

Town needs to unite, get on with building pool

Mayor Rob McFee's principled stand against signing anything to do with the Oberlin pool could wind up costing city taxpayers a lot of money.

While the mayor has every right to refuse his signature on anything the City Council passes, while we're sure the mayor means well, while the mayor could even be right — we think he's made his point.

Further delay to the pool, approved by voters in a 2-1 landslide last fall, is unfair to the town's young families and could be costly. There has to be a better way.

The council has agreed, following advice of its bond lawyers, to finance the pool through bonds issued by a public building commission. That keeps the \$2 million-plus debt outside the city's statutory borrowing limit.

The mayor calls that a "criminal work-around" and refuses to have any part in it. Since the voters also provided for a way to pay the bonds with a 1.5-cent sales tax, however, the whole thing is a closed loop. It *should* be outside the bonding limit.

Nor is it "criminal." It's allowed under a law passed by the same Legislature that created the bond limit. It's legal, proper and in this

case, sensible.

The firm that designed the pool warns that prices for the \$2.1 million project could rise 3 to 4 percent a year, meaning that each year's delay could cost taxpayers \$63,000 to \$84,000, even more. (Earlier estimates had been 10 to 20 percent, then 5 to 10 percent.)

And that is a big price to pay.

Others in town cling to their opposition. Their arguments are logical, but the voters didn't buy them. Still, they persist. It's like there never was a vote to settle the issue.

The pool backers won fair and square. A big majority of the people in Oberlin want a new pool. And the time to delay is past.

We're not asking anyone to change their mind or abandon their principles. Just sit down and let the majority rule. If he can't sign documents for the pool, thereby creating a two-week delay every time something comes up, the mayor ought to step aside temporarily and let the council president sign instead.

The rest should find another fight to pick and let the town unify behind the pool. The issue is settled. You lost. Let it go, before it costs all of us extra money we shouldn't have to spend. — *Steve Haynes*

Booster wants us to try again

It's not that Jay Anderson always spreads doom and gloom. Just that he's worried about the future of our town.

"If we don't do something soon, then our town is dead," he said in a couple of presentations this month. "We're almost at Armageddon."

"Norton this spring was way ahead of us. If action isn't taken, Oberlin may have gone too far to recover."

Dr. Anderson, a retired veterinarian and a long-time civic booster, former city councilman and economic-development gadfly, is a veteran of years of battles in the development wars. He's been through projects here including the dairy, bus and boat plants, all of which failed, to the feed yard north of town, a spectacular success.

Just what is wrong with Oberlin?

A lot, if you listen to Dr. Anderson: We may wind up alone among area towns without fiber-optic high-speed Internet; we suffer from a loss of our best and brightest youth, a brain drain, if you will, to colleges and ultimately the cities, that leaves the town, increasingly, as an "old-age ghetto." And that has left us with empty homes and business buildings, deteriorating facilities, isolated from the growing urban population, our schools no longer large enough to field a standard football team. (In that, we are not alone, but it's small comfort.)

What Oberlin needs, he says, is an extensive economic development effort, a new and novel effort for tracking down leads and prospects. Our alumni — those of the best and brightest who went elsewhere — may be a great source of leads, he said, as could any interested citizen.

He recalled a couple of years ago attending meetings of something called the Rocky Venture Club, a

group in the Denver area that seeks to bring together investors and people with business ideas. The recession shut down that market, he said, but it'll come back. The schools here drew interest from people who looked at Oberlin, though.

Oberlin has tried a lot of things for economic development, he noted, but, "Our failure rate is more than some towns have ever tried."

But something more is needed, he said, a concerted effort to recruit businesses to come here and invest in our town. Leads are available from all around, including the state Department of Commerce and commercial sources.

"If you do the nationwide thing," he said, "you might pick the 'broken' state, Michigan or even New York."

"With the income-tax situation (as the state moved toward eliminating its income tax), there's a lot of interest in Nebraska in moving (businesses) down here."

Opportunities might include dairies, swine production, vegetable production and processing, other things based on our agricultural foundation.

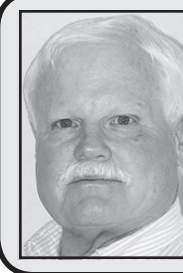
"We could have 30,000 hogs in here tomorrow," Dr. Anderson said, adding that he didn't want to give too many details because "when ever Oberlin does something, Colby always profits."

The town has a lot to like, he says: it's in the center of Plains history,

and has the museum, the home-owned carnival, the speedway, downtown attractions including the LandMark Inn and many antique stores. In Europe, interest is great in Plains Indian heritage, and many fierce battles were fought in this area.

But first, we have to sell the area and create some jobs. A minimal program, he said, would take \$8,000 to start and need a lot of volunteers to make calls, contact companies and follow up.

The alternative, he says, is not pretty.



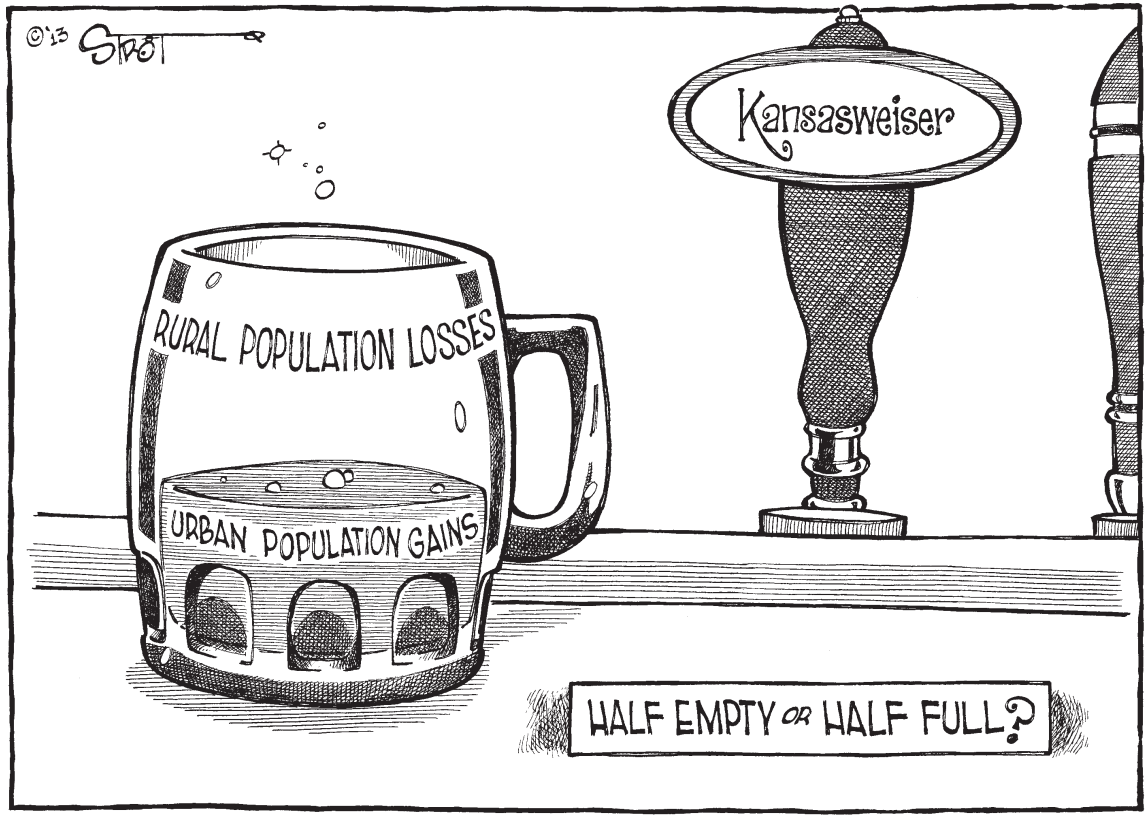
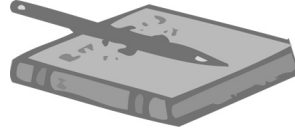
Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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From the Bible

And Jesus answered them saying, "The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal."

— John 12: 23-25



Guatemala pretty, friendly

After a week in Guatemala, I can say this is the most beautiful place I have seen. It also has some of the worst poverty in the world. But, like Mexico, the people are kind, generous with what little they have and grateful for our presence.

The Casas por Cristo team we worked with was from Monticello, Ill.: a retired police chief; his wife, a retired first grade teacher; their daughter; a school district employee; a commodities trader; a computer guy; a single mom working on a college degree; and five high school students.

It's amazing how, in one short week, you can really bond with people. Working and sweating side by side kind of puts everyone on the same level. Add in sharing meals, bathrooms and space in the truck, and you understand how close everyone can become.

The family we built for, Marvin and Erma, had lost their first child but are expecting their second. Marvin worked with our team every day. The day we finished the house,



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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the family invited the entire team to have lunch. We knew the meal probably cost them a week's wages and eagerly accepted.

What a feast it was: Chicken, rice, potatoes, tomatoes and, of course, homemade tortillas. Jim discovered something new — lime juice on raw tomatoes. The meal was preceded by the mandatory firecrackers. It seems Guatemalans really like their fireworks and use every opportunity to set them off.

No matter how many house dedications I am involved with, each and every one is special. Many tears are shed as we present the keys and a Bible to the new homeowners. We

look forward to seeing Marvin and Erma and their new baby again.

So, here we are, in San Raimundo, spending the night with a young couple who live here full-time. They have a lovely Spanish-style house outfitted with all the modern conveniences and genuine hospitality.

They are gone to the airport right now, picking up another volunteer, a woman we know from Canada, who will be working with another group next week.

By this time next week, we will have another house built and be back in the U.S.A. As much as I love doing this, there really is no place like home.

New 'toy' just gathers dust

It took me six months to get my iPad.

You wouldn't think that it would be that difficult. I should be a pretty important person in the business. I'm an owner and chief financial officer and that doesn't mean squat around here when it's time to hand out new equipment.

What does make a difference is what you do with the equipment. Ad and page makeups people get the best stuff. Reporters are next, although they usually point out that they make up most of the pages and get a better spot in the line for goodies.

Then there are the correspondents, bookkeepers, ad salesman and press-room supervisors. They get what works its way down because, while they need computers, they don't need the biggest or the fastest.

But an iPad was not in the equipment list — MacBook Pros, bigger and better screens, scanners and miscellaneous things for the press were.

Still, I travel a lot, and I figured that I could use the iPad instead of my laptop much of the time and it would be so much easier to take through airports.

Whine, whine, whine. Huff, huff, puff, puff, puff. And more whining to both Steve and Evan, the tech guy.

For about six months, there were a lot of smiles, pats on the head and raised eyebrows, but no iPad.

Finally, I think they got tired



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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of listening to me and decided to grease the squeaky wheel. Or maybe Evan just found a good deal on an iPad.

Whichever, I got it. And then I went online and found a great case and keyboard for it. There it was, my baby fully outfitted with a Kensington KeyFolio Pro 2 removable keyboard, case and stand.

I was in business. I got busy setting it up, and was surprised to find out that it was more like a phone than a computer. It had a touch screen which worked as well as the keyboard and could take pictures if you didn't mind holding it up at an odd angle and looking pretty dorky.

I got it set up for my e-mail. I put apps on it. I get a couple of books on how to get the most out of your new baby iPad.

Then I went back to my normal life and the baby sat there on the table day after day after day. Sometimes I would take it in my bag when I went somewhere, but I didn't get it out. I didn't take any pictures with it, check my e-mail on it, surf the web or even try to write a story on

it. I just admired it and worked on my laptop.

This went on for about four months, then it was time to go on vacation. I took my laptop, my camera and my iPad. This was the opportunity to use the baby and prove to myself that I needed this piece of equipment.

We spent a wonderful week with our friends Merle and Mary. Merle spent time on his laptop. Steve spent time on his laptop. Mary took pictures, surfed the web, shared stories and laughs with friends on her little handheld device. I worked on my laptop, and didn't open the baby.

On my return, I made a difficult decision. I handed my baby — complete with fancy case and keyboard — back to Evan. If I wasn't going to use it, I was sure that someone else in the company would.

It was a hard decision, but my baby needed a home where it would be loved and used. Now Evan says that if I'll just give him the cords that go with it, he'll find it a new home. Boy, he wants everything. Whine, whine, whine.

Ag Week points out role of farmers

To the Editor:

You, I and 153 other people ate today because of one American farmer. That's an increase of 800 percent over the past 73 years; in 1940, each farmer produced enough food to feed just 19 people.

We recognized our farmers and all they do to make our lives better during Agriculture Week, March 17-23. Farmers not only produce food, fiber and fuel, they contribute to a strong economy. The total impact of agriculture and agribusinesses account for 20 percent of the state's economy, according to Kansas Inc.

The role of farmers will become even more critical with the exploding world population. We reached 7 billion people in 2011. The United Nations forecasts that world population will reach 9 billion by 2050 — and that our farmers will have to produce 70 percent more food than they do today.

Agriculture is this nation's No. 1 export and vitally important in sustaining a healthy economy.

Letter to the Editor

And it's not just the farmer who makes our food possible. The entire agriculture industry, all the way to the grocery store, are vital links in a chain that brings food to every citizen — and millions of people abroad.

Farms of every size are important today, regardless of whether they are feeding just their families or the world. Here's an interesting fact from U.S. Department of Agriculture numbers released on Feb. 19: 25 percent of American farms have an average of 55 acres and sales of less than \$2,500.

Agriculture Week is a good time to reflect — and be grateful for — American agriculture and remind ourselves that agriculture is a part of all of us.

Be part of America's agriculture, if even just for one day. Take a drive in the country with your family. There's no prettier green than

winter wheat fields waking from cold-weather dormancy. And wave if you see a farmer. I guarantee they'll wave back.

Happy Agriculture Week!
Lesley Schmidt, Park City
second vice president
Kansas Agri-Women

In the U.S.A.

"Let us all take more responsibility, not only for ourselves and our families, but for our communities and our country."

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Third youngest president

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