

from our viewpoint...

March banquets highlight leadership

It's spring. The weather turned warmer this month; people have been coming out of their winter shells to enjoy the sun and begun to stir in their gardens and lawns.

March has been busy on the banquet circuit, with the celebration of the 10th Leadership Sherman County graduation and the annual Farm-City Banquet. These followed on the heels of the Goodland Area Chamber of Commerce and Sherman County Conservation District banquets in February.

We were impressed with the entertainment and message from Miss Kansas, Michelle Walthers, at the Farm-City event last week.

A lot of people hold a stereotype of a beauty queen, but Walthers went beyond that and showed how she used her talent, brains and beauty to win her title.

Her message about strengthening the family was simple yet well thought out and presented with a bit of humor and some audience participation.

She was clever coming up with the points to fit the letters in "family," and tying each one into her message. Forgiveness, Appreciation, Make memories, Initiative, Love and You are six excellent ways to help any family.

Walthers' intelligence, determination and talents are great leadership qualities, and this young woman who found a way to go to college through the pageant may be one our state's future leaders.

Agriculture Person of the Year was Carroll Mogge, a 4-H project leader and fair judge and superintendent for many years.

Mogge worked hard for over 40 years in the county assessor's office. He was a leader and worked with the young people of the area. He is an example of the many behind-the-scenes leaders a community needs. He gave back to the community with his 4-H work.

We were impressed with the members of the 10th Leadership Sherman County class, and feel this is a wonderful way to grow leaders.

Over the 10 years the program has been in place, the nearly people 100 who have completed the eight-month course have learned about the people and institutions in our county. Many of those from previous classes can be found involved in community programs, on boards and running for office.

It has been a wonderful month to spotlight the great people living in our city and county. — Tom Betz



The reality of a modern day school teacher

When asked to name a person who has made a difference in one's life, the most common response, other than a family member, is a favorite teacher.

This speaks volumes about the influence educators have on the lives of young people. The education profession has long been known for inadequate pay but high job satisfaction. Teachers have been willing to forfeit material gain for the joy of seeing the eyes of their students light up as they grow and learn.

Lately, the job satisfaction that brought so many teachers into the profession seems to have left the classroom. Unfortunately, much of this development can be attributed to the No Child Left Behind Act. The joy of teaching has been replaced by pressure-filled staff meetings where educators talk not about how to help a child learn, but rather their school's test scores. Morale has diminished and more teachers are at wits end.

Recently, a teacher in Lindsborg told me of her frustration:

"I am a first-year teacher, and I am begin-



jerry moran

• in Congress

ning to get very discouraged. I went into the teaching profession to help students learn and to encourage them to follow their dreams. However, I am finding that more and more of my time is spent preparing students for standardized tests.

"These tests do not prepare students for any career. They only teach students how to take a test. With all these tests, we don't have time to teach. I truly feel the time and effort I put into teaching is not worth my while. No Child Left Behind is wonderful in theory, but impossible to carry out. Not every child is equal in ability, and no teacher should be expected to make it so."

With the number of teachers leaving the profession exceeding the number entering by 23

percent, this young educator's thoughts should be a warning. If we have to shut the doors on schools in Kansas, it will not be because of lack of students, it will be because we cannot find the teachers to fill the vacancies.

Congress must be sensitive to the responsibility we hold in encouraging educators to stay in the classroom and continue their profession. We need to strive for improvements in our education system, but we must make sure we do not over regulate the classroom. We must not take the joy and passion out of this noble profession by requiring things that are simply not possible.

This year, Congress is set to examine No Child Left Behind and potentially reauthorize it. While I voted against this program, I look forward to hearing from Kansans about how we should reform and change this policy. My hope is Congress will make the changes necessary to help teachers succeed as they educate our greatest asset — our young people — and fulfill the jobs they love.

Letter Policy

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Closing county offices effects all of us

To the Editor:

"Our USDA Service Center Closes its Doors!"

Would this headline get your attention rather than the next county over or a few counties down?

Do farmers and landowners alike understand they will be directly affected sooner or later? Is there any concern on real savings for agencies within the Department of Agriculture system by shutting doors, or is it a Band Aid covering a deep wound?

Is it possible that streamlining or using the existing expertise each individual agency has could impact current avenues in a positive way, rather than turf building?

These and many more issues need to be addressed and seriously considered, because once these agencies are relocated, it will take an act of Congress to get them back, if ever.

If you attended the Gove County hearing on March 16, it would be safe to say that every concern (about the Gove office) brought forward from the state level was not only countered but discredited by the few who spoke at that meeting.

Opposition was in abundance that day with compelling figures to back up their convictions. In fact, if there is any common sense in the decision to close the office's doors, it was so well hidden as we were unable to find it. One gentleman said it well when asking which would you rather rent, \$2 grass or \$20 grass to put your cattle on, if the grass was the same? It is sad to say, but it looks like the Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service would rather pay the \$20 rate.

The proposed savings from shutting down 11 offices across the state would be \$289,000 a year.

But what about the wear and tear on vehicles to transport employees to their new destination? Did they fail to mention the cost to pay these employees for driving time? Did they fail to mention the cost of fuel to transfer these employees? The list of questions goes on and on. What about the time spent driving rather than working, or did that slip their realistic agenda too? This is if all the employees don't move. If that were to happen, then they would have economies to factor in.

More money can be saved by streamlining and making more efficient use of the programs and delivery system currently in place. Ask any Farm Service Agency employee if they like all the duplication, and if they enjoy or deem necessary the paper trail currently in place. Could



from our readers

• to the editor

it be simplified, creating less administration time dedicated to paper shuffling? Could a computer-friendly program for farmers be a way of freeing up employees so they could better serve the agency?

Would conservation officials rather be shuffling paper or back in the field doing what they were trained to do? Has as much energy been put into fixing the problems rather than adding to them? Can we actually use the words "common sense" and "politics" in the same context?

Perhaps when the Department of Agriculture was founded, they meant to not only serve and implement programs and land grant institutions, other than to gradually starve out their purpose over time by choking the very unwavering adherence to which it was intended by design to help.

The farm programs delivered by Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service and conservation districts do not just serve farmers and ranchers. They help protect urban water supplies and the erosion of roads, rivers and streams.

Let's not forget that this money protects our

underground water and wildlife. Can anyone remember the dirt blowing in Kansas 70 years ago? I can name a few families that lost loved ones recently and not so recently due to dirt storms. Are we willing to put a price on that?

Every school in Kansas has an opportunity to partake in the education that is offered through these offices. Scholarships and training sessions, as well as educational camps for the teachers, are offered. The services and opportunities are mind boggling in number.

Are the citizens of Kansas going to be able to access these opportunities if they are many miles away? Yes, but with much added cost.

Are we really saving money or just redistributing? It really should be no big surprise to those of us who are the active participants of these programs that we will take yet another big hit in the pocketbook.

Are we willing to let a selective few determine the future of Kansas agriculture, a few who seems to have little, if any, foresight or patriotism to an old and diminishing profession? This doesn't affect a chosen few, but rather a much larger picture that has prosperity, or lack thereof, written all over it.

If you do nothing, then you are aiding to the demise of agriculture and its colleges. Get involved and get involved now because you may not have another chance!

Jon Starns, Brewster Area 1 Director, Kansas Association of Conservation Districts

