

# NSN EXPRESS

## A No Standing News Special Edition

*Fast reading for busy people*

June 13, 2001

Number 3

**The Rolla School Board and Character Education.** Ewing and the Rolla Board of Education brag about the Character Education they are giving our children due to our alleged failure to provide it at home. Character Education they claim, will reduce conflict, teach good manners, fair play and produce responsible citizens. Judging from recent events, the Board and their highly paid enablers should be sentenced to take their own Character Education classes until they demonstrate they have acquired some.

Two months after the levy election the It's Worth It Committee has become The Committee That Won't Shut Up and Go Away. Not content with bending and breaking campaign finance laws and telling a long list of half-truths during the campaign, they were drumming their heels on the floor and demanding that Channel 16 (Rolla Video Productions) be hanged, drawn and quartered by the FCC and the Rolla City Council for bruising their delicate egos. Strassner, Wiggins and Bass – all political amateurs – did not expect to have their hand called when they tried to muscle the local public access station and it still smarts. “They wouldn't play by our rules!” they whined in their complaint.

The committee for too long had basked in the uncritical spotlight obligingly provided by the Rolla Daily News, sycophants in the Business Partners organization and the adoring faculty and staff – a group that would cuddle up to Godzilla if he brought home the bacon. But taxpayers always resist when they feel a hand on their wallets, so when taxpayer backlash kicked in during the final weeks of the campaign, Ewing, Westbrook, Bass, Wiggins and Strassner panicked and tried to play hardball with the TV station. When Channel 16 aired the No-Show Show and hung out their dirty linen, the shock of not getting their customary white glove treatment (Bass had a hissy fit at a previous board meeting which the RDN kindly failed to include in their “news” report) produced this cantankerous complaint. Well girls, that's just politics and prima donnas who can't take the rough and tumble shouldn't dabble in it. When the city

was presented with the demand to spank Channel 16, City Councilmember Jimmy Dale Williams wisely cautioned the council not to rush into someone else's First Amendment fight. At their June 4<sup>th</sup> meeting the council very wisely took his advice and dropped the hot potato that had been tossed in their laps by their fellow council member Charlotte Wiggins.

**The “One Voice” Boogeyman.** The school board's problem is quite different. The counter fire from Channel 16 demands that the board distance themselves from the antics of board member Bass by censuring her behavior. This presents the board with a pass/fail ethical test. Ewing and the board created this Frankenstein surrogate group but failed from the beginning to protect the staff, students and the integrity of the board by first setting clear limits for involvement of staff, students and use of district facilities and resources. However, cleverly they and the committee think they skirted campaign finance laws the results reeked of impropriety. Taxpayers saw their own school property, staff, students and resources employed against them to squeeze more taxes out of them. The school board enthusiastically approved a presentation of the committee's campaign plan. All these activities should have been kept at a very distinct arms length from the school system. Ewing declared that, “It isn't a school matter or a board matter” when asked about the complaint and counter complaint. He takes too much on himself. Who gave him the right to decide what is or isn't a board or school matter? Silence implies consent and the rest of the board members, by their silence, will again be endorsing the wrong behavior and sending the wrong message. The board has passed voluminous canned VOLTS policies, politically correct slogans, mission and ethics statements. But where is their moral authority to impose rules and policies on others if they break them to suit their convenience? How legitimate are their lessons in ethics and character if they continue to tolerate actions from administrators and board members that show a lack of both?

The board, they are fond of saying, “speaks with one voice”- the board ‘Voice’ in this case was that of board member and President-Elect Annie Bass. She may claim that she was just a citizen volunteer but her oath of office says something else. State law and school board policy both say that when she campaigns for or against any ballot issue, she does so as a board member and not as an anonymous citizen member of the advocacy committee.\* She can’t just take her oath of office on and off like a hat that gets in her way. It is time for the board to drop this “one voice” nonsense. “One voice” is a concept which can be found nowhere in the history of American civil government. Majority does rule but even the U.S. Supreme Court recognizes and respects the dissenting opinions of its members. “One voice” is just one of Ewing’s devices to intimidate and gag board members so the “Voice” will always be his. They ran and we elected them individually not as a “one voice” slate. It is time for them to speak for themselves in this messy matter as the independent elected officials we thought we elected. If they hide behind Ewing’s thin excuse and try to duck the issue they will prove that Board President Elect Bass and Ewing are the “one voice” of the school board and the rest of them are just empty suits.

**\*RSMo 115.646 and School Policy adopted 6/18/98:** No contribution or expenditure of public funds shall be made directly by any officer, employee or agent of any political subdivision to advocate, support, or oppose any ballot measure or candidate for public office. **This section shall not be construed to prohibit any public official of a political subdivision from making public appearances or from issuing press releases concerning any such ballot measure.** (Note: In other words, public appearances and press releases are the only activities **specifically permitted** to elected officials. We find no statute that tells how you can pretend you aren’t an elected official while “acting as a member of the It’s Worth It Committee”.)

**Will County Prisoners Need Snorkels?** There’s something about people who do public projects around here; they’re allergic to doing the soil tests first. In the middle of explaining why he can’t get the measurements right for the jail’s expensive custom steel, Corky Stack, St. James engineer belatedly discovered a huge pool of water under the site for the new jail. It’s immaterial that the water is coming from some of RMU’s many busted

antique water mains – why they didn’t fix it before construction started is something the county should ask them – the point is that Corky didn’t bother to do a few simple core samples to see what he was putting the foundation on before he started. Corky’s solution is a permanent sump pump. Our solution is to fire Corky and get another engineer. The new Western District County Commissioner Bud Dean doesn’t appear to be swallowing Corky’s excuses. Bud Dean, normally the most genial of men, does not suffer waste and incompetence gladly. His hackles were already up over the steel fiasco when the swamp under the foundation was discovered. We urge Commissioner Dean to stay on top of this one and demand the performance we are paying for.

**Son of WaCo.** Having failed to deploy their model non-representative government corporation gimmick on the \$37 million regional landfill, Butz has now proposed a mutant of it to hide the taxpayer’s money and business behind another phony corporate shell. This one will be a foundation-ish sort of thingy and will hide how money is being wasted on stale ideas and more futile efforts to capture that big pie in the sky - Economic Development. Never mind that NAFTA killed off most domestic industrial expansion when the federal government made it irresistible for US companies to flee to cheap labor countries. Never mind that no one in Rolla has been successful in attracting industry without offering bribes from the taxpayer’s pockets so huge that they have robbed investment in our service infrastructure. Never mind that our weak infrastructure doesn’t have the surplus capacity to support more industry. The thing to mind is that this is just another dodge to satisfy the demands of Ed Owsley and Dain Ward for a \$125,000 annual sinecure for the same old RCDC stuff. The thing to mind is that if the city agrees to this foundation gizmo the same old RCDC faces will be appointed and will control it.

**Ouch!** The biggest hoot of the May council meeting came when they were discussing this RCDC bailout. When Butz admitted that as a quasi-public organization spending public funds the foundation would be subject to the Sunshine Law, Councilman Matt Williams (one of the council’s two Sons of RCDC) blurted out, “RCDC won’t like that, they are used to working behind closed doors.” Out of the mouths of babes....

**Post Script:** Before the pixels were dry on this NSN issue the Rolla School Board thumbed their noses at their constituents once again by having a board meeting in St. Louis to "plan." School board credibility, already stretched thin by dubious campaign tactics and vendettas, now hangs by a thread. One of our readers gave permission to reprint her letter that contains a history lesson for all of us.

Mr. Nash:

Thank you for keeping us up to date on the "government doin's" in Rolla. I appreciate your time and trouble.

I'm writing concerning your latest communication about the Rolla School Board and their decision to meet in St. Louis. It is appalling that they see fit to do such an injustice to the Rolla citizens. There are many places in Rolla in which they could meet. What is wrong with City Hall or UMR for that matter? The university has many nice meeting rooms and I'm very sure these would be a lot cheaper to use than a TRIP TO ST. LOUIS!!! What is wrong with this town?

My dad, Edward Wilson, (some of your readers may remember him--he and my mother Lucille owned and operated Ed's Florist at 205 West 11th St.) moved us from Jefferson City to Rolla in 1945. He had the same problems back then with the School Board, the "City Fathers", and "The Chamber of Commerce" as we are having now. Although I have kept quiet, I cannot any longer. My observations are that Rolla takes one step forward and ten backward. I wish someone would follow in the footsteps of the Rolla High School Class of 1954, of which I am a very proud graduate.

The School Board in its infinite wisdom, decided not to renew the contracts of several popular teachers, two of whom were Isabell and Harry Estes. These beloved teachers were given no reason, at least none that was put forth to the public. So in retaliation, the Class of 1954 walked out, and stayed out of school until these teachers were rehired. It was done in an orderly fashion with our class president leading the way. Mr. Nash, you can check this out in back issues of the local

newspaper. And, by the way, we also made national headlines and the story made its way even to the armed forces in Korea. Now, I don't think I have to tell the people of Rolla what a treasure Mrs. Isabell Estes turned out to be. She directed the Rolla Chamber Singers for many years and provided much pleasure for Rolla's citizens. I was very privileged to be a member of her Chamber Choir. And I am so very glad that some of us (even if we were only teenagers) had the guts to stand up to the School Board. Otherwise we might not have had the honor of Mrs. Estes' expertise for the remainder of her years.

Does anyone out there have any guts anymore to stand up to these people who think they can do everything their way? If I were younger and not handicapped, I would get the Class of 1954 together and sic them on the present school board. They certainly should be up a tree.

Sincerely,

Mary Dee Wilson-Wieland  
Rolla Senior High School  
Class of 1954

*[Editors note-NSN wishes to thank Ms Wieland for her letter and giving us permission to publish it in our newsletter. The editor was living in Rolla in 1954 and also remembers with admiration what the Class of 1954 did.]*

\*end

**[Another ED Committee?** Rolla doesn't just reinvent the wheel they photocopy it. When it comes to economic development committees the city just can't have enough do-nothing committees for it and they appoint the same half dozen do-nothing warm bodies to all of them. Why (other than the obvious pork for RCDC reason) create a foundation for economic development when the city has for decades had an Industrial Development Authority (IDA) - the only legitimate organization authorized by state statutes to act for the city in these matters? Why not get the deadwood off the IDA, appoint new people with fresh ideas and see what happens? Using the IDA they already have has the virtue of at least being cheaper than

creating a new foundation that won't have an IDA's specific statutory powers for development. An IDA would also be accountable to the council and subject to public audit – something the foundation may not be. H-m-m-m... subject to audit and accountable to the public? Therein may lie the rub.]

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