

## When trouble shows up, people rise to challenge

The blazing prairie fires last week brought out the best the people of this town and this county had to offer.

Don't leave our neighbors out; many of them rushed to help, too, sending fire crews, water and more.

We get so used to tut-tutting the sins and foibles of humanity that we forget that we are, by nature and inclination, a noble breed. Sometimes it takes a disaster to remind us.

We expect volunteer firemen and emergency medical technicians to respond to the call. That's what they signed up for. Same for sheriff's deputies and other public employees.

But watching these men and women work last week, you saw what they were made of. Many were on the job for hours on end, then called back out after whatever rest they got.

The firemen were great; they got ahead of the fast-moving flames and stopped what could have been a far greater loss of property and livestock in a fairly short time. They also saved all five houses brushed by the blaze.

The work was hard, dirty and hot, but not thankless. Citizen after citizen praised their efforts.

But many, many others pitched in. People brought money, water and food to Dollar General, where donations were collected. Volunteers in town made sandwiches, iced water and drinks, took the bounty out to the fire lines and passed it out. Crews were fed and watered in the field and when they returned to the station.

Dozens of farmers filled tanks with water Tuesday and again Saturday and raced out to the fire lines to help supply the many fire rigs

spraying the flames. Others brought tractors pulling disks to make fire lines. Area counties sent fire trucks and tankers, and both Decatur Co-op and Grafel Farms sent their biggest tanks.

The whole thing seemed like a giant machine, oiled and poised to suppress the fires. And that's what happened.

The only sour note we heard at all was the complaint, from some fire crews and from some people living near the blazes, that sightseers blocked some of the roads.

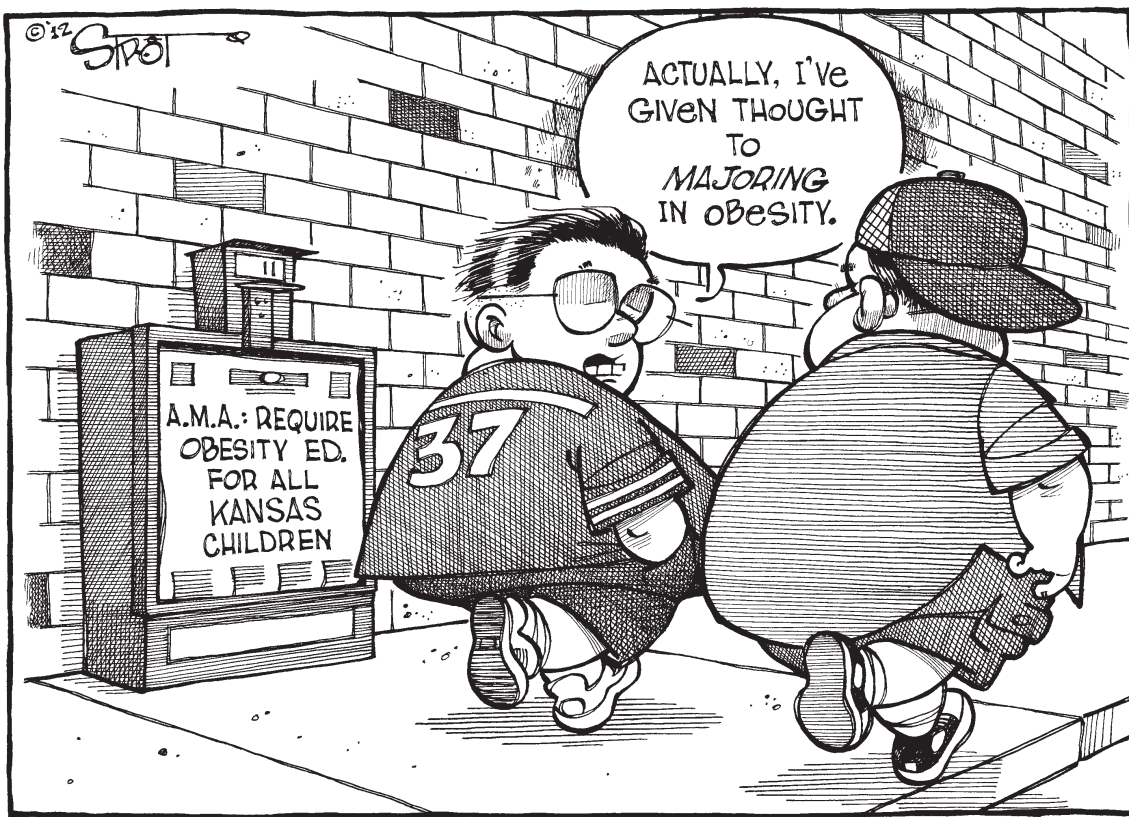
Many of these vehicles may have been driven by volunteers bringing water, but some undoubtedly were just there to see what was going on. No one had time to block off the area or screen the roads, and people do have a right to travel on public highways.

However, we'd suggest that anyone who isn't working a fire or other incident should stay well away. Follow the example of a dozen or so people who, during the big fire Saturday night, parked on U.S. 36, several miles away, and watched the flames and the fire trucks from a safe distance.

No one should drive into a fire zone, or a bad thunderstorm, for that matter. Anyone who does might lose more than respect. You could lose your car, or even your life. You might cause a wreck, or impede emergency operations.

That said, we thought most people behaved marvelously all week. We're proud of our town, our volunteers and our public servants.

Hats off, ladies and gentlemen. Hats off!  
— Steve Haynes



## Doll traveled bunch of miles

He's not really an old Indian. He just looks that way.

He's a kachina, a doll that Pueblo Indians use in ritual dances.

However today, most kachinas are made for the tourist trade.

It was about 11 p.m. the last night of the annual National Newspaper Association convention in Albuquerque last fall when we got the call.

Could we take a kachina home for a friend?

Our friends live in New Jersey, and their son bought the kachina that night, figuring he could somehow get an almost three-foot-high wooden Indian into his suitcase.

That wasn't happening, the family discovered, so maybe their friends from Kansas, who were taking the train home, could help.

Of course we could. We love kachinas.

Our friends planned to drive from New Jersey to Jackson Hole, Wyo., for Christmas and would stop by and pick up the doll. (Yes, they are kinda crazy, but they have the cutest Jersey accents.)

Unfortunately, I realized that I had overbought myself — what with the chili ristras, the books, the big Indian rug, the piñon incense.

I could take the kachina home, but it would really put a strain on our luggage. Still, we had promised, and the kachina had to get back east somehow.



## Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes  
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Then I realized that a set of friends from Colorado hadn't left yet. They were driving. They could take the wooden Indian home with them, and we could meet them later in the fall and pick him up.

This seemed to be the perfect solution, so our wooden friend left his home in New Mexico and headed for Colorado, where he stayed for the next two months.

In the late fall, we were able to get out to Colorado and meet our friends at a restaurant we all like. The transfer was made and the Indian headed for Kansas.

Now we just had to wait for Thanksgiving and hand him over.

At Thanksgiving, however, our friends realized that they would have four teenagers at their home over the holidays. They decided they should probably just stay in New Jersey and guard the silver and the alcohol.

So, sometime after Christmas I decided maybe I should ship the Indian east.

The cost was more than our young friend had paid to start out with, and finding a box to fit a three-foot wooden Indian was tough.

Then, as we were about to head for Washington in March, it hit me. We could stuff him in a large suitcase and take him as checked baggage. Our friends would be in Washington, driving from Jersey, and we could turn our wandering Indian over to them.

This strategy worked. We rode coach and the Indian rode baggage. In D.C., we turned him over to his rightful owner, who took him home to New Jersey on the train still in his suitcase.

We got a photo of our well-traveled wooden friend as he rode with his owner back to college in New York. He was buckled into his own seat belt and looking as if he was having a fine time. And why not? He'd enjoyed traveling across the country by car, plane and train.

He's seen more of the country than a lot of my friends.

## Berry season's almost gone

My husband came in bearing gifts. It was a pitiful offering, though.

It was terribly quiet in the house this morning, and I wondered where he was. That's when he came in holding a small, plastic bucket with about one cup of semi-ripe mulberries. Our mulberry tree is a big producer, but if you don't get sheets on the ground at exactly the right time, the fruit is lost to the wind — or the birds.

I even have sheets to use for that purpose only. They are laundered each year and stored in a box marked, "sheets for mulberries." Of course, they look like I've tie-dyed them with a box of purple coloring, but I'm not about to waste a new set of sheets on an occasion that only happens once a year.

This year, the wind was our enemy. Ripe berries would be blown off the branches before we had a chance.

Which explains Jim's desperation attempt to pick them. He loves this cherry-mulberry pie and is determined I will bake one this year. So I will take his sad little drab of mulberries and bake him a pie.

Yes, I still bake, even in this heat. But I do it early in the morning or late at night. I hope everyone is doing what they can to conserve energy, but in this kind of oppressive heat, it's enough to just stay comfortable, let alone cool.



## Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts  
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I'm going to start hanging clothes out to dry. With this heat and wind, the ones hung first will be dry before the last ones even get on the line. It's like a dryer on steroids.

A report from National Weather Service data said this part of Kansas was the hottest spot in the U.S. last week. It's said we hit 118 degrees one day and 115 degrees the next. It's the kind of heat that takes your breath away. At least it's a dry heat. I'll take western Kansas heat over Texas heat any day.

My friend Norma sent me a cute e-mail with, perhaps, some truth in it.

The message, supposedly written by an elderly person, said that instead of going to a nursing home they would just check into the local motel.

It quoted nursing homes as charging about \$188 a day as compared to a motel, where with your senior discount based on double occupancy, you could get a room for \$59.65

a day. Included with that is cable television, free Internet, a mint on your pillow, a continental breakfast, shampoo and conditioner, room service and employees that treat you like a guest and not a patient.

Think of it. No household chores. Call room service to change a light bulb or the sheets. Maybe you want a change of scenery? With all the money you've saved, you can call a shuttle to take you to the airport and catch a flight to Hawaii. They have motels there, too.

Your kids are guaranteed to come see you because you'd have a spa and a pool.

It's really not such a far-fetched idea for those who don't want a big house to care for but don't need nursing care, either.

Norma's e-mail had this little blurb at the end: "Life is like a hot bath. The longer you stay in it, the more wrinkled you get."

## Fire was a fickle destroyer

The fire that ripped through northwest Decatur County on Tuesday was as capricious as it was quick.

Flames raced on the wind, in some places splitting to go around a homestead.

There was no stopping the fire, at least not at first, driven by 35-mph winds out of the southwest. Firemen were lucky to save the five farm homes in its path, though most of those lost all or part of their windbreaks, plus some outbuildings.

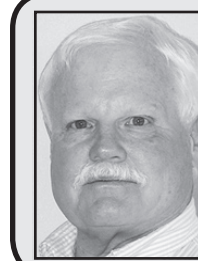
The historic barn at the Art May homestead made a spectacular scene as it went up, to be sure, but a similar barn to the west — abandoned and unused, its boards dry and weathered — remained untouched. The fire didn't quite get that far.

One tongue of flames raced up a grassy draw to the northwest, stopping across the road from the site of the old St. John's Lutheran Church. That piece of the fire was moving crosswind, and it apparently didn't have enough push to breach the road.

Had it made it, the trailers, tall grass and old cedar trees on the former church lot would have fueled quite a bonfire. Safe on the corner were the belfry and bell from the old Methodist church in Traer, still on the lot after many years. The church cemetery on the west side, well tended to this day, was spared as well.

Without a quick response from fire fighters, some of the homes undoubtedly would have been lost. As it was, flames consumed the shelter belts around the homesteads, all or in part, but the main fire raced on. Firemen were able to stop and protect the houses while other crews finally got ahead of the blaze.

Wind-driven fires can go for miles unless someone gets ahead of them. Had the wind been any worse, who knows if the fire lines along the



## Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes  
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roads would have held?

It was no surprise that the fire moved quickly through dry grass and wheat stubble. Many were surprised at the speed at which it ripped through a quarter of green corn, even in this budding drought.

Maybe we shouldn't have been. A cursory examination showed that the corn plants did not burn. They were brittle, damaged but looked to be more melted or cooked than burned. There was no sign of fire damage.

Last year's wheat stubble, left on the field for ecofallow residue had, like most stubble in open fields, been reduced to ash. The flames apparently raced through the field under the corn, cooking and probably killing the green plants.

This is not to say green corn won't burn. When it's hot enough, anything will burn.

But this fire was moving too fast to burn green, growing plants.

Grass that looked green in the ditches sometimes was a different story, however. Flames fairly jumped through the mixture of old, dry grass and new green leaves, leaving only ashes behind. It's debatable whether the green stuff even slowed the blaze.

Saturday night, dry lightning left four or more blazes scattered around the county. One at Sappa Park gave a graphic example of the power of lightning.

The bolt, a big one by the sound

of it, struck a green cottonwood at the campsite of the Black Powder club. The electricity cooked the green tree, and the trunk exploded, showering the area with chunks of green wood.

The green wood didn't catch fire, but dry stuff at the base of the tree apparently did. The flames spread from there, but Norcat firemen efficiently snuffed the flames.

The Norcat crew had been passing the park when the call came in, and could see the smoke. They asked if they should come on to the bigger blaze out west, and that drew a memorable quote from Chief Bill Cathcart:

"If you find one," he said, "put it out."

## From the Bible

And he said unto me, "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, in persecutions, in necessities, in reproaches, in infirmities, in persecutions, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.  
II Corinthians 12: 9-10

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