

Postal Service heading down road of no return?

The management of the U.S. Postal Service may have the best of intentions, but we all know where that road leads.

The venerable agency appears headed, if not for outright oblivion, at least to an obscure corner of the economy where it won't bother anybody much. Except those of use who've always depended on it.

The Post Office was not exactly the first of federal agencies; it came before. The founders thought it so important to bind the states together that the postal department predates the Constitution by about a year.

Since 1775, the Post Office and later the Postal Service have built up "universal service," the idea that you could send a letter anywhere in the U.S. for the price of a stamp.

Today, however, even this bedrock idea is in danger. With first-class mail, and the profits it once brought, fading fast, the service seems to believe it can restore its financial health by cutting service and driving even more mail out of the system.

First, the leadership decreed that mail sorting in small towns could be done more inexpensively in larger cities.

Thus, across the country, mail "processing" was moved wholesale from smaller section centers such as Colby and Hays to the next-largest town, Salina in our case.

The service estimated it would save \$139,000 a year by eliminating the equivalent of four jobs in the two smaller towns. All that was part of a plan to save \$1 billion nationwide, out of a projected loss of around \$8 billion this year. Later, however, the service said it had hired 13 people in Salina to replace the four.

At the same time, headquarters decreed a plan to close mail processing plants in all but one or maybe two cities in each state. So those new hires in Salina face a dim future as their work moves to Wichita, along with whatever

processing is left in places like Colby.

In Kansas, mail processing work would be moved from Liberal, Dodge City, Hutchinson, Colby, Hays, Topeka and Salina to Amarillo, Wichita, Kansas City and perhaps even Denver. And these cities are places where mail does not move today. A letter to your next-door neighbor will travel so much, it will take two to three days to deliver.

Is the service about to abandon rural America? Already, 3,700 post office are to be closed, with another 7,000 to be put up for "study." That means closing nearly one-third of all offices, including many in towns you have heard of.

The implication are staggering. It means the end of overnight delivery. Businesses, banks, cities and counties that count on the post office to promptly deliver checks and bills will have to find some other way.

Newspapers won't be able to count on the Postal Service to deliver their product on time, and they'll have to bail out. "Service" will no longer be a part of the agency's product, even if it remains in the name.

Good jobs will leave smaller towns, moving work to big towns where the work ethic is poor and labor problems abound. What business is left will flee the mails, leaving only advertising fliers (what people call junk mail), Christmas cards and the less-profitable end of the package business. Saturday delivery will end, followed perhaps by a shift to every-other-day mail.

How the system will sustain itself, who knows. Once the idea of universal service has been abandoned, Congress will have little incentive to save what is left.

What the founders valued highly, it seems, could become just one more wreck on the Internet highway. We all will suffer the consequences. — Steve Haynes

Lure of a job calls her back

I owe, I owe, it's off to work I go.

When I received the call that the society editor at one of the newspapers I write for had broken her ankle, I didn't hesitate to say I would fill in for a couple of weeks. One day down. No telling how many more.

So far, it's fun. I love being around the people. And to tell the truth, I even enjoy the pressure a little. Perhaps, it's fun because I know it's only for a little while.

-ob-

We were part of planning a fun get-together in our little town. As per usual, I plan; Jim implements.

A group of volunteers wanted to hold a weiner roast. Simple idea, but we knew we couldn't build a fire on the ground in our city park. Nor could we put fire in a container on the asphalt street.

That's where Jim's creative side came in. He took an old one-way disc and welded a tire rim to it, then added three legs. It made the cutest little fire pit. I sprayed it with stove black. He also made several hot-dog sticks using small-diameter pipe and heavy-duty wire.

Anyway, everybody did a little and everyone had a great time. It wasn't a benefit. It wasn't a fundraiser for any worthy cause. It was just plain, simple fun, the best kind.



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
cplotts65@gmail.com

So much fun, in fact, the general consensus is: we need to do it again. And soon.

-ob-

Talk about planning. My daughter Kara called this evening to "run something by me." She said her daughter Taylor came to her saying, "Mom, I have a proposition for you."

That should have been Kara's first clue. Taylor's proposition was to bring a girlfriend along when she comes to visit us next summer. Kara told her it would be up to Grandma.

Well, Grandma is ready. I told Kara I didn't even need to think about it. As long as it was all right with her friend's parents, it was OK with me.

Taylor will be 13 in January, and the time will come soon enough when coming to Grandma's might not be so cool. In too few years, the

lure of summer jobs, camps and friends will compete for her time and attention. So, if bringing a friend will keep her coming I say, "Come on. Bring the neighborhood."

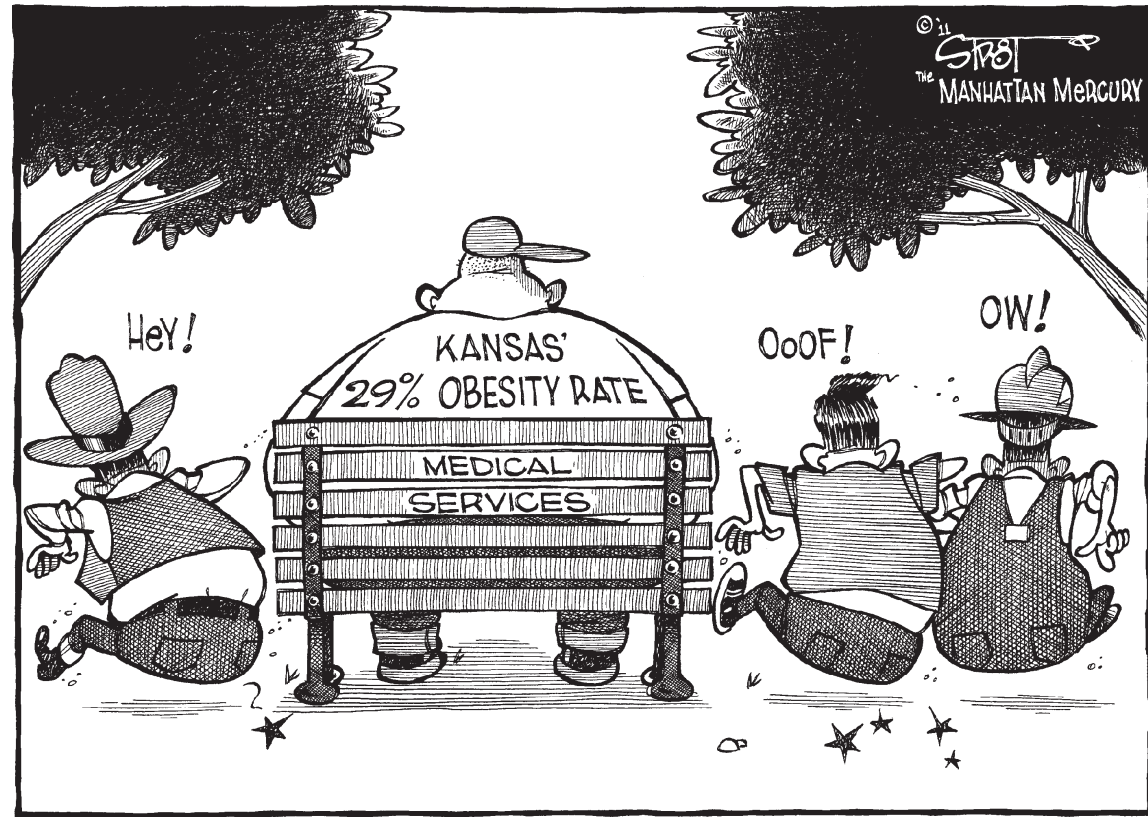
Somehow, when my girls were teenagers we avoided the battles I heard so many of my friends complaining about. Oh, we had drama. I had rules. But not too many.

I loved every minute of having my girls at home. It will be fun have two giggly, girly girls in the house again. Come on summer.

From the Bible

Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves.

—Philippians 2:3



Flowers bless bright fall days

I heard someone say that fall is the time that flowers give way to fruits and vegetables.

Looking around me, I don't see that.

True, my spring flowers — irises, tulips, daffodils and lilacs — are gone, and my summer lilies are about bloomed out, but I still see lots of flowers around.

The mums I bought several years ago to decorate the front porch and later planted next to the sidewalk are starting to bloom, and the neighbors' morning glories are a riot of blue and purple every morning.

But the biggest, most impressive flower around is the sunflower. The fields of cultivated ones are mostly gone, but the wild ones are in their full glory.

I remember being amazed and comforted by the sunflowers when I moved to southern Colorado. I had never lived anywhere but Kansas and, while I had visited Colorado on a few summer vacations, it was mostly uncharted territory.

It was hard to quit a good job, sell our home in Kansas City and move to this new state, where mountains reared out of the prairie and they raised potatoes instead of corn and milo.



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
c.haynes@nwkans.com

But all along the roads, there they were — sunflowers, the welcoming symbol of my home state. They made me feel a whole lot better about this whole move-to-someplace-else-and-run-a-weekly-newspaper thing.

I don't have any sunflowers in my yard this year, but a couple of years ago, the birds planted some at each end of my garden.

It was kind of cool, and I don't know why I didn't pull them as weeds when they were tiny. For whatever reason, we left them to grow. And they grew, and grew and grew into giants that towered over me. Each was topped by a single enormous flower.

Then there is the flower box out in front of my office. While the sweet potato vine has mostly taken over, the petunias as still hanging in there,

blooming their fool heads off. And beside the planter are the two half barrels we put to hold the remnants of the last owner's rose moss. She's gone now, but her flowers still bloom every year, and every time I see them, I remember a wonderful woman.

Yep, my vegetables are doing well. The tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, cabbage, carrots and squash are spreading out all over the garden. My fall lettuce is making salads and I think I'll get some fall peas before the first frost.

But the flowers are definitely not gone, and even after the frost, when the tomatoes vines turn black and the squash is dead, the mums out front will be providing a welcome splash of color to my front lawn.

'Facts' may change in time

The keynote speaker at a conference we were at last week pointed out how fleeting our perceptions of what is can be.

Dr. Lowell Catlett is an economist and dean of the School of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Science at New Mexico State University, Las Cruces — and one heck of a speaker. He combines the cadence of a black Baptist preacher, the folksiness of a Panhandle ranch kid (which he is) and the insight of a keen observer of what is and will be.

When he was in school, he recalled, a scientist declared that the world's known reserves of oil would be used up by 1980.

"And I didn't even have my driver's license yet," he complained.

But every year since 1960, those reserves have risen as drillers find more oil. The Bakken field in South Dakota, stretching to Canada and Montana, is said to be larger than those in Saudi Arabia. Beneath it, too deep to recover today, lies another, still larger pool.

We've been told we depend too much on foreign oil, he said. Today, the U.S. imports about 8 percent of its energy; tomorrow, we could be self-sufficient.

So much for running out of oil, at least in our lifetime.

His point, of course, was that what seems so certain today has a way of changing tomorrow.

We all remember the Population Bomb, and how it was supposed to bring on mass starvation before the millennium. The "best science" of that day did not account for changes in human behavior — having fewer children — or on the magic of modern agriculture — growing more food.

And of course, we all knew the



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
s.haynes@nwkans.com

threat of nuclear annihilation would be with us forever. Just as the Soviet empire would be. Just as the threat of terrorism will be. And global warming.

And, of course, Dr. Catlett said, we've all heard about the the rising cost of medical care and how it will break the nation. That'll never happen, he told us. Why?

Right now, somewhere between 40 and 60 percent of all medical-care expense comes in the last six months of life. Most of it is wasted, doing little to improve either the length or the quality of our final days.

America has changed dramatically in the last century, he said. A hundred years ago, most Americans were born at home and most would die there. Today, we're born in a hospital and most of us will die in one.

But that's not how he sees his life, he said. And he asked the audience, most of us aging Baby Boomers like him, how many of them wanted to spend their last six months in the hospital, enduring needless pain and expense. Few hands went up.

No, he said, the Boomers — and Hospice — will solve the crisis with Medicare and health costs. Government "death panels" won't be needed. Politicians will have to find something else to scare us with.

The way we act, Dr. Catlett said, can be explained by something called Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs; a theory of human behavior that dates back to the 1940s. Abraham Maslow postulated that people respond first to basic needs, such as air, water, food and shelter. For centuries, perhaps, that's all that mattered.

But today, we are well off enough that most Americans can worry about the tip of the needs pyramid, which Dr. Maslow designated as "self-actualization." We worry not about living, but the quality of life.

It's the difference, he said, between eating and organic.

One more story he told: growing up on a west Texas ranch, all he could think of was leaving. When his mother called a few years ago, he told her he did not want the ranch, that she should sell it. It was good for nothing but raising short grass and dust, he thought.

Last year, a fellow speaker at another conference told him he'd been signing up Panhandle ranch land for wind-tower leases, minimum of \$10,000 a year. His neighbors landed 100 towers, he said. \$1 million a year in long-term, triple-net leases.

It just goes to show, he said, you can't assume what is today always will be.

THE OBERLIN HERALD

Serving Oberlin and Decatur County since 1879

USPS 401-600

Office hours: 8:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. Mon.-Fri.

170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749-2243

Phone: (785) 475-2206 Fax (785) 475-2800

Published each Wednesday by Haynes Publishing Co., 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749. Periodicals postage paid at Oberlin, Kan. 67749.

E-mail: oberlin.herald@nwkans.com

Nor'West Newspapers

STAFF

Steve Haynes editor
Kimberly Davis managing editor
Mary Lou Olson society editor
..... proofreader
Carolyn Kelley-Plotts columnist
Joan Betts historian
Cynthia Haynes business manager
Pat Cozad want ads/circulation
Tim Davis advertising representative
..... advertising makeup

Steve and Cynthia Haynes, publishers
Kimberly Davis, assistant publisher

Official newspaper of Oberlin, Jennings, Norcatatur, Dresden and Decatur County. Member of the Kansas Press Association, National Newspaper Association, Colorado Press Association, Nebraska Press Association and Inland Press Association.

Subscriptions: One year, \$38 (tax included) in Decatur, Norton, Rawlins, Sheridan, Thomas and Red Willow counties; \$42 (tax included) elsewhere in Kansas; \$48 elsewhere in the U.S. Foreign subscriptions, \$50-\$250 (in U.S. dollars only) extra per year (except APO/FPO). POSTMASTER: Send change of address to 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749-2243.



Honor Roll

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

Elsewhere: Sherri Shaw, Redwood City, Calif.; Robert Borton, Arvada, Colo.

Kansas: Amy and Clayton Erickson, Tecumseh; Barbara Robertson, Wichita; Dr. Gary Young, Manhattan; Boyd Bainter, Hutchinson; Matt Gawith, Salina; Sheila Marney, Rossville; Lloyd Wentle, Quinter; Mrs. Ron Fikan, Atwood; Lora Arnold, Clayton; Northwest Kansas Groundwater Management District, Colby; James Vahling,

Dresden; Greg Marintzer, Herndon; Rawlins County Sanitation Service, Ludell; Wes DuBois, Norton; John Wessell, Selden; Jean Ann Confer, St. Francis.

Danbury: Ramona Hornkohl, Ron's Applying Service.

McCook: Tom Anderson, Robert Eskew, Howard Mace.

Jennings: Kenneth Carter, Paul Nauer, Mary Carper.

Norcatatur: Dorothy Ward, Larry VanOtterloo.

Oberlin: Vernon Diederich, Ron McPhillips, Paul Corcoran, Brice Meitl, Wilma May, Laurene VanOt-

terloo, Oberlin Elementary School, Oberlin Elementary School Library, County Conservation Office.

Write

The Oberlin Herald encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of public interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

Mail letters to 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan., 67749.