

Opinion



Free Press Viewpoint

Colby needs to blow its own horn

By John Van Nostrand

Celebrities from the Great Plains are few and that is why towns where those celebrities come from need to let the others know. Legendary champagne music band director Lawrence Welk is from Strasburg, N.D., actor Dennis Hopper is from Dodge City, actor Denver Pyle is from Bethune, Colo., and Colby has opera talent Samuel Ramey.

The Colby City Council was informed by the Kansas Department of Transportation that the town should have a sign installed on Interstate 70 stating Colby is the birthplace of Ramey.

Those kind of signs are common. Astronauts may be the most popular celebrity, as Burlington, Colo., and Salina are two area towns that claim an astronaut and let the motorists driving through know. There are other towns with astronaut signs.

Opera is a unique form of entertainment. Opera does not have the media attention like movies, rock stars and professional athletes. But that is exactly why a sign for Ramey should be installed. Colby’s celebrity is not like other towns’ famous natives.

Ramey, who performed in Wichita last month, admitted Colby is a known place in the opera world because of what he has done to the industry since his career began decades ago. He knows where he stands in the business.

Either in New York City or overseas, Ramey said there have been people who said they remembered him while driving through Kansas, usually on their way to the Rocky Mountains.

Other people need to know about Ramey too. Colby would be doing a favor for the opera industry by potentially creating more opera fans. People may stop at the Colby Visitor’s Center and ask who Ramey is and that may be all it takes to start an interest in opera — and maybe an interest in Colby and Thomas County.

(While we’re at it, if we are considering a sign for Ramey, we should also note Christian contemporary musician Mark Schultz, another Colby native. Connecting him with KGCR Radio near Brewster, which regularly plays Schultz, would be a great combination.)

— John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press.

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@nwkansas.com or pdecker@nwkansas.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

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Prescription for frustration

The latest chapter in the continuing saga of Dr. Vic Hildyard unfolded last weekend when the Kansas State Board of Healing Arts reinstated his license to practice medicine with conditions.

For the benefit of newcomers, this parody started more than five years ago in April 2002 when a complaint was lodged against the doctor alleging sexual misconduct with a Citizens Medical Center hospital employee. That allegation was recanted.

Two years later; however, the board became involved when information was subpoenaed by the hospital in 2004 alleging medical incompetency, misconduct, procedural errors and other inappropriate behavior. By the way, how did the board know what information to ask for?

My thoughts, though, center around the recent reinstatement of Hildyard’s license and a few questions that come to mind.

In June 2006, the board, in what most people in the Colby area considered a shocking decision, voted unanimously to revoke his license, but no explanation was given.

In August 2006, the board did explain their reasoning for the revocation, basically calling the doctor a “substantial threat.”

Four months later, the doctor and his attorney, Mike O’Neal, appealed the decision to the district court, but Judge Jack Burr ruled he would not get involved in second guessing the state.

Following that decision, and while still inside the courtroom, Mark Stafford, general counsel for the Board of Healing Arts, told O’Neal and Hildyard that there was an “open invitation” to discuss ways the doctor might be able to practice again.

The doctor wasn’t officially barred from practicing until mid-December, but even before that happened, the board is looking at renegotiating?

Why didn’t the board do the negotiations back in June 2006?



Patty Decker

• Deep Thoughts

Why revoke the privileges — wait two months before saying why they did it — and then wait another four months before actually taking action to physically bar him from working?

The board could have pulled the doctor’s ticket in June, in August, but they waited until Burr’s ruling.

Odd that a doctor who is a substantial threat was allowed to continue practicing months after the board’s unanimous decision to revoke.

So in one quick motion and one fell swoop, the board on one hand, pulled his license and, in the other, held out an open invitation to look at a solution.

It sure looks like bureaucratic bumbling.

Justice was not done. There is no question about it.

As for the final negotiations that led to the doctor getting his medical license back — what choices did Hildyard really have?

This recent chapter belongs in a book entitled, “Ruin of a Small Town Doctor” and simply boiled down to whether Hildyard was willing to wait another year for the state to hear the appeal or just get back to work.

Tough call.

I suspect, though, money was probably the deciding factor.

The board didn’t just shove the doctor around, the state board of healing arts has shoved this community around and no matter what some-

one thinks of Hildyard, this should scare every one of us.

How often does the state board of healing arts do this? How does the rest of the medical community across the state feel about the board?

Are there any other doctors in the Colby area being scrutinized by the board?

Even if the board had some legal merit for pulling the doctor’s license, the damage to this community and threat to its medical services should have played a greater role.

And what of the initial findings by the board’s hearing officer, Edward Gaschler having cleared Hildyard of 16 medical-related violations and finding only three non-medical violations had warrant?

At worst, the doctor should have been facing public censure — certainly not revocation.

The board of healing arts disregarded its hearing officer’s findings, which carried a price tag of more than \$70,000, it disregarded the wishes of the community and in setting aside the revocation accomplished nothing.

When all is said and done, the community and the doctor will be better off now that it’s all settled, but still this entire proceeding, from the original charges through the bumbling of the Board of Healing Arts, was a fiasco. Most of the players can walk away, sadly leaving the doctor with a financial disaster from which he may never recover.

I believe the state legislature should investigate this incident and call the board of healing arts to explain itself.

And still one final and baffling question lingers: Who started this, and why?

That chapter has yet to be fully explored, but I have no doubt more will be revealed.

Decker is editor of the Free Press. Her column appears on Fridays.

Your turn

Vandalism toward teachers must stop

Tracy Rogers
Colby

I am writing with a concern that I’m sure not too many in our community know about, but I feel it needs to be addressed. I’m talking about the growing trend of vandalism that is being directed towards several teachers in our district.

There have been numerous cases during the past few months of homes being egged, cars being damaged and property destroyed. I say it’s a trend because I know things like this have hap-

pened long before this year, but it seems to be occurring much more frequently lately.

Why is this happening and why the disrespect of those who have chosen the field of education to make their living? It’s difficult enough to recruit and retain teachers to come to northwest Kansas, without these added obstacles to overcome. Word gets around about the way a community treats its residents, and I for one do not want Colby to be a red flag on anyone’s radar. We are a good community with good people liv-

ing here, and acts like these need to be stopped.

I don’t know what the answer is, but I feel like the word needs to get out about what is happening. The more people that know what has happened in the past maybe will help everyone be more aware of their surroundings in the future. If you see someone or know of someone doing these cowardly acts, call the authorities and let them handle it. Let’s make sure Colby remains a safe and caring community for all who want to live here.

About those letters . . .

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

