star-news opinion

from our viewpoint...

Old tags prettier, new ones pale blue

In Topeka, where spending your money is always a priority, the state Department of Revenue is issuing new license tags which, eventually, will replace the ones you have at a cost of several million dollars.

The department, known as KDOR, is proud of the new tags, which feature a slice of the Great Seal of the state — with the words Ad Astra and a field of stars visible in the pale blue back ground.

The "Ad Astra" tags are going out now to people who buy a car or need a new tag, but the state won't require people to have a new tag for another three years, in 2010.

By then, everyone will have to switch over, though it's likely more than half the tags on the road will be the new type. The state claims this will save money, but that's not likely.

The new tags are different, though many would argue that the present design, which features an image of the Statehouse in Topeka in pale blue and yellow, is prettier. At least the old tags have a little color; the new ones don't stand out much.

The three-year switch obviates the main reason the state has always used to justify changing tags, with all the incumbent cost. Always before, the department has said that changing the tags brings in more revenue because people have to pay renewal fees at least every time a new design comes out.

With a three-year switch over, though, that won't happen. Thousands with the new tags will be delinquent by the time everyone has to have one.

Someone has to pay for all the aluminum and plastic used to make the new tags, and if you can't figure out who that is, just think about it.

In switching to the new design, the department apparently abandoned the old number-letter series, "wasting" the unused Y and Z series. New tags have the three numbers first, with the letters last, the reverse of the old ones. The new series starts right off with 000 AAA.

Maybe nobody wanted Y or Z tags? Hard to say.

For our money — which it is, come to think about it — we see no reason for the state to recall perfectly good license plates. Why not just let people use them until they're too dim to read?

Kansas, like most states, used to issue new tags every year. It switched to "permanent" tags, but kept the idea of issuing a new design every so often to save money.

Having taken that leap, why not just go all the way and let two or more designs coexist? California and Colorado have done that, among other states.

And if the Revenue Department wants to increase collections and bust people who don't pay to renew their tags, why not double the size of the year and month stickers so the cops could read them?

That's likely to bring in more money than new tags, at a lot lower cost. But it's probably too logical to fly in Topeka. — *Steve Haynes*

PS: If you like the new tags, KDOR sells samples for $5.50 each. Information is available on the department website, but sorry, at that price, you can't put one on your car.

The Goodland Star-News

(USPS No. 222-460. ISSN 0893-0562)
Member: Kansas Press Association
Inland Press Association Colorado Press Association
National Newspaper Association
e-mail: **star-news@nwkansas.com**

Steve Haynes, President
Tom Betz, Editor
Erica Harlan, Copy Editor
Sharon Corcoran, Society Editor
Pat Schiefen, Reporter/Copy Editor
Sports Editor
Jordie Mann, Andrew Liebau Advertising Sales
Sheila Smith, Office Manager

Nor'west Press
Jim Bowker, General Manager
Richard Westfahl, DeLisa Allen, Betty Morris, James Jackson, Lana Westfahl, James Ornelas, David Erickson, Kris McCool

nwkansas.com
N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services
(ntbetz@nwkansas.com)
Evan Barnum, Systems Admin.(support@nwkansas.com)

Published every Tuesday and Friday except the days observed for New Year's Day, July 4th and Christmas Day, at 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

Periodicals postage paid at Goodland, Kan. 67735; entered at the Goodland, Kan., Post Office under the Act of Congress of March 8, 1878.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Goodland Star-News, 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

TELEPHONE: (785) 899-2338. Editorial e-mail: star-news@nwkansas.com. Advertising questions can be sent to: goodlandads@nwkansas.com

The Goodland Star-News assumes no liability for mistakes or omissions in advertising or failure to publish beyond the actual cost of the ad.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: In Sherman County and adjacent counties: three months, $29; six months, $46; 12 months, $81. Out of area, weekly mailing of two issues: three months, $39; six months, $54; 12 months, $89 (All tax included). Mailed individually each day: (call for a price).

Incorporating:
The Goodland Daily News
1932-2003
The Sherman County Herald
Founded by Thomas McCants
1935-1989

The Sherman County Star
Founded by Eric and Roxie Yonkey
1994-2001

Nor'West Newspapers
Haynes Publishing Company

I forgot to mention Red Wing Stoneware

cynthia haynes
• open season

I got into trouble with my column on going to Red Wing, Minn., and it didn't even have one single mention of cat.

One of our antique dealers took me to task for not mentioning one of the community's more famous products — Red Wing Stoneware. I can see why he thought maybe I hadn't seen any or heard of it. He has a shop window full of the big old crocks that the famous firm used to make.

Actually, I not only have heard of this product; I have some in my closet. My father used the crocks to make wine. After his death, Mom gave the stoneware to my son, who is still moving every year or so as he tries to find out what he wants to do with his life.

So, like his sister's cat, the stoneware has been left with Mom and Dad. And while I don't expect his sister to ever take back her cat, I hope son will one day settle down in a place of his own and take all his stored stuff out of the closet and basement.

According to the current producer's web site, the Red Wing Stoneware Co. started production in the 1878. The company joined forces with another local firm and changed its name to the Red Wing Stoneware and Sewer Pipe Co.

It was just one of several pottery firms busy in the Red Wing area in the late 1800s. Others included the North Star Stoneware Co. and the Minnesota Stoneware Co.

In March 1906, the potteries merged into the Red Wing Union Stoneware Co. In 1936, the name was again changed to Red Wing Potteries, but that firm closed its plant in 1967.

In 1984, the technical records, name and legal rights were purchased by new owners and the Red Wing Stoneware Co. resumed production in a new facility down the road from the old factory.

On my visit to Red Wing, I stopped by the new pottery and purchased a tiny crock, just large enough to keep next to the stove for spoons and spatulas. It's not an antique, but it's pretty and more useful to me than six huge wine crocks in the closet.

The old factory buildings have been turned into a fancy shopping and eating area called Pottery Place Mall. I didn't feel the least need for baby gifts, antiques, bath products or other assorted junk, so I stayed away.

An equally famous and historic product from the area is made by the Red Wing Shoe Co.

I remembered Red Wing shoes and went looking. I didn't really need any, but I figured they'd have all the latest styles and maybe some real good prices. It was worth a check.

What I didn't remember is exactly for what line the company is famous — big, heavy, steel-toed work boots.

I stuck with my piece of pottery.

Court strikes down integration plans

bill steigerwald
• newsmakers

The U.S. Supreme Court made history recently by striking down integration plans in school districts in Seattle and Louisville, Ky., that used race as a way to determine which schools students should attend. The 5-4 decision was split along liberal-conservative lines with Justice Anthony Kennedy tipping the balance in the combined opinion on Meredith v. Jefferson County Board and a similar case, Community Schools v. Seattle School District #1.

Liberals were generally dismayed by the ruling, which they feel undoes decades of race-based school integration schemes. But conservatives were pleased to hear Chief Justice John Roberts say, "The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race."

Probably no one was happier to hear those words from a Supreme Court justice than Ward Connerly. The chairman of the American Civil Rights Institute, he has worked tirelessly for years to oppose or reverse laws that use racial and gender preferences in schools and workplaces. I caught up with Connerly by phone at his home in Sacramento, Calif.

Q: Can you sum up what these cases were about and why you are so pleased by the decision?

A: The question revolves around whether K through 12 schools could use a student's race to determine what classes that kid could attend, or which school that kid could attend. While the cases did not deal with segregation of a school, as Brown v. Board of Education did, it dealt with the whole question of whether it constitutes discrimination to use race even in the pursuit of diversity in racial balancing. The court said, "No."

Now, it's important to understand that four of the justices were in favor of absolute colorblindness — (Samuel) Alito, (John) Roberts, (Antonin) Scalia and (Clarence) Thomas. Four of the justices were in favor of color consciousness. And one, Justice (Anthony) Kennedy, said, "I side with the colorblind people for the most part, but not absolutely."

Kennedy essentially said "I want you to prove it to me in other venues whether race should be used in K through 12, but my mind is open to that possibility." So if someone could devise a seemingly race-neutral way to arrive at not an exclusive use of race but a race-intended outcome, Justice Kennedy was saying, "I'm going to look at that." Roberts, et al., were saying, "We don't even want to hear it."

Q: You are pleased by this decision a lot, a little bit, what?

A: I am very pleased by the decision because the majority opinion represents a complete reversal of the (Grutter v. Bollinger) decision that was handed down June 23, 2003, involving the University of Michigan (which upheld the right of universities to consider race in admissions procedures in order to achieve a diverse student body). So I'm very pleased with it in that regard. I would have been ecstatic if Justice Kennedy had said, "I favor total colorblindness." He didn't say that.

Q: What was the worst aspect of the plans that were being used to try to balance the school systems in Seattle and Louisville?

A: The worst part was that they were really selecting these kids on the basis of race. They were saying in the Louisville case that the minimum percentage of black kids in a school would be 15 percent and the maximum would be 50 percent. That was essentially a quota, and the court has always come down against quotas.

Q: Who was being hurt most by that system — black kids, white kids, or both?

A: Both. That's why you had parents from both groups involved in the lawsuit. They were saying, "If you are a black parent, my kid has to go on an hour and 15 minute bus ride across town to go to a white school driving past his neighborhood school." White parents were saying, "Well, so does our kid." So they were both upset that their kids were being used for this ostensibly social experiment, the value of which has yet to manifest itself. There is no proof that a racially integrated school is somehow infinitely better than a school that is not racially integrated. I think most of us want racial integration, but the question is at what price should we favor the government orchestrating it for its own purposes?

Q: How common is this method of achieving racial balance?

A: I think it's fairly common. There are a lot of school districts in their magnet programs, for example, that use race to achieve this so-called diversity.

Q: Do you expect this decision to have a serious effect on other school districts?

A: Oh sure. It's going to have all kinds of effects. Our foundation, the American Civil Rights Foundation, has sued the Berkeley School District and the Los Angeles Unified School District for having programs that are similar to the ones that were thrown out. All across the country you will find programs of varying degrees that are similar to the Louisville and Seattle programs.

Q: Would you call this a "landmark" decision?

A: Yeah, I would, coming as it does on the heels of the decision on June 23 of 2003, where the court by a 5-4 margin said that race could be used by higher education to achieve diversity. This decision is 180 degrees from that. Remember that Sandra Day O'Connor said in 2003 she was voting in favor of the use of race for diversity purposes but she hoped that within 25 years this use would no longer be necessary.

Q: So this is a real serious threat to the idea of integrating schools by using race?

A: Yeah. I think it is. The fact that we stumble over this a little bit as we describe it kind of bespeaks what it is all about. There is no question that five years ago or 10 years ago a decision like this would not have occurred. The court always makes these decisions taking into account the social context. If you look at the decision that was handed down in 2003, and the 1978 Bakke decision (University of California Regents v. Bakke), in every instance the court kind of held its nose and said we know this is not the ideal way the government should conduct its business — by classifying its citizens on the basis of race. In the case of the 2003 decision, Sandra Day O'Connor didn't say "affirmative action," she said "race preferences." To have the court now hand down this decision kind of says that the court recognizes that times have changed.

Q: What's the next thing you'd like to see the Supreme Court fix on the issue of race and schools?

A: Overturn the Grutter decision. That's the decision that involved the University of Michigan Law School and undergraduate school in 2003, where the court said that using race to achieve diversity is constitutional because diversity is a compelling situation.

Q: It sounds like the key from your point of view is to replace Justice Kennedy.

A: I would have some very good nights sleep if one of the other four happened to be replaced. But if one of the other four happened to resign, then I think that would provide an opportunity. But if we could get the fifth vote, then that would slam the door on racial preferences. The other thing is to continue pursuing initiatives at the ballot box to build a national consensus which the court has to take a note of — that race should not be used.

Bill Steigerwald is a columnist at the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review. E-mail Bill at bsteigerwald@tribweb.com.