

Going west with mail could be snowy mistake

If the U.S. Postal Service decides to ship our mail to Denver for sorting, sending it back a couple of days later, it'll be a huge mistake for several reasons, but most of all because the service has not taken into account either the weather or where our mail goes.

The service claims it will save a whopping \$14,000 by hauling mail from the Colby postal area to Denver, where it would be routed through massive machines, sorted down to delivery "walk sequence" and sent back out, ready for carriers to take on their routes.

The paltry amount is mostly because our mail is being sorted in Salina already, or most of it. Today, postal workers at each office are supposed to separate the "local" mail, for their town and for the 677 ZIP code area, before sending the rest off.

In-town and area mail is kept here and delivered overnight, according to postal custom. Under the new plan, though, the service wants to send every letter to Denver for sorting. That will cut out the cost of separating the mail, get carriers out of the office an hour or two earlier so they can deliver to more homes and end the traditions of next-day service for letter mail.

There's real money in eventually reducing the number of carriers, of course, but the real driver for this change is the chance for the service to use its expensive sorting machines up to 20 hours a day, rather than five or six.

Today, these machines must be run on the overnight shift, just six or seven hours a night. They start up as trucks bring mail in during the evening and must finish in time for trucks to go out and carriers to get their mail in early

morning. If the service gives up the goal of overnight delivery, though, the machines can run day and night.

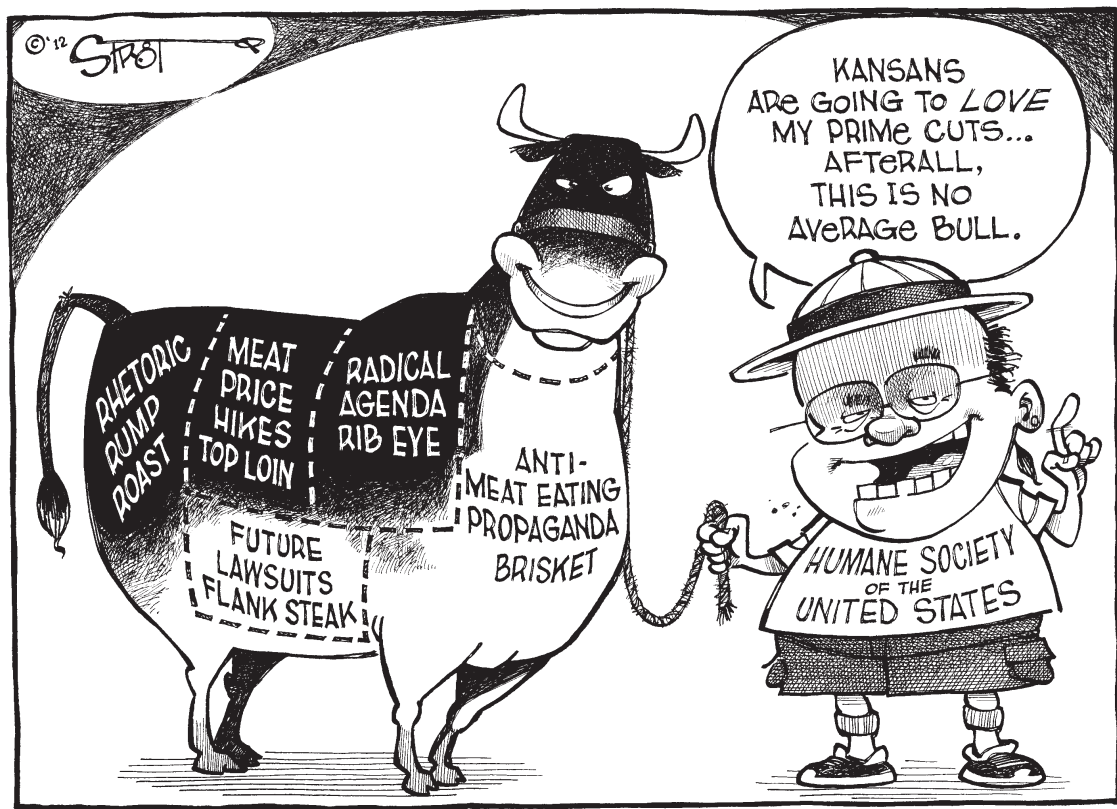
Whether that is a good idea is another thing. Most people who've heard this plan believe the service is shooting itself in the foot by lowering service standards. The loss of business could easily exceed the savings as banks and other businesses flee the mails for internet billing and payment. The Postal Service seems to feel that business will be lost anyway.

Sending in-town mail out for sorting defies logic, though. It's mostly collected in separate bins, so the cost of sorting it shouldn't be much. Nor should the cost of sorting it out to routes. The price in lost goodwill could be much more.

In any event, northwest Kansas mail should not be sent to Denver. If it has to be sorted someplace, send it east to Wichita. It's nearly 50 miles farther, yes, but the weather is much better. Interstate 70 is closed several times each winter west of Goodland — sometimes for days — but rarely east of there.

Add to that the fact that most of us do a lot more business between here and Kansas City than in Denver, and it's easy to see sending the mail east would be more efficient.

We'd rather see the Postal Service re-evaluate this whole scheme, which is now on a six-month hold to give Congress time to help the service avoid bankruptcy. But if something has to be done, let's hope our letters will move east, not out into the howling blizzards of the plains west of here. — *Steve Haynes*



Seed catalogs get early start

They showed up on Dec. 27.

I'm sure they would have come on Dec. 26, but that was a holiday for the post office, so they had to wait a whole 24 hours before announcing that spring is just around the corner.

I'm still trying to figure out which corner spring is just around, since I still have my Christmas tree up and the ground is frozen solid.

Still, there they were — seed catalogs with their siren song of enormous vegetables, gorgeous flowers and tropical fruits you can grow in your own backyard. Of course, your backyard better be in Florida and the size of a football field.

Still, I can't help myself. It's like pornography. You gotta take a little peek. You may be dismayed, horrified, embarrassed and ashamed of yourself, but you gotta check it out.

Ohhhh, pecan trees. My grandmother had pecan trees. They had great foliage and provided wonderful shade. They also had great nuts. Grandma would spend all winter picking out her pecans and send us a couple of bags at Christmas time.

Grandma also lived in central Arkansas.



Open Season

By *Cynthia Haynes*
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Wake up, Cynthia. You live in northwest Kansas. Pecan trees might grow here, but they aren't going to thrive like they do in Arkansas.

OK, asparagus grows here. My sister in Concordia has a great asparagus patch, and this catalog offers five varieties. One of them is even purple.

But wait. I had an asparagus patch. It was 10 years old. Last year, I got three spears. I think I killed it with kindness. My sister ignores hers, which is next to the alley, and it rewards her with enough spears to equip a fair-size army.

OK, maybe not asparagus. What else do they have in here?

Beans. I love green beans. I can grow green beans. I do grow bush beans every year. By the time the

beans quit producing, I'm tired of bending over, and I've run out of recipes for green beans.

Oh, and look, here they have a bean tower:

"Conserve garden space and enjoy delicious pole beans!"

That's what I need. Of course, they're \$29.99 each, and I'd need about a dozen. That sort of raises the cost of the beans from a few cents apiece to a few dollars a batch.

Maybe not.

Let's face it. These seed books are going to be the Sears catalog of the modern bathroom — full of lots of things you can't afford, don't know what to do with and will never experience.

But it's fun to read them, especially in the middle of the winter, and they're free!

Desk move about did her in

When I tried to roll out of bed this morning, I thought I would break. That's how stiff and sore I was. That'll teach me to talk Jim into helping me when I move furniture. I had one last piece to come downstairs and I wanted to work on it while he watched a football game. I promised him a huge snack tray of crackers, cheese, olives and pickles if we could move the desk before he turned the television on.

So up the stairs we went, and down we came with this ultra-heavy desk. Jim took the downside and I took the upside (thinking it would be lighter). Perhaps it was lighter, but it was also the most awkward. It's not a pretty picture, but envision me trying to hold a big desk back from crushing my husband while, at the same time, trying to straddle the end piece and take a step downward.

The desk now is in the living room on a plastic drop sheet receiving two coats of paint, but I ache all over. It's funny. I worked way harder than this for three days in Mexico building a house, but didn't hurt half as bad.

I feel like some hillbilly bootlegger. And it looks like it too. Most Mexican vanilla comes in tall, one-liter bottles that look just like a fifth of whiskey. And the vanilla trade is booming. I've already sold two cases. Don't worry, though. I still have about 30 bottles left. Just call me, and I'll get it to you.

I don't carry them in the vehicle with me anymore. At least not in the wintertime. That's a mistake I won't



Out Back

By *Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts*
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make twice. I had a bottle freeze and burst once. And even though the van smelled good enough to eat, that's a mess I don't want to clean up again.

Jim's ability to slip into our secret language is uncanny. We call it "dislyxese" because we take the first letter (or syllable) from each word and reverse them.

Driving home from church, a pheasant flew across the road in front of us. Without hesitation Jim said, "Rook out looster!"

I thought it was so funny and laughed 'til I cried. OK, maybe you had to have been there.

Speaking of wildlife. One of my Christmas presents this year was a set of "deer whistles" for the car. With all the deer we've hit (or have hit us), plus the raccoon, the kids thought it was a good investment. I think they work, too. When we approach deer on the highway now, their heads jerk up and then they take off.

Anyway, Jim tried to talk our insurance agent into giving us a

discount since we've installed the whistles. I told him to "shoosh." With all our claims, I just pray they don't raise our rates.

Our friend Bob is a cowboy poet. He's a quiet-spoken man, but like E.F. Hutton of old, when he talks you listen.

Bob told us about a conversation he with an acquaintance. The two were talking when the conversation turned to the subject of death and dying.

They were both expressing themselves when his friend said, "You know, no matter how much money you make or how famous you are, when you die, the number of people who come to your funeral is determined by the weather."

From the Bible

The Lord will give strength unto his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace.

— *Psalms 29:11*

Feed yard has helped town

Back in the fall, when it was warmer outside and the snow hadn't fallen, the Decatur County Feed Yard celebrated its 40th anniversary.

Owners Warren and Carol Weibert put on a dinner for customers, suppliers, friends, and especially the original investors who put money into the yard that first year, perhaps more out of a sense civic responsibility than any expectation of profit.

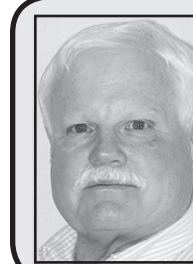
Oberlin has a long history of people supporting economic development efforts. Most came to naught, but the feed yard was the exception.

The bus plant, the boat plant, the dairy, all floundered. Not the feed yard, which was a major effort by any standard.

Oberlin area investors put up \$270,000 and borrowed another \$480,000 from county banks, backed by the U.S. Small Business Administration, to get the yard going. With wise management and good planning, it took off.

Five years later, one of the organizers, Milton Nitsch, a Pontiac-Buick-GMC and implement dealer here, brought out the other investors and brought his daughter and son-in-law in to manage the operation. In the 35 years since, the yard has earned an international reputation far beyond anything you'd expect in a small Kansas town.

Mr. Weibert has been active in state and national beef organizations, and he's earned a reputation as an innovator in the feeding industry. Today, computers track each individual animal through the yard, all the way to the packing plant. Results can be used by customers



Along the Sappa

By *Steve Haynes*
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to improve their breeding.

The yard is one of the most successful in the industry, and certainly the most successful economic development project ever conceived in Oberlin. Forty years later, it provides 17 jobs and generates millions in income, much of it spent on grain grown within 30 miles of the facility.

None of that would have been possible without those original investors, many of whom backed the project with little thought of reward. This time, though, they were paid back, according to news reports at the time, with a 50 percent profit over five years.

At the dinner, Mr. Weibert recognized those investors, a precious few of whom were actually present. Most of us who waved to the crowd were just standing in for parents or predecessors who actually gambled on the project. It's good that they should be remembered.

The Weiberts treated the crowd, and anyone else who wanted to come in after dinner, to a show by Red Steagall, a Texas cowboy poet, songwriter and singer who's a lot of fun to listen to. Red entertained us for some time, but my favorite, I think, was his poem, "Riding for the Brand."

In it, some ranch hands are lis-

tening to an old hand named Jake "schoolin" a young cowboy in the "unwritten law of the range:"

He said, "Son, a man's brand Is his own special mark That says this is mine, leave it alone

You hire out to a man, Ride for his brand and protect it like it was your own."

A lot of Jake's stories were so much hooey, though the listener concludes:

But I got to thinkin' 'Bout what he had said, And the more of it I understand, The more I believe. We'd all be better off If more people would ride for the brand.

After dinner, Mr. Weibert gave out "Riding for the Brand" awards to four long-time employees. But it seems to me that all those investors, the feed yard's workers over the years and the Weiberts themselves have been riding, not just for the brand, but for the whole town.

Do they give an award for that?

Elves feel it's time to slow down

To the Editor: Now is the time to listen, wait and reflect about tomorrow's plans. All the Elfs and Elfkin helpers are slowing down; time to take a nice long rest. Every season serves its purpose in time.

Wise Father Elf gave us a long talk the other day when we assembled together in our Big House in Elfland.

"It is time to repose, collect thoughts and reminiscence about the good deeds, filling needs this past month in Oberlin and surrounding area," he said.

Loving Brother Elf continued: "I am very pleased with all of your hard work, you elfs and elfkin helpers. A new dream and vision has begun in

the hearts of the people in Oberlin and surrounding community. The seed of love has been planted. Now it must rest, so it has time to make deep roots within each heart and mind."

Caring Mother Elf offered more enlightenment: "It takes time, patience, much waiting. The wholesome seed planted into each heart must form slowly.

Growth takes time to correctly fulfill the call, bringing forth the purpose it was planned for. The call of the 'Field of Dreams' takes everyone, however, not everyone

hears, sees the purpose of the vision at the same time."

Our little Elfkin minds were trying to understand, as we listened carefully, but we knew we needed more time to understand as well.

That is why we need to continue to listen to those wiser than ourselves for now, until we grow up more.

So hopefully, everyone in Oberlin will find peace, rest, and joy in this new year of 2012. May we all find what we are called to be as we rest.

Your loving Elf and Elfkin family

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