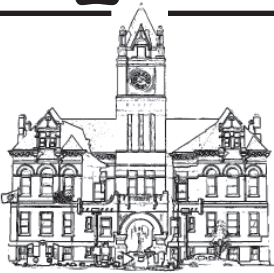


Opinion



Free Press Viewpoint

404 is still too many

From Lawrence Journal-World
Here's hoping that a 15-year low in the number of traffic fatalities in Kansas is not a fluke but the beginning of a trend. The Kansas Department of Transportation reported last week that 404 people died in Kansas traffic accidents in 2007. That's still 404 too many, but it represents a decline of 13 percent from the 468 fatalities in 2006. Only twice in the last 60 years have fatalities fallen below 400. That was in 1947 and 1992. The 2007 dip in fatalities certainly is welcome news. State transportation officials attribute the decline to a number of factors including new seat belt laws and initiatives to curb drunken driving. Although figures aren't available yet for 2007, statistics for 2006 indicate that 60 percent of people who died in traffic accidents that year were not wearing proper safety restraints. It is too early to know whether rumble strips and median barriers on some highways in the state have had a significant impact on fatalities, but it stands to reason that they would eliminate many head-on collisions and perhaps some fatalities caused by drivers falling asleep at the wheel. Whatever its cause, last year's decline in traffic fatalities certainly is welcome news. If the lower number is partly a result of new laws and heightened awareness concerning drunken driving and seat belt use, then it also should remind us of new threats to attentive driving such as cell phone use. As noted above, 404 fatalities in Kansas still is too many. Let's all resolve to shoot for an even lower figure next year by hanging up, buckling up and driving sober.

Where to write, call

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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@nw.kansas.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the Free Press.



Enough

John Van Nostrand

- Line in the Dust



“And grandma’s on the front porch swing with a Bible in her hand
Sometimes I hear her singing take me to the promised land
When you take away a man’s dignity he can’t work his fields and cows.”
— from the 1985 John Mellencamp song “Rain on the Scarecrow.”
I received an e-mail Thursday from the wife of a former boss of mine. It’s still troubling me. Linda said Ed, my former boss, had a heart attack last Monday and was still in the hospital. I knew his health was a concern since I left his paper about six years ago. We’ve kept in touch, one way or the other, over the years. He started kidney dialysis, maybe three years ago. After the heart attack Ed told Linda he had enough. He stopped his dialysis. Now, he’s just waiting. Linda told me she knew this day was coming. But, like with everybody else, you can never prepare for something like this. Now she’s trying to balance time with him and trying to keep the paper operating like it should. It’s tough, but not rare, for a rural weekly. Hugh still had a place in his heart for his hometown, his brother and the family business. Hugh helped out when he could, however he could. As far as I could tell, Ed and Hugh had a genuine relationship. Hugh died in 2005. Ed tried to pass on the paper to one of his sons, but, by that time, newspapers and rural Iowa was not like it was when Ed was handed

Hugh eventually went on to a fantastic career with Life magazine. After Ed told me that story, I thought he would be like his ancestors and spend his last days within that office. I don’t know how he did what he did over the years. Ed got knocked down by the financial trouble of the 1980s, got back up and kept going. Land prices dropped, interest rates skyrocketed, foreign markets scattered and white crosses were being placed in courthouse lawns representing the number of family farms lost in auctions. Off-the-farm jobs became a new category. Ed knew about the category because he was part of the group that lured the big employer to town. Hugh still had a place in his heart for his hometown, his brother and the family business. Hugh helped out when he could, however he could. As far as I could tell, Ed and Hugh had a genuine relationship. Hugh died in 2005. Ed tried to pass on the paper to one of his sons, but, by that time, newspapers and rural Iowa was not like it was when Ed was handed

the reins. His son tried it for a while, but eventually backed out and pursued other interests. Ed continued to work, but I was hired to replace his son. I enjoyed working with Ed. We occasionally went for lunch at the restaurant next door to the office and talked about the short-term future of the paper. His strategy is practical. His humor is clever. He is a wonderful writer. Ed dedicated his weekly column to the dramatic story of the birth of my first born. Of all the doctor visits wife Jennifer had during that pregnancy, I only missed one. Ed wanted me to go knowing the excitement during a couple’s first pregnancy. He was always supportive and encouraging for me. When I left for the daily paper down the road, he completely understood why. Ed is well-known across Iowa through the newspaper industry. He was chosen to sit on the Des Moines Register’s committee to determine the most influential Iowans of the 20th century. Henry Wallace was on the top of the list. Wallace was one of F.D.R.’s vice presidents and a strong voice in agriculture in various ways. Coincidentally, Wallace is from the same county Ed is from. I don’t know why people, in Ed’s situation now, make that decision. My only guess is since he knows he’s not fully capable of giving 110 percent to the newspaper, he won’t do it. Thanks, Ed, for giving me 110 percent. — John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press.

New year’s resolutions, sort of

By John Schlageck
Kansas Farm Bureau

Before we all become buried in the new year, let’s look at this new beginning with a bit of humor. Plenty of people trot out their lists of resolutions. Often, such lists are as long as their arms and last as long as their pinky. I’ve all but given up on New Year resolutions. Seems I can’t keep them either. But this year I’ve decided to do something different. I’ve compiled a list of “lesser” resolutions – some things I believe I can accomplish in 2008:

- Remember that no time spent with your children is ever wasted.
- Don’t let a little dispute injure a great friendship.
- Never laugh at anyone’s dream.
- Don’t wash a car, mow a yard or select a Christmas tree after dark.
- When traveling, take two big safety pins so you can pin the motel drapes shut.
- Accept (always) a breath mint if someone offers you one.
- Keep the porch light on until the family is in for the night.
- Rehearse a joke before you tell it.
- Always try the house dressing.
- Believe in love at first sight.
- Send your mother-in-law flowers on your spouse’s birthday.
- Buy ladders, extension cords and garden hoses longer than you think you’ll need.
- Steer clear of any place with a “Ladies Welcome” sign in the window.
- Once in a while invite the person in line behind you to go ahead.
- Be patient when behind the wheel of your vehicle – hand gestures are out of the question.
- Own a hammock and use it.
- Never be photographed holding a cocktail glass.
- Give people more than they expect and do so cheerfully.
- Be as friendly to the janitor as you are to the board chairman.
- Overestimate travel time by 15 percent.
- Never wear a white bathing suit.
- Don’t miss a good idea simply because you don’t like the source.
- When you say, “I’m sorry,” look the person in the eye.
- Trust in God, but always lock your car. Have a wonderful 2008.

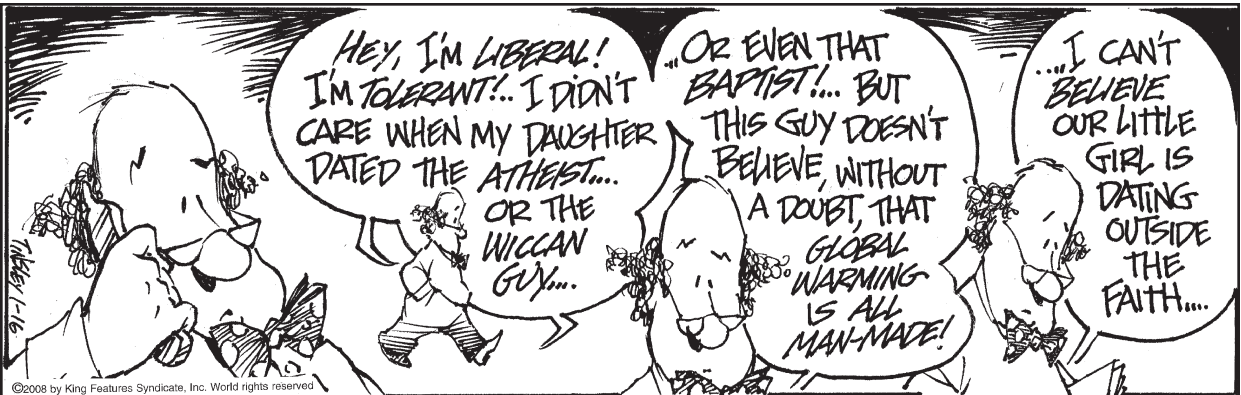
John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

About those letters . . .

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Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley



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