

Commissioner owed vote of thanks for service

In politics, the retirement plan isn't always a government pension and a lifetime of free health care.

Sometimes, a devoted public servant can cruise along for years, working for the people for two or three or four decades, then bam, one year the voters just seem to decide "it's time for a change."

It's often nothing the official has done, or failed to do. Nothing wrong. Nothing specific. Just a feeling, often unspoken, that enough is enough. That someone else should have a crack at the job. It's not unheard of.

In our estimate, that's what happened to County Commissioner Ralph Unger in the Republican primary earlier this month. There was no grumbling or complaints before hand. People just walked into the booth and marked the other circle.

A 40-year career was over, just like that. It's not pretty, nor is it fair. We'd guess if you asked a few voters, they wouldn't say anything bad about the incumbent. It just sort of happens.

Why people get to thinking that way, so many of them, all of the sudden, is hard to say. Maybe some political scientist has studied the phenomenon. We just know it happens, and when it does, it's usually a surprise.

The campaign had not been all that heated, and neither candidate has anything bad to say about his opponent. No drive for "a change," the code words for "he's had his turn."

The county will be well served by Sid Metcalf, a retired farmer and businessman who should make a good commissioner. In time, we hope, Mr. Unger will offer the benefit of

his 40 years in office and the things he has learned, not just to Mr. Metcalf, but to all the commissioners.

This we do know: Getting the boot after 40 years of faithful service is no way to retire. This county owes Ralph Unger a deep and extended round of applause for his years of service. Sure, he enjoyed it — most of the time — and he learned a lot, made a lot of friends. But if you think being in the spotlight is great fun, try it sometime.

There are things about public service he won't miss, like late-night phone calls and people stopping him in the grocery or on the street to complain about the roads.

It'd be easy to say, and true, that a good card player knows when to fold 'em. Not so easy when you don't see the train coming, though. And to be fair, Mr. Unger hadn't had much opposition lately. There was no reason to think this year would be any different than the last 10 elections.

But enough of the instant analysis. When you see Mr. Unger in a store or downtown, do talk to him. Take time to say how much you appreciate what he's done for this county and for the state. He'll shuffle and say something like, "Aw, shucks. It was nothing."

It wasn't. It was hard work, coupled with a few tears, some sweat and some good judgment, and always the thought of what was best for the county, whether everyone agreed or not.

This is not the way anyone should go out after so many years, but the voters have spoken. Now we get the last word.

"Thanks, Ralph." — Steve Haynes

Keep learning to stay young

All the articles on aging that I read say you should try to keep learning. Keep your mind and body active so that neither realizes it's getting old and they won't stagnate.

I remember that after my mother retired, she spent hours and hours every day doing crossword puzzles and fancy work like crocheting and cross stitch. It was only after her strokes that she gave up trying to do these things and refused to go to physical therapy.

She never walked again and, although her mind was clear, I could see her slipping a little more each time I visited.

I'm sure it's the old "use it or lose it" adage at work. So far, I've been able to keep my mind busy, and I'm trying to learn new things. But, like learning to walk again after a stroke, it's not always easy.

My latest foray into the unknown is the purchase of an iPhone.

I've had an Android "smart" phone for a couple of years, but we've never gotten along. Frankly, I've had a hard time just dialing phone numbers. The tiny virtual keypad and I didn't get along. I would try to hit the 7 and the phone would come up with a 4. I'd try to hit a S and a W would appear. It was not a happy relationship.

My daughters said I needed an iPhone. It would be a better fit. We were made for each other.

However, my contract with the cell company was for two years. And after my last relationship with a "smart phone," I wasn't sure it



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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wouldn't be just another two-year long blind date.

But when the time came, I got the iPhone, and I have been learning how to use it ever since. I've even gotten some apps for it after oldest daughter helped me set up an account with iTunes. I'm still not texting, but when I dial someone, the right numbers show up on the screen, and I'm learning how to put in "Favorites" and "Contacts."

I've got several games on my new phone, but haven't learned to play any of them yet. I'm not a big game player, but do want to learn how to run Angry Birds and maybe some sort of Scrabble game. I like to throw things, and I've got a pretty good vocabulary.

I was feeling pretty good about my newfound expertise with a telephone when a friend, who is about five years younger than I, burst my bubble.

I hadn't seen her in several years and asked if she was still running marathons.

She said that she had decided that she needed a new challenge, so she had decided to enter a triathlon.

He husband thought it was a great idea, but reminded her that that meant running, biking and swimming. She was born and reared in a town without a pool. She was almost 60 and couldn't swim a stroke.

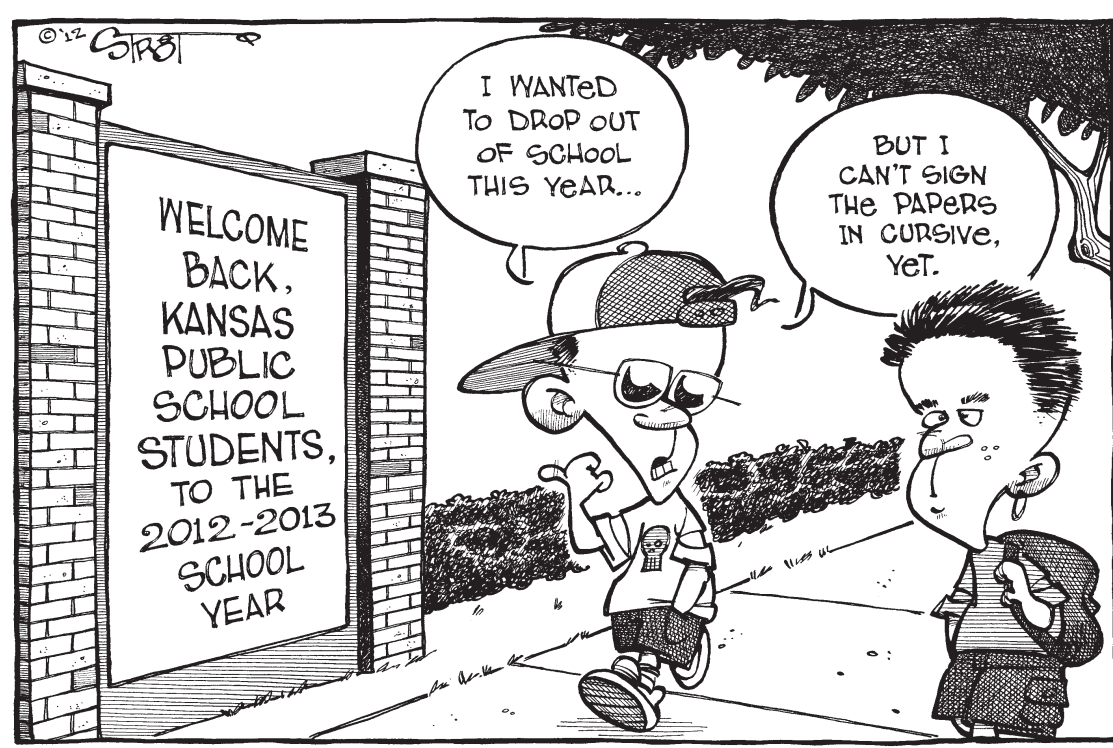
So, she said, she's taking lessons. It's kinda tough, since all the other students are about 50 years younger, but she is determined to learn.

There, I thought, goes a woman who will never grow old.

From the Bible

See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.

— Ephesians 5:15-19



Cool-down brings winter fear

What's up with this weather?

Don't get me wrong. I'm not complaining, but it's a little scary. If it's this cool in August, what will December, January and February be like? If winter is as severe as the summer was, we could be in for a long haul.

Right now, though, I'll take it. I've had the house opened wide up for at least a week. At night we sleep with the balcony door open. My poor husband thinks he's freezing and has actually added a blanket to his side of the bed.

My flower beds look sort of sad. The heat took its toll and everything is droopy — even after watering. The garden is all but gone. The tomato plants died. A friend said it was spider mites.

I need to salvage what few tomatoes are left, but it sure isn't the bumper crop I thought I would have. Considering all the water I poured on them, I'm not getting my money's worth.

-ob-

School has started again, and mothers all across the Midwest heaved a collective sigh of relief. Not because they have their days to themselves again, but because they can establish a routine again. It seems like during the summer, kids get their days and nights mixed up. If they're not farm kids with morning chores to do, they tend to stay up too late at night, then sleep too late



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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in the morning.

I shouldn't limit this to farm kids. City kids can have chores, too. In fact, all kids should have some chores. You can call them what you want: jobs or responsibilities, but everyone needs something to do. It actually makes them feel like they have some importance in the family.

Oh, they will whine, procrastinate and do a job sloppily, but deep down, it gives kids a sense of accomplishment. And, if they know their folks are depending on them, they begin to develop a sense of self worth. Kids are capable of lots more than their folks give them credit for — it just needs to be drawn out of them.

-ob-

Jim and I share the office. He has his computer and desk — I have mine. With Jim's big, gnarly fingers, he has a hard time typing, so he bought himself something called "Dragon." He speaks into a headpiece microphone, and it types exactly what he says. Great, except I can't always

tell when he's writing a letter or talking to me.

Just now, he said something and I answered him, only to learn he was dictating a letter. He needs to give me some warning.

-ob-

Doesn't seem possible, but we are trying to organize a team for our fall Mexico mission trip. A solid core of seven have committed and we could build a small house with that number. However, our goal is to build a larger house, and we really need 15.

I will just unabashedly say, "If you ever wanted to do something like this — now is your opportunity." Call me at home or write me at the above e-mail address. This will be our fifth trip to Acuña, a sister city across the border from Del Rio, Texas. It's the safest border town in Mexico, and we love it. Never once have we ever felt a moment's fear.

So, come on. Join us. Step out of your comfort zone just a little. It's the hardest work you'll ever love.

Fair too short and just right

The last corn dog has been eaten, the last funnel cake bought, the last porkburgers slathered with mustard and sauerkraut.

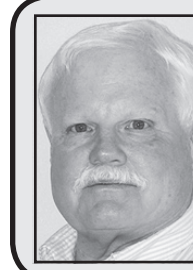
The seats from the Ferris wheel have been put away for the winter, the train parked in its tunnel and the swings brought down and put away in the storage containers.

The 4-H animals have either gone home or off to auction, the exhibits are judged and gone, the money counted and the tickets put away.

The 2012 Decatur County Fair has trundled off to history, its week, as always, altogether too short. Around the county, housewives have begun cooking at home again and people are trying to figure out how to get rid of the five pounds they put on after the cake sale, the funnel cakes and the other fair food. At least until Thanksgiving.

Not that we could stand a two-week fair. The volunteers tend to be plumb tuckered out by the end of a single week, especially the Amusement Authority and Fair Board members, Extension agents and the volunteers who work either every night, or almost every night.

Give us another week of fair, and it might get pretty difficult to staff the Sinko game, the ring toss and the big slide, let alone the Ferris wheel and the Tilt-a-Whirl. The cooks might revolt at the porkburger stand, and how would anyone be able to come up with cars for another



Along the Sappa

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Demolition Derby?

Admitting that a week might be all we can stand, though, the fair and carnival make the first week of August one of the best, maybe the best, of the year. Holidays are nice, of course, especially when you can take two or three days off. Other events entertain and please; I'm thinking here of Mini Sapa and Mini-Sappa, Thanksgiving and Christmas and the days in between, the Fourth of July, at least when harvest is over, and a few others.

But fair, oh fair; fair is our favorite week. It's so different from fairs in big towns, which feature many of the same elements, but not the same atmosphere. There's no way to describe a small-town fair and carnival other than family: family fun, family learning, family togetherness.

But the week is great, even if your kids are grown and the grandkids not yet on the scene, or old enough to enjoy the fair. You can run a ride or a game or a booth, and have all the fun you need watching other

people's kids.

Just show up at the fair and talk with everyone you know and haven't seen for weeks or months, or who's visiting home from Colorado, or who's just snuck in with a grandson from McCook to run around and enjoy the little fair where no one worries about their kids getting into trouble or into harm's way.

We've learned not to book much of anything for fair week because there's so much to do. It's a holiday from the kitchen and from ordinary work, though there's plenty of work for us at the fair. If we're not working the fair, we take pictures. We track down, or bump into, old friends.

And there's always another shift you can volunteer for, and time to ride the train and maybe one last chance for some fair food.

And then it's over, not soon enough, but all too soon. The fair-ground is quiet, the colorful rides disappear, slumbering for the next 51 weeks.

We'll be ready.

Support sought in search for doctor

To the Editor:

The Doctor Procurement Committee needs all of the community's help to find a doctor. This will support our hospital and health-care workers. We don't want to leave town for health care.

To give financial support, please send your donations to: Doctor Procurement Committee, in care of the Decatur County Hospital, 810 W. Columbia, Oberlin, Kan., 67749.

Dewaine Stapp, Oberlin

Alumni challenged

To the Editor:

An open challenge to Decatur Community High alumni:

I am an Oberlin alumnus, Class of '64, and have recently returned to Oberlin. During my years away,

Letter to the Editor

while serving in the Navy and after my retirement, I followed Red Devils sporting and other school events in *The Oberlin Herald* and on the Oberlin School District website.

Since my return, I have gone to many sports and music events. This last winter, I was surprised when I heard that there was no send-off for the wrestling squad when it left for the state tournament. I then made it a personal goal to help to change that, and not just for wrestling.

Subsequently, a Decatur Community High Booster Club was formed and is still in the growing stage. We sponsored a send off for the track team on its departure for the regional and state tournaments, ran the concession stand at the Northwest Kansas League track meet and

regional music festival, and staged the "Macho Nacho Challenge" at the Decatur County Fair.

We have many other events planned to support all high school and junior high events, not just athletics. Music and academics have a history of being at the "Top of the Class" at Decatur Community High and will be equally supported. We hope that more alumni and community members will join us to support our youth.

My challenge to all alumni who are still feeling the "Red Devils" spirit is to join us. This does not just mean just parents and grandparents of current students. The youth of this community need all of our support. Remember they are our future.

Go Big Red!

John R. Sater, Oberlin

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