

Cleaning up our 'Dirty Laundry'

ASK YOUR PHONE, smart speaker, or computer to play it, and it'll sound dated — like a funeral organist trying to play to a disco beat. But a lot of people probably still share the views singer-songwriter Don Henley expressed when he wrote these lyrics in 1982:

*I make my livin' off the evenin' news.
Just give me somethin',
somethin' I can use.
People love it when you lose.
They love dirty laundry.*

*Well, I coulda been an actor,
but I wound up here.
I just have to look good; I
don't have to be clear.
Come and whisper in my ear.
Give us dirty laundry.*

*We got the bubble-headed bleached
blonde, comes on at 5.
She can tell you 'bout the plane
crash with a gleam in her eye.
It's interesting when people die.
Give us dirty laundry.*

*Can we film the operation?
Is the head dead yet?
You know the boys in the
newsroom got a running bet.
Get the widow on the set!
We need dirty laundry.*

*You don't really need to find
out what's goin' on.
You don't really wanna know
just how far it's gone.
Just leave well enough alone.
Eat your dirty laundry.*

*Kick 'em when they're up,
Kick 'em when they're down,
Kick 'em when they're stiff,
Kick 'em all around.*

To be sure, our air waves have more than their share of Barbie and Ken clones, so blown-dry that not just their hair but also their brains are poofy. Still, most journalists share Henley's disdain for an "if it bleeds it leads" approach to news.

Stories of that nature are popular. They'll top the list of most-read items on our website. Facebook's secret algorithm for how it decides what small percentage of postings to share with others gives exceptionally high ratings to such things — presumably because people want to read them.

Journalists, on the other hand, are in the business for a different reason. They cope with corporatization that has gutted respected newsrooms, advertisers who would rather pay social media influencers than help communities by supporting local news, and a postal service that annually targets news publications with 15% rate hikes for mailing.

They work for low pay — or, in my case, no pay — for obscene hours, constantly be-

ing yelled at by anyone who doesn't want his or her misdeeds to be noted. Journalists do this not so they can feel important but so they can try to help their communities have the information they need to make democracy function.

The problem is, too many things journalists point out — and readers wholeheartedly seem to agree with — end up remaining unchanged.

We can report how city administrator and manager searches were conducted in public, not behind closed doors, in Atchison, Gardner, Junction City, Lawrence, Kansas City, Manhattan, Topeka, St. Joseph, and Wyandotte County, among many other places. But in one of our cities, the search goes on in secret.

We can note how budgets were set without detailed examination then were used as justification for across-the-board raises absent any sense of whether employees deserve them. Yet there's no public cry to that public employees' performance should be better evaluated.

We can explain how the state screwed up by hiring a convicted financial felon to oversee grant programs and how another of our cities then made him interim city clerk, all without checking his background. Yet the same city then goes out and hires a police officer without a background check who turns out to be someone no one would ever want to work in law enforcement.

We can report how cops like this with bad backgrounds move from town to town because regulators hide behind privacy laws and won't share information about the cops' misadventures. Yet we learn that the latest developments here won't be disclosed anywhere except in the columns of this newspaper.

We can write about how a taxing district conducts its elections in a manner more appropriate to a 4-H club than a governmental body, but two elections later, the voting will occur exactly the same way May 26.

We can try to get sponsors to help pay for such information to be provided to the public, but the only information they want to get out is about whether their employees' kids or kids they hire play sports.

News is a public service more than a for-profit business. Its economics are fragile and constantly under challenge. Yet it won't be technology or even corporatization that ultimately condemns the vital role news providers play in making sure our democracy functions. It will be unwillingness of citizens to have the courage to step up and demand actions they know our democracy needs.

As revered broadcast journalist Edward R. Murrow said in quoting Shakespeare after exposing Senator Joe McCarthy, "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars but in ourselves."

— ERIC MEYER



Another Day in the Country Being overtaken

By PAT WICK

© Another Day in the Country

IT'S THAT time of year when the Artful Eye Show is coming up for Centre Elementary students, grades 3 to 5. It's happening on May 9, with doors to the art exhibit opening at 6:30 p.m.

My house, where a year's worth of artwork from 32 prolific students is stored, has been overtaken.

One bedroom has been designated as the current staging area. Everything that's been created since September and stored in various places around the premises is now in one room — mostly.

Stacks of matted pictures and canvases along with boxes of clay masterpieces, decorated gourds, and even Bavarian Easter eggs end up all through the house.

Our judge for this year's show is Dennis Medina, retired curator for the Eisenhower Museum in Abilene.

Among other things, Dennis is an abstract artist, a skilled quilter, and an avid art collector. A sampling of his artwork and a quilt will be on display in the Centre Elementary small gym, which we will do our best to turn into an art gallery.

After Dennis got through judging this year's show around my kitchen table, with all the extra leaves added for ease of display, he said, "Your students are producing wonderful, consistent work. When I was their age, I remember my art classes as being tedious and boring. It all changed my senior year in high school. I wish I could have started with teachers like these children have."

That was quite a compli-

ment. I think my young students are amazing. They pick up a pencil and begin to draw. However, when I show their work to someone new, I wonder whether I'm biased, like an overprotective grandmother.

Some years, I've held some art projects back from being judged — like the end-of-the-year canvas paintings that are done only in 5th grade.

Handling acrylic paint is a trick for an adult to learn, and working on a larger scale also is difficult. So, I've usually withheld those completed paintings from being judged. It's just too subjective.

However, this year, we put everything into the mix. Judging such a variety of work was a big job. I was worried that the judge would be overwhelmed. He wasn't, even though it took four hours to complete.

"The time flew by," Dennis said, enjoying the process so much.

One of the interesting types of art we studied this school year was artwork created for stamps.

"Philatelic" is a new word in our vocabulary, thanks to the clerk at Ramona's post office, who introduced me to a quarterly magazine put out by the U.S. Postal Service about all the beautiful stamps the service creates every year.

In a world in which children know very little about letter writing in general and stamps in particular, I thought it was time they were introduced.

The kids took on the challenge of reproducing stamps as forms of art. Stamp art was such a hit we made it into a category of its own. One piece of stamp art was chosen from each grade represented, and a

unique ribbon, especially created for this occasion, will be awarded to the winners.

"You can never have too many ribbons," my sister Jess tells me.

Speaking of being overtaken, I was overtaken by surprise when I opened my mailbox one day this past week and found an envelope addressed to me from my grandson, who is graduating from high school in a few weeks.

I recognized his handwriting — neat, precise printing that could almost be a typeface on a computer.

"Could this be a graduation announcement?" I wondered to myself.

But the envelope was business style, borrowed from the place where his mother works.

I stood there beside the mailbox, looking at the letter. This boy just turned 18, and this is the first letter I've ever received from him.

Kids his age don't write letters. He has included notes on birthday cards the family sends. He's written tags on presents at Christmas. He regularly texts me and occasionally sends an email but never has written me a real letter. And here I have one in my hand.

"The magazine article about the tennis player was really interesting, Baba," he began. "Thanks for sending it. I've decided to try to answer every letter you send me with actual paper correspondence, even though it takes more orchestration to get the stamps and envelope than to just send a text."

"Hallelujah," I said to my cat, who was the only one listening. On another day in the country, I'm completely overtaken.

Letters TO THE EDITOR

Exposing a bad cop

To the editor:

Thank you to reporter Finn Hartnett. Your investigative reporting on the Peabody "officer" and his apparent lack of an adequate pre-hire background was excellent.

No city, county or state in the USA should have to rely on an officer of this reputation and work history to call at a time of need or emergency. There are plenty of other hourly jobs this guy could apply for besides public service.

You would have thought that Peabody would have known how to do it right after the last people-problems they hired.

These bad officers travel the USA and our state, working from one to two years before they find themselves back into a self-imposed corner for violating department rules, ethical rules, and — yes — even Kansas laws.

They mostly survive as officers by going to and from the smaller law enforcement agencies that don't have adequate personnel policies or the know-how to conduct even a cursory background and work history.

I was undersheriff at Abilene and a KBI senior agent until I retired after 33 years in police work. As a KBI agent, I investigated many public servants at

the state, county, and city governments, including law enforcement officers who committed very serious crimes including murders, sex offenses, drug sales from seized evidence rooms, and thefts they thought they could get away with because of their positions of trust.

Some people should never be employed in law enforcement or as public servants in any capacity. These are the employees that get caught and arrested.

It takes everyone to stand up to these losers and say no, you can't work in our community.

It takes city and county leaders, sheriffs, chiefs, and — yes — even local newspapers to investigate wrongdoing and report the news.

Sometimes it's as easy as a few phone calls or a records waiver signed by a prospective employee that relieves a city or county from any liability for giving information to a prospective employee.

We have a local newspaper in Abilene that has some nice folks working for it, but unfortunately they don't report untruthful statements by public officials, nor do they care to question anything they are hand-fed by city and county officials.

In many cases, they never get public records because the

agencies jack up the prices of copies so newspapers can't afford to investigate anything.

Forty years ago, when I began working as a deputy at Abilene, we had the Salina Journal that checked into everything.

Its great investigative reporter David Clouston was one of the best reporters I have ever met. He always told truth to power by asking the right questions and was greatly supported by the Journal's editor at the time.

Those days are passed, and the Journal is a shadow of what it was. Nowadays, cities, counties, and even state agencies work hard to cover up their mistakes when all they have to do is tell the truth and learn from them.

I wish my current home of Abilene had a reporter such as you and the others at the *Marion County Record* with the guts to investigate complaints and report the news to the citizens that are all too often kept in the dark.

Thank you for doing your job to the best of your ability and the integrity to tell the truth. You deserve a big pat on the back by every officer in Kansas and the city fathers of Peabody for saving them a potential lawsuit in the future.

Good work!

John C. Nachtman, Abilene

JOINT ISSUE

Marion County RECORD

(USPS 329-780) ISSN 2159-4422

Hillsboro Star-Journal

(USPS 245-620) ISSN 2159-4368

PEABODY Gazette-Bulletin

(USPS 424-280)

Phone: (620) 382-2165
Fax: (620) 382-2262
E-mail: record@marionrecord.com
Postal: 117 S. 3rd St., Marion KS 66861
Web: http://marionrecord.com/
http://starj.com/
http://peabodykansans.com/

Marion County Record, Hillsboro Star-Journal, and Peabody Gazette-Bulletin are published weekly, every Wednesday, by Hoch Publishing, the county's only fully accredited member of Kansas Press Association, and are the official newspapers of Marion County and all cities in the county.

Periodical postage is paid at Marion, KS; Hillsboro, KS; and Peabody, KS, and additional mailing offices. Circulation records are available for review by postal officials at Hoch Publishing, 117 S. 3rd St., Marion, KS. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to 117 S. 3rd St. Marion KS 66861.

SUBSCRIBE for \$45 a year online only, \$50 a year in the Marion County area (ZIP codes 66838, 66840, 66843, 66850, 66851, 66858, 66859, 66861, 66866, 67053, 67063, 67073, 67114, 67123, 67151, 67154, 67438, 67449, 67475 and 67483), \$55 a year elsewhere in Kansas, or \$60 a year in other states. International rates on request. Single copies over the counter are \$1. Subscriptions are transferable but not refundable and include applicable taxes.

PICK-UP: As an alternative to postal delivery, subscribers may pick up their papers in Marion at Hoch Publishing, 117 S. 3rd St., or at Marion Senior Center, Hilltop Manor, Marion Assisted Living, or St. Luke Living Center, in Hillsboro at Chamber of Commerce office, 110 N. Main St.; and in Peabody at Scissor Cottage, 106 E. 2nd St.

SUBMISSIONS: Letters, articles, images and other materials submitted for publication become property of Hoch Publishing for purposes of publication and are subject to editing. The newspaper welcomes brief letters to the editor (generally no longer than 400 words) that express an opinion on a currently newsworthy topic. The writer's contact information must be included for verification. Letters that contain defamatory comments, open letters, third-party letters, letters sent to more than one publication, and letters that more appropriately would be advertisements, including Cards of Thanks, are unlikely to be published. One letter generally is allowed per writer per calendar month.

RATES: Full media guide available online at <http://marionrecord.com/rates>

COPYRIGHT: Hoch Publishing and each advertiser possess joint copyright over advertisements placed. Additional rights may be possessed by Metro Creative Graphics Inc. and others. No portion of this newspaper, either advertising or news, may be reproduced in any form without express written permission from the publisher.

© 2025 Hoch Publishing

EDITOR & PUBLISHER

Eric Meyer

NEWS STAFF

Reporters Finn Hartnett
Nicholas Kimball
Rowena Plett
Ryan Richter
Phyllis Zorn
Contributors Delbert Peters
Willow Spence
Pat Wick

BUSINESS STAFF

Sales manager Debra Steele
Office manager Cheri Bentz
Distribution Beverly Baldwin
Barb Creamer
Arlene Ehrlich

CORRECTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

The Record regrets that errors sometimes occur or that stories may present incomplete information. If you think something was misleading, let us know and we will provide a correction or clarification in this space.

Tax sale

Properties sold in an April 17 tax sale did not include 328 N. Lincoln St., Marion, as was reported last week. The property was redeemed by the owner before the sale.

Police database

Former Peabody police officer Eric Watts was not placed on a national database of de-certified officers after his provisional license was revoked.

A spokesman for the Kansas Commission of Police Officer Standards and Training said Watts would be put on the database only if commissioners decided he committed a "training act violation" after their own investigation.

The spokesman would not say whether an investigation was ongoing. Watts could apply for provisional certification again in April, 2026.

Track coaches

Grant Thierolf did not take over as head track coach from Rex Wilson in 1998, as was reported last week. He actually took over from Jerry Smith.