

Wednesday's

Editorials, Columns & Letters

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Paper 'n Ink... up in smoke...

By Lynn Brisendine

Everyone knows that a person who has beaten a bad habit can be a pain. Lots of folks do partake in various activities that can be considered not good for the participant.

Smoking easily comes to mind. Perhaps, that should read tobacco in any form used, is unhealthy for the user and those around the person who smokes.

I enjoyed tobacco in most of its forms. Cigarettes, cigars, pipe tobacco, chewing tobacco all but snuff, I just never could find any pleasure in having thousands of little hot balls roaming around in my mouth. And the few times I tried, I couldn't expel the stuff fast enough.

I never actually smoked over a pack of cigarettes a day. But, and this was stupid, I enjoyed tobacco for too many years. I quit, cold turkey, on Oct. 7, 1988. I remember the day all too well. I was sitting in my car, in the parking lot smoking a cigarette. I had just returned from the doctor's office where I had been told that I had pneumonia and pleurisy at the same time. The doctor said he wanted me in the hospital, but being a real man I went back to work.

Sitting in the smoke-filled car, I looked in the mirror and thought out loud, the doc just told me I had two lung problems and here I sit, smoking. I rolled down the window, tossed the butt (I know littering too) and that was the last tobacco I have used.

To be honest, I had been trying to quit the legal weed for a couple of years and would go for a while doing just fine until I went into a place where smokers were having that after dinner cigarette, or in a crowd where too many began lighting up.

I was reading all of the warnings and paying attention to the medical alerts which told anyone interested that tobacco in any form was an unhealthy activity.

Of course it was a different time in a world filled with people enjoying their tobacco practically anywhere, at anytime they wished.

Offices, and mine was no different, were truly smoked-filled rooms as employees and customers blew smoke into the air without a care.

In my lifetime, smoking has been curtailed like no other habit I can recall.

Growing up, nearly everyone smoked. It was rampant on television, in the movies, even at sporting events. Tobacco smoke hung in the air before huge air conditioner scrubbers began to, more or less, take much of the haze away.

Smoking was a cool thing, a romantic interlude where the hero lit up, inhaled deeply, sighed out loud, blew smoke and took care of business. Tobacco was being advertised in

every format, the huge cigarette companies were the biggest spenders on television. Actors pretending to be doctors promoted their brand as a healthy thing to do. All baby boomers can remember the Marlboro Man. Years later, cancer claimed his life.

In today's reality, many outdoor places exist where fumers are verboten.

In the last 24 years, I have saved much. I truly believe that day added years to my life. And, it wasn't too long after I quit that I began to notice changes in my health, all to the better.

But, health hasn't been the only thing I have saved in quitting smoking. I have saved thousands of dollars, which were (no pun intended) going up in smoke.

A recent magazine article I read on the Zite site on my iPad had the writer estimating that many people spend 25 percent of their annual income on cigarettes. I think that, when I quit, a carton of smokes cost around \$18. That would be \$1.80 a pack. A few quick punches on the calculator tells me that even if that price was still in effect I have saved \$15,768.

Which isn't really even close to what has been actually saved over the 24 years. Cigarettes have gone up in price. Make that a whole lot up in those years since I decided to throw that butt out the window (I know, littering).

Purchasing a carton of cigarettes (10 packs) sees a cost of somewhere around \$70. And that's in Texas. New Yorkers and many other states pay a lot more, some see a pack of cigarettes going for \$11.

That means that a pack a day smoker in Texas is paying, give or take, \$2,555.00 a year. In New York that figure turns into \$4,015.00. A couple who both smoke a pack a day are looking at from \$5 thousand to \$10 thousand dollars a year. And that has to be a significant hit to household income.

Naturally, money isn't the only thing to save when smoking is halted. Adding years, and in many instances, good years, to life has much value, worth more than a few thousand dollars.

Still, the idea of using all those dollars for necessities, or healthier pleasures, has to be a motivating exercise in the extreme.

So, light 'em up. It's really none of my business. Unless you factor in increased health costs and higher insurance rates to care for the ones who scoff at the idea of quitting. Then it is my business.

So, go ahead, light 'em up... but do it far away from me and mine.

So, go ahead, burn those dollars...

Told you.... a reformed person is pretty much a nag in the worst way. And I am not blowing smoke.

State Capital Highlights

Compiled by Ed Sterling, Texas Press Association



Texas receives clean water funds from EPA...

AUSTIN — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency last week announced its award of \$57,041,000 to the Texas Water Development Board to support the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund program.

The funds are for loan assistance to eligible water systems for infrastructure improvements needed "to ensure safe drinking water is available to Texas residents."

The fund program was established under the Safe Drinking Water Act Amendments of 1996 authorizing the EPA to award capitalization grants to states, which in turn are authorized to provide low-cost loans and other types of assistance to public water systems to finance the costs of infrastructure projects needed to achieve or maintain compliance with the act's requirements.

States are also authorized to use a portion of their capitalization grants to fund a range of set-aside activities including source water protection, capacity development and operator certification. The program helps to ensure that the nation's drinking water supplies remain safe and affordable and that public water systems that receive funding are properly operated and maintained, the EPA said.

In other news, President Obama appointed Ron Curry of New Mexico to head Dallas-based EPA Region 6, which includes Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Louisiana and Arkansas. Curry is the first non-Texan to serve as director of the region since the EPA was created in 1970.

Curry succeeds Al Armendariz who resigned six months ago.

Texas leads in job gain

Texas added 38,000 seasonally adjusted nonfarm jobs in August, leading the nation in

number of jobs gained for the month, the Texas Workforce Commission and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported last week.

Closest to Texas in monthly gains were Florida with 23,200 jobs gained, and Missouri with 17,900 jobs gained.

Texas' seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 7.1 percent in August, the same as for the month of July. A year ago, Texas' unemployment rate was tabulated at 8.1 percent.

Texas' job growth rate has been positive for 28 consecutive months and has been at or above 2.0 percent since December 2011, Texas Workforce Commission reported Sept. 21. Among the states, the largest over-the-year percentage gains in overall employment occurred in three states where oil and gas exploration are robust: North Dakota, 6.7 percent, followed by Oklahoma, 2.9 percent, and Texas, 2.5 percent.

'FAST' ratings released

Texas Comptroller Susan Combs on Sept. 19 published the 2012 Financial Allocation Study for Texas ratings that chart academic progress and cost effectiveness in 1,136 public school districts and charter schools.

Ratings are from one to five stars, in half-star increments. A district that achieves the highest rating of five stars ranks among the top 20 percent of all Texas school districts in academic progress, while keeping expenditures among the lowest 20 percent of fiscally comparable districts.

Forty-five districts received the highest rating of five stars. Rating information for all Texas public school districts, campuses and charter schools, which is meant "to fairly compare the state's diverse school districts" is available at <http://www.FASTEXAS.org>

Federal funds up for grabs

Texas Department of Transportation on Sept. 14 announced that Texas communities may apply for federal aid for their transportation related projects such as pedestrian and bicycle trails, roadway landscaping, water runoff abatements and historical preservation.

Up to \$70 million in funding through the federal Transportation Enhancement Program is earmarked for cities across Texas.

Selected projects are eligible for reimbursement of up to 80 percent of allowable costs, TxDOT said, and applications must be received by Nov. 16.

Radioactive cylinder missing

The Texas Department of State Health Services on Sept. 13 reported it is looking for a piece of equipment lost Sept. 11 by an oil and gas crew in a rural part of West Texas.

The stainless steel cylinder and attached plug about seven inches long and an inch across, contains Americium-241/Beryllium. The device is not considered highly radioactive but could expose someone who comes in close contact with it for an extended period of time to a harmful dose of radiation.

"A Halliburton crew was transporting it from a well outside of Pecos to another well south of Odessa. On arrival, the crew noticed the shielding was not locked and the device was missing," the health department reported.

High court justice resigns

Texas Supreme Court Justice Dale Wainwright earlier this month announced his intention to leave the high court at the end of September to join an Austin law firm and return to private practice.

Elected to the state Supreme Court in 2002, Wainwright earlier was a district court judge in Harris County.



Thinking in Type ...

By Brian Brisendine

During a recent car ride, my favorite 8-year-old asked me if I am a Republican or a Democrat.

Before I could frame a response to explain my position and educate my young audience, my favorite 6-year-old interjected.

He rolled his eyes and stated with authority, "He's an American."

It was a revealing little moment from the un-corrupted mind of a bright child who still views the world with wonder and curiosity.

It was a proud moment for this bumbling dad who too often garners knowledge from his children, rather than imparting it to them.

Regardless, he hit the nail on the head.

In the midst of our non-stop political atmosphere, that's exactly how I feel.

I don't agree with President Obama on everything he believes.

But, I don't disagree with him at every opportunity either.

On the flip side, I can see logic in some of the things Governor Romney says.

But, I also find fault in some of his stances.

Both men are intelligent and successful and can move an audience with thoughtful speeches.

Both, despite their politics, deserve at least a modicum of respect and admiration from all of us for what they do.

Neither, because of their politics, deserve the unquestioned adoration they receive from their followers or the unreserved derision they get from their naysayers.

I am not a Republican. I am not a Democrat.

The problem our country faces these days, is that I just ostracized myself from both groups.

There is no longer any middle ground.

You're with us, or you're against us.

My yard sign better support the same candidate as your yard sign or we can't be friends.

Your bumper sticker better have the same campaign slogan as my bumper sticker or you're just obviously an idiot.

We don't discuss anymore, we double down.

We don't debate anymore, we yell louder.

We don't listen and learn anymore, we seek affirmation.

We don't read the news anymore. Actual news wherein a trained and experienced reporter provides background and facts and, heaven forbid, both sides of a story.

A story that might take a little time and concentration and a few pages to understand the breadth of the subject.

Instead, we watch talk show hosts with admitted and celebrated bias as they play snippets and sound bites with no mind to context.

We listen to radio jockeys who delight in dumbing down their audience with gleeful disdain for whomever the other side is.

The great irony in all of this is, I truly believe that I am represented by...None of the above.

Our two choices for president both give good speeches and can rattle off endless bullet points.

But neither really knows how you and I live out here on the South Plains of West Texas. You could use almost any

locale in that analogy.

They are so enthralled with the game of politics and ensconced in the bubble of Washington D.C. that they have no inkling of real life.

Governor Romney caught flack last week for giving his idea of a middle class income at around \$250,000 a year.

Just a little fact checking shows that President Obama has an almost identical view of the middle class at between \$200,000 and \$250,000 a year.

Those are telling statements from both men, which separate them from reality.

I consider myself a part of the middle class, born and raised and now a contributing member.

I don't make anywhere near a quarter of a million dollars a year. I wish I did. I congratulate those that do.

But if that is their idea of the middle class, then the vast majority of the citizens of Brownfield, of Terry County, of Texas and of the United States as a whole, are sub-par in the eyes of both candidates, the leaders of their parties.

We deserve better than that.

The lesson I learned in just one comment from my wise little 6-year-old is this:

This country needs fewer Republicans.

This country needs fewer Democrats.

This country needs more Americans.

The Brownfield News welcomes and will publish engagement and wedding stories under a long time policy.

The News will accept and publish for free weddings which are newsworthy. We will provide our readers this service with the understanding that we reserve the right to edit the content for space. We will not accept (for free) a wedding story which details an event more than one month old. Should you wish to have a story published concerning an event more than a month old, we have an affordable and workable wedding package available.