

## Balance needs to be goal in care of blighted homes

There's been a lot of back and forth on Oberlin's ordinance covering cleanup of "blighted" property, also known as the nuisance ordinance.

It's easy to see both sides of the argument: A man's home is his castle, private property, a sacred right protected by the Constitution. No one else can tell a landowner how to use his property, or how to keep it up.

But, an eyesore affects everyone in town, not because it's ugly, but because it affects the way people look at the whole town, and the value of every nearby property.

Both are true arguments, and it's no easy task to balance the rights of all concerned. We think the City Council is trying.

The council has moved to soften the legalese in letters it sends to landowners about nuisance violations — which can range from unmowed weeds to a house that's falling in — and make the process more friendly. That's a good step, but the city could go farther. Why, for instance, are people only given 10 days to "abate" a nuisance? Perhaps in the summer, when weeds are high and need to be mowed, a month would be too long?

We know the city gives people time to act if they call or come in and promise to clean things up. Maybe that should be in the letter.

The extreme argument on the right is that the city simply has no business telling people what to do on their own land. And if the condition of a neighbor's property had no effect on the rest of us, then the argument would hold water. The truth is, however, that the condition of your property and ours affects our neighbors where it counts: in the pocketbook.

An eyesore across the street can depress the

value of your home by thousands of dollars, whether it's owned by a civic leader or an absentee landowner, who perhaps can no longer take care of it.

So the conflict is between our rights as landowners and our moral obligation to our neighbors not to harm them. Nothing is black and white.

But here's what it comes down to: A town that wants to grow and prosper has to look like it wants to grow and prosper. No one wants to move to a town that looks trashy, rundown and decrepit, that allows abandoned or dangerous houses to remain standing, that does not care.

When you drive through a town that allows abandoned buildings just to fall down over the years, you know you're in a town that's out of the race. There are plenty of them around.

We have higher aspirations for Oberlin. We think the city needs to enforce this ordinance, but in a kind and reasonable way. We also think that the rest of us, the ones who can afford to keep our property up and worry about the value of our homes, might just want to get together, as has been proposed, and help those who can't keep their property up.

That fits in with our overall concepts of duty to our neighbors. That would be a good way to build our community.

But the city needs to retain a hand in the battle, because there are those who could keep their property up, but don't. They are not holding up their end of the bargain, not observing their duty to their neighbors and the town.

Yes, it's their property, but its condition affects all of us.

— Steve Haynes



## The best educators teach life

There are teachers, and there are educators. Oran Milner was an educator, and so much more.

Mr. Milner died a few days ago, and those of us who were fortunate enough to have had him as a teacher mourn his passing.

I was an eighth grader when our little country school could no longer keep the doors open and the board decided to consolidate Spring Branch into the Norcatcur School District. What a change from country school to town school. Riding the bus, hot lunches, organized sports and boys in our class, which had been all girls.

Mr. Milner was the principal and eighth-grade teacher. He taught all subjects with authority and conviction. He, himself, was probably one of the most intelligent people I have ever met, but he had the talent of being able to transmit his knowledge to squirmy, hormonal 14-year olds.

More than book knowledge, he taught us integrity, compassion and character. He exemplified these qualities. He was liberal with his praise, and when you got a compliment from Mr. Milner, it felt like you were the greatest. It was like you were the first person in the world to figure out multiplication or you'd thrown the ball faster and straighter than any other player ever had.

He was always Mr. Milner to me. It would have been impossible to call him "Oran." The year my daughters and I lived with Mom after Dad died, my daughter Kara



### Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts  
cplots65@gmail.com

had him for her fifth-grade teacher. It made for interesting parent-teacher conferences, to once have been his pupil then to be the parent of one of his pupils. I hope my mother was as proud of me after one of those conferences as I was of Kara after hearing a glowing report on not only her academic progress but her personal growth. He was always able to make you feel special.

Mr. Milner and his wife were both teachers. They never had children of their own, but they had an impact on the lives and futures of thousands, first through shaping the lives of the students themselves, then through the children of those students, and their children.

Mr. Milner might have said he was just doing his job, but it was so much more than that. And I pray that he will hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

—ob—

What do you get when you put three women together in a car for about seven hours on a weekend?

You get the solution to world peace, advice on how to raise your kids, how to make good meat loaf and how to deal with a picky eater.

You also get a chance to just have "girl talk," which is the best therapy in the world.

Every year I go to a women's retreat held about 3 1/2 hours away. Women from our church carpool down, and we schedule in an extra hour or two so we have enough time to lunch and shop. It's an event I look forward to and Jim knows I am going, no matter what.

This year, he should have gone to the retreat as an "honorary" woman, because he did more to help me get ready than I did. I was asked to lead a workshop on a deep spiritual subject, and I was struggling with the preparation. I knew what I wanted to say, but I didn't know how to say it.

That's where Jim stepped in and saved the workshop. My material would have filled about five minutes; which would have left about 40 minutes of uncomfortable silence. He helped me organize and expound on my thoughts and knew the scriptural references I needed to support the statements. He even did some of the typing for me.

When I came home, I told him that I had given him credit for all his help.

## Train a popular way to travel

There must be half a dozen tourist trains in Colorado, and at least three of them are in or near the San Luis Valley, where we go to relax and rejuvenate each summer.

The biggest and fanciest is the Durango and Silverton line, which runs from, amazingly, Durango to Silverton. You can ride in private cars, parlor cars, Pullman cars or by plain old coach. They all take you the same place, through the gorgeous Rocky Mountains. The big difference is the price. You can pay \$189 for a seat in the fancy cars, enjoy a regular coach seat or stand in the open gondola car for \$81 a person.

Either way, you go from the college town of Durango up to the mountain mining town of Silverton for lunch and then back by train or by bus, your choice. The train is cooler, but the bus is a whole lot faster.

We love Durango and Silverton, but it's about half a day's drive over the mountains to get there. We either have to spend a couple of nights in Durango or leave and return from our place in Creede at unholy hours of the morning and night.

I wasn't up for either this year, but I really wanted to ride on a train. More than that, I wanted to try the parlor car. I wanted to sit in a car with a couple of dozen chairs lined up looking out the windows on both sides, and an attendant to bring my hot chocolate, sodas or a snack. I wanted to see how the other half lived, or at least traveled, in the 1900s.

The closest was the Rio Grande Scenic Railroad, which had trains departing from Alamosa, about an



### Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes  
c.haynes@nwkans.com

hour and a half away, each morning and had both regular and parlor-car seats. This trip looked ideal. It was closer and cheaper than the Silverton train, and we could get to Alamosa and back on the same day with ease. The trip wasn't quite as long or spectacular, but it's always fun and interesting, and ends at the little mountain town of LaVeta.

However, they didn't have any seats left in their parlor car. Must be popular.

Well, with my heart set on the parlor car, I started checking again.

My next choice was the Cumbres and Toltec Scenic Railroad, which runs from Antonito, Colo., to Chama, N.M., with a stop in the middle at Osier, Colo., about halfway, for lunch. Actually, to do this involves two trains, one coming from each direction. If you take the trip all the way from Antonito to Chama, you have to return on a bus. Or, you can take the train from either end to Osier and return to your destination on that same train.

This time, I lucked out. Two seats were available in the parlor car. I booked them, and we were off.

Our train almost got out of the

station at Antonito before it broke down. We were soon transferred to a bus and driven to the other end to meet the train coming up from Chama. Most of us got to sit in the half-empty parlor car, but a few folks lost their fancy seats.

Steve and I lucked out, however, and got parlor seats.

I think that has probably used up my allotment of luck with trains, so I'll just take a coach seat next time, or just take the ding-dang bus.

### From the Bible

And Jesus went out, and his disciples, into the towns of Cesarea Philippi: any by the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, "Whom do men say that I am?" And they answered, "John the Baptist: but some say, Elias; and others, one of the prophets." And he saith unto them, "But whom say ye that I am?" And Peter answereth and saith unto him, "Thou art the Christ."

— Mark 8:27-29

## 'Normal' Oberlin a great thing

Two things said at Wednesday's community meeting struck me personally.

One was when J.J. Jones, marketing and trade director for the state Department of Agriculture, showed a slide that read OPPORTUNITY-ISNOWHERE, and asked us what we saw.

The other is how state Budget Director Steve Anderson said that when speaking of Oberlin to outsiders, we should tell them about what we don't have as well as what we do have.

When Mr. Jones showed the opportunity slide, I read it as "opportunity is nowhere." Many others read it as "opportunity is now here." And when Mr. Anderson pointed out what Oberlin doesn't have — crime, a long commute or high drop-out rates — well, that had never occurred to me before. It was like turning a picture upside-down and realizing that it could be a picture of something else entirely.

The reason these things spoke to me is because I wasn't born into an environment that really gave me a sense of "normalcy," and I think Oberlin is incredibly, beautifully normal. Not normal in a statistical way or even in any factual way at all, but Oberlin actually is what I always thought was normal when I was a



### Newcomer's View

By Stephanie DeCamp  
sdecamp@nwkans.com

kid. I pined for an idea that was only ever an idea until I got here.

I don't think I realized how much of an opportunity moving here was until I started settling in. For the first time in my life, I am in a community, surrounded by people, and living a life that is altogether peaceful, happy and calm, and that's never really happened to me. I know that Oberlin has its problems, some of them serious, and that these need to be addressed as such. But they are not the same kind of problems I have encountered in the past, and this has given me a whole new perspective.

For those that worry that everyone will leave and the town will die, I tell you now that I don't think that will happen. As an outsider, I have seen how much people all over long for this kind of life; they just don't realize it's here for the taking.

For those who fear that if we court

new population and growth, that the identity of the town — its values, history and way of life — will die, I tell you, too, not to worry. I think those who would make the jump to this kind of life would respect it, and seek to revel in what it has to offer while also contributing what they have to share — whether that be a new language, different ideals or a strange new perspective that we can't understand because we haven't been there before.

The latter can be scary, and I know this because, in all honesty, it kind of scared me when I was packing up to move here. But those fears were dispelled when I realized that this town, and these people, are giving me something I've never had before — their normalcy. It's an incredible gift, and I can already feel myself growing in wonderful new ways because of it.

## Part of support is being informed

### Letter to the Editor

To the Editor:

In the last few issues, there have been several articles or letters regarding the physician situation in Decatur County. For years, Dr. (Richard) May was our family physician, however if we needed medical care we always saw anyone available. When Dr. May left, we saw Dr. (Stellan) Andrea, Dr. (Elizabeth) Sliter or any of the assistants. I was happy with them. When they

left, I saw Dr. (Steve) Albert, then Sean Conroy or Lynetta Ward.

I like the Oberlin hospital and I like the nurses there. I always gave my full support.

If we are expected to support whoever is brought in, however, I feel we should also expect to be

informed of what is going on. Dr. Albert was suspended and we were not told why. I have discussed this with many people, and they feel the same way. We have a right to know the reason he was suspended.

Lillian Sulzman, Dresden

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Phone: (785) 475-2206 Fax (785) 475-2800  
E-mail: oberlin.herald@nwkans.com

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