

Collapsed bridge hampers access for medical and fire service

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The Three Mill Bridge in Selma collapsed after enduring the unusually precipitous weather of December and January. Because of the heavy rains and snowmelt the stream's banks were eroded away and, as a consequence, the bridge was washed out. The bridge itself was constructed out of a rail car that was donated by Rough and Ready Mill 15 years ago.

Despite reaching out and being extensively briefed by FEMA with regards to the application process, the residents found out that unexpectedly and to their surprise, they didn't qualify for funding after all. Unfortunately, the county government can't financially help them either. Because of this, the residents of the Three Mill Bridge area must raise the funds personally or suffer the consequences including extreme fire hazard and lack of expedient medical coverage.

Speaking on the county's side of things Rob Brandis with Public Works said that the bridge and road leading up to it cannot be maintained by the county because the infrastructure is not up to code. "The underlying premise is that if those facilities are brought up to county standards by the developers, or in this case the local residents,

the county will accept them into our maintenance."

Unfortunately, bringing the bridge and road up to standard would be prohibitively expensive for private individuals because the bridge alone would cost an estimated million dollars. That being said, if the bridge was constructed up to standard it would likely last around 75 years as opposed to 15.

Brandis also explained that the county maintains around 565 miles of road, but there's probably about another 200 miles of nonmaintained roads around the county. "We always encourage folks in these situations to be thinking long-term in terms of having some kind of local road maintenance fund," said Brandis.

Illinois Valley Fire Chief Dennis Hoke shared his thoughts on the problem. "The bridge standard is kind of a big issue with the county so we fight this battle even with other bridges that we can't take fire trucks across... It's a big problem when you have private bridges that are not maintained and inspected." Adding to his statement, Hoke said that private bridges continue to be a problem all over the state but are particularly concentrated in the Illinois Valley. He would like to see the county enforce the state bridge requirements and not a "watered down" minimum standard by county ordinance. So far they have not.

Compounding the problem is that private bridges are often unmarked with regards to how much weight they can support so it is basically guesswork if they can drive their fire truck across in a time of need.

"I have a truck that weighs 56,000 pounds. How do I know that that bridge is going to support it?" Hoke asked rhetorically. Continuing on, Hoke said that fire trucks fall through private bridges all the time with one example having occurred in Applegate about two years ago and the consequences, because they couldn't respond to the fire, were severe.

The residents of the Three Mill Bridge have started a Facebook GoFundMe account run primarily by Norm Cegelnik. "Our neighborhood is kicking in," Cegelnik said, "Our family and friends are all kicking in and my daughter Holly is collecting money. We look like we might be about halfway toward getting the bridge started." However, there are other related projects that need to be tended to aside from the bridge which will require additional funding.

About 20 families regularly use the bridge and as it stands now the only way in and out is via a long detour that heavy vehicles cannot traverse. When there is significant rainfall, and thus mud, only four wheel drive vehicles can reliably



(Photo by Dan Mancuso, Illinois Valley News)

Three Mill Creek bridge Friday, Jan 20.

enter or escape.

"The nightmare has been from FEMA funding," Cegelnik said, "They wasted a lot of our time... We need to get this done before the first of July because that's when they have their regulations kick in." When the residents of Three Mill Bridge accrue \$20,000, a specialized contractor will start the repairs. Because there's no equipment available and powerful enough to lift the 60,000 pound railcar, it will

have to be hoisted up by an array of helical piers.

In addition, the Illinois Valley Soil and Water Conservation District will ensure that erosion does not wash out their bridge a second time. Fortunately, this work might be covered by a federal grant.

"That's the main problem, not being prepared for fire season," Cegelnik concluded like Hoke, "If someone needs an ambulance they could die before they get to them."



Life in the Valley of Riches

By DAN MANCUSO,
 Publisher

I often deal with folks who come in to the newspaper office with either an obituary of a loved one or looking for a copy of an obituary that ran. I treat the interaction like

any other I come across in a day at the office and I feel like I need to apologize for coming across as insensitive. I am not a cold-hearted person who has zero concern for the people around me, the ones that have lost someone important to them. It's just that after 50 years on this planet, I still don't know how to respond. Every person is different, there is no one-size-fits-all response, so in my mind, I treat them as I would any other person that comes in.

Generally speaking, I try to be true to me, who I am, the "real Dan." But, there are people out there who seem to like to wear masks. Depending on the part they

are playing at the moment, determines which mask they put on. I am sure in their mind they are doing what's appropriate for the moment.

The problem with masks is I never know who I am dealing with. I am left wondering, who is the person behind the mask? Is that big smile really a genuine smile, or is it a mask? Oh heck, since I am being me, I will be brutally honest, the person is being fake.

I have a strong distaste for fake people. Yes, I want to be liked, and at times it does bother me when people don't like me. But really at the end of the day, I think, "Do I really want to be liked enough to be fake? Then, am I really liked at all, the fake me?" I doubt it.

The downside to being real in all

situations is that some people do not appreciate who you are. I think that is OK too. I have put the world into four quarters: 25 percent of the people will love you no matter what you do; 25 percent of the people will dislike you, no matter what you do; and the remaining two quarters can be split between people who dislike you but could be convinced to like you, and the opposite, people who like you but could be convinced not to.

Life is short and unless you enjoy being fake, I suggest you spend your time on this rock playing the bit part you were assigned at birth, being you.

Thank you for picking up this week's paper, enjoy! ~ djm

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Jennifer Kowalczyk, WHNP

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