

## Wind power deal now 'Gone With the Wind'

Oberlin's City Council has washed its hands of the wind power deal, which hasn't blown anyone much good out here.

It's hard to fault the council members, who are charged with making some big decisions on the town's future. The vote upset the wind firm's principals, who now are 0-for-3 with northwest Kansas towns, already having "nos" from St. Francis and Sharon Springs.

Council members asked why they should sign a contract to pay more for power down the road than the city pays today for its most expensive source, Sunflower Electric Power Co. out of Hays. The Sunflower Wind people really didn't come up with a good answer for that, at least not that we heard.

The city also had doubts about the firm's lack of experience and financing, with several council members complaining that they'd never even seen a balance sheet. That's information the company didn't have to provide, but the lack of transparency didn't help the company sell anything.

Sunflower Wind did present a reasonable plan to build wind farms and to build the equipment to stock them. Whether that would have been self-sustaining was a valid question, and a difficult one to answer.

Investors, too, shied away from the firm, which is more of an idea than an operation at this point. It would have helped to have a power contract or two to show them, and the firm pushed the cities — maybe a little hard.

The firm bent over backwards to please Oberlin, rewriting its proposal several times to try to make it more attractive. The company at first wanted the city to dump its current suppliers as soon as the wind farm was ready,

but the city didn't have much incentive to do that and the council wasn't buying it.

The final version contained a "reverse bidding" process provision that no one really explained well. It didn't, apparently, give the council any reason to go with the proposal, though the firm said it was designed to protect the city from paying too much.

The sales proposition wasn't there, in the final analysis, and the council at large remained unconvinced that the deal was in the city's best interests. If they felt that way, the members really had to vote no.

Their vote probably won't set too well with Sunflower Wind people, who have blamed nearly everyone, including the newspaper, for their problems selling the plan. One principal complained that he had been told no action would be taken at the meeting last week, but it looks like the council, hearing that its consultant wasn't going to recommend signing a contract, was just tired of fooling with the issue.

The firm did leave things on friendly terms, saying it would be ready to serve Oberlin when Oberlin was ready. Maybe that time will come. Sunflower announced last week it was buying a building in Hutchinson to begin building European-designed wind turbines.

When the company has more than ideas to sell, the city just might be willing to listen. The terms might not be as attractive then, or they might be better. Everyone would like to be using "green" power, though the federal hydro power the city gets is about as green as it comes.

Only time will tell on that part.

— Steve Haynes



## Many memories of solid oak

Ode to an oak table.  
No don't worry, I'm not going to write a poem. I'm just going to reminisce about an old friend.

I grew up in Concordia. My family moved to 522 East Sixth Street in 1954, just before my sister was born. I was 6. That's when the old oak table came into our lives.

I always thought it came with the house, but mother told me that they bought it for about \$10. After that, it was in our living-dining room for most of my childhood.

We didn't eat at the table except on rare occasions, even on holidays. My grandparents lived a block and a half to the north and we spent most holidays with them. That big old oak table was only used when we had a lot of company at our house, which was rare.

Most of the time, it held books, papers and homework.

It was at that table that I did my nightly homework and my mother, a teacher, graded her papers. When my sister was old enough, we sat together and did homework and later, when I was older, I helped mother grade papers.

When I was in high school, my parents remodeled and there was no room for the big old table, so it was relegated to the basement, where it served as a handy flat surface for out-of-season Christmas decorations and a storage place for old books and papers.

When bad weather approached, it became our sturdy shelter to hide under in case the house decided to take off or fall in.

Steve and I had been married three years when we bought our first house. This was not a starter home. It was a five-bedroom brick house in an older neighborhood in Kansas City. We were able to afford it because no one wanted to live in the inner city. We had a huge house



## Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes  
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and very little furniture.

My parents offered us the table, and we snatched it up.

We had the old table, with its fluted legs, stripped and then painstakingly refinished it by hand. It took a place of pride under the silver chandelier in the formal dining room. Steve's aunt donated a set of antique chairs his grandmother had owned, and we were set.

When we moved to Colorado, we took our table and put it at one end of our living-dining room.

Unlike my parents, we used our table for supper every night. Over the next 18 years, my children—with some help from the dry Colorado weather—proceeded to destroy the antique chairs and hide their gum under the table, but the old oak beauty held out.

After supper, the dishes were cleared and the homework came out. While Steve edited copy for the paper, the kids studied and I did whatever needed to be done around the house.

Over the years, we spent a lot of time at that old table.

It was where the children and I created gingerbread houses during the holidays, made pies and art projects. It's where Steve and I sweated over the figures on the newspapers we wanted to buy — could we afford them, would they make cash flow, where did this old dried gum come from?

It's where I served the recipes I was testing for the food column I did

every week. It was where I served family favorites like "chicken goodie," spinach-stuffed manicotti and swiss steak.

It was where I served my famous green eggs, a recipe using spinach and leftover Easter eggs. The children wouldn't eat it. Steve wouldn't eat it. Even the dogs wouldn't eat it. It didn't make the column, but won't ever be forgotten.

After we moved back to Kansas, the table moved into our dining room. We still eat at it every night and it's still covered with paperwork, just like in my parents' day.

There were four of us when we moved, and the table was our family place. Since there are just two of us now, we eat at one end and the paperwork is pushed to the other during supper. Then after the dishes are taken back to the kitchen, we bring out our laptop computers and start our homework.

Sometimes we have company meetings there. Other days, guests for dinner, or holiday meals with real silver and china.

Little has really changed for the old table, really.

It still stands there, a beautiful golden sheet of oak with four leaves ready, to put on a formal dinner for 12 or store used gum for three lively youngsters.

Hopefully, it'll get a chance to do both again in the future.

But for today, "Move the computers, dear, I'm serving chicken goodie tonight."

## Celebrate our Bill of Rights

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** We didn't have space for this column earlier in the month, but Carolina Plotts apparently never got the message about early deadlines this week. When her column didn't arrive, we dug back and found this one, which is well worth reading.

By DOUG ANSTAETT

Kansas Press Association

December is famous for Christmas Day and Pearl Harbor Day, but how many of you know the significance of Dec. 15?

It's Bill of Rights Day, set aside each year to remember what it is that makes America unique compared to most other countries around the world.

Those first 10 amendments to the U.S. Constitution are critical to our nation's freedom.

While Thomas Jefferson, George Washington and Ben Franklin fought for independence, you might be surprised to learn that George Mason is considered the Father of the Bill of Rights.

Why Mason? Because in his call for independence from Great Britain, he wrote the Virginia Declaration of Rights, which later became the basis for our national statement of individual rights.

Mason wrote that "all men are born equally free and independent, and have certain inherent natural rights . . . among which are the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety."

Sound familiar?

It should. Those are some of the words in the Declaration of Independence, drafted by Jefferson in June of 1776.

But the Bill of Rights wasn't in the original Constitution, so Mason withheld his support. Only later was he able to convince the Federalists to modify the Constitution and add the Bill of Rights.

So why do we celebrate on Dec. 15?

Because it's the day in 1791 that the new Congress of the United States of America ratified the document that gives us many of the individual freedoms we've come to cherish.

- Freedom of speech.
- Freedom of assembly.
- Freedom of the press.
- Freedom of religion.
- Freedom to petition government for a redress of grievances.
- ...all part of the First Amendment.
- The right to bear arms, the Sec-

ond.

The right to due process, the Fourth.

The right against self-incrimination, the Fifth.

The right to a jury trial, the Sixth

And many others, rights that we use in our daily lives as Americans.

So, we say a word of thanks for George Mason and for the other founders who saw the value of including a list of individual rights in the Constitution.

The insight they had has helped ensure the survival of this experiment we call "America" for more than 230 years.

Doug Anstaett, executive director of the Kansas Press Association headquartered in Topeka, is an award-winning editorial writer and long-time Kansas publisher.

### From the Bible

...there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star . . .  
Matthew 2:1b, 2a

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Serving Oberlin and Decatur County since 1879

USPS 401-600

170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749-2243

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Published each Wednesday by Haynes Publishing Co., 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749. Periodicals mail postage paid at Oberlin, Kan. 67749.

Steve and Cynthia Haynes, publishers  
Official newspaper of Oberlin, Jennings, Norcat, Dresden and Decatur County. Member of the Kansas Press Association, National Newspaper Association, Colorado Press Association, Nebraska Press Association and Inland Press Association.

Subscriptions: One year, \$33 (tax included) in Decatur, Norton, Rawlins, Sheridan, Thomas and Red Willow counties; \$38 (tax included) elsewhere in Kansas; \$42 elsewhere in the U.S. Foreign subscriptions, \$50-\$250 (in US dollars only) extrayear (except APO/FPO). POSTMASTER: Send change of address to 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749-2243.

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

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## Streets remain slick as glass

If you've been out on Oberlin streets this weekend, you know they're about as slick as they can get, and with the forecast for cool weather and more snow this week, not liable to get much better anytime soon.

Oberlin's city crew has spent a lot of time and effort working on the streets already this month, with the prospect of more to come. Whatever they do likely won't have much impact now, because the underlying ice is pretty solid. It'll take a week or two of normal weather — sunny, in the 40s — to clear things off. And we may not get that for a while.

The crew usually plows big snows and lets the little ones fade away, but that didn't work very well this time.

First it rained, Mayor Joe Stanley pointed out the other day, then it snowed, and that actually made driving easier with the powdery snow on top. Then it snowed again. And again. Cars kept packing the snow down.

No single snow was enough to get the city out plowing under normal circumstances, but the crew did try to clean up downtown. City Foreman Dan Castle said the crew probably put down more sand than it ever has before. A lot of it just wound up under the new snow.

Then, it snowed again, almost enough to plow this time. The crew did plow my street, but for all the good it did by then, you'd hardly notice. The ice just wouldn't come up.

Mr. Castle said the city crew usually waits until a snow gets to several inches before it starts plowing main routes. The city can declare a snow emergency to get people to move their cars off marked routes.

The crew gets some help from the county, which plows out the hospital and airport and around county facilities. If the snow it bad enough,



## Along the Sappa

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they'll plow residential streets, too, but that is a rough row. They're choked with cars and, especially if the crew has been busy doing other things, the plowing will block drive-ways where people have shoveled. Then those people call and complain that the street was plowed.

"You can't do anything without making people mad," Mr. Castle said. "And I mean hopping mad."

The city does sand downtown and at touchy intersections, he said, plus a few spots on hills. The sand isn't so expensive, he said, but it takes a lot of time to put it down and the operator costs money. They avoid salt, which could damage the pavement, especially Oberlin's beautiful old bricks.

The crew plows snow downtown into the center of the street and hauls it off, but this time that left lots of ice on the surface. It hasn't all melted yet.

One thing for sure. People are not shy about saying what they think.

"Everybody's got their own opinion," Mr. Castle said, "and I've heard 'em all."

Some of them aren't even very nice about it, he added.

Even at the City Council meeting last week, opinions differed. Councilwoman Marcia Lohofener said she thought the ice was bad for the town's image. She thought the city could do more. Councilman Rob McFee said he thought people should learn to deal with it, and if they couldn't, they should stay home.

For my point of view, the crew pretty much did what it was supposed to do this time. After the melting last week, the ice froze up solid, and it's time to apply some more sand before we have a lot of wrecks. The truck could have been out over the weekend.

Mr. McFee's attitude seems a little cavalier. A lot of people have to get out — to go to the store, to the doctor, to work. And the city does need to do all it can to make the town livable.

That's my view. What's yours?  
I think Oberlin's snow removal effort is about par for the course around here, not terrible, not the best in this part of the state. It could, like many things, get better and you have to assume the crew will try.

When they do, though, Mother Nature probably will find some other way to fool them.

☆☆☆☆  
It was nice to see the grade-school kids out caroling. It's a fine old tradition, almost lost in the hustle and bustle and commercialism of today's world.

What? No one objected to the school kids singing Christmas music? As someone pointed out, there aren't many Jewish carols, and no one can agree on how to spell Hanukkah, anyway. Or is it Chanukah?

Most people here probably buy into Christmas. I, for one, wouldn't mind having our kids learn about other traditions, too. But it is nice to hear carols, isn't it?