

from our viewpoint...

Public notices really are news

The front pages of our nation's newspapers are more colorful and compelling than ever. From the smallest county-seat weekly to the largest city tabloid, action shots reach out to the reader, trying to draw you in.

We try our best to help you stay informed, even as you blog, GPS and phone-video your way through the world.

But while there's plenty of interesting news in the front, we find the back of the paper even more important. We invite the reader to join us there.

The public notices in most newspapers appear in the classified section. In some states, that is because the law considers them classified ads. In others, it's simply tradition. They've been there for all of our lives. Lewis and Clark used public notices. Most state constitutions were drawn up with the help of public notices.

Now they are so much part of our tradition that we sometimes forget them. These notices are part of the three-legged stool of democracy: open public meetings, public records and public notices.

They let us know about tax increases, zoning changes and property foreclosures — when they are allowed to work.

Washington Gov. Christine Gregoire drew attention to these notices this year when she signed a bill requiring her governments — state and local — to go back to using public notices to inform citizens. The law she signed was a reaction to a state Supreme Court decision involving the owners of a small business whose property was condemned to make way for a parking lot.

The public notice provided by the transit authority was posted solely on the agency's own Internet website. There it announced condemnation of private property. The property owners never saw the notice. They sued, but the Washington Supreme Court said notice on an obscure website was good enough.

The state legislature thought otherwise. It now requires notices to be mailed to property owners — and a notice to be put back into the newspaper, where people will see it. As the state of Washington has acknowledged, people have a right to know.

In most states, an unclaimed property fund exists in the state treasury for assets in long-forgotten bank accounts, uncollected insurance claims and personal property, all belonging to someone who has not yet found it. In the days of more vigorous newspaper notices, readers could pore over interesting catalogues of unfound heirs and uncashed checks. Today, in many states, notice of these funds has shrunk to a page buried in a state computer.

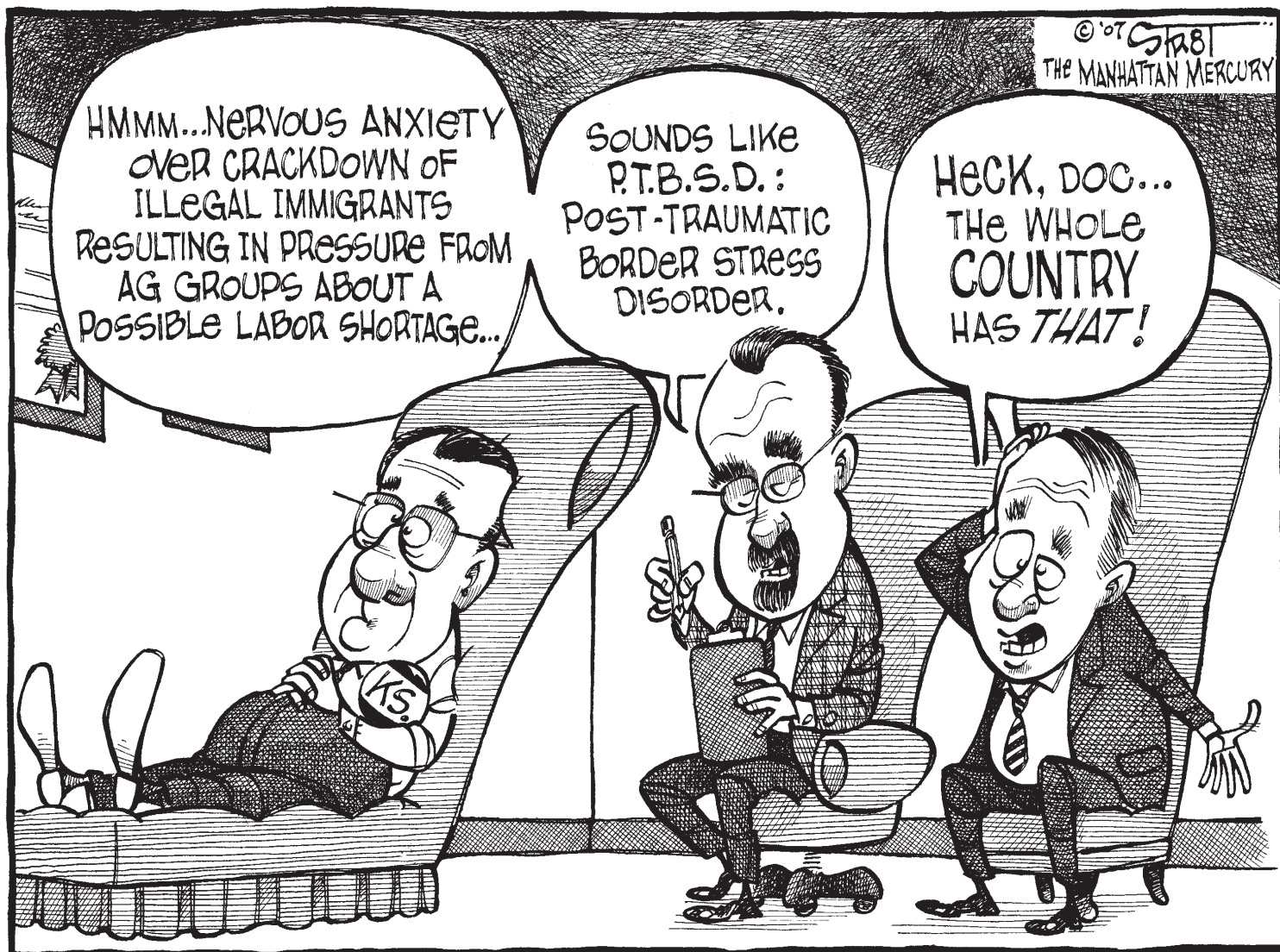
A federal judge in California has stepped into that state's hoarding of these rich deposits. He stopped the state from continuing to rake in the contents of abandoned lock boxes and the like. He demanded a better effort by the state to find rightful owners.

The Internet is going to be an important channel for delivery of newspaper information. It also will help newspapers provide broader public notice. But the Internet must not become a tool of secrecy for our governments.

Washington's governor and legislature understand this principle. The California judge knows visible public notice is important. Newspapers provide public notices week after week where people can see them, not locked away on some obscure website.

That's why so many readers are like us. We read the paper from back to front. — *Steve Haynes*

This editorial was distributed to publications across the country for the observance of National Newspaper Week this week. Steve Haynes, president of Nor'West Newspapers, is president of the National Newspaper Association. He is a former president of the Kansas and Colorado Press associations.



Jamestown celebrates 400 years

In the spring of 1607, the first permanent English settlement was made at Jamestown in what was to be called Virginia.

The 104 men and boys who settled Jamestown came over from England on three ships — the Susan Constant, the Goodspeed and the Discovery. After months at sea, they set up their new home on a swampy, dismal coast far from home among unfriendly natives but away from even unfriendlier Spaniards, who already had colonized parts of the New World.

No women came on those ships. The men were part of a commercial venture by the Virginia Co. of London, named after Elizabeth, the supposedly virgin queen. The job of the colonists was to set up a camp and find something worth sending back to England — preferably gold and silver.

Half the crew were laborers, artisans and craftsmen. The other half were gentlemen, mostly unused to hard labor but good with weapons.

The new settlers set up palisades and put up buildings including a church.

The first women arrived the next year, in 1608.

Life was hard and the natives weren't friendly. Supply ships were wrecked and the



cynthia haynes

• open season

colony was in dire straits.

The winter of 1609-1610 is called "the starving time," and the colony was nearly abandoned when supplies arrived that spring.

The colonists found no gold or silver and most of the English crops they tried failed.

Finally, tobacco, a product many Americans might prefer had never been discovered, became the colony's best cash crop.

The Indian problems were temporarily solved when Pocahontas, Chief Powhatan's daughter, was captured and held as hostage.

Pocahontas converted to Christianity and married one of the settlers, John Rolfe.

Her joining the settlers helped bring peace between them and the Indians for about 10 years — enough time to plant the Englishmen firmly on American soil.

When I was in school, I learned most of this. But everyone thought Jamestown had been lost to the ages.

Historians thought the site of the original colony had been washed away. The wooden stockade and buildings were gone. It was believed that almost 400 years ago, the site had become part of the James River.

Then in 1994, archaeologist William Kelso started excavation in the area where the foundations of a church could be seen.

He believed that the church played a central role in the lives of the colonists and would have been inside the fort. That hunch proved to be right, and he soon uncovered dark, round stains in the soil left by the palisade logs.

Further excavation determined that most of the Jamestown site was not in the river, but still on dry land, and since then thousands of artifacts have been uncovered. Many are on display at a new museum there.

Now on its 400th birthday, Jamestown has attracted visitors from all over the world to both the historic site and a reproduced settlement where costumed re-enactors show how the colonists and Indians lived in those early years.

I was one of those visitors, last week, and believe me, the short time I spent there was not enough.

Free speech ain't free. Oh, yeah, it is.

After all the brouhaha in New York this week, this seems like a good time to have us a little chat about free speech. Not restricted free speech. Not partial free speech. Not pseudo-semi-counterfeit-limited-free speech. Not free speech on Wednesdays between 2:00 and 3:00 p.m. EDT. Not free speech zones, and not free speech reserved for the people we like and kept from the ones we don't. No, my friends, I'm talking about your total, unfettered, full throated, in your face, front row death metal rock concert, spitting in the wind, 24/7, every square inch of your big white furry butt, gushing like runoff from a rain gutter off a cantilevered roof during a force-five hurricane in the tropics of free speech.

There's no whining about who gets to speak at what college. We're supposed to be setting an example. Doesn't matter out of which holes the free speech is coming from. The mouths of an opposition politico, or the biggest little two-bit dictator in the world, or the personification of Lucifer himself replete with red horns and forked tail and cloven hooves. But let's leave the vice president out of this one.

Everybody gets to say their piece. That's



will durst

• raging moderate

the deal. Even if half the world considers that "piece" total BS. Face it; half of what WE believe usually turns out to be total BS. Beliefs have this nagging tendency to mutate over time. It wasn't long ago they burned people as witches for not thinking the world was flat. Wasn't it Cardinal Richelieu who said treason is just a matter of dates?

The same way it is better to let 100 guilty people go free rather than convict one innocent person, it's better we let 100 cretinous, fool, toad, buttwives reveal themselves as boneheads, just so a safe platform for the idealistic visionary is guaranteed. Given enough rope, idiots are notoriously susceptible to hanging themselves from the noose of their own ridiculousness.

And yes, Mr. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, I'm talking about you. Ad-

mitedly, you got a lousy intro at Columbia University, but when you agree to a Q&A, the general routine is to answer the questions you get asked. And yeah, okay, the crowd laughed at you and no, you can't execute them like the gays you say your country doesn't have. Our crowds enjoy free speech too. Democracy is a bitch isn't it? And next time, for crum's sake, wear a tie.

If free speech isn't what this country is all about, what the hell are we fighting for? Free speech ain't free. Oh wait a minute. Yeah, it is. As we witnessed at the UN when both Presidents Bush and Ahmadinejad got to exercise their rights on the same day. Think of it: on one hand you got a religious fanatic who sponsors secret prisons and has antagonized the entire world, and on the other hand you got an Iranian. And you know why I get to say that? That's right. I think you're finally getting the hang of it.

Former beer smuggler Will Durst thinks confidential free speech sucks too.

Will Durst is a political comedian who has performed around the world. E-mail Will at durst@caglecartoons.com.

Impressed with the Van Gogh painting

To the Editor:

Recently I had a chance to visit your city and was most impressed with the Van Gogh painting that is part of your newly-created city entrance.



from our readers

• to the editor

I am certain that this was a most expensive and time-consuming effort by the leadership of your community, and I would like to express to them my thanks. However, as a person just passing through, I did not know to whom I should express my thoughts.

While staying at the Motel 6, I asked the management about the best way to thank those responsible for their efforts. She thought that I should write a letter to you. I hope my thoughts will be passed on.

Thank you for your help.
Rosco P. Gaethers
Maize

To the Editor:

In the discussion about the coal fired generators proposed to be built near Holcomb, Kansas, I have not heard anyone mention one of the worse pollutants produced by such coal fired generators.

The water downwind from the coal fired generators — rivers, farm ponds, and other water — will be polluted with mercury, a deadly poison to anyone who eats fish from mercury polluted water.

The mercury polluting smokestacks of Chicago and Detroit have made it impossible for my friends and relatives who live downwind to eat fish from the water of a multi-state area.

Rev. Gene M. Tromble
Retired United Methodist pastor, hunter and fisherman
Goodland

Letter Policy

The Goodland Star-News encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, and must include a telephone number and a signature. Unsigned letters will not be published. Form letters will be rejected, as will letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive. We reserve the right to edit letters for length and good taste. We encourage letters, with address and phone numbers, by e-mail to: <star-news@nw-kansas.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

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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