

from our viewpoint...

We're glad to help, ask for transparency

At *The Star-News*, we're often asked to run items — and donate ads — for fund-raising events. And we're glad to help. Occasionally, though, the sponsor of an event is less than forthcoming about the finances involved, and this causes some problems.

We think anyone who asks the public for money should be completely open — transparent, as they say in government today — about what they're doing. When you go public with an appeal, after all, it's no longer a private matter. This applies both to groups raising money for a specific cause and quasi-public agencies like the Sherman County Community Services who run the carnival, the Goodland Area Chamber of Commerce or the High Plains Museum board.

The basic principle applies to all: if you ask the public for money, you need to account for it. It shouldn't be a big deal, and usually it isn't.

But there have been enough questions that we'd like to set out a policy, and it is this:

If you want us to run a story about any appeal for money, we need enough information about how it will be spent to give people confidence in giving. The release ought to say exactly what the money will go for. If it will be for a civic group's projects or a specific project, say so. If you're raising money for an individual or family, give a clear statement of the need, not just a name. Why does this person or family need money?

Groups such as the carnival group or Chamber (and we cite these as examples, not as problems) are mostly private in nature, but they ask the public to support them. The Chamber has as its membership most of the businesses in the county and many individuals. An agency like that — or the carnival board, which performs a public role at the county fair — owes it to the "stockholders" in town to be forthcoming.

The need for openness is stronger with groups such as the Fair Board and Museum Board, formed by and supported at least partly — in the case of the museum mostly — with tax money. They fall under the state Open Records Act and by law must make their finances public.

We are not criticizing past performance by any group. Most are more than willing to let the public know what they are up to. But we want everyone to know the questions we'll be asking and the information we expect to publish in the paper.

Life is easier when we have all the cards on the table. We want fund raisers, especially those doing a one-time or infrequent appeals, to know what will be expected. After the event, we'll want to know how much was raised and where it went.

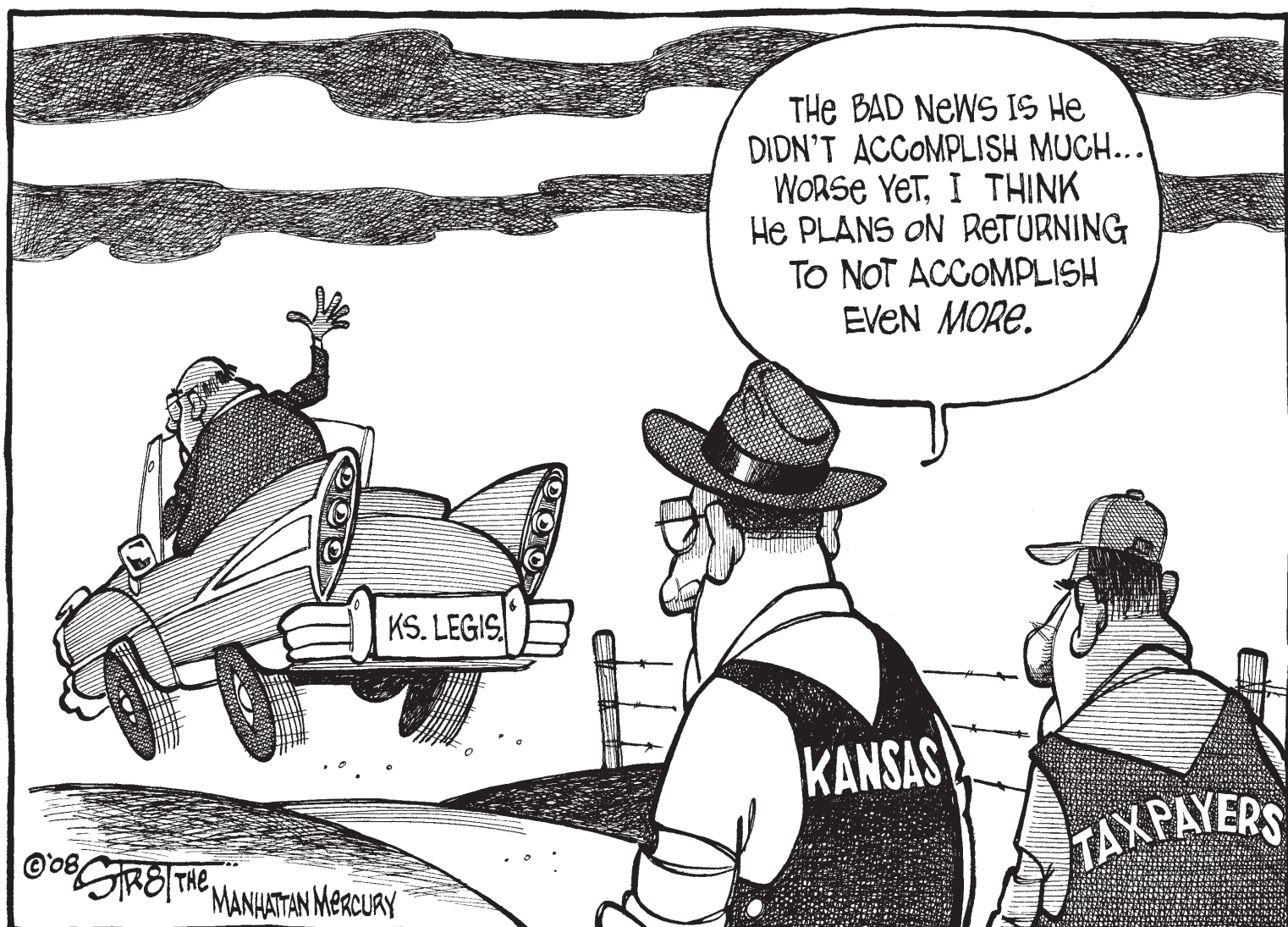
The Star-News always supports community causes. We will run a story in advance of any event, and we try to get a report on how each one did. For groups such as the carnival board, whose members may be unfamiliar with the situation, we report each year on the group's finances and the performance of the home-owned carnival. The bottom line is, when you are spending someone else's money, you need to be prepared to account for it. It's not a big deal, just part of being in public life.

Anyone with questions is more than welcome to ask how this applies to their situation. When you call with a release on a fund raiser, we'll try to explain.

And we're liable to have some questions of our own. Take no offense. We're just getting a report for the community you serve.

— Steve Haynes

Any group collecting and spending people's money should be glad to make a report on how the event went.



Priest finds inspiration in top 20 songs

Mike Scully might just be the quintessential Irish priest.

Balding, grey fringe of hair, jutting jaw and ruddy complexion, a twinkle in his eye: give him a green hat and put a pipe in his mouth, heck, he could pass for a leprechaun.

A big leprechaun, for sure, but as mischievous as any on record.

And while you might think a 68-year-old Catholic priest would be the least likely person around to spend his time listening to rock and rap music, you don't know Father Scully.

He says he started listening to the top 20 songs on the radio more than 25 years ago and found, not sin and iniquity, but inspiration for the teens and college students in his flock.

Having been a high school teacher in Hays and a pastor in Lawrence, he found plenty of common ground in the music the kids he dealt with were listening to.

Known as an inspirational speaker as well as a musicologist, Father Scully has a radio show on a Hays station from 10 a.m. to noon on Sundays that's popular with teens and college students. He spoke to students at Decatur Community High, and to the Oberlin Rotary Club, last Tuesday.

Sometimes, he said, he has to get the kids to slow down and listen to the words. Most people are so caught up in the music, he said, that they don't really listen to the lyrics.

And in rock and rap, he said, there's often plenty to listen to — and not what many adults



steve haynes

• along the sappa

might expect.

He brags that he's got every top 20 song since 1980 running around in his head.

"Can you imagine what that does to your brain," he says with a sly smile.

Inspiration from rock? Eighty percent of popular songs are about love, he notes.

"I say every love song has a message you can learn from," he said, adding that people, especially teens, have trouble talking to each other about love.

A couple of his favorites are "Paralyzer" by the group Finger Eleven, and "Never Too Late" by Three Days Grace. You can look them up on the Internet.

"Listen to the music and listen to the message," he said, adding that a lot of adults criticize teen music without really listening.

The best message from a song? someone asks.

"Something to Believe In" by the heavy-metal, death's-head group Poison in 1985.

"You'd never believe it from Poison," he said. "A very difficult song."

Father Scully came to Oberlin at the request of students who'd heard him at a Rotary Youth

Leadership camp. He went over the five principles of leadership he gave them, part of a talk that impressed the kids so much they wanted all their schoolmates to hear it.

They are:
• Study your behavior and ask why.
• Develop the ability to talk and to listen.
• Never stop learning.
• Develop the ability to love.
• Choose a significant guide.

"And for me, that's God through Christ Jesus," he adds, "and I'd be glad to talk about that. It's not important what you choose, but you must make it something that's important in your life."

And of course, all that can be related to music.

A priest with a sense of humor who studies rock music and relates to teens. It took me a few minutes to recall the first time I'd met him.

We'd gone to church in Lawrence, where Father Scully served after leaving Thomas More Prep in Hays. He was talking about people who left Mass right after communion, ducked out and sped off for home. Many, he complained, parked right under the street-side stained glass windows at St. John the Evangelist and gunned their engines as they left.

"If you have to leave early," he grumbled, that twinkle in his eye, "at least park somewhere else."

Oh, yeah, I remembered Mike Scully. Most people do.

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'Horton Hears a Who' rings cash registers

A lovable elephant is stealing the hearts of children and adults across America. Would you ever expect that Horton of "Horton Hears a Who" could reach the pinnacle of Hollywood stardom as the lead in a number-one box-office hit?

The elite executives of Tinseltown would answer "no." Their reasoning? Horton is a G-rated, animated movie. They claim to know that G-rated movies cannot be number one, especially one based on a Dr. Seuss book written in 1954 about a friendly, talking elephant that comes to the rescue of a community of tiny folks called Whos.

Have you ever watched a movie and thought, "Why did they have to put that in there?" (You fill in the blank with one or all of the following: foul language, nudity, excessive violence, etc.) "This movie would have been so much better without it," you think. "It really wasn't necessary and only ended up detracting from the movie." We have such thoughts frequently.

Hollywood likes to respond: "We are just giving people what they want." But who are these "people" they are catering to by making movies filled with explicit nudity, graphic violence, profanity and foul language, and rated R or N-17?

For answers to questions about the movie marketplace, let's look at some empirical data. Recent studies reveal that G-rated movies perform exceedingly better in the box office than films on the opposite side of the spectrum. The Nielsen Company reports "G" movies make three to five times more money per movie at the box office than R-rated films.

And it's not only that the film is G-rated that brings people to the movie theater, but that it's a movie with strong moral content, like 2007's popular "Enchanted," or movies with a strong redemptive or Christian worldview. In the last decade, movies which come to mind with this philosophical viewpoint and theme are "Amazing Grace," "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy, "Spider-Man 3," "The Chronicles of Narnia" and "Remember the Titans," to name just a few.

"Sex, nudity, obscenity, and profanity don't really sell that well, especially in extreme forms," says Dr. Ted Baehr, founder and publisher of Movieguide, a comprehensive direc-



floyd, mary brown

• commentary

tory which examines the content of movies. "But movies with very strong Christian worldviews do three to 11 times better than movies with sex, nudity and foul language," he says. "They also perform much better than movies with very strong non-Christian, immoral, false, or even anti-Christian worldviews." Baehr's data comes from a recently released five-year study showing that movies with very strong Christian worldviews earn the most money.

Hollywood would do itself and America a service if it went back to the Code of Decency that led to what has been called Hollywood's Golden Era from 1933 to 1966. In the 1930s, the film industry formed a group to improve their image and they introduced the Production Code, "to help the industry regulate itself by following certain moral principles and guidelines."

During the years that it was enforced, most movies had noble themes, such as honor, duty, valor, and pride in our national heritage. Not only that, there was a clear distinction between right and wrong. Jack Warner of Warner Brothers Studio said all of his movies had to have a moral to the story with a noble hero and an im-

moral scoundrel, both sides sharply defined.

When the Codes of Decency were abandoned in 1968, and superseded by the new ratings systems which are still in use today, movies quickly changed (and not for the better).

Movies made up until 1968 directed the movie watcher toward towering ideals and truths, like the classic Westerns. But then began the downhill slide. By the '70s, moral absolutes began to disappear from the movies. Think: "The Graduate."

President Reagan detested how movies had changed in the '60s and '70s and wrote in a letter while governor of California, "[T]hose pictures with no four letter words, no nude scenes, no blatant sex, no vulgarity were better theatre than today's realism." Reagan's words still hold true today and we couldn't have said it better.

Let's hope Hollywood finally listens and gets the message by making more quality movies that Americans want to buy a ticket to see. Americans want to leave the theater feeling good, not wishing we hadn't just shelled out our money on garbage. Give us movies with real heroes and stories that are uplifting, inspiring and good clean fun. Money talks. Are you listening, Hollywood?

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