

# Opinion



## Free Press Viewpoint

### All for one

The Thomas County Planning committee created four basic groups people need to emphasize and improve.

Among all the things a community has, the committee will focus on four categories; live, work, shop and visit. Now just because this committee is meeting on a regular basis and comes up with this stuff, does not mean the rest of town does not have to do anything.

Like the wife of a former president said, "it takes a village to raise a child." In this case, it takes all of us to make Thomas County a better place to live.

Here at the *Free Press*, reporters are reminded to think of the first-time reader when they write their stories. First-time readers need a good impression of a story.

The same is true for property owners and tenants in Thomas County. We need to think of the first-time visitor to the area. Those visitors will be impressed with clean and trimmed front lawns, shoveled sidewalks and attractive houses and properties.

Some of those visitors may be business representatives looking for a place to either relocate or expand their business. If they like how the town looks, they may consider bringing their work to Thomas County. Visitors can tell how much pride there is in a town based on the physical condition the town is in.

Live can also be interpreted as making sure all of us are on our best behavior. It's amazing how fast reputations can spread.

Shop is an intriguing category. Prospective business owners like towns that are supported by the locals. We need to utilize what Thomas County has to offer. Not only does that insure those merchants will have repeat customers, but it gives off a feeling Thomas County residents support Thomas County.

Visit may be the most challenging aspect for residents to comprehend. Since we already live here, it's tough to think like a tourist. But that's it. — we need to think like a tourist.

Know your directions and locations. You never know when you will be putting gas in your car and the person at the next pump over says he is from out of town and asks for directions to where ever. A polite and accurate answer may make that person's day and a reason to remember Thomas County.

Colby and Thomas County were fantastic for helping those people stranded here because of the weather Thanksgiving weekend.

Now it's time to help ourselves.

*John Van Nostrand, publisher*

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail [jvannostrand@nwkanas.com](mailto:jvannostrand@nwkanas.com) or [pdecker@nwkanas.com](mailto:pdecker@nwkanas.com).

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**U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran**, 2443 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. 202/225-2715 or Fax 202/225-5124

**State Rep. Jim Morrison**, State Capitol Building, 303 SW 10th St. Rm. 171-W, Topeka 66612. 785/296-7676 e mail: [jmorrison@ink.org](mailto:jmorrison@ink.org) web: [www.ink.org/public/legislators/jmorrison](http://www.ink.org/public/legislators/jmorrison)

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### Isn't Kansas great?

One of the most lovable features about this state is its constant state of change. For instance, if you don't like the weather just wait a few minutes and it will change. What many people blew off as a slight change in the weather Sunday ended up being a blizzard. And just think, the year's not over yet, we've got four weeks to go.

Kansas weather not only amazes me, but so do people living in and traveling through our beloved state. Why don't they take the weather seriously? From where I stand, there's absolutely no reason to become a statistic, stranded motorist or deceased, from weather related traffic conditions.

With today's technology of car radios and portable weather radios, I can't understand why people don't use common sense and get off the roads when bad weather hits. I wonder how much they value life, and the lives of others?

In Hoxie and Oakley alone, there were more than 300 motorists stranded because of Sunday night's blizzard.

Hello people - get tuned in - to the radio and common sense.

I'm constantly amazed people seem to turn off their noggins when it comes to the consequences of being on streets and roadways during bad weather.

Somebody ought to calculate the man hours spent rescuing people from late Sunday evening to the point when things were back up and almost running normal.

People who get out on the roads and try to navigate blizzard conditions must not have a clue to



**Jan Katz Ackerman**

### • From Where I stand

the manpower it takes to rescue them.

Think of the hours dispatchers spend relaying information to authorities - sheriff's offices, police departments, emergency medical personnel and fire fighters - during a blizzard.

Not only do the authorities battle extreme weather conditions getting to a stranded motorist, they must battle dangers of being on the roadway during each rescue. Dangers like pulling cars and trucks out of ditches all the while praying they don't get struck by another vehicle's driver who just flat refuses to get off the road.

Then there's the city workers which must try and move snow from point A to point B so a town can somewhat function during the storm.

Sure, if temperatures are warm enough and snow is light it can sit where it comes to rest in hopes it melts quickly. But in a storm like Sunday and Monday's, the heavy wet white stuff needs to be moved so motorists can navigate and businesses can operate. Throw in energy company workers who keep homes and businesses powered and warm and the cost is phenomenal.

But what slays me even more are the people

out there that push forward in zero visibility rather than give up and get out of danger. Don't they know what a motel is for? Why do they put their own life at risk as well as the life of someone who might need to rescue them?

Don't get me wrong, I love being independent as much as the next guy but give others a break. Those of us who are not city, county or state employees need to put the lives of others at the top of the list and demote our needs to a much lower level.

Someone should also calculate the cost a blizzard such as this week's creates.

I wonder if motorists who refuse to get off the road during bad weather even stop to think of the dollars spent trying to keep them safe.

Not considering the man hours, there's equipment costs such as a gas, tires, oil, snow blades, and the list goes on and on. There's equipment at the city, county and state level which all must be maintained and coordinated to move people in and out of towns and along the highways.

And, during storms there's the added cost - one not calculated in dollars - but the time spent by volunteers manning food banks and shelters.

So, next time you venture out on that must go or can't wait trip, please calculate whether it's really necessary. After all, it's your tax dollars which are spent for the luxury traveling.

As for me, I'd rather my tax dollars be spent on something like economic development or park equipment rather than pulling someone out of a ditch.

### There's hope for news, despite trends

**By Jason Salzman**

Here are the latest trends in news, and they aren't looking good.

First, and possibly most frightening, is that we are seeing the rise of ideological, not fair and accurate, programming.

Most obvious is the FOX network, owned and run by arch conservatives, and shown by many media critics, like Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, as having a corresponding conservative agenda.

Some analysts predict that a liberal network will soon emerge to battle Fox in the ideological news war. While this might sound encouraging to liberal partisans, it's actually a step backward for journalism, which needs more than ever more outlets that meet the profession's basic standards.

Talk radio also remains a polarizing force in the media landscape, with conservative shows dominating but the liberal network Air America on the rise.

Second, we're seeing more and more infotainment, which is that toxic mix of news and entertainment. Entertainment values trump news values across the media landscape, especially in broadcast news. If there's a choice between serious news and fluff, fluff usually wins! The latest victim was CNN's NewsNight Aaron Brown, a thoughtful program, which was replaced by the shrill Anderson Cooper 360. It's no wonder that people are losing confidence in journalism. What do you think when you look for news on TV and you find infotainment.

Third, we're seeing increasing fragmentation

of news audiences.

Once, network news on television and the daily newspaper reigned. No more. Audiences are not only abandoning news shows altogether, but they're tuned into cable, internet, radio, and other niche outlets. While the major news outlets continue to dominate news production, fragmentation is nonetheless pushing advertising revenues down, putting pressure on news departments to cut staff and expenses.

The last and most confounding news trend is the continued consolidation of news and information corporations. Television, music, radio, cable, publishing and Internet are dominated by fewer than two dozen major corporations with most power in the hands of 10 conglomerates. This is down from down from 50 companies 20 years ago.

The dangers are clear. Foremost among them is the potential for media owners to abuse their power, insert their views including their preference in political candidates in news coverage, and skew information that citizens rely on in a democracy.

What's a citizen to do?

First, try to make journalism better. If you see local coverage that's over the top, let media outlets know. Use with letters to the editor, guest opinions, calls, or e-mails to journalists.

You can also suggest news stories to reporters. If there's a big story in your area about, say, a rape, make sure advocates of rape awareness insists that substantive stories about prevention are covered as part of day-to-day crime reporting. You should likewise protest in front of news

outlets that continue to offend you. Media protests get noticed in newsrooms and spark public debate and education.

Second, as an individual, you should consume a variety of news. Many people find their comfort zone, like a newspaper, and never venture out of it-into, say, the strange world of local TV news. But to understand our country, and the issues confronting journalism, you have to educate yourself about the full spectrum of news sources.

Finally, and probably most importantly, you cannot give up the fight for media reform. This means, ultimately, pressuring Congress to pass laws that, without censorship, protect news outlets from the market forces that currently threaten it.

At times this battle seems hopeless, despite last year's incredible and heartening grassroots revolt against the Federal Communications Commission's proposal to allow giant media corporations to get even bigger.

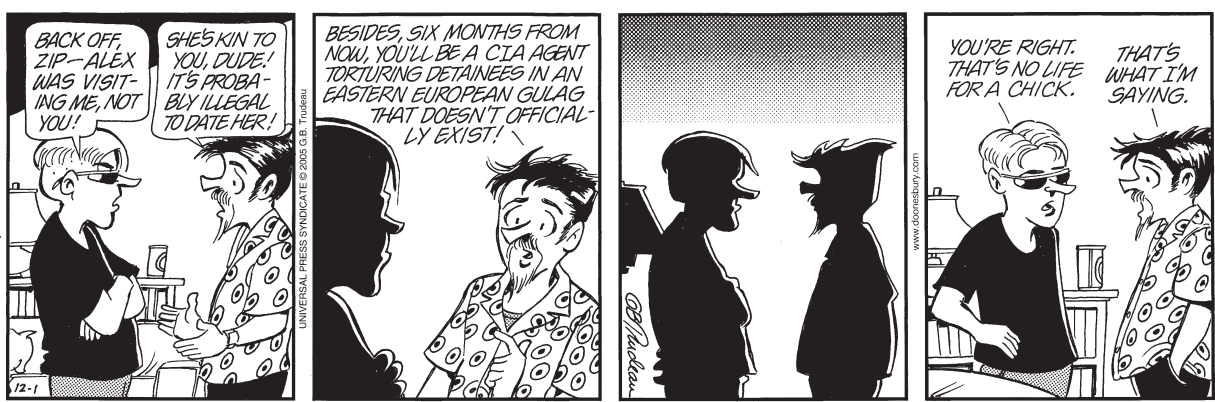
I know, we need to make these giant corporations get smaller, so stopping them from growing doesn't feel too good. Yet, we won partially in Congress and eventually in the courts, and in the process, a bipartisan constituency formed in support of media reform.

It's this movement that provides our best hope for a better day for journalism.

*Jason Salzman is the author of Making the News: A Guide for Nonprofits and Activists, and board chair of Rocky Mountain Media Watch, a Denver-based media watchdog*

### Doonesbury

• Gary Trudeau



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