

Open meeting law ignored during meeting

If it looks like a skunk and smells like a skunk, it's a skunk, and the stink is covering the City of Sharon Springs, thanks to the mayor. The mayor was on the agenda of the regular monthly county commissioners meeting to talk about the Wallace County Recycling. Since both men operating the plant have resigned effective June 26th, the city is left scrambling to find someone to take their place. Not that they will ever be able to replace L. O. Samuelson. They have taken advantage of his passion for recycling for decades. After all he saved them a ton of money over the years by paying for recycling expenses out of his own pocket.

That being said, Mayor Dennis Sharp and councilman Milton Tokoi entered the commissioners meeting at around 10:00 a.m. The agenda said that they wanted to talk about recycling. The first thing out of the Mayor's mouth was to call for an executive session for personnel reasons. That was where it was left and both the county clerk and myself left the meeting, the door was closed and the shades were drawn, I assume so that no one in the hall could read lips. The session was called for ten minutes.

Naturally, I was starting to smell a definite odor by this time. The fact is, neither L.O. Samuelson nor Everett Langdon are employees of the city or the county. Samuelson is an independent contractor and Langdon works for him. Langdon gets paid from Samuelson's personal business account. There are no county or city signatures on anything. As a matter of fact, Samuelson's contract to operate the recycling center states specifically that Samuelson is "an independent contractor for all purposes and shall not be deemed as an employee of the City for any purpose hereunder."

Both men had already resigned their positions, and that was made public in last week's Western Times, so the bird had already left the nest, the jig was up, everyone involved was already identified, there was nothing to hide. Or was there?

I voiced my complaint to the county commissioners after the executive session was over. Commissioners Cowles and Buck couldn't see anything wrong with it, but commission chair Adam Smith listened and said that he would do some checking on his end. And he has, much to his credit.

The real truth of the matter is that the Open Meetings Act was not designed to keep people from being embarrassed. The rules are specifically spelled out and available to everyone. Every elected official should know them forwards and backwards. The longer you hold

an office, the more you should know, which is scary in and of itself, since the Mayor doesn't seem to know them at all. If he does know the rules, then he just willingly broke the law.

It is corrupt to go behind closed doors for no reason at all. The Open Meetings Act and its rules are often overused by people who are trying to cover up wrongdoing.

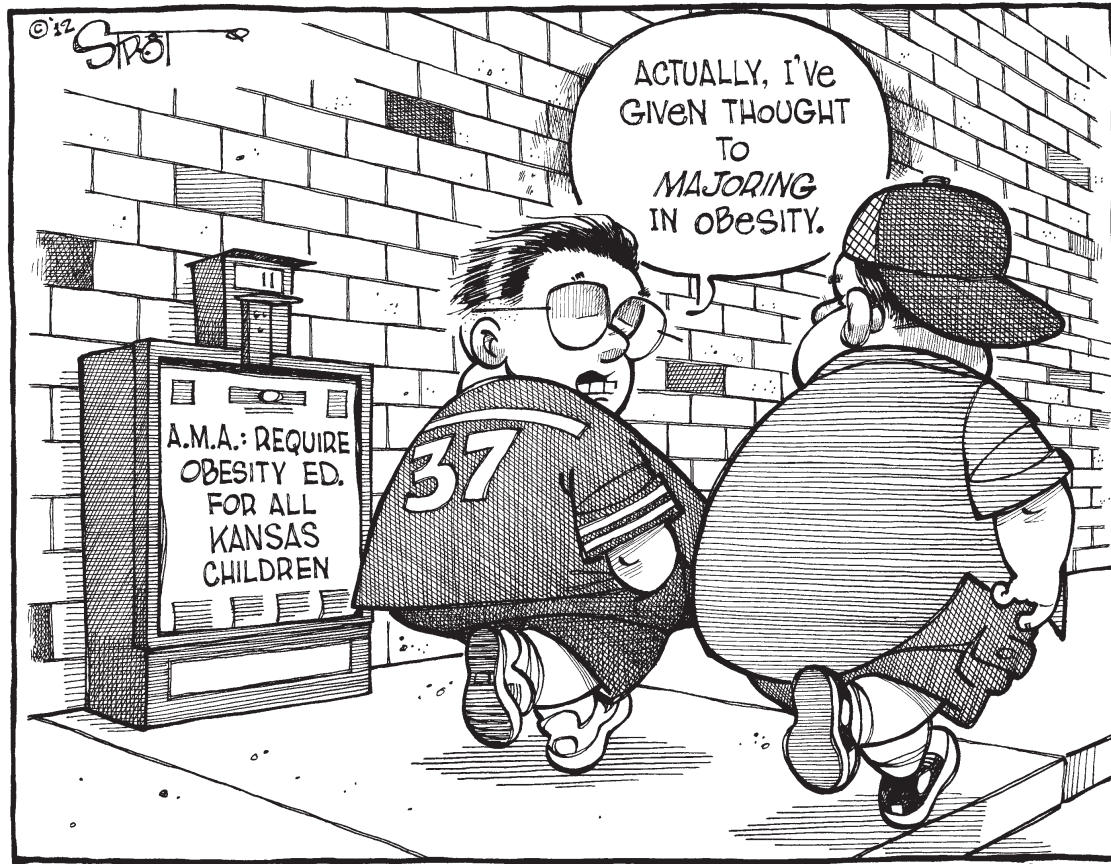
After doing some research, on his own, Commissioner Smith found a form that should have been filled out by the entity calling the executive session. This should have been done before the meeting. Smith also said that he didn't understand why anything discussed had to be in executive session in the first place and that nothing discussed was what he considered to be confidential. "That was my mistake," said Smith. "I should have called them on it and asked for a better explanation. That's my fault too. I'll accept my responsibility." At least he accepts his responsibility.

The Open Meetings Act specifically states that when going into executive session, justification for the session must be made, subject to be discussed must be given, and the time and the place for the body to reconvene must be given. In this case, there was no real justification, the subject was personnel, which was incorrect, and the duration of the session was ten minutes. I guess one out of three isn't bad.

There are seven subjects that can be legally discussed in executive sessions: 1) Personnel matters of non-elected personnel; 2) Attorney client privilege; 3) Employer/employee negotiations; 4) Confidential data pertaining to financial affairs or trade secrets of corporations, partnerships or individual proprietorships; 5) Matters adversely relating to a person as a student, patient or resident of a public institution; 6) Preliminary discussions relating to the acquisition of real property; 7) Security matters relating to a public body or agency.

Why the mayor did this is anyone's guess, I'm sure he thinks he had his reasons. I believe that he called the executive session simply because the newspaper was there and he didn't want what was said to be public knowledge. Did it save him or the council some embarrassment? Obviously not. It is action such as this that should remain on the minds of every voter come next city council election. We should not, ever, re-elect anyone with so little regard for the law. After all, how can anyone in good conscience pass laws governing the public, when they can't obey those that govern them? We should expect, and demand better behavior from our elected officials.

Guest opinion by Julie Samuelson, Owner/Publisher of the Western Times in Sharon Springs, Kan.



Hangin' With Marge

By Margaret Bucholtz



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Dimples

Can you remember when you were a little child and you wanted something really, really bad? I am sure there were other things I wanted but the one thing I remember the most was I wanted to have dimples.

My brother had dimples and so did a lot of other people I knew, but I didn't have any. I think it might have been that someone had commented on Gary's smile and how cute his dimples were. I really don't know I just knew if I didn't have them I was going to make them.

Now how do you make dimples? I didn't know but for some reason I thought if I locked myself in the

bathroom and stood in front of the mirror and poked my two index finger really hard in my cheeks it would work.

I would smile while I poked and sure enough I thought I could see little lines coming.

Of course after about a week of doing that every spare moment I had, I realized it was just marks that my fingernails were making. In a few minutes the marks would be gone and there I was disappointed again.

I asked my mom if a Dr. could cut my cheeks so I could have dimples. She looked a little surprised but told me that I was lucky I didn't have dimples because

when you get older they just turn into wrinkles.

I had to accept it but I didn't want to. One day my uncle was at our house and I mentioned to him that I really wanted dimples. He just laughed and told me I already had them. I smiled just to show him I didn't and that was when he told me I had dimples on my knees.

The funny thing was I looked and sure enough I did have dimples on my knees. I just wasn't smart enough to know that it wasn't a compliment.

Photo Policy

The Saint Francis Herald and Bird City Times wants to emphasize photos of people doing things in the community. If you know of an event or new happening that we should attend, please call 332-3162.

Please be sure to allow a couple of days' notice so we can be there.

Space in the paper is limited and so is the time of our staff, so we may not be able to get to every event. Because space is so limited, we cannot run team or group photos, any pictures of people lined up or of people passing checks, certificates and the like. (We will always try to make room for a story about any of these events, however.)

We do run wedding and engagement pictures and "mug" shots with stories and obituaries, when they are provided to us. Please remember that we need a clear, sharp picture. Dark or fuzzy prints will not work.

We cannot return photos unless you submit a self-addressed, stamped envelope with clear instructions for return. Other photos submitted may be picked up at our office within two weeks. After that, they will be disposed of.

Laser prints of photos which have run in The Herald or Times are available, first come, first served. Special-order laser prints of photos will be available at \$3 each.

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Casey's Comments

By Casey McCormick



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The fourth of July offers us a moment to see and remember what our unique nation is all about. Seeing the stars and bars waving in the breeze should evoke something deep within your chest. If not, that's too bad because we live in a special land and pride is not always a bad thing.

We have a tradition of honoring our local warriors, past and present, with our Freedom Special Section that comes out in the two Cheyenne County papers the week that Independence Day is in. Take a few moments to read this publication and reflect on the sacrifices these individuals made for the betterment of us all.

A couple weeks ago I received a letter from an old family friend in Dayton, OH. Faith Rosenthal is

her name.

Faith was close to my father's first cousin, Jack Thacker. I got to know Jack better the last few years of his life as they were the first of my new life of recovery. He had spent over 60 years being clean and sober and he sure helped me through a time of change.

Anyway, Jack and his brother, Kelly, were among the "Greatest Generation" of American fighters in W.W.II. Jack served in the Army Air Force, teaching others and manning machine guns himself on B-24s. Kelly was a Marine. Jack came back from the war. Kelly lies buried on the Island of Guam in the Pacific along with his brother Marines who didn't come home.

Back to Faith's letter, a few

years ago I requested photos of the brothers from when they were in the service. With the letter came a shot of Jack with palm trees behind him. I'm assuming in California before heading to or coming back from the war zone. Kelly's picture is of a kid in a sharply fitting uniform on the front porch of his parents home in Ohio.

Both brothers are gone now, but their gift of freedom will not be forgotten. That goes for the veterans who have graced our Freedom section over the years.

As it's said, thank a vet ... because freedom isn't free.

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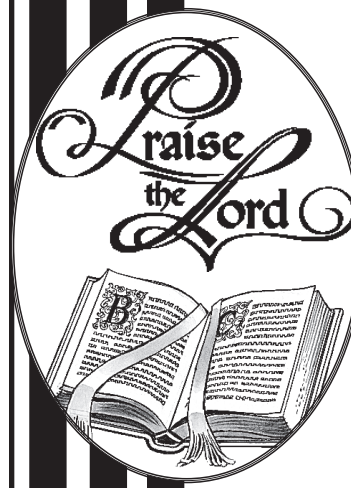
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Morning Worship 10 a.m.

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Worship 10:30 a.m.

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Morning Worship 10:45

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Weekday Mass 8:00 a.m.
Confessions Sat. 4-4:30

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Pastor Chris Farmer
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Communion 3rd Sunday

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Sunday School 9:30 a.m.
Worship 10:30
Prayer Meeting, Wed
7:30 p.m.

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Bible Fellowship 9:15 a.m.
Church Service 10:15 a.m.

First Baptist Church
2nd & Scott • 332-3921
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Worship 10:30 a.m.
Sunday Evening
Service 6:30 p.m.,
Wed. AWANA Club
6:30 - 8:00 p.m.

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332-3150

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Worship Service 10:30 a.m.
Potluck & Communion -
Every 2nd Sunday
Wednesday Bible Study 7 p.m.

Peace Lutheran Church, AFLC
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Pastor Randy Nelson
Church 332-2928
Parsonage 332-2312
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