

Hiding public notices on websites a bad idea

A Kansas Senate committee planned hearings Tuesday on a bill which would allow cities, counties, school boards and other government units to “publish” their legal notices on government-run websites rather than in the newspaper.

This is a bad idea, and not just because it would hurt newspapers.

The bill was introduced by Sen. John Vratil, R-Leawood, who over the years has made himself a devoted enemy of the state’s newspapers. His bill, however, would have effects far beyond his home in Johnson County.

Whatever his issues are back there, this bill would be a bad law. It would remove public notices from the one place where people see them and hide them away on government websites. And it could cost many small Kansas towns their papers, an economic blow to these communities which should not be ignored.

This definition of a public notice comes from the Public Notice Resource Center, a national nonprofit group.

“A public notice typically possesses four major characteristics:

1. “A public notice is published in a forum independent of the government, such as a local newspaper.
2. “A public notice is capable of being archived in a secure and publicly available format.
3. “A public notice is capable of being accessed by all segments of society.
4. “The public and the source of the notice must be able to verify that the notice was published, and its information disseminated to the public.”

Placement on a government-controlled website is not really publication. People would have to find the notice, where a newspaper takes it to the reader (and in rural markets, that usually is every household in town). Not everyone has a computer or Internet service,

and not everyone is sophisticated enough to find notices buried on some page of a big county website.

Independent verification is hardly possible with a government-run website, and these sites can suffer failures, be entered by hackers, be changed with little or no evidence left behind by anyone with an interest in doing so. Electronic archives are neither stable nor trustworthy.

In short, posting something on a website is little different from filing it down at the courthouse, except the books there last longer than a CD. A citizen still has to go digging for it. Publication means putting a notice out to the public.

Then, there is the economic problem. The income from public notices can be vital to smaller weekly papers. These publications serve their communities, but the towns have fewer businesses and resources each year, and it’s hard for newspapers to hang on.

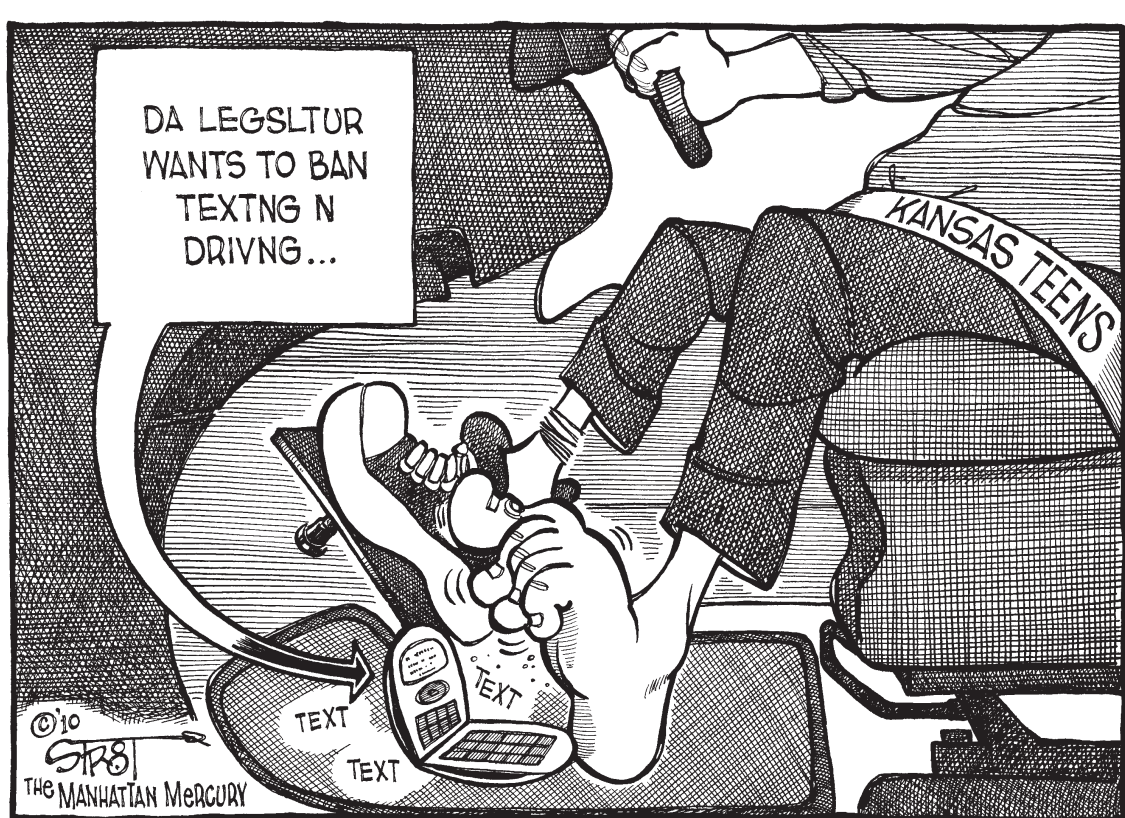
On the other side, Kansas cities, counties and governments spend only a tiny fraction of their budgets on legal notices. That, in our opinion, is spent in return for a valuable service and helps supports each community where a newspaper is published. Ask people in towns where the newspaper has gone away; most would see that as a real economic loss.

The Kansas Press Association estimates as many as 50 Kansas newspapers might be threatened by loss of their legal-notice income.

We hope the Senate will ask itself, is the little to be saved here important enough to justify this kind of damage?

The legislators should kill this bill. It’s not now and not likely ever to be a good idea. Taxpayers and citizens deserve to see public notices out in the open, where they can be verified and trusted, and not be forced to go hunting for them.

— Steve Haynes



Household felines multiply

This is a tale of two cats, or how the Wiletses and Hayneses ended up as four-feline families.

We’ll start with Frank.

Frank is son Lacy’s cat. He was born in our closet in May 2002. He is a slightly larger version of his mother, April Alice, whom we adopted a month before his birth. Yes, we knew she was pregnant, but she jumped into my arms and purred, and Lacy said he would take one of the kittens. And he did. Until this winter, when he moved to an apartment with a no-pets policy. Then Frank came home to live with Mom and Dad, April Alice, Molly Monster and Jezebel.

Of these four cats, April Alice is the only one I chose. Jezebel belonged to youngest daughter but had to have a new home when her relationship with husband Brad became serious. Brad is allergic to cats. Really allergic.

Molly was picked up at a construction site by son-in-law Nik, who just knew his soft-headed mother-in-law would take her in.

So we are now a four-cat household.

Down in Georgia, Nik is getting his own back, because he has a four-cat household now, too.

Daughter Felicia brought Marcell and Sabine with her into their



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
c.haynes@nwkansas.com

marriage. Sabine she got in college and Marcell soon thereafter in Wyoming, about the time she got Nik. Both are getting on in cat years.

After Nik and Felicia had been together several years, Louis, a beautiful stray, wandered into their lives and hearts. Their cat population was capped at three for about 10 years.

Then they spotted the pretty little lady living outside. This cat knew suckers when she smelled them, and hung around the Wilets home until she had her kittens — a boy and a girl.

Daughter Felicia dutifully brought the family indoors and found homes for Mom and son. But, strangely, no one seemed to want the third member of the family, the little girl, so they are now a three-cat, one-kitten household. Felicia says they

had forgotten how much trouble a kitten can cause.

Cat names vary by year and person naming. This year is Russian at the Wilets home. The mother cat was Sophie, the brother Urie and the new kitten is Svetlana, which I’m sure is Russian for little troublemaker.



Svetlana

Svet was the first ornament on the Christmas tree. She drives the older cats crazy trying to play with them. She climbs pants legs. She lords it over the dogs — both of which outweigh her 100-1, since they are very big dogs.

While little Svet wrecks havoc at the Wilets home, her mother is the queen of the house at her new home. I’ve heard. She even has her own page on Facebook. Now that’s one spoiled cat.

Some animals are just tasty

Animal lovers are a breed unto themselves.

We are cat people. Many of my friends are dog people. One of my sisters-in-law is a horse nut. One of my nieces is a huge advocate for the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. It seems there is something born into us that gives us an affinity for animals.

That’s why I can hardly watch that television show *Animal Cops*. The abuse they uncover is almost unbelievable. How could a person mistreat an animal so?

Don’t get me wrong. I am no member of PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals). They carry animal rights to the extreme. Humane treatment — yes. But, animal rights on the same level as human rights — no.

Mankind was given dominion over animals. That means we are to provide and care for them. But, we are also to use them and, perhaps, eat them. I can appreciate a vegetarian who chooses not to eat meat for health reasons. But not because some animal died for my meal.



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
quality-pro@webtv.net

God gave us Angus cattle because He knew I had to have a thick, juicy steak every now and then.

— ob —

Jim put a little ad in the paper about his antique car parts and bodies. Advertising pays, because he receives calls almost every day from someone who is into restoration as much as he is.

The problem is their idea of “antique” and his are not necessarily the same. Many callers want to know if he has a part for say a 1975 Chevy or an ’82 Mazda. He just laughs and says he is more into the 1920s, ’30s and ’40s. Now that is antique.

— ob —

A new decade is under way. That means the census is taken this year.

It’s our chance to, literally, stand up and be counted.

I’ve noticed that the older I get, the more I become like the government: I count time in 10-year increments.

From the Bible

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things.
Philippians 4:8 NIV



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
s.haynes@nwkansas.com

When Evan called me last Saturday and asked who our insurance agent was, I knew it was no social call. No conversation that begins that way ever ends well.

I just wasn’t prepared for the news: A city water main had burst in front of our Colby office, flooding the basement and then the back rooms.

“When I opened the back door,” he said, “six inches of water poured out.”

Great, I thought. Just great. I was in McCook, 75 miles away, but I quickly made plans to finish my errands and get on the road. I figured I’d have to see this, but I was supposed to pick up inserts for the paper at a couple of stores.

Also, at home in Oberlin, we had a pot of taco meat simmering in the slow cooker for the Colby office “Christmas” party, really an after-New Year’s taco feed because no one had time before the holidays.

I had to get that. And Cynthia. Don’t forget Cynthia.

So by the time we got to the Colby office, it was 5:30 p.m. and the party was supposed to start at 6.

What a mess. The water had come up a good 6 to 8 inches in the two back rooms. The back room is where we have meetings and keep the “morgue,” the place where a newspaper stores its “dead” files of back issues, bound volumes and the like.

The files, mostly, were above the high-water mark, and the safe was, fortunately, closed and water tight. The back, back room, however, was full of — there is no other way to describe it — junk.

It appeared that no one in this office has ever thrown anything away.

There were 20-year-old business records that we’d promised to sort through some day, files and cases of documents that the same company which owned the Colby paper in the 1980s had hauled in from Atwood when it closed a paper there, every vacuum cleaner the Colby paper ever owned (one of which even worked), dead and unused computers from the same era, old machines I think were typewriters, a machine that typed punch-tape to record stories and run the old Lin-o-types, and a stack of dead calculators. You get the picture.

And those were soggy records now, I might add. Real soggy.

Then there was the basement. We opened the door.

Water lapped at the top step. A huge, heavy table floated by. Someone suggested a swim, but the water was icy and we weren’t sure the power was completely off.

We closed the door. We went over to Evan’s house and joined the party in progress. Eventually, we all settled down and talked. The kids ran around and talked. We ate tacos and burritos and swilled soda and talked. Adam played the piano; he’s really good. And the old-fashioned good time was had by all.

Then six or eight or nine of us went back down to the office. We

set out to salvage what we could: printed company forms in boxes on the floor, for instance. The bottom inch was soggy, the next few inches damp, the rest all dry. Marion, I think, set out to save them all.

We hauled boxes and sweepers. We sorted files, setting a few recent ones aside to be dried and saved. We threw up our hands.

We realized we wouldn’t be working in the front room or my office for a long, long time, because the power was off and anyway, the furnace was in the basement. We grabbed desks and moved them to the hall by the newsroom, where I swept the floor. We figured the front-desk girls would need a warm place to work.

Next day, Evan ran phone lines and computer lines and moved their machines. (He’s our “systems administrator,” or computer expert, but mostly, he’s invaluable.) Servicemaster came and started pumping out the last of the water. The city crew kept digging up the street and pumping out an ever-growing hole.

Anyway, by Monday morning, we were able to get back to work with a minimum of problems.

And that was just the start of my week.

I think I’ll stop answering the phone.

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Phone: (785) 475-2206

Fax: (785) 475-2800

E-mail: oberlin.herald@nwkansas.com

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STAFF

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Woman finds trouble on computer

To the Editor:

Even though I am not of the computer generation, I am learning some of the many facets of our new technology. Recently appearing on my computer screen was this message: “local connection to my computer, etc.!”

Is it telling me that I am on Internet? If so, I am not paying for the service.

It makes you wonder, as I received a hate letter not too long ago. That hate letter implied I should not write

Letter to the Editor

a letter to the editor and I should not write to my U.S. congressman. Instead, it said, I should just sit back and watch television.

That person doesn’t appreciate the fact I am still researching the unattended death of my daughter. That person doesn’t want me to finish and publish my book in regard to

my research and her memory.

We still have our freedom of speech and freedom of the press. I sincerely hope that we always will as long as we live in America. I hope no one tries to take this freedom from us. That is what made America what it is today.

Elsie Wolters, Oberlin