

## Consolidation is coming, but will we be ready for it?

A statewide conference last week on local government consolidation drew a lot of interest, and out here in rural Kansas, we should be listening.

The first thing to mark down is that consolidation is coming, like it or not.

Kansas has more local government employees per taxpayer than most states, and sooner or later, people will get tired of paying them.

With pressure for consolidation building, though, we have time now to decide what kind of local government we want.

One model would merge Kansas' 105 counties to form "supercounties" with larger populations and a single, presumably less expensive, government.

That could mean joining two or three counties, but in northwest Kansas, you could easily see a nine-county cluster with a single courthouse and branches in the other eight.

Another model joins city and county governments to provide the same services we have today.

That's the model used by populous Wyandotte County (157,461 people) and tiny Greeley County (1,503, the state's smallest).

Other counties have consolidated a service or two, including law enforcement under a professional chief in Riley County or under the elected sheriff in Cheyenne County.

Any way you look at it, consolidation is a fight because somebody will lose power, position and influence when counties, cities or agencies merge. Farmers suspect city folk won't pay to grade their roads anymore if cities and counties merge, and employees fear for their jobs.

Many questions need to be answered, many fears are valid, but consolidation is an idea

whose time has come.

Today, though, consolidation is next to impossible. Wyandotte and Riley counties had to get special bills passed by the Legislature. Greeley has to follow the same path.

A bill last year to allow government to consolidate without a special law failed. Farm Bureau opposition to a single vote of all county citizens was critical, because most people assume a consolidation measure would never pass that way.

If the summit last week is any indication, the subject will come up again and again until it does pass. Farm Bureau is fighting a rear-guard action here.

We think citizens should have the right to decide how they'll be governed. If that results in a patchwork of different solutions, all the better. If people are happy with a plan, and willing to pay for it, let them.

The question we should ask ourselves is: how do we want to be governed?

By separate county and city governments with overlapping functions? By megacounties, where it might be an hour's drive to the courthouse to get tags for the car or pay taxes?

Do we want separate three-person sheriff's departments and city police in a lot of little counties, regional law enforcement or joint city-county departments?

We have our ideas. You may have yours. One thing is for certain.

If we don't decide how to do things, someone will decide for us. And that's wrong.

Our centuries-old system of city and county government is changing, and we, the people, ought to decide how we want the new system to work. — *Steve Haynes*



## She went down — but not out

It was a beautiful fall. And I'm not talking about autumn here. I'm talking about trying to take a bite out of the road — a big bite.

We were walking Friday. It was a nice evening for a walk, but it was getting late and we needed to stretch our legs and get the kinks out. Annie, our dog, needed to get out and check out the world.

Suddenly, the black dog from down the street came out of his yard straight for us, barking up a storm.

This happened about a year ago and Annie had him on his way home in about 10 seconds, but Steve's been working with her and she's better behaved now. When he says, "Heel," she comes to his left side — a bit excited but obedient.

Steve wanted to avoid a fight, so he called Annie.

She came, but she was excited, not knowing whether she should make friends or send this interloper on his way. She danced around, back and forth, but always at Steve's left.

The only problem was that's



## Open Season

By *Cynthia Haynes*  
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where I was walking, then dancing, then falling as I tripped over the dog. I came down hard, my left knee hitting before the rest of my body.

"Are you all right?" Steve asked anxiously.

I didn't answer right away. I wasn't sure. But, I soon rolled over, spit out some gravel and examined myself. Except for a bruised lip and a sore knee, I seemed to be OK.

I figured I'd have a limp and a fat lip in the morning, but nothing was broken or even very bent.

In the morning, I discovered that I was fine, I had no bruises and only a tiny cut on my left hand. I wasn't

sore and I wasn't even mad at the dog — or my husband.

I think those calcium supplements are working. Now maybe I should try taking dancing lessons or dog avoidance lessons or something.

I'm in a quandary. Obviously, no one wants to be in pain or suffer injury. On the other hand, I should have something to show for the shock and trauma.

I guess I should be glad the road wasn't paved. Concrete or asphalt might not have been as forgiving as gravel. Then again, grass would have been nice. Maybe a walk in the park next time.

## Hunter helped get 'em moved

They said it couldn't be done — but we did it.

I told you Jim Plotts would see to it that we made the move by the promised deadline. Granted, I was mopping the kitchen floor and working my way to the back door as the pheasant hunter was coming in the front.

Notice, I said "hunter." Only one showed up this weekend, and as I showed him the kitchen and the coffee pot his only comment was, "Don't drink coffee, don't cook." Well, I wonder why I worked so hard to get everything spic and span. But he promised to come back next weekend and bring some friends.

No matter, one hunter or 10, we are out of The Sunflower Inn and into our "new" house. The "bones" of the house are actually closer to 110 years old, but after we gutted it, rewired, insulated and sheetrocked, it's like a new house.

Anyone is welcome to stop by, but don't come unless you are prepared to carry boxes, paint trim or help hang curtains. We are a long (and I mean very long) way from being settled. It's a work in progress.

Jim has worked relentlessly on our house for the last two months,



## Out Back

By *Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts*  
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but now it's time for him to get back to work for hire. This morning, he's headed out to begin a job for his sister: new siding, windows and a roof.

—ob—

My oldest daughter Halley tattled on our 7-year-old granddaughter, her niece Taylor. Halley is staying with Taylor and her family for a while and gets to spend a lot of time with Taylor.

Remember "Lick 'em Stix?" flavored crystals in a packet with a sugar "stick" you dip in and lick? My kids loved 'em when they were little.

Anyway, Taylor's parents were gone and left Halley in charge. Taylor had a grape-flavored "Lick 'em," and accidentally spilled the crystals on the carpet in the middle of Adam and Kara's bedroom.

Not wanting her mother to find the mess, Taylor tried to clean it up herself — with water. The more she rubbed, the bigger the stain became.

They say the purple will eventually fade away.

—ob—

I hope you voted. We did.

## From the Bible

But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

Jude v. 20, 21

## Readers appreciate sports coverage

To the Editor:

Sarah and I would like to thank all of you at *The Oberlin Herald* for all of the coverage you have given the 2006 Decatur Community High School volleyball team. We feel the articles written, the photo coverage and the ad for the state sendoff were a great boost to the team.

We know all of the publicity given the team helped spread their fame as they went 31-0 to the state tournament. Many of our relatives could read weekly about them and keep up on their season accomplishments.

We know that sports are one of the primary activities for the students to

## Letters to the Editor

excel in, and we think that it builds a lot of self esteem for many.

This has been an exceptional year for the volleyball girls, one they will remember forever. For the seniors, this has been a real dream to reach state two consecutive years. We know Karli's scrapbook will be filled with many pages from your paper and the activities you cover so thoroughly.

Again, our thanks to your great staff for all the long hours they put

in each week to put together the paper for all of us to enjoy.

Gary and Sarah Fredrickson Oberlin

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** *The Herald* staff, readers, the team and parents should thank Sarah Fredrickson for her willingness to take pictures and otherwise help get coverage into the paper. We appreciate all the help we get from coaches, parents and others in covering the news with our small staff. — *Steve Haynes*

## Cousin feels system failed sheriff

To the Editor:

I am saddened and angry that the mental health system has failed a member of my family, Sheriff Jim Johnson of Hoxie, and the family of Steven Paul Reitcheck. The laws written to protect our civil rights are wonderful, if you don't happen to have a case of mental illness, an illness that an individual is not always cognizant that they have. They may not receive help until they are a threat to themselves or someone else. By that time, it can be too late, as has been so demonstrated by the death of my cousin, Jimmy.

In Florida, where I live, we have a 40-hour Crisis Intervention Team

training for our police officers. Police officers were never meant to be mental health care workers, but because of the fragmented system in our country, they must deal with people with severe mental illness. It is not fair to ask this of our police officers without first giving them the tools to help protect their lives and those of the mentally ill.

In honor of my cousin, and Mr. Reitcheck, I ask Kansans to insist that all officers have the chance to protect themselves and others by receiving the life-saving education of Crisis Intervention Team training. Call your legislators and insist; they work for us, remember that!

Jim was so eloquently described by Kansas Attorney General Phill Kline as a man who looked for resolutions. This training can help prevent many senseless deaths. Surely your attorney general will promote this kind of training throughout your state. Do what Jim would have done; call, write, e-mail your legislators demanding this kind of an education for the safety of all citizens in Kansas.

This time, it was my family; tomorrow it might be yours.

Gloria Johnson Strother  
New Port Richey, Fla.  
Member of the National Alliance on Mental Illness

## Fair needs everyone's help

Decatur County commissioners have set out to mend the county Fair Board, but they still have a lot of work to do.

Over the last couple of years, the fair has been threatened by disagreements over a new livestock building. It's the kind of thing you hope will never happen, but feelings are easy to arouse sometimes and toes can get stepped on.

The good news is the fair will get a new livestock building. The bad news is the effort has left a lot of hurt feelings and driven a bunch of volunteers away.

The fair board, always difficult to fill, is down at least four members. Several quit after facing pressures to get the building up. Some had long service and will be difficult to replace.

Likewise, the young citizens, who raised money for the building left the effort successful, but with a bad taste in their mouths. It may be years before some of them want to get involved again.

And that is a shame. One of our county's goals is to involve young people more in civic affairs, but when they do jump in, it seems, we want to put them in their place.

It's not our purpose here to assign blame. There's plenty of that to go around.

In a small community, often we don't have enough volunteers to go



## Along the Sappa

By *Steve Haynes*  
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around. We can't afford to lose a bunch of people to infighting and turf wars.

If the kids were pushy, and maybe they were, the veterans may have been dragging their feet. At the end of the day, we need both groups to keep building a successful fair.

The commissioners took a strong first step by writing the fair board and the fair foundation board and defining the roles each should play. The foundation, they said, was created to raise money, not to run the fair or make decisions about how the money is spent.

That is how it should be. The full fair board should make decisions, not rump groups consisting of only a few members. All meetings ought to be open, announced and include every voice.

Next, the commissioners will need to find people to fill the open board seats. That may not be easy, but it can be done. Perhaps one or two of the younger leaders will step into a board role. We hope so.

Then the county needs to address questions about money. The fair board and foundation don't seem to know how much is in the building fund. The foundation apparently escaped county audits because everyone thought things were going well.

If we want to raise money in the future, though, the county had better account for every penny given to the fair. How else can people have confidence that their money is spent as they intend?

It's not the board's money or the foundation's, after all, but the people's. Those who gave it and those who own the fairground — all of us taxpayers — deserve to have confidence in how it is handled.

When all that is done, the fair can move forward again. The damage so far is mostly to egos, and the county has the chance to stop it now, before the fair suffers.

The fair is our biggest annual event, our celebration of rural life, and it's too important to let slide.

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Office hours: 8:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. Mon.-Fri.  
(Also open most Saturdays when someone is in.)

