

State lacks the money to fix stretch of two-lane

State officials are focusing on U.S. 50, particularly the stretch from Emporia to Newton, as the state's most dangerous two-lane highway, yet admit they have no money to fix it. East of Emporia, U.S. 50 runs on I-35, but west of there, it's a two-lane road all the way to the Colorado border. The worst stretch is the 70 miles from Emporia to Newton, which is clogged with big trucks and contributed heavily to the 17 deaths reported on the highway last year.

That stretch was supposed to have been part of the Interstate system, but Kansas officials penciled it out to please the Kansas Turnpike Authority, which feared opening a parallel freeway from Kansas City all the way to Wichita would bankrupt the toll road.

The state Legislature — members of the House and Senate Transportation committees sit on the authority board — made sure no parallel roads were improved enough to compete with the toll road.

Several — including U.S. 24 from Kansas City to Topeka, K-10 from Lawrence to Topeka, U.S. 81 south of Wichita and the deadly stretch of U.S. 50 — were more or less frozen in time. Eventually, traffic west of Emporia became so heavy, the state Department of Transportation rebuilt the road under the latest 10-year transportation plan.

The work did not include any four-lane expressway, however, even though truck traffic has become more and more dense. When U.S. 50 advocates paid for a study of making the road four lanes to Colorado, they avoided that stretch, knowing too well the power of the Turnpike gang.

In the 1950s, blocking U.S. 50 improvements probably made sense. The turnpike represented a big investment to this state. But you have to wonder how many lives have been lost to ensure that turnpike bonds got paid.

Today, U.S. 50 is an overcrowded deathtrap. At last the state seems ready to address the problem, but legislators note it would cost as much as \$1.2 billion to turn the road into a four-lane expressway all the way west.

Under the state's upcoming transportation plan, now in the early stages of planning, there's no money for that kind of improvement. Kansas will be lucky to just keep the pavement it has in good repair with the money it expects to have.

Since Gov. Kathleen Sebelius has told her planning committee to avoid a tax increase of any kind, it's not likely there will be any money for U.S. 50 or any other major road improvements.

That despite the fact that everyone — transportation officials, legislators, road users — agrees the money model for transportation is broken. Fuel tax revenue is going down. The government is forcing automakers to improve fuel economy, people are driving less with \$4 gas, and alternative fuels such as natural gas, hydrogen and electricity are not taxed at all.

With traffic expected to double in the next 20 years, Kansas will be left with inadequate roads and a huge bill, with no plans for paying it.

And U.S. 50 will still be overcrowded and deadly. It's some fix to be in.

So far, no one has a clue how to solve it.
— Steve Haynes

Friends celebrate 50 years

We attended the 50th wedding anniversary of some dear friends on Saturday.

Bob and Gerri Sweeney tied the knot on Sept. 7, 1958, and went on to own and operate a slew of newspapers while raising four children.

We met them in 1981 while attending our first Colorado Press convention in Denver. The Sweeneys were old hands at both press conventions and child rearing by then, as most of their kids were teen-agers while ours were between 8 months and 6 years old.

Steve asked how to get involved in the group and Bob, big and bluff and sensing a kindred spirit, just slapped him on the back and started introducing him around.

Bob's been doing that for the last 27 years.

He nudged Steve into working on this and that in the Colorado Press Association, and before long Steve was being sworn in as president, a job Bob had held several years before.

Back in 1981, we were living in the tiny town of Creede, way up in the mountains, and the Sweeneys were running a weekly, then a daily paper in Craig. We didn't get to see each other except once or twice a year at meetings. Then it was like a family reunion, as we compared notes on how big the kids had gotten and who was causing the most trouble for the competition.



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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The Sweeneys sold their paper and moved to Denver, where they started another newspaper, *The Villager*, which still serves Greenwood Village, an upscale suburb.

We sold our operation, which by then included six weeklies and a daily, and moved to Kansas. With the move, our visits became less frequent for a while. We still saw each other once a year at the February meeting in Denver, since we stayed on as associate members of Colorado Press. Still, our paths seemed to be diverging as we became more involved in the Kansas Press Association, a group Steve led in 1998, just 10 years after his term as president in Colorado.

Then one winter as we were talking and mingling at the Brown Palace on our annual trek to Denver, Bob put his arm around Steve's shoulder and said, "You need to get involved in the National Newspaper Association."

Bob was on the board of the national group and he wanted us to stop just sending in our dues and get

with the program.

That year we attended the national convention in Reno, Nev. I've always suspected we went to the convention because we could take the train. Nevertheless, Steve was hooked.

He ran for the national board a couple of years later and lost the election.

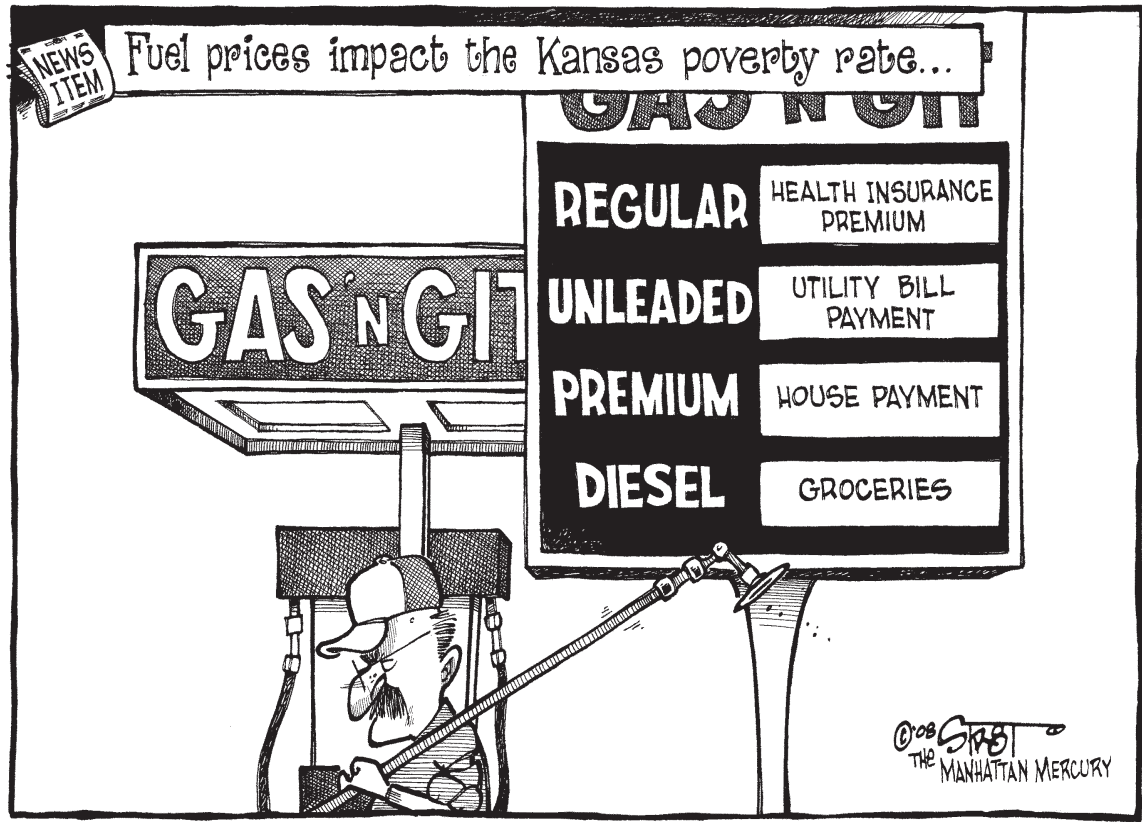
That February, Bob put his arm around Steve's shoulder and said, "If you want to join the board, don't give up. They always need good people."

Two months later the man who'd won the election resigned, and Steve was selected to fill his seat.

Bob served as president of the national group a few years ago, and this year it was Steve's turn to follow in his footsteps again.

They've been really big footsteps — Bob is a big guy — but as he danced with his bride of 50 years on Saturday, I knew why we've followed his advice.

It's always been as good as his dancing.



Do it yourself to get it done

If you want something done, they say, do it yourself.

That's why, armed with a crowbar and a hammer, I'm heading to the garage Jim moved onto our property a few weeks ago. Some re-enforcing lumber he put in to stabilize the structure during the bumpy ride has to be removed before he can add extensions to the frame and lower it to the foundation.

Why am I tackling this manly-man kind of job? Because Jim is working full time on a new house and I want to get started — now — on the last phase of remodeling at our house.

The last three rooms have to be entirely torn out. And right now, the rooms are full of tools, building materials and supplies which, if all goes as planned, will be moved to the "new" garage. As usual, one job has to wait on another before it can be started.

I can't help Jim much with the construction — but I am the "Queen of Demo."

We checked in with our Texas kids during Hurricane Ike's sweep across the state. They all reported to still have their heads above water and not being much worse for the wear.



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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They had lots of rain, but where they live, at least, no flooding.

I'm lovin' this weather. Brisk (some say cold) weather makes working outside a real pleasure. There's still lots to get done before the snow flies. I have a few trees to get planted, sidewalks to be edged and probably grass to be mowed at least once more. I love the change of seasons, and fall is probably my favorite.

In less than one month we, along with five other intrepid souls, will embark on another mission trip to Juarez, Mexico.

It almost didn't happen. Seven people are not enough to build a house in the time allotted. We were almost ready to scrap the trip when our prayers were answered. A call to the missionary agency we work

with in El Paso led us to another team that didn't have quite enough workers, either.

Long story short, we are hooked up with a team of Southern Baptists from Silver City, N.M. And we found out we were the answer to their prayers, too.

From the Bible

But *this* I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.

Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, *so let him give*; not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver.
2 Corinthians 9:6-7

Future good for newspapers

I'm just fed up with the way the newspaper industry is reacting to its current "crisis."

First of all, it seems like half the editors and publishers in the country and two-thirds of the journalism deans are ready to write our obituary. Some already have.

And a lot of newspaper people stand around, shoveling dirt into the grave.

Yet the dearly has not yet departed. In fact, community newspapers are quite healthy, and the future is nothing but bright for this growing and vital industry.

Yes, I said the future is nothing but bright for the *community* newspaper, like the ones most rural editors put out. We're not going to tumble to the Internet any more than we rolled over and died for television or radio or cable.

We're better at what we do than any of those "new media," or any that's likely to come along.

We'll still be printing newspapers, still be making money and still be covering our communities like no one else will do way down the road.

I just wish our colleagues would stop shoving that dirt in my hair. Stop writing that newspapers are about to fade away. It's not true.

Stop claiming that to make money, we have to become "new media" companies. It won't work.

Fortunes will be made in the Internet and other new media, but darned few of them will be made by newspaper companies. As newspapers did with broadcast, we're going to find that this is a different business.



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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A lot of newspaper companies will make some money at it, and as in broadcast, a few will make a lot. Don't count on the Internet saving us, though. That kind of thinking has never worked.

My company knows we need to use the Internet to survive, as any business does. We're growing online revenue sources, but we don't expect them to overtake newspaper income in the foreseeable future. We expect to make some money, but we expect print advertising to be our bread and butter.

Sometimes newspapers are our own worse enemies. I picked up a city daily the other day and got a shock: The lead story in the lifestyle section was all about how to find coupons online. The story did not say that newspapers still handle 80 percent of all coupons, but made it clear that online was the sexy, fun way to find them.

Why would any newspaper feature that? Why not just get a gun, and get it over with?

The same day, I came across an article from the Readership Institute, where Director Mary Nesbitt reported that newspaper reading habits have held up pretty well over the last two years. Even the kids

are not deserting us in the numbers we've heard.

Where was that story on the financial pages, among all the bad news? I didn't see it.

If we take advantage of our strong position, community newspapers have a strong future. We're about the only mass medium left, as television, cable, radio, magazines and websites continue to fragment their audience.

Today, only a newspaper can command the attention of an entire market.

That's valuable.

City dailies should pay heed. They will have to become local, community newspapers again to survive, giving up in many cases the pretense of regional power. They started out as community newspapers, and need to return to their roots. Those that do — and stop writing their own obituaries — will share in the bright future of our industry.

I'd invite the journalism schools, the pundits and the naysayers to take another look, too.

This is a good business, and it's going to get better — for those who pay attention to what readers want in the way of news.

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Township treasurer says thanks

To the Editor:

Thank you for electing me to serve as Beaver Township treasurer for the last 16 years. As treasurer I have:

- Graveled all mail and school routes in the township.
- Removed snow from driveways and roadways in township and provided aid to stranded residents and school buses during extreme weather conditions without charge to the township. This is a service that I am uniquely able to provide due to the proximity of my farm operation to Cedar Bluffs and the majority of township residents.
- Worked to obtain funds from the federal government for disasters

that occurred in township in order to repair our infrastructure.

- Secured repair of the main street in Cedar Bluffs.
- Allocated money to township citizens for prairie dog elimination.
- Fought to keep limited-access roads in our township open.
- Purchased a speed mower used on minimum-access roads to save money by not contracting the county for such tasks.
- Fielded calls and inquiries about

grading and mowing, listened to township citizens' requests, and stayed in close contact with the county and the railroad in order to maintain the roads, bridges and crossings.

Exercised elected duties without pay or other compensation.

If elected in November, I will continue to diligently serve my township and its citizens.

Brendan Moore
Beaver Township treasurer

Letter to the Editor