

NSN EXPRESS

A PUBLICATION FROM THE OUTLAW CITY OF THE OZARKS
A No Standing News Special Edition / Fast reading for busy people

December 10, 2001

Number 15

Advice on Character Education • Mark Twain Mafia • Strategic Ambiguities and other lies • Burn Baby Burn • Criminal negligence • Waiting for a Burning Bush? • Big Brother IS watching • Trouble in Rec City • In your face • Get a Brick

Character Education. St. James is debating the merits of adopting Character Education. In the wake of Columbine, Character Education was touted as the cure for everything that ailed youth from acne to going postal. We have some tips for St. James on how to introduce this educational fad into their school system - we did it all wrong in the Rolla District. First you make the board and administrators take the character test to see if they have any. Second, and this is the part we really slipped up on, you make the employees take it to see if they have the moral and ethical authority to preach to children about character. The following true or false test might help St. James weed out the ethically challenged on their staff: **True/false question #1.** While imposing a dress code on students it is appropriate for employees to dress as if they are working the night shift at Big Louie's. **#2.** Adultery and sex between district employees is fine as long as it doesn't become the subject of a current events report. **#3.** Displaying T&A in the classroom is a good thing, because it gets the little children ready for Sex Ed. **#4.** Using district, phones, computers, staff and school property for private business is OK because the board and administration let us do it to illegally influence school elections.

Enter our new **Superintendent, Terry Adams.** It's unexpected but it appears that Dr. Adams may have...character? Faces are disappearing in an untimely manner from district employment, a welcome sign that a long overdue house cleaning is taking place. The sleazy behavior of some employees has been well known for years but the board and administration pretended to be unaware of it. If these sudden 'resignations' are the signal that the new boss intends to raise the standard of behavior in the district, we applaud his actions. So will the many district employees and parents who have watched with disgust while some teachers, staff and principals have gotten away with behavior that would, and at times has, earned students severe punishment. If Dr. Adams means to enforce higher ethical standards a few unexplained 'resignations' are not going to get the point across without a clear public statement of what the new benchmark is, and why. The point will also be lost if the example doesn't start at the top and that is a task that may defeat even a man with character.

Mark Twain PTO 'Mafia' goes to the mattresses. When

the vague announcement appeared in the paper that MT Principal Lynn Reed had been...well...been 'disappeared' board members phones started ringing off the hook as the MT 'Mafia' kicked their election calling-tree into action. It wasn't clear what "taking leave for personal reasons" really meant. Given the vacuum of information, the PTO plans to march on the board meeting Thursday night in protest, something they would think twice about if they had better information. This should be interesting on several levels. The board is reaping the benefit of using coy euphemisms to hide an embarrassing personnel problem instead of simply telling the truth. Even more interesting is that three board members, Bass, Rapier and Strassner, will be facing the same political 'machine' they have carefully cultivated and used for their own purposes in the last two elections. Will the irate PTO call in their markers? If they don't get what they want will they be willing pawns in the April election and fall in behind the "For the Children" banner once again or will they finally have to look at all sides of these complicated issues and their long-term impact on the financial health of the district? Will the PTO members be treated to the same cold "Thank-you-now-the-next-item-on-the-agenda-is" response from the board that everyone else gets? Probably not, but whatever happens the board is already feeling the painful hoist from that old petard. **(In case you've never looked it up, a "petard" is an engine of war; an explosive device used to blow open a gate or breach a wall. A very apt metaphor in this case.)**

"Strategic ambiguities" and other lies. In political and bureaucratic lingo a "strategic ambiguity" is not really a lie it is just a tricky way of stating something to plant an image in the listeners mind that bears no relation to the truth. During a KTTR interview after the November 21st school board meeting **Board President Annie Bass** and **Curriculum Director Giger** told a big "strategic ambiguity." In discussing the modular classrooms they said there were 39 "units" located at the various schools. This is a lie and the signal that the April election campaign has started. They will claim that refinancing old debt for another 20 years won't add to our school taxes, therefore, this "payday loan" plan to get rid of the modular classrooms

won't really cost us anything. (Another 20 years of principal and interest payments doesn't "cost anything"? That's the rational of teenagers.) The image they are trying to plant in our minds is that our little elementary schools are awash in the Mother of All Trailer Parks.

Unfortunately, Bass and Giger were blissfully unaware that **Rolla Fire Chief Williams** had already told the truth about their modular buildings in the (first ever) school fire inspection report to the city council on November 4th. The fire report given to the council shows that there are only 14 modular buildings – not 39, not 17 not 24 – all figures that have been tossed around in board meetings. Four of the modulares are used for nothing but storage, so only 10 are really used for classrooms. The number would be only 8 modulares actually used for classrooms but this summer, anxious to spend their first tax-windfall, the school board unnecessarily doubled the kindergarten hours and purchased two more modulares to cram in front of Mark Twain School to provide a visual poke in the eye for voters at the expense of children's safety. Four buildings that we have been led to believe were housing students from crowded classrooms, are not classrooms at all but only warehouses for unneeded junk! The board has left them to clutter up the schoolyards and create fire hazards for nothing more than cheap political effect – a visual aid to trick voters into a sympathy vote for the \$7.5 million bond issue planned for April.

The report exposes years of bad management and voter manipulation - not sufficient reason for voters to approve 20 more years of bond debt payments for more elementary construction that will also add another half-million dollars every year in operating overhead for a static school population. Voters should not reward "strategic ambiguities" about the real contents of those so-called classrooms by giving approval for more public debt to get rid of surplus buildings that should have been disposed of years ago.

Burn Baby Burn. The fire inspection of the school's modular buildings was requested not, as you would expect, by the school board but by **Rolla City Councilman Rolufs**, one of the few elected officials in town who seems to know what he is supposed to be doing – taking care of public safety and welfare no matter whose egos are stepped on. Why isn't he on our school board?

Fire Chief Seest clearly wasn't satisfied with either the limited scope of the inspection or with what he found. He said the schools meet the "intent" of the Life Safety Code "with warning devices (smoke detectors)" and with "adequate number of exits and exits with egress lights." There are **not**, he noted, "adequate windows for rescue and ventilation at the Rolla Middle School." The inspection did at least result in the "addition of kitchen suppression systems, installing in-house smoke alarm systems, having exit and egress lights installed" and he made sure the exits worked. Because of his inspection the schools are being

hard-wired into a third-party alert system. He noted that he "could not speak for structural considerations, such as wiring, holes that are not firestopped after plumbing or electrical piping breach to fire walls." He also said that "inspections conducted at the Rolla Public Schools are courtesy inspections" only. Public school buildings with thousands of people in them only get "courtesy" inspections! What kind of folly is this?

Chief Seest also commented twice on the lack of a building permit inspection process for new building construction or remodeling projects by the school district. It obviously worries him and it should worry everyone. The district erroneously and arrogantly claims to be a "superior governmental entity" and therefore immune from safety inspections and compliance with the local permit and plan review process for construction and remodeling. The result is that the fire and police department have no idea what they are facing when they are called to a fire or other emergency and that is dangerous. The lack of current floor plans with remodeling changes, information about the electrical and fuel systems, chemical storage areas and other critical information costs time and in an emergency wasted time can cost lives. *It is an outrage that year after year the school board has made no effort to provide this information or cooperate with local safety officials to protect the children but they never hesitate to lay a guilt trip on voters for more money to prove that WE care "for the children."*

Criminal negligence. Does the fire report bolster the school board's argument that we must vote to increase our debt to eliminate these dangerous conditions "for the children?" No doubt they will try to spin it that way but the attempt will only provoke nasty questions about their years of indifference to even such cheap precautions as smoke detectors and lighted fire exits. We hope they do try to spin the fire report because their obvious negligence and lack of building safety is a public debate that is long, long overdue.

Before there is any talk of new construction voters, and especially parents, should demand to know: Why these "classrooms", some of which we have had for over 17 years, are only now being inspected and equipped with minimal basics such as smoke alarms and exit signs? Why aren't *all* school buildings inspected every year for fire and construction safety and why aren't they fully compliant with the Life Safety Code? Why haven't they always been? It's called the *Life Safety Code* for good reason. Why did it take Councilman Rolufs insistence to get even this limited inspection? With four modular buildings available, why did the board make a last minute, knee-jerk decision this summer to buy two more "units" and then deliberately create a fire hazard by stuffing them both in front of Mark Twain? Why have they been making lease payments on buildings only used to store junk? If the four modular "warehouses" are just storing junk why hasn't the board gotten rid of them to reduce the fire hazard? Why weren't the Fire Chief and

City Engineer consulted when each of these “temporary” buildings were installed even if only on an informal basis? Is this a community where we help each other or is it a place where turf-protecting bureaucrats who would rather risk lives than surrender an inch of petty jurisdiction?

Waiting for a Burning Bush? The keep-your-distance stance of the school board (that the city can’t impose building and safety codes on “their” property) is not only dead wrong it’s a criminally reckless position weighed against the safety of students and employees. The board’s refusal to submit to BOCA code inspection and compliance with city building codes is doubly baffling in the face of the fire that destroyed the administration building that (contrary to overwhelming local opinion) the State Fire Marshall finally blamed on jury-rigged wiring that didn’t meet the BOCA code! *Before the ashes cooled last March the first priority of the school board and administration should have been to order a top to bottom inspection of every school building and bring them all up to code.* The school board, however, showed no interest in the highly likely possibility that other buildings might have the same dangerous wiring. They were too busy picking out new drapes and having painting parties for their “emergency” office building to bother with such mundane tasks. Are they waiting for another sign perhaps, something more spectacular than a blazing administration building?

The timid position of city administration, that they have no “right” to impose BOCA construction or safety codes on the school district buildings, is as irresponsible as the school board’s “Keep Off Our Turf” attitude. In the event of a tragedy neither group will have a leg to stand on. State law, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and Federal funding all require school district compliance with local codes. The city is required by law to cite the district for violations even if it does bruise the board’s superior image – why are they not doing it? Where does the school board get the nerve to plan more buildings more when they can’t prove to the public that the ones they have are in full compliance with the most exacting safety standards? The school board needs to get their priorities straight and until all the people we elect to manage our community and our schools learn to work together for the common good we suggest you send Johnny to school with a fire extinguisher and tell him to sit close to an exit.

Big Brother IS watching. On rechecking “Rolla School District Goal #3: Enhance Communication.” and the five implementation “Strategies” the board claimed they would use, we found lots of “strategic ambiguities” about communicating with “stakeholders” (that’s not you, that’s someone more important than you) but nothing in their goals and strategies tells us that valuing freedom of speech and honesty is part of the “strategy.” Well, at least they didn’t lie about it. Last year the Rolla School Board spent \$2,500 of

taxpayer’s money - money given to them for the education of children - on a special computer program to block access to two web sites. The undesirable websites that our anal-retentive board and administration censored were not, as you might guess, pornography sites, game sites or chat rooms where perverts might lurk. No, the subversive sites they did not want employees or students to see were: "<http://www.rollanet.org/~rwnash/nsn.html>" and "www.rollaschoolboard.com." As far as we know the RDN web site is not part of their attempt at thought control, but then they have no reason to deny access to school ‘news’ stories that are usually written in the administration building.

We are delighted to be considered as dangerous as banned books such as: “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer”, “The Age of Reason” by Thomas Paine and “Black Beauty”, but we don’t flatter ourselves that we belong in such distinguished company. The expenditure of \$2,500 for censorship is a trifle compared with much larger amounts wasted by our Board of Education. Their fear of both sites is well founded given their appetite for controlling public opinion and anxiety over any close scrutiny of their actions, which unfortunately they only get from us. But the mind-set behind the purchase is not insignificant; it is distasteful and disturbing coming from school officials who operate an educational institution. Education is supposed to teach that public debate and public scrutiny of government is necessary to maintain a healthy democracy. As far as our board and administration is concerned if they can’t control it they don’t want it. Their time and money would be better spent getting employees to quit using the school computers and cell phones for personal ‘affairs’, an undisciplined practice which costs the district far more than the few minutes someone might spend reading information that has not first been approved by Big Brother.

Don’t tune in yet. In the same vein... As we predicted the broadcasts of school board meetings that the board reluctantly agreed to (as long as they could control, control, control) still haven’t materialized. As it turned out the district already owned nearly all the equipment needed to broadcast their meetings; it was sitting around gathering dust in closets. Channel 16 and Fidelity, however, are still being hampered by more trivial conditions. No broadcasts of board meetings will be allowed unless the RTC student “helpers” are available to run the cameras. How difficult is it for the people who sign the diplomas to make sure students aren’t “available” for certain sensitive meetings? The board meetings that are taking place right now contain information and presentations by architects, financial advisors and staff members that are key to the decision they will make soon on what to put on the April ballot. These are meetings that would be very enlightening for the voting public to see...which is why you’re not seeing them.

Trouble in Rec City. Several local residents found to their surprise that the topic of conversation around the Thanksgiving table was about the juvenile harassment at the recreation center. What was remarkable about it is that these people were all having Thanksgiving out of town and in different towns! The various hosts had the Rolla news from Channel 13 in Jefferson City five days before we did. People are learning to go to reporters out of town who don't belong to the local Chamber Image Polishers.

When they opened the recreation center they published a list of rules that prohibited a list of bad behavior including spitting in the drinking fountains. Mooning lifeguards and shaking boobies wasn't specifically mentioned but it does qualify. Break one of the rules and you get thrown out - at least that's what they said. But can dues-paying members be banned from a public recreation center? Can anyone be denied access to any public facility if they have the money to pay to get in? Enforcement can become schizophrenic when a government tries to operate a public facility like a members-only private club; this kind of public service isn't as simple as picking up trash or paving streets. There is a problem with running a "public" facility that charges country club dues because it has a million dollar overhead and a "100% recapture goal. The problem is that there is a natural reluctance on the part of the dunderhead who made the 100% recapture promise to throw out dues paying members no matter how badly they behave.

In your face. The Mayor and Butz were not satisfied with the council's decision last month not to pass the ordinance making it an offense to turn left at the RR tracks. Morgan and Butz sold out to the railroad demands, when the council found out from Councilman J.D. Williams how they had been tricked and killed the ordinance it made Morgan and Butz look like wimps. So Morgan put the dead ordinance back on the agenda. His message was: "I will shove this in your face as many times as it takes until you do what I want." Typical Morgan bullying but the council lets themselves be bullied. The ordinance will, of course, be obediently passed at the next meeting. We expect there will only be one council member who won't knuckle under, Councilman J.D. Williams. This is an administration mess that could have been avoided.

Get a brick. The city needs you to buy a brick for \$25 to pay for maintenance on the "Kiss My Bum" Caboose. They need you to subsidize the perpetual maintenance on this wreck the Chamber foisted on them because they don't know how to turn down things they can't afford. One taxpayer commented she would buy one but only if she could throw it at the Mayor.

Headline: *"Missouri Counties plan to sue over (state) budget cuts."* Missouri counties are about to learn you can't milk a dead cow.

To receive " No Standing News " by e-mail, free of charge, send a message to rwnash@rollanet.org with the word SUBSCRIBE in the Subject line.

To unsubscribe send a message to rwnash@rollanet.org with the word UNSUBSCRIBE in the Subject line.

Editors note: Copies of No Standing News can be obtained free from the Rolla Public Library and from Mail Boxes Etc Of Rolla Also visit our web site at <http://www.nostandingnews.com/>

I encourage distribution of " No Standing News ." Please feel free to copy and distribute any issue.