

from our viewpoint...

Flatlander Festival fun for how long?

The Flatlander Fall Festival — beginning today and running through Sunday afternoon — has grown into one of the best events of the year, and provides fun for everyone in the family.

The Early Iron Rod Run celebrated 20 years last year. In one of our stories it was reported this is the 20th this year, but it is actually the 21st annual car show. We want to thank Scott Lockhart, a member of the Early Iron Car Club for pointing out our inconsistency in the years.

The Brick Top Cruisers are the new car club who became organized this summer to continue the car show and technically it is their first year.

What is ultimately important is that with the efforts of the members of the Brick Top Cruisers the Rod Run is continuing and hopefully there will be a 22nd year for the car show and more years beyond.

Some of the confusion comes from the story that the Rod Run was older than the festival, but we were given information that what is today the Flatlander Fall Festival was an Oktoberfest celebration held at a different time than the Rod Run. Apparently with the success of the Rod Run the other festival was moved and combined to create our wonderful Flatlander Fall Festival.

We regret any confusion any inconsistencies in the number of annual years of the festival and car show may cause some people. The best thing to do is to meet at the beer garden on Saturday and toast the success of the community's efforts to build on the foundation laid by those who got it all started more than 20 years ago.

The Flatlander Festival committee has worked hard and deserves a round of cheers for their efforts. It appears the committee had a better handle on the discussions with Mother Nature, as it appears the weather will be nicer than last year.

A bigger anniversary was observed this week when Rasure Lumber Do It Center celebrated 60 years in business.

Being in business for that long and continuing as a family business is an accomplishment worthy of special note.

The evening was pleasant Tuesday with a special business after hours and reception where the Rasure family invited everyone to come help celebrate their anniversary.

It was not easy for Kevin Rasure's grandfather Paul Rasure to strike out on his own in 1947, and Kevin said his grandfather faced come tough competition from the Foster Lumber Company, where he had been a manager for many years before. His grandfather was not a spring chicken at 57 when he decided to start a lumberyard of his own.

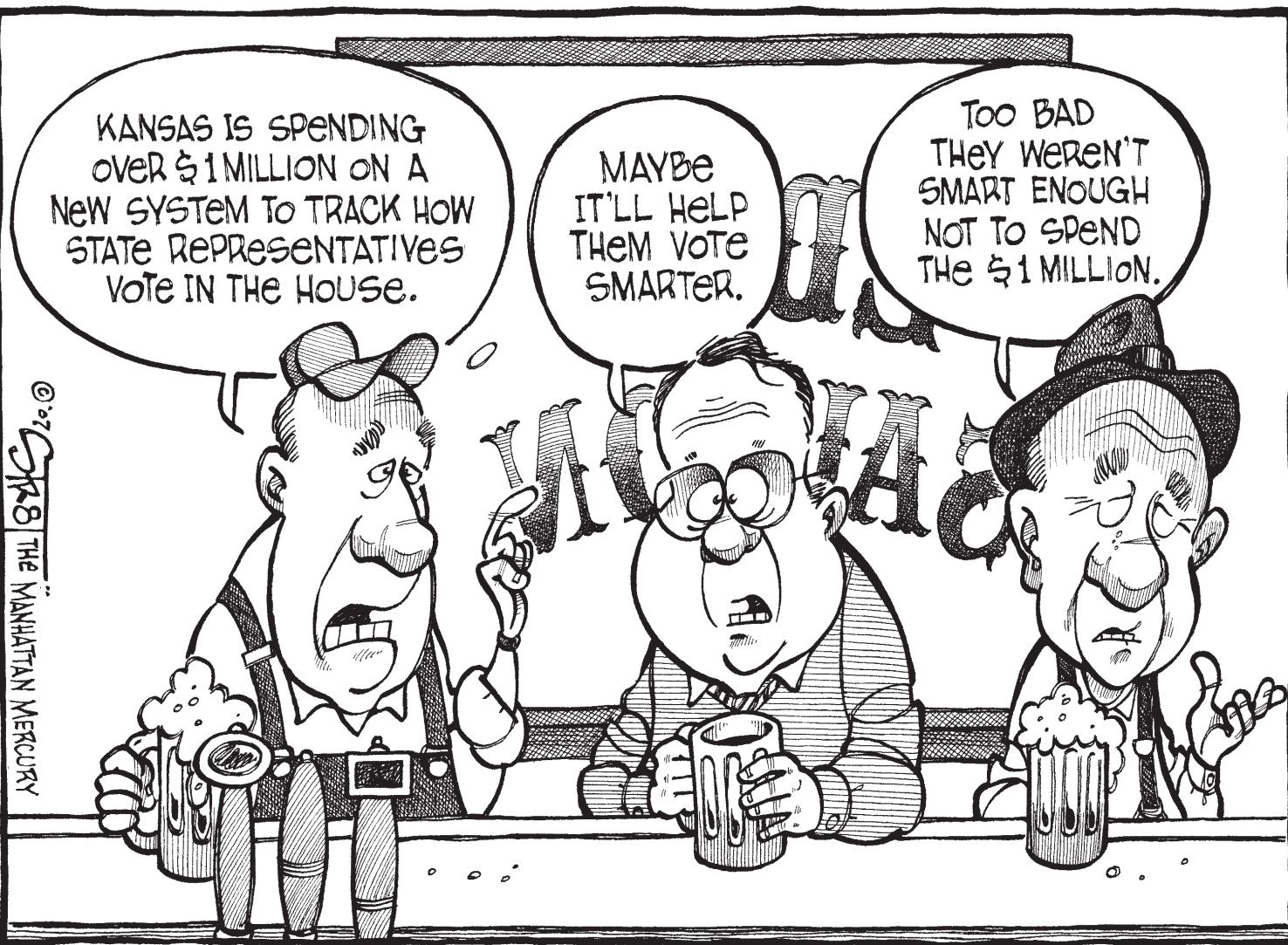
The timing was good at the end of the war, but with all the returning soldiers there was a lack of supplies, and sometimes those in competition could twist certain arms to keep an independent like Rasure from getting a fair shake on lumber and other building supplies to try to squeeze the little guy out.

Rasure not only survived, but the business grew and expanded and his son Dick took over the management.

Continuing family businesses takes real commitment and Kevin has shown the third generation has the same values and good business ethics that he learned from his grandfather and father.

Keeping a family business afloat and continue to provide good service and be competitive is certainly not easy. Rasure Lumber and the Rasure family and employees are an example of the strong base and work ethic of small town rural America.

A salute to the Rasure Lumber family! May your example inspire young entrepreneurs for the future. — Tom Betz



On handwritten letters

I received an unexpected postcard in the mail the other day from an old friend. It made my day.

It's been a long time since I've gotten a handwritten letter from a friend -- it has to be 10 or 15 years. What's worse, I can't remember the last time I wrote one.

The reasons are obvious: e-mail, text messaging and cell phones. It's so fast and easy to whip off a quick note electronically, why would anybody take an hour or more to hand-write one?

I love what technology has allowed me to do. I'm able to keep in touch with more friends than I ever could have with traditional letters. Every now and then I "Google" a long-lost friend and pull up an e-mail address and contact number. I fire off an e-mail and soon a friendship that has been dormant for 20 years or more has been resurrected.

I've made new friends this way, too. A few years ago, I made a call to an editor in a big city whom I'd never spoken with before. I called to pitch my column. We chatted for a spell and he agreed to review samples of my work.

A few weeks later he began running my column in the papers he oversees. Early on, we began swapping e-mail about the column and writing in general. One night, as I sat in a pub writing, the fellow sent me an instant text message. We chatted back and forth electronically for a while.

Well, we've been chatting this way two or three nights a week for a year and a half now.



tom purcell

• commentary

While I sit in a pub, my friend sits on his back porch in California. We chat about writing, sports, politics, family ... a million things.

This fellow is now one of my best friends. He even helped guide and edit a mystery novel I'd been struggling with (thanks to his assistance, I finally finished the thing after six years of agony).

I share details of this friendship for one reason: I never met the fellow in person. I'm not entirely sure what he looks like. We spoke on the phone only once. Our friendship has evolved entirely through electronic means.

Still, I miss getting handwritten letters in the mail.

I've kept every letter I ever received. I have boxes of them in the attic of a little rental property I own. I remember one Saturday in 2000 when I decided to move from that property to Washington, D.C. I had to organize my stuff and store what I wasn't taking with me in the attic. It began as an unpleasant task that soured my mood.

As I sorted through years of "junk," I stumbled upon a letter I had received in 1985, a year after I graduated college. It was from a

fellow I'd gone to Penn State with, who went on to become an editor in Bangor, Maine. It was written on a light-blue final-exam booklet with great wit and humor.

As I read it that Saturday in 2000, it took me back 15 years -- took me back to exactly who I was when I was 24. I laughed out loud as I read it. As soon as I finished, I began fishing around for more letters.

I found a stack of them in pink envelopes from two girls, Bonnie and Tracey, who attended the same college as my friend Griff. He had them send me an anonymous letter once during our freshman year. A robust correspondence resulted between 1980 and 1984. As I reread those letters that Saturday in 2000, I laughed so hard tears tumbled down my face.

I spent hours that Saturday rereading the dozens of letters I'd received over the years. It was amazing to me how much living I'd done and forgotten about. A day that started off unpleasantly became one of the most uplifting Saturdays of my life.

Yeah, I like e-mail and text messages and cell phones. I like handwritten letters, too. If only we could figure out a way to embrace technological advances without tossing out the best of the old ways.

Perhaps we just need to sing: "Why don't we sit right down and write ourselves a letter ..."

Tom Purcell is a nationally syndicated humor columnist. For comments to Tom, please email him at Purcell@caglecartoons.com.

Are our 37 million poor really poor?

Robert Rector of The Heritage Foundation is a national authority on poverty and the U.S. welfare system. Specializing in welfare reform and family breakdown, Rector has done extensive research on the economic and social costs of welfare.

With presidential candidates of a certain hue decrying the suffering of the 37 million Americans who have been officially classified as poor by the U.S. Census Bureau, we thought we'd ask Rector if these poor people are really as poverty-stricken as we have been led to believe.

I talked to the author of "America's Failed \$5.4 Trillion War on Poverty" on Sept. 6, by telephone from his office in Washington:

Q: John Edwards and others lament that 37 million Americans struggle with incredible poverty every day. You say it is not so simple or accurate to think of them as truly poor. What do you mean?

A: Well, when John Edwards says that one in eight Americans do not have enough money for food, shelter or clothing, that's generally what the average citizen is thinking about when they hear the word "poverty." But if that's what we mean by poverty, then virtually none of these 37 million people that are ostensibly poor are actually poor. In reality, the government runs multiple surveys that allow us to examine the physical living conditions of these individuals in great detail.

When you look at the people who John Edwards insists are poor, what you find is that the overwhelming majority of them have cable television, have air conditioning, have microwaves, have two color TVs; 45 percent of them own their own homes, which are typically three-bedroom homes with 1(1/2) baths in very good recondition. On average, poor people who live in either apartments or in houses are not crowded and actually have more living space than the average person living in European countries, such as France, Italy or England.

Q: How many Americans would you define as "truly poor"?

A: If you are looking at people who do not



bill steigerwald

• newsmakers

have adequate warm, dry apartments that are in good repair, and don't have enough food to feed their kids, you're probably looking at one family in 100, not one family in eight.

Q: Who are these "truly poor" and where do they live?

A: Generally, they will be families that have a whole lot of behavioral issues in addition to mere economic issues — possibly drug problems, mental problems, certainly very low work effort, probably unmarried mothers and so forth. They would be spread around the country. Very few of them are elderly. Even though the elderly appear to have low incomes, they are not likely to lack food or to have a hole in their roof or things like that.

Q: Is there any single reason why the "official poor" are poor?

A: If you look at the official poor, particularly at children who are officially in poverty, there are two main reasons for that. One is that their parents don't work much. Typically in a year, poor families with children will have about 16 hours of adult work per week in the household. If you raised that so that you had just one adult working full time, 75 percent of those kids would immediately be raised out of poverty.

Q: Are these 37 million officially poor people the same people year after year, decade after decade?

A: Not exactly. Some of them are just down there temporarily. Others tend to be in poor or near-poor status for a long time. That would tend to be true of single mothers, for example. ... But vis-a-vis the single mothers, it's important to understand that 38 percent of all children are born to a mother who is not married and in half of the cases she is actually living with the father and the couple will express an interest in marriage but it never actually happens. One of

the simplest and most important things we could do to reduce child poverty would be to go and communicate to those couples — all of whom are low-income — the importance of marriage for their own well-

Q: You said we're spending \$600 billion a year?

A: That's what we are spending on cash, food, housing and medical care. The biggest program in there is Medicaid, followed by something called the "earned income tax credit." The federal government, with state governments, runs 70 different means-tested welfare programs. These are programs that provide assistance exclusively to poor and low-income Americans.

Q: How much of this money actually gets to the poor people who need it and how much is overhead?

A: Most of the money goes directly to poor people either as services or as something like a food stamp or medical care. The problem with these programs is that they reward individuals for not working and not being married. Essentially, they set up a very negative set of incentives that tends to push people deeper into poverty rather than helping them climb out of it.

Q: We've known for a long time about these problems with the welfare system. Is there any progress being made to fix them?

A: In 1996, we reformed one small welfare program — Aid to Families with Dependent Children — by requiring the recipients or part of the recipients to perform work in exchange for the benefits.

As a result of that, we got a huge decline in welfare rolls, a huge surge in employment and record drops in black child poverty. Unfortunately, the rest of the welfare system — the remaining 69 programs — remained unreformed. Until we reform those programs in a similar way, we will make no further progress against poverty.

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

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@nwkans.com

Steve Haynes, President
Tom Betz, Editor
Pat Schiefen, Society Editor
Sharon Corcoran, Reporter
Sports Editor

Jordie Mann, Andrew Liebau Advertising Sales
Sheila Smith, Office Manager

Nor'west Press

Jim Bowker, General Manager
Richard Westfahl, Betty Morris,
James Jackson, Lana Westfahl, Kris McKool
James Ornelas, David Erickson, Amanda Campbell

nwkans.com

N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services
(ntbetz@nwkans.com)

Evan Barnum, Systems Admin. (support@nwkans.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@nwkans.com. Advertising questions can be sent to: goodlandads@nwkans.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