

from our viewpoint...

Kudos to all our firefighters

Just about every day the news has been full of stories about wild fires all over the country, and on our recent trip to Arizona we drove through the burned remains of the forest north of Raton, N.M.

We were not sure we were even going to be able to go that way because the fire had closed that 12 miles portion of I-25, but it opened early on the morning we were driving south.

The signs were up for fire crews and we could see smoke on the ridges on the east side and a wide path of blackened trees stretching along the west side and across to the east and up the side of the hills.

South of Raton we saw a helicopter hauling a large water bucket toward a fire spot somewhere to the northeast.

We had decided to go south because of the huge fire to the west in Arizona that was moving through the Apache National Forest, and did not want to get caught up in that congestion.

Further south in New Mexico we saw the clouds of smoke from fires along the south side of I-10 and the haze from a number of other wildfires burning in southern New Mexico.

Driving along we felt it was a good time to think about the wonderful volunteer firemen we have in Sherman County and Goodland who work hard to protect us and our property from raging grass fires and house fires.

With the high winds Sherman County firemen have been called out several times to handle grass fires, and on occasion Goodland firemen have been called to assist.

The Goodland firemen recently were called to help with a fire in a grain leg at SunOpta and had to haul hose to the top to put out a fire. Chief Brian James said it was not a big fire, but they were worried it would spread to the nearby grain bins that were full.

For both the county and the city these volunteers spend a lot of time each month training to stay current on the best fire fighting techniques and frequently get to put some of that training into practice.

The city and county have been looking at ways to either consolidate or better coordinate the fire protection in the county, and the volunteers are working to help improve the ISO ratings to help homeowners with their insurance costs.

We do not often think of the many ways volunteers help and feel it is good to acknowledge the important service they provide to the community and the whole county.

The firefighters are not alone in this effort as we would be remiss if we did not mention the great work of the Emergency Medical Technicians and Pari-Medics who man the ambulance service.

We know the budgets for both the city and county are stretched tight, but when the commissioners are studying ways to cut we certainly hope these volunteers are getting what they need to continue to provide the wonderful protection and emergency services to our people.

Our best kudos to all those emergency service volunteers both in Sherman County and those fighting the many wildfires around the country. — Tom Betz



Elder driving, how to avoid getting caught

Let's talk about a subject that has split many families, and how this 'Man of the Plains' avoided getting caught in that net.

Elder driving. Yep, driving when you really shouldn't be.

This always causes a heated exchange between a parent and the kids. As an example, let's say Mom has passed on and Pop is up there in age and he sometimes navigates his machine in a fashion that causes concern. Or, there might be a slip of the tongue about some weird experience while driving. These are tell-tale signs that the time has come for Pop to hang up the keys.

"But that's not fair! How would I get around?" he will ask, with a stern look that makes you feel guilty for even bringing up the subject. Church, groceries, visits, card club, and the list of reasons for hanging onto the keys goes on.

You need to be prepared and have answers that make sense. And don't think those six hated words, "You're getting too old to drive," will carry any weight. It won't. Expect a chilly reception from "old Pop" after you drop the "too old to drive" bomb on him. It'll take a while, quite a while for him to allow those words to sink in. And then again, he just might resent the suggestion and continue driving.

The roadways are packed with aging drivers who shouldn't be part of the pack. You'll spot them. Slowing everything down, or pretending to be part of the racetrack mentality. And there is always that thought in the minds of others: "Well, there's another one of those 'shouldn't be' drivers."

How did I avoid the family confrontation? I hung up the keys myself.

I had noticed things just weren't always making a lot of sense while behind the wheel. I was 75 at the time. Some of the examples of "why I shouldn't be driving" included:

1) A need to blink rapidly and then squint my eyes to bring whatever I was looking at into focus.

2) Noticing things that weren't there and not noticing things that were. That explains why sometimes I would suddenly stop, and then look around and wonder why.

3) Pulling up to a curb to stop, then suddenly experiencing a bit of confusion because my foot failed to automatically engage the brake and instead hit the accelerator and I would



tom dreiling

• man of the plains

jump the curb.

Those three personal experiences stick in my mind and played a major role in my decision to lock the pickup doors, hang up the keys and make other plans as far as transportation was concerned.

The brain controls our every move. And when things are going along smoothly, there's no hesitation. But when the brain forgets to alert the rest of the body of its plans, that's when trouble starts. And you can find yourself in all kinds of unfavorable, if not down-right deadly, situations.

When I told my two sons what was happening, I know in the back of their minds they wondered, "How do we tell him it's time to get out from behind the wheel?" Well, I answered that question before they had a chance to ask it. I abruptly announced I was going to give up driving. You could almost hear the sounds of relief settling in their systems.

To underscore my intentions, I told them we will put the pickup up for sale. That became their responsibility. I wouldn't know where or how to begin. They determined the best place would be CraigsList. They posted it on a Sunday evening and by noon the next day the pickup was sold. The couple who bought it liked the looks from the photo that accompanied the printed sales pitch.

It was a 2001 Ford Ranger, extended cab, bright red with around 50,000 original miles. The inside looked like it had very little use. I didn't drive much, generally no more than 7,000 or so miles a year. I had an idea what I wanted for the pickup. My sons had another idea. And because of them I made much more than what I was going to ask for it.

So, since the sale, which took place the first week of September 2010, they, the sons, became my "taxi" drivers and there hasn't been a time or cause that stood in the way.

It was a tough decision to make. After all, when the pickup left the driveway for the very last time, that put an end to nearly 59 years of

driving. It hurt and that evening in bed a few tears were shed. But I knew "luck" had been with me but if I stayed behind the wheel, my "luck" most surely would run out.

If you have a mother or father, or maybe even both, still driving and you question their ability to continue doing so safely, approach the issue as lovingly as you can. Don't hurt them. Don't scold them. Hear them out. Then tell them that each time they pull away from the curb in front of their home, you worry yourself sick until they return. That might be food for thought.

Good luck.

Here we go again. This time it's Rep. Anthony Weiner, who seems to have a problem keeping his "trash" where it belongs. He's taking some time off now to get treatment for this problem. Why didn't he seek treatment before he became the talk of the country? I think a three-word sign needs to be made and then placed in the area on the front of his pants where it would best be noticed: "Out of Order."

Snippets

"President Obama needs new teleprompters. The old ones aren't 'teleing' him what he needs to hear. ..."

"Leave it up to Newt Gingrich, the first presidential candidate to get fired by his campaign staff. ... Go, Newt, go far away!"

"President Obama says he is closing in on the \$1 billion he needs to get re-elected. ... Would be nice if he could raise that kind of money for the American cause!"

"... After watching the GOP debate Monday night, surely there are others interested in that office. Slim pickins. ..."

"Be careful what you buy! ... The Miami Heat and those trillion dollar players deserve a good round of laughter. Dallas turned out to be the darlings of the NBA. 'Wonderful, wonderful,' as Lawrence Welk would say."

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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, Memorial Day, July 4th, Labor Day, Thanksgiving 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

The Sherman County Herald

THE SHERMAN COUNTY STAR

Founded by Thomas McCants 1935-1989

Founded by Eric and Roxie Yonkey 1994-2001

Nor'West Newspapers

Haynes Publishing Company

Fenway last of old city ballparks

I'd never been to the 14th-inning stretch before, but I can tell you, by that time, you really need another stretch.

We were high in the bleachers in deep center field, just east (right, looking from home plate) of the fabled Green Monster, the left-field wall at fabled Fenway Park in Boston.

Fenway, along with Wrigley Field in Chicago, is the last of the old city ballparks of a century ago. The fabled stadium celebrated its centennial in April, though it's a creature of many parts, built up and around over the decades, and jammed in among stores, bars and shops.

But there we were, sitting three or four rows down from the top of the bleachers, where only a chain-link fence kept fans from falling into Lansdowne Street, with its bars and burger joints hard by the park.

And we were sitting there for a good reason. If we'd have felt rich, we could have tickets for the standing-room-only terraces atop the Monster itself, or atop the right-field pavilion, or down in the box seats by first base. But tickets that would cost \$35 in Denver go for \$110 and up in Boston, so we settled for \$55 bleacher seats.

Baseball is expensive at Fenway, maybe because the seating is limited, or maybe because the park is so famous.



steve haynes

• along the sappa

I was beginning to wonder if it was our day. We missed the first two innings and most of the third after getting lost while trying to return our rental car. I did learn something, though: never trust a GPS. Seems Boston had two identical addresses, miles apart.

When we finally did make it, the Sox had a lead everyone thought would last.

And it did, until the ninth inning. Ahead 7-3, manager Terry Francona brought in his closer, Jonathan Papelbon. The Oakland A's proceeded to dismantle both Papelebon and the Red Sox lead. All-Star second baseman Dustin Pedroia missed a routine grounder which should have ended the inning.

After a hit that tied the game, catcher Jason Varitek had taken enough. He got tossed for arguing balls and strikes, rather heatedly at that, as Francona pushed his pitching star out of the way.

That lasted only a couple of pitches, though, as another close call prompted Papelebon to charge the plate. He'd been ejected before

he got there, but the manager had to drag him away, cussing and screaming.

And we'd thought the game was all but over, a routine win for the Sox. Ha!

Both teams scored in the 10th, leaving the game tied at 8. It wasn't until after we sang "Take Me Out to the Ballpark" for the second time that the Red Sox broke things open. Right fielder J.D. Drew, after coming in as a pinch hitter in the 10th, and striking out twice, singled to right, driving in the winning run.

And just like that, the game was over. By that time, we'd "upgraded" our seats, moving down to the lower 10 rows as others went home so we could actually see the plays. From on height, the ball was pretty tiny.

We filed out, happy with 11 innings of baseball and a long, loving look at a piece of history. We've only been to eight or nine of the 30 major league parks, but it's a hobby we could get more involved in, I think.

Cynthia was happy, having snared an 18-inch stuff doll of the Red Sox mascot, an, er, green monster named Wally.

Next year, maybe the kids can take us to Wrigley, which won't be 100 until 2014. Brad's from Chicago, after all.