

Fiery crash shows threat

The tragic rail accident, explosion and fire in Canada last week gives us a glimpse of just how much danger passes through our towns every day.

The disaster in Lac-Megantic, Quebec, wiped out the historic downtown district, killing up to 50 people, some of whom have not yet been recovered. It happened when a 72-car train loaded with crude oil broke loose and ran downhill until it derailed on a curve in Lac-Megantic.

The ensuing fire and explosions were horrific, but the incident is far from isolated. Similar trains of oil, alcohol, dry fertilizer and random hazardous materials criss-cross our area, and the entire continent, each week. Oil is being loaded here and moved through each county.

Other shipments involve one or a few cars of chemicals, or single trucks moving on the highways. Nearly every town is visited, usually without notice. Until something goes wrong.

In Canada, the head of the railroad first blamed fire fighters who had put out a small blaze in one of the train's engines earlier that night. Before they left, they shut the engine down. A few days after the accident, someone asked whether the train's hand brakes had been set.

The answer was uncertain. The engineer and

conductor should have set hand brakes on the engines and up to 11 cars, but no one could say if that had been done. If it was not, then after the engines were shut down, it was only a matter of time before the train's air brakes failed — and it rolled away.

It's against railroad rules to leave a train standing with air brakes only, because eventually through leakage, they "bleed off." When that happens, there's nothing to hold a train except hand brakes, set by cranking a wheel on each car or engine.

Perhaps the Quebec accident will lead to better regulations and better training for crews. Perhaps the governments in the U.S. and Canada, which share a single unified rail network, will only invent some meaningless new paperwork for crews to fill out.

We hope for the former. There is too much hazardous material running up and down our roads and railroads to be comfortable with slipshod safety procedures.

If you don't believe that, go down to the nearest rail yard or highway intersection and count the number of "diamond"-shaped placards that mark hazardous loads. Be sure to write down the numbers; you can look them up on the Internet.

You'll see how lethal our transportation network can be.

— Steve Haynes

Fourth festivities a real hit

By all accounts, Oberlin had a great Fourth of July celebration, and a big share of the credit goes to the firemen's wives, who recruited a laser light show for the evening and put together the schedule. They had help from the swim team, high-school cheerleaders, the American Legion and the Community Band, among others.

People's reactions to the light show varied, with some saying they still preferred fireworks

when that's possible. Even those people thought having a show and a blowout day was a lot better than the showless celebration last year.

We should celebrate the Fourth, and the firemen's wives and their helpers made that possible. And a combined light-and-fireworks show for next year with Jonathan Fick? Awesome.

Hip, hip, hooray!

— Steve Haynes

A man must know his job(s)

When I left you last week, it was two days before I was to host my ladies club and a long-time girlfriend was to visit. I discovered that a leaky pipe had flooded the closet and most everything had to be hauled out to either be dried or washed.

Here we are one week later and life is pretty much back to normal. The leak was fixed, the carpet torn out and everything returned, in a more orderly fashion, to the closet. Oh, the closet still needs to be purged of all that does not belong in a closet, but I have Jim's promise that we will tackle it together.

Which is how we tackled the whole house-cleaning project — together.

"If you'll go up into Nebraska with me to pick up a counter top," he said, "I'll help you get the house ready for club. Just make a list of things I can do."

"You've got a deal," I said.

On cleaning day, I made my list on a small dry-erase board. Now, husbands are a little like children, but I've raised teenagers, so I knew better than to request something vague like, "Clean the living room."

It wasn't long before I had a list 44 items long, each specific to the task at hand:

1. Sweep bathroom floor
2. Sweep utility room floor.



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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3. Sweep kitchen floor
4. Empty dishwasher.
5. Fill dishwasher.
6. Dust library shelves on south side.
7. Dust library shelves on north side. And so on, and so on.

Just for fun, I slipped a special assignment into the list at No. 36: "Kiss your wife 10 times." The day was slipping by with many tasks being completed, but nary a kiss. Finally, I asked Jim, "Have you read the entire list?"

"No," he answered, "I'm doing each one as it's on the list."

That must be another one of the differences between men and women: to do things in order. Men are right-minded and task oriented. A woman, on the other hand, would scan the entire list, prioritize in her mind, tackle the easiest jobs first and work her way, hop-scotch style, through the entire list.

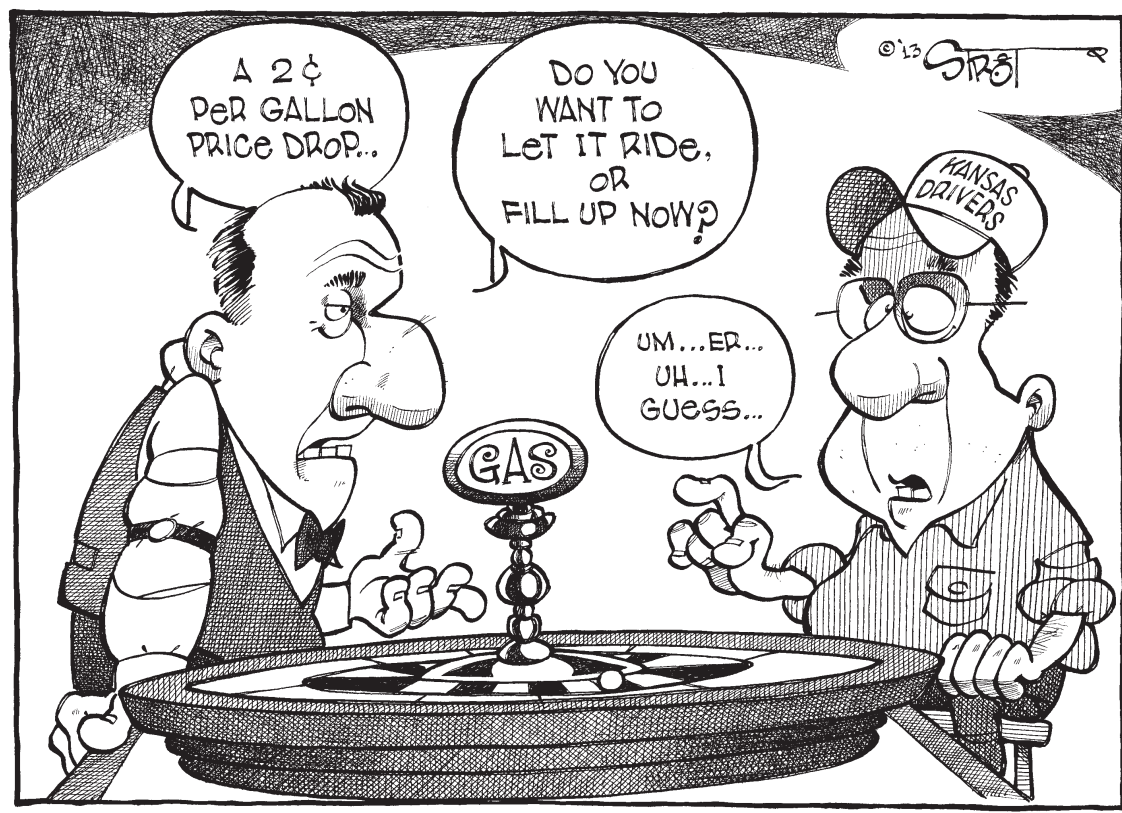
Finally, at my insistence, Jim

read the entire list and I finally got the smooch I had requested. In fact, I kept getting kisses all day. Jim would say, "Hey, I'm just doing my job. It was on the list."

I am pleased to report that everything was in readiness for club and we had the usual good time together. We played a trivia game, learned a little something about why we celebrate the Fourth of July and had refreshments.

As for my friend showing up, that has been postponed for awhile. I got the hint from her text message that said, "I'm not in charge." She was riding with her daughter and two of her grandchildren to Wyoming for the National High School Rodeo Association Finals. Their focus was getting to Wyoming. It's all right. We'll make the connection later.

At least now, I'm really ready for company. Barring any more water leaks.



Committee wants facts out

Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

We would like to once again try to get the correct information about the swimming pool project. With a petition being circulated against the Public Building Commission revenue bonds, it's possible we may be facing one more vote to get this project completed.

As the city's pool committee, we have and continue to try to get all the pertinent information to the public. Ultimately, it is up to all of you to decide if you want to see this project completed for our community and for all ages.

Our group saw a need for our town and then worked to find a feasible way to pay for the project. The 1.5 sales tax voted on in November — which passed by a 2-1 margin — was the best possible option to fund a new pool. A property-tax increase did not seem fair to all the citizens, as not all own property in the community. The sales tax is shared by residents and those passing through our community for business and travel.

We have been told by one of the petition carriers that Oberlin having a swimming pool had no effect on their desire to move here, but we hope that citizens look at the big picture and not center on just small pieces of a much larger puzzle.

Our young families can live in any surrounding town and commute to work here or can choose to move on to other towns that offer the perks they want while working

and raising their families. These younger people are the ones who are employed in the businesses, schools and health-care facilities we need, especially in a county with an older population.

We need to not only retain the citizens we have, but to offer incentives for other productive young people and families to choose Oberlin. The towns that work together for all ages will be the ones that survive.

Go visit area towns and watch how people work together to make sure their communities will thrive for generations to come. They have cars lining their main streets, people using their medical facilities and businesses and most importantly, people who are committed to working together for the very life of their towns.

The 1.5 sales tax that has been collected is only now giving us a true picture that the figures we have presented from the beginning are exceeding the projections. Putting this project off is costly. Municipal revenue-bond interest was at historic lows shortly after the election in November and have since gone up about 1 percentage point, raising the cost of the new pool. Repeated delays also have cost an estimated \$80,000 increase in construction costs since then.

The Public Building Commission

Act was established in Kansas in 1965 and has been used by many communities to complete projects without affecting their city and/or county debt limit. We have compiled a list of those towns and the projects they have completed; if you would like the list please contact one of us.

As a committee, we have striven in every possible way to get the correct information out there to the public over the last 18 months so you could vote on the swimming pool project. It passed by a wider margin than in any other area town wanting to build a new pool.

The integrity of that vote has been challenged by some who do not want to honor it and do not respect the democratic process. Instead, they seek every opportunity to delay and undo what the voters wanted.

Now it is in your hands, the citizens of this city, to come together and vote one more time — if the petition gains enough legitimate signatures.

We will pull together as a community and work toward building the future of Oberlin, or will be looking back on a town that once was?

Oberlin Pool Committee
Danielle Leitner, Erica Fortin, Rachel Johnson, Sarah Howland, Shayla Williby, Susan May, Valisha Raile

Does majority rule in city?

To the Editor:

First, we need to ask when, in a democratic society, is it possible for a minute minority to overrule the definite majority?

This seems to be appearing in our city government lately. Our citizens voted in a 1.5 percent sales tax to pay for a city swimming pool by a 2-to-1 margin. This is a significant "Yes" vote in our eyes. We can't say it was just a certain age group voting, because Oberlin does not have one age group large enough to sway the vote by 2 to 1, unless it would be the older population. Therefore, once again, like the airport vote, how can this decision by the majority be sidetracked by a minute minority?

It has been said that those in this minority feel they need to protect the community. Well, unless we're mistaken, the majority vote is the majority of the community, so is it being said by the minority that the majority doesn't know what they are doing? Once again, we must ask, where is the democratic process in all of this?

One of the issues being discussed is whether Oberlin might run out of water in the next 25 years. If you believe this to be true, talk to one of your City Council members. They can explain to you that Oberlin does not, probably won't ever in the foreseeable future, have a water shortage problem. We sit on top of the largest

aquifer in the world. It is highly unlikely Kansas will ever actually run out of water. Go to the Internet and research the Ogallala Aquifer for yourself. Oberlin doesn't have a water quantity problem, but rather a water quality problem.

Then, there is the cost of the pool. The Kansas Department of Revenue website states that our 1.5 percent sales tax brought in \$25,000 in April. In April, not all businesses were collecting that tax yet, so it is possible that the results for June, when all businesses were collecting the tax, the amount may be greater. At \$25,000 a month, though, that sales tax will bring in \$300,000 a year. The projected bond payment would be \$155,000 to \$175,000 a year. Do the math — the sales tax will pay for the bond payment, plus the \$74,000 presently allocated by the city for pool costs, with money left over. So, the sales tax that is already in place will pay for the pool in the next eight to nine years.

Another thought — the present interest rates are probably the lowest they will ever be but rates will increase in the near future. The interest rates and cost of construction may prohibit us from having a pool in the future unless we take action now.

To close, we would like to say before we sign petitions and jump to conclusions, we should do our

own fact-gathering and not just take hearsay for the gospel truth. Foremost, we feel a need to abide by the democratic process and let the majority rule stand.

Deanna Castle, Debra J. Lohofener, Tucker Woolsey, Tonya Woolsey, Jo Mason, Cindy Shirley, Jamie Soderlund, Kaylene Thomas, Joyce Hartzog, Brenda Breth, Linda Glaze, Elaine A. Miller, Mirla Coleman, Janet Rorick, Derek Chambers, Hunter Nedland, Mary Long, Jerry Lohofener, Robert Williby, Marcia Lohofener, Terri Woolsey, Sharon Addleman, Jolene Fortin, Shirley Shields, Gaylord Shields, Mary Ann Erickson, Gary Erickson, Jackie Anderson, Carol Morford, Dorothy Moore, Helen Gee, Becky Wilson

Oberlin

From the Bible

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.

— Ephesians 1:3-4

Reader asks, is this a democracy?

To the Editor:

Democracy: government by the people; especially: rule of the majority. (from the Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

We recently celebrated the Fourth of July, and I'd like to thank those folks who worked together to plan the parade, the park activities and the laser show. That is what is best about living in a "community" and celebrating the democracy we live in!

In November, we used the freedoms we are blessed with to vote. The majority ruled that we would work to build a new pool. It seems to me we should be moving toward that goal as a community rather than some of us complaining that "we

didn't get our way."

I believe one of the problems facing our society today is the attitude "it's all about ME!"

We cannot let that attitude prevail if we are going to keep our community strong.

It may not be our choice, it will cost money but isn't that the reality of our lives?

If our community is to survive, we should be working together in many ways, on many things, to make Oberlin a good place to live, not necessarily for each individual, but for the betterment of all who have chosen Oberlin as "home" and those who may choose to live here one day.

To those of you who did not vote

"yes" on the pool, I am sorry you were disappointed. But the votes have been cast and we all need to see that we can make it work without causing hardship for anyone.

If we would all make an effort to be a part of the community through volunteerism, shopping here in town and supporting the many wonderful activities in Oberlin, we could really bring back the pride in our town.

Let's not waste time or money trying to push negative opinions that divide us.

I know that would be a start toward a great present and future for Oberlin.

Susan Nelson, Oberlin

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