

How are we doing anyway?

When Ed Koch was mayor of New York, his common greeting when out amongst his constituents was a cheery “how am I doing?” I tend to use the same approach as editor of the Chieftain. We value what you as readers and subscribers have to say.

One way we collect feedback formally is the comment space on the back of the circulation statements. The latest batch crossed my desk this week, and I am pleased to report that most who commented gave us high marks. There were also great story suggestions.

I thought it would be interesting to share some of the feedback as a way of encouraging you to add your own comments to the discussion.

We received a lot of “excellent” ratings.

“We love learning about our new home,” wrote one out-of-state subscriber. “We are very impressed with the quality of your newspaper.”

Another reader called it “a breath of fresh air ... keep it up” and another “we are so grateful for your local coverage of environmental, political and human interest news.”

There were also a few who didn’t give us high marks.

“For many years, we had a subscription to the Chieftain,” one respondent wrote. “It’s now a thing of the past.”

We will redouble our efforts to be more relevant in the weeks and months to come.

We also heard from a subscriber who chastised us for having “little or no coverage on school events.” This person was particularly miffed we had missed the donkey basketball games at the Enterprise gym.

“Sales of the Chieftain



WAHL TO WALL

Paul Wahl

would have soared if anyone would have covered it,” he or she wrote.

Our apologies for missing the event. I have participated in a few donkey basketball events, and they are a hoot. We have been strengthening our coverage of schools and hope to come back next fall with an even better plan.

A final comment I wanted to deal with here:

“We have been very disappointed in the Chieftain. We are reading the same content in the Capital Press Ag newspaper. So much of the local information is being left out.”

It is sometimes difficult to keep all of the balls in the air when a newspaper with a small staff is short a key person. As you know, the Chieftain had been without an editor since December before I came aboard. If you look carefully at the last three editions, there has been nothing in the print edition from the Eastern Oregon Media bureau in Salem. All of that content is posted on our website, however.

While our goal remains to be as Wallowa County focused as possible, there are topics — wolves, for instance — where it makes sense to run those stories in the print edition.

You don’t need a formal invitation to let us know “how we’re doing.” Email editor@wallowa.com or call 541-426-4567. If you see me out covering an event, introduce yourself and give me feedback.

Wahl is editor of the Wallowa County Chieftain.



Mothers, remember the pickles

This time of year the world outside my window speaks of mothers. Mama cows and their calves, as black as coal, block the road ahead of me as they plod toward verdant pastures. An osprey with its beak claspng a branch wings overhead toward its nest atop a power pole.

Mother sheep and goats rest in the barnyard with blades of grass protruding from either side of their mouths while lambs and kids bound about. Tails of steelhead wiggle in redds, preparing to lay eggs.

Winter and spring play tug of war with us, snowing on daffodils, as though struggling through labor pains for new birth.

My mind drifts back to my boys (now grown men) and how much I enjoyed being their mother. Like a digital slide show, images flash before my inner eye.

Slide 356: I was trying to prop first baby Matthew, six-months, upright on



WALLOWA GAL

Katherine Stickroth

the floor level waterbed. He kept tipping over to the side, and I would set him up. Over to the side. Up. Again and again. He started giggling, and I got tickled. It was the first deep laugh we shared.

Slide 420,761: 10-year-old Sam wanted to draw on his bedroom wall. I agreed, curious about his artistic abilities. Among his sketches was an army personnel truck carrying deer, elk and moose holding rifles. Underneath was the caption, “How do you like being shot at?”

Was he going to be a pacifist? I didn’t have an opinion either way, but I wondered. Today he is as big a hunter as his brother.

It seems like more pictures are of my failures, but by the grace of God, they don’t remember most of them. Yet ...

Slide 1,288,397: While the boys were growing up, I invited company over for dinner after church nearly every week. It was a pleasure to prepare the meal, properly decorate the table and use my fine china.

As guests complimented the display of food and dining room décor, Sam called out amidst the chatter, “Where’s the pickles?”

“Pickles?”

“Pickles, Mama. You always have pickles.”

Normally I included bowls of gherkin pickles and black olives. Having overlooked pickles on my last grocery shopping, I gave no thought to the single bowl of olives now on the table.

“Sam, I didn’t get pickles last time I shopped,” I said.

See PICKLES, Page A5

Cheap automobiles lead to excellent adventures

To make it in Wallowa County, you can’t just go throwing money around. A penny pinched is a penny earned, or whatever, so as a service to the thrifty-minded here in the Land of Winding Bank Balances, this week we have an installment of The Frugal Motorist, dedicated to buying and operating a \$500 car.

I hesitate to call myself an expert on the topic because I’m not sure expert is a strong enough word. I’ve owned an impressive array of shoestring vehicles, if I do say so. So what’s it called when you’re more than an expert? Experter-er? Let’s go with that.

The main thing to look for when purchasing a \$500 car is that it runs. And drives. Those are the two features to really insist on. If you can’t drive it home, you paid \$500 for a metal sculpture.

Totally different topic we’ll cover later in The Frugal Art Collector.

A true \$500 car will move thanks to its own internal combustion, not a tow strap or being on a trailer. Quick aside on combustion: some \$500 cars may combust both internally and externally. I had one that would shoot the occasional flame out the carburetor and tailpipe. Think that was a timing issue.

Obviously the low entry cost is attractive, but another joy of owning a \$500 chariot is the breezy freedom of not being overly concerned with minor worries like dents, dings, engine failure, scratches or resale value. One such car that once graced Wallowa County roads was known as The Deerslayer for shaking off repeated collisions of the hoofed kind.

Rather than hurt its value, this ability to keep working after deer kept throwing themselves in front of



AND FURTHERMORE

Jon Rombach

it became a selling point for durability. The Deerslayer was passed around a long string of friends in need of cheap transportation.

The best cheap cars have this mystical perpetual motion quality of continuing to run when all common sense says they should not. An exceptionally good cheap car has the power of self-healing, and major problems will just go away by magic.

There’s no sure-fire way to positively ID one of these magical self-healing cheap cars, but one semi-reliable characteristic is if the car has run for several years without one of its cylinders working. That’s a

good sign.

My current \$500 car is an early model Volkswagen Golf. A previous owner had the wisdom to transplant a four banger diesel into this sleek auto, so I enjoy fuel economy to the tune of 44 miles to the gallon. I’m basically getting paid to drive this thing.

Normally I wouldn’t fritter away a bunch of money on budget wheels, but in a fit of extravagance, I did buy two quarts of all-purpose enamel paint from Jo Hard and gave the Golf a makeover. I used a roller for most of it, but wanted to do this up right so used a brush for the tight spots. Always wanted a car with plaid side panels.

My ol’ pal Mike Midlo asked if he could put the Golf in a music video for a new song he recorded, so a bunch of county folks recently crammed into the Volkswagen, and we drove around the slope while

Mike filmed it. Ralph Swinehart and his Model A truck really steal the show, but the Sinclair family and Liza and Jacey and Danielle are definitely accomplices.

“Juicy Fruit” is the name of the song, and Mike’s band name is Pancake Breakfast. Look those two things up on your computer device, and take a peek if you want. “Pony” is also tremendous, both as a song and the video with Bart Budwig.

Goodness sakes, do yourself another favor and watch “Plant that Seed,” another song and video by Midlo that one critic has already called “the best song of 2017,” which I tend to agree with.

That wraps our buyer’s guide to \$500 cars and free music videos with Wallowa County seasoning. See you at NAPA.

Jon Rombach is a monthly columnist for the Chieftain.

Article was missing part of the story

LETTERS to the EDITOR

Regarding last week’s front page story pertaining to the legal action of David Van Doozier against the Willises, I’ll qualify myself by saying I know neither party.

At first blush, I thought, wow, the little guy stood up against the big bad bully and won. Cool! Even though I believe the tort system in the U.S. is grossly overused and abused, still, if someone is grossly wronged, there should be a remedy.

But as I read, it started looking less like an unbiased news story and more like a press release. I found especially intriguing the paragraph on page 16 stating: “How did this quickly rejected criminal case end up going before a grand jury ...”

How indeed. Having been involved in a grand jury process once, I know that the evidence must be overwhelming for the jury to proceed. So, how does a case go from the grand jury to an acquittal after only a short deliberation? What changed?

It would seem obvious that the two panels heard different information and/or evidence. But I see no explanation on your part. Was any investigative research done as to the whys and wherefores of the case history?

It is my sincere hope that any article that appears in your paper has been well investigated and is not just a press release made to look like a news story to fill up space.

Bob McFaul
Joseph

ODFW not doing the elk or ranchers any favors

I am in support of Mike and Pam Harshfield. I believe the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife did not fulfill its responsibilities to the care and welfare of the elk.

ODFW doesn’t manage game; it manages people and money.

ODFW straddles the fence. If the elk cost them money, it is not responsible. But if it can make money, then the elk are their responsibility.

If domestic livestock cause damage to someone else’s property, the livestock owner would be liable. But ODFW doesn’t think it is accountable for what their elk do.

I think the ODFW (for their lack of responsibility) had Harshfields backed into a corner, so they did what they thought was a last resort.

Whenever I have talked to ODFW about elk damage, I am told that they can’t do this or that, they aren’t responsible for this or that and you need to talk to the state about your problems.

If we have to go through the state, then what good are the ODFW people here doing us?

I urge all livestock and landowners to support the Harshfields. ODFW needs to start managing game and be fully responsible and pay for the damages their game causes. I am just one of many livestock and landowners who are fighting the ODFW over their elk.

Casey Tippett
Joseph

Court story reporting seems one-sided

I was very disappointed to read what appeared to be a paid advertisement regarding a recent court case. The one-sided reporting is outlandish.

I have known the Willises for well over 10 years and have the utmost respect for their honesty and integrity. Anyone who wants to know the truth in this case should do a little more in-depth investigating of the true facts and the character issues involved.

After doing so, it is my opinion that you would see the exact opposite of what the article portrayed. The Willises did nothing more than follow the law and protocol in dealing with someone occupying their property who did not have a legal right or contract to be there.

It was the Grand Jury and the District Attorney that determined to indict David Van Doozer on removing items from the rental unit and damaging the premises. The Willises had no part in making that decision.

Why did it take Van Doozer two years (according to the article) to file his malicious prosecution suit? Why was the suit filed against the Willises and not the Grand Jury or District Attorney who did the actual indicting?

It is my opinion that justice was not served. Truly a sad day for business and property owners of the county.

Lori Schaafsma
Joseph

WALLOWA COUNTY

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