

A nice change for downtown

Hastings Tribune

There was a day when a city's residents shopped downtown for everything they needed: groceries, clothing, gifts, hardware.

In Hastings and other cities across the nation, it was a matter of practicality. There were no mega shopping centers, no malls — no other options. So the place to go was always the same: downtown.

But that was then. The downtown concept has shifted. Downtowns have to be an experience, offer a certain aura. Remodeled storefronts, loft living, flowers, park benches and bronze statues have added to Hastings' "downtown lifestyle" in recent years.

Now a new idea for Hastings — sidewalk cafés — is being considered by the Hastings City Council.

We think allowing restaurants to offer sidewalk dining will add to the downtown experience in a big way. The outdoor dining concept is a staple in large cities. People like it. There's something very appealing about enjoying the food and atmosphere of a favorite restaurant and at the same time enjoying the fresh air and atmosphere of the city.

If the council approves the idea, downtown restaurants would be able to fence off a portion of the sidewalk outside their businesses and set up tables and chairs to accommodate outdoor dining. They also would be able to serve alcohol within the dining area. Currently, alcohol cannot be served on city property, including sidewalks.

The idea was brought to the council by Bob Murphy, owner of Murphy's Wagon Wheel, and by Randy Chick, head of the downtown Business Improvement District. Murphy already has plans to create a sidewalk café on the south side of his restaurant, should the council approve the measure. But Chick said several other downtown eating establishments have expressed interest in the idea. If the council approves the matter, Chick said the BID plans to get as many downtown businesses as it can on board, whether they serve alcohol or not.

The council gave the matter first-round approval two weeks ago, and it appears it will be approved on second reading Monday. With a final vote July 9, Hastings could see sidewalk cafés throughout the downtown as soon as the end of July.

Sidewalk cafés have been a tried and true element of downtowns for decades, and we know they will be successful in Hastings, too. We hope the public and council will give their approval to this idea now, and give their support in the future by dining on the sidewalks of downtown Hastings.

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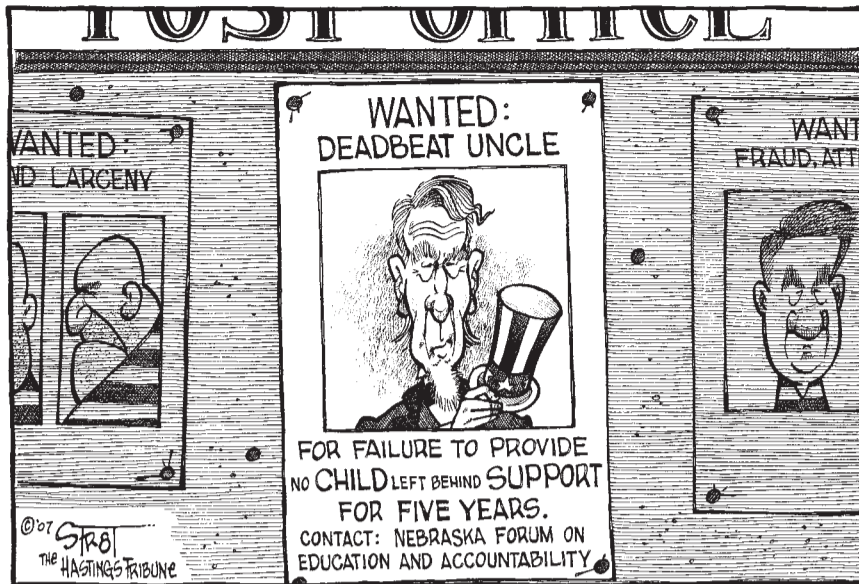
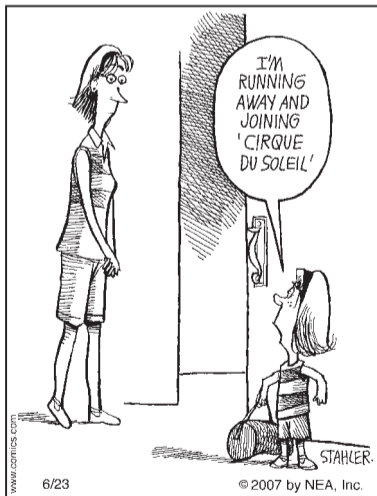
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Tragic fire 1,000 miles away hits home

Hastings firefighters observed a moment of silence at 7 p.m. Tuesday for nine men who died about 1,400 miles away. It was 7 p.m. 24 hours earlier that a fire broke out in a furniture warehouse in Charleston, S.C. Nine firefighters died.

They were inside the building when the roof collapsed. The fire got too hot, too fast. So fast that they didn't have a chance. Firefighters, police officers and other rescuers saluted as the firefighters' bodies were carried from warehouse that night.

"Nine families were affected by this," Hastings Fire Chief Kent Gilbert said Friday. "You can't help but think about the loss to those families."

Gilbert said that while Tuesday evening's time at both Hastings fire stations for reflection and prayer was brief, thoughts about those nine lives lost have persisted since and will for a while. It's hard to block out that those men died doing the same job that you do. If you're a firefighter, you're bound to talk about it, think about it, get emotional about it. So are family members of firefighters.

Of course, there are questions from the media, investigators and others about what went wrong, how did this happen? Gilbert said Hastings firefighters are asking those same



Darran Fowler

questions. They're having those type of conversations, doing their own analysis, hoping to learn something.

But many of them can relate to what happened. They have been in situations that have involved a lot of risk. They've had close calls with death or serious injury. Danger is part of the job.

In May 2004, a fire destroyed a historic downtown building in Hastings. At one point during the early-morning fire, there were about seven firefighters inside the building. Things changed in a hurry as the fire spread into other parts of the building, causing its instability.

Recognizing things were getting more dangerous, the firefighters were ordered to get out. The building collapsed a few minutes after they evacuated. Pieces of it fell into Second Street, not far from where firefighters and others stood. That was too close for comfort.

"The building wasn't worth the firefighters' lives," Gilbert said at the time.

Personally, Gilbert said he can recall a scary situation years ago when he was inside a burning building and he feared he might not get

out in time. He had lost contact with the fire hose, making it difficult to trace his steps back out. He lost his sense of direction and his air tank was running low. He felt trapped.

"Those situations can be a little unnerving," he said.

Hastings is fortunate in that a firefighter has not been killed in the line of duty in nearly 70 years. Two were killed in the 1930s, Gilbert said.

But even though no one from Hastings died in a fire in recent years, it still hits home when one does from somewhere else.

Gilbert said that's because there's a special bond between firefighters. It doesn't matter if they're from the same state. It's like a fraternity, a brotherhood.

"I have never gone into a fire station and not be welcomed," he said.

This week, Gilbert said, the mood has been somber for the nearly 50 full- and part-time firefighters because of what happened in Charleston.

That's because even though that tragedy occurred more than 1,000 miles away, there's still a closeness.

Darran Fowler is the Tribune's managing editor. He can be reached at 402-461-1260. His e-mail is dfowler@hastingstribune.com.

Voice of the People

With Hastings becoming a cool, green city, surely cutting down on the use of coal would be a step in the right direction.

The wind is free. Coal has to be mined and transported at quite a cost. Let's get together and at least give this a try.

Jessie Garksa, Hastings
Jim and June Doyen, Hastings

LOCAL RED CROSS NEEDS HELP

As some of you may know — in my case, I did not — our chapter of the American Red Cross needs help.

In just the past few years, the strains of providing aid such as food, clothing, shelter and medical care to individuals and families in need has created a monetary crisis for our local chapter.

I just assumed and took for granted that when the rain and hail come — like they did two years ago, a fire destroys a local home or an ice storm leaves local citizens in peril, someone would be there, and they were. It was our local Red Cross.

Before any state or federal aid arrived, our Red Cross stood forth to help. Now, I see that it is time for me and our community to step up and help it.

As a community effort, a benefit fundraiser will be Thursday at the Adams County Fairgrounds. The event begins at 6:30 p.m. and will include a Texas Hold 'Em poker tournament with plenty of socializing.

Everyone of all skill levels is welcome and encouraged to play. You can pre-register or buy-in at the door.

For those wishing to give generously, there are some neat card game sponsorships. Those wishing to pledge may do so at the event or send your contributions to:

American Red Cross Mid Rivers Unit
415 N. Kansas Ave.
Hastings, NE 68901

I sincerely hope that you, your business and our community can generously give back to an organization that has unconditionally given so much.

Marc Hultine
Hastings

SHOW SUPPORT

Nebraska National Guardsmen and Reservists have a special, crucial role in helping our country and Nebraska communities respond to threats and turmoil, both across the globe and in our state.

As we go about living our daily lives and enjoying our freedoms, we must not forget our Guardsmen's sacrifices, the sacrifices of their families, and the sacrifices of their employers.

About 30 percent of our current active military force overseas and around 48 percent of our total military force is comprised of our nation's Guard and Reserve servicemen and servicewomen. Nearly 900 Nebraskans are currently on active

duty and serving in Iraq, Afghanistan and other locations throughout the world. The sacrifices of our Nebraska soldiers and their families are great, and we thank them for answering the call to duty.

As a retired Navy commander with active duty and Reserve time, I understand the difficulties that are a part of military service. I also understand the importance of military service. Regardless of our political views on the Iraq conflict and other policies, we Nebraskans are 100 percent behind and supportive of individual soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines.

Nebraskans understand and appreciate the importance of our National Guard and Reserve forces, but many may not realize the contributions our employers make in supporting our soldiers. By supporting their Guardsmen and Reservists, both through legally required means and by going above and beyond, our employers put the good of our country above their own interests.

Employers endure financial hardships and organizational disruptions when a Guardsman is called to active duty — and most of our Nebraska employers do so without hesitation and with great pride.

Employers who wish to express support of their Guard and Reserve employees have a way to do that. It's called a Statement of Support, and it's available through the Nebraska Committee of the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR), a Department of Defense agency.

Signing a Statement of Support is a simple yet meaningful way to show support and be recognized for the sacrifices you make for national defense. Call the Nebraska ESGR at 402-309-7105 or visit the Web site www.esgr.com for more information.

Arlo Bower Chairman, Nebraska Committee of the ESGR
Lincoln

Letter Policy

The Hastings Tribune welcomes letters about issues of public interest. Here are some rules:

◆ Letters can be submitted by e-mail: tribune@hastingstribune.com

◆ Letters may be hand-delivered: 908 W. Second St. Or mailed: Voice of the People, P.O. Box 788, Hastings, NE 68902

◆ Letters must be signed and include an address and phone number. (The address and phone number will not be published.)

◆ Letters should be 250 words or less. Letters will be edited for length. They also will be edited for spelling, grammar, clarity and content.

◆ Letters should express an opinion or explain why something is important or in the public's interest.

◆ Thank you letters and form letters may be rejected.

◆ Letters submitted within 30 days by the same author on the same issue may be rejected.

◆ Letters of a political nature will not be accepted within seven days of an election.

VANDALISM REVOLTING

Good Samaritan Village has a nice golf course that residents, their families and friends enjoy. New flags were donated by a family of one of our residents and flag sticks donated by other local golf courses.

Most of the residents are fathers, mothers, grandmothers and grandfathers. All are senior citizens.

On June 13, five of the flags and flag sticks were taken from the course and some cups pulled out of the greens. The golf course is maintained by the GSV maintenance department and many volunteer residents.

This revolting event will not deter the enjoyment of the golfers, but we sympathize with the person or people who did this act of vandalism.

At Good Samaritan Village, we acknowledge the fact that "everyone is someone" and this is someone no one should be. If the perpetrators live one year or 100 years they can always remember the claim to have disrupted the lives of some elderly people.

May your conscience be your guide forever.

Lavern Hartman, chairman of the GSV golf committee
Hastings

USE TAX FOR WIND POWER

We think it would be of great value to the city of Hastings to reinstate the half-cent city sales tax and use it to install wind-generated turbines.

We know the initial cost would be expensive, so maybe the tax could be collected for a year and that amount could be used toward the initial cost. Then, issue bonds for the remainder to be paid off with the sales tax.

If enough turbines were erected, everyone in Hastings could use the wind-generated electricity at no more cost than what we now pay with the coal-fired plant.

Lincoln only has two turbines that generate a good share of the electricity for more than 100,000 people. Surely, two would be sufficient for a city of 24,000 with excess that could be sold to other utility companies.

This revenue could be applied until the original cost was paid, and then go to the city for needed improvements to be voted on by the citizens of Hastings. A return on our tax dollars sounds great.

Why purchase electricity from Kimball when we have the wherewithal to produce it ourselves?

The subject has been mentioned that we do not have enough wind to erect wind-powered generators. I lived 25 years in Iowa and 45 in Nebraska and, believe me, there is more wind here than in Iowa.

I returned to Iowa in April. Along Highway 3 between Cherokee and Pocahontas, there are more than 100 turbines in that area alone. If Iowa can produce a good share of its electricity with wind-powered generators, why can't we?

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