expect the unexpected

Always expect the unexpected. When we agreed to host a man and his horse who were traveling from Kentucky to California, we never dreamed it would begin a chain of events no one could have predicted.

The man is Don DelMonte, from Lexington, Ky., who has something to say and an opinion on any subject. That's OK. You know right where he stands.

Wishy-washy is not in Don's vocabulary.

The horse is Rico, a beautiful sorrel, 3-year-old Tennessee Walker stallion. Shortly after the two arrived at our home Saturday night, it was obvious Rico wasn't feeling good. By Sunday night, his condition had deteriorated and we called the vet. Dr. White did everything he could, but said surgery would have to be considered if Rico wasn't better by morning. He wasn't.

Jim borrowed a horse trailer from a neighbor and he and Don were on their way to Kansas State University and an operation for Rico.

Jim has never had good luck with horses. While still a young man, two contrary critters, on separate occasions, gave him injuries that plague him today. That's why it surprised me, just a little, his compassion for this ailing horse.

When I told him how proud I was of him for all the care he had demonstrated for Rico, he could only say,



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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"It's the right thing to do."

The preacher's sermon Sunday morning was on hospitality. I'm glad we paid attention. It was preparing us for what was to come.

— ob —

Stop me if you've already heard this one.

A funeral director asked a professional bagpipe player to play at the graveside service for a homeless man. He had no family or friends, so the service was to be at a pauper's cemetery deep in the backwoods.

Not being familiar with the area, and not asking for directions, the bagpipe player got lost. He arrived an hour late and saw that the hearse and funeral director were gone. There were only the diggers and crew left, and they were eating lunch.

The bagpiper felt bad and apologized to the men for being late. He went to the side of the grave and looked down. The vault lid was already in place. Not knowing what else to do, he started to play.

The workers put down their

lunches and gathered around. The bagpiper played his heart and soul out for this man with no friends or family. He played like he had never played before. As he played "Amazing Grace" the workers began to weep; then he began to weep. They all wept together.

When finished, he packed his bagpipes and headed for his car. Though his head hung low, his heart was full.

As he opened the door to his car, he heard one of the workers say, "I ain't never seen nothin' like that before, and I've been puttin' in septic tanks for 20 years."

From the Bible

When I said, "My foot is slipping," your love, O LORD, supported me.

When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought joy to my soul.

Psalm 94:18-19 NIV

Veggiemobile headed west

The veggiemobile headed west last week.

We were starting out on our annual August trip to Creede, Colo., which at elevation 8,800 feet, has a growing season of about six days.

Well, I exaggerate, but I have seen it freeze in July, and by September you can get caught in a snow storm.

This is not the place to grow much besides lettuce and spinach, and even those cool-weather crops have to fight like crazy to make a decent season of it.

So when I leave Kansas in August, I gather as much fresh produce as I can to share with my old friends and neighbors.

I started out with my sister. I called ahead and said that, since I was visiting our mother a week before I was scheduled to leave the state, could she please save me some of whatever was growing in her garden, especially half-ripe tomatoes.

She met me on her doorstep with enough zucchini to make about a dozen loaves of bread. We proceeded to the garden and picked every tomato that was even thinking about turning red. She also sent me off with a cantaloupe and some



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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green peppers.

The cantaloupe didn't make it to Colorado. We ate it for breakfast the next day. But the rest of the stuff did.

Next I hit up friends for cucumbers and yellow tomatoes.

I went out and picked all my yellow squash. For some reason, even though I planted an even number of zucchini and yellow squash plants, only the crook-neck squash made it, but five plants of yellow squash produce is more than enough — especially when I can get my sister to hand over her zucchini or just leave my car unlocked in her yard.

Before we left, I picked green beans, wax beans, corn, broccoli and yellow squash. I also found a couple more cucumbers, a few ready-to-turn tomatoes and a ton of cherry tomatoes.

We were ready to go.

On the trip, we stopped by a fruit stand in La Junta and picked up onions, a couple more cantaloupe and some Colorado peaches.

We rolled into Creede with a dog, two cats and a car-full of food.

The neighbors were ecstatic, especially with the tomatoes, which never taste as good when they come from the store.

As well as giving a bunch away, I've been trying to cook with as much of my fruit and vegetables as possible. In fact, Steve's turning a little green from all this healthy stuff. I think he's ready to head out for a nice, greasy hamburger.

Come to think of it, that doesn't sound too bad to me, either.

Hold the onion, lettuce and tomato, please, I brought my own.

Husband hit with smutty ears

As I walked out onto our brick patio the other day, my wife started throwing ears of corn at me.

Well, maybe she wasn't throwing them at me exactly, but onto the patio, which is really just a concrete slab. We just call it the brick patio, and I don't have time here to explain why.

Anyway, ears of corn were flying as she picked produce for dinner. We've been eating a lot of garden stuff lately — green beans, broccoli, tomatoes, squash and corn — and we love it. The lettuce and spinach, the peas and other early-season foods are gone, but they were good. The zucchini mostly died, but that stuff is easy to get.

Now it's summer, and time for the corn. And I apparently was in the way.

Cynthia shouted at me to get a basket for the dinner corn, then tossed something black and ugly at me. It did not look much like an ear of corn, but it was, or had been at one time.

"Most of this batch has smut," she said.

Oh, dirty corn? Well, in a manner of speaking. It's not reading pornography; it's an infection. Smut is a black-and-grey fungus that infects corn plants, taking over ears and sometimes the male flowers as well.

"Don't complain so much," I said. "In China, you know, they think this



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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is a delicacy.

She just snorted. She barely tolerates domestic mushrooms. In earlier years, she picked them out of soups and sauces, and later she started mincing them so she wouldn't notice. Actually, I kind of liked it when she picked them all out and gave them to me, but tastes changed. She's even begun drinking red wine.

Another ear of smut hit my foot. "You know, I'm allergic to mold," I said.

She just tossed another blackened ear.

I am allergic to mold. Heck, I'm allergic to corn, too, and with all the corn blooming out there this summer, I've been sneezing and sniffing all year. Maybe with the wet weather, we've got a record crop of smut, too.

And if farmers could figure out some way to harvest that, we'd have a new cash crop. (On the menu at Chinese restaurants, corn smut usually appears in English as "fungus." Really.) Oh, and with a little

fungicide, you'd expect farmers don't have as much problem with the stuff as gardeners do.

By the time the corn dries down for harvest, of course, the fungus would be dried up, so maybe that's not a workable plan. Cynthia tossed all her pickings in the sack destined for a bunch of horses in St. Francis, along with the empty stalks, when she was done, so I guess we're not going to have stir fry with fungus any time soon.

The next batch of corn, she said, was in much better shape. Maybe it wasn't raining as much when it pollinated. In all, we got enough corn to give some away, with the hope of a few more ears when we get back from vacation. The smut didn't get enough to cause a real problem.

I managed to duck most of the black ears that came my way. Which brought up the question in my mind, "Is it worse to have smutty corn or a smutty wife?"

I suppose I'll find out.

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The Oberlin Herald wants to emphasize photos of people doing things in the community. If you know of an event or news happening that we should attend, please call 475-2206.

Please be sure to allow a couple of days' notice so we can arrange to be there.

Space in the paper is limited and so is the time of our staff, so we may not be able to get to every event, but we will try.

Because space is so limited, we cannot run team or group photos, any pictures of people lined up or of people passing checks, certificates

and the like. (We will always try to make room for a story about any of these events, however.)

We do run wedding and engagement pictures and "mug" shots with stories and obituaries, when they are provided to us. Please remember that we need a clear, sharp picture. Dark or fuzzy prints will not work.

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