

EDITORIALS

Let it snow . . . as long as the road crew plows it

They're the butt of endless jokes about their work ethic, the forgotten men and women on the public payroll . . . until it snows. Then, people like "Butch" Chamberlain, the retiring roadmaster in Kingston Township, come into their own. We depend on them to clear the snow, ice and slush from the Back Mountain's highways and byways, and nearly without fail they come through. Of course, we much prefer to point out the alley they missed than the dozens of miles of roadway they cleared, working through the night so we can back out of the garage and go merrily on our way to work or shopping.

But they're just doing their job, we say, what they get paid for. That's true, and we should be glad they do it well. How many of us would be willing to work all day, grab a nap and sandwich and head back to work at midnight to work another shift? Not many, we would guess. And it's not just in the winter. Spring floods or windstorms demand the same response.

Like so many people whose job is to serve others, it's unlikely Chamberlain and his comrades have ever been able to please everyone all of the time, since most everyone wants their road cleared first. They have to set priorities and work within a budget, just like people in "the real world," and they generally do pretty well at it. (And, judging by the condition of main roads compared to township roads, better than the state.)

The next time you're tempted to complain about those loafers who make the streets safe for the rest of us, remember what it was like in the "good old days," when it was not unusual to wait two or three days for roads to be plowed out. Instead, be thankful that people dedicated to doing their jobs well are steering plows and wielding shovels, so we don't have to.

Publisher's notebook

Ron Bartizek



Let's say you found something that would cut the rate of stroke in men by 45 percent. Let's say it was a perfectly legal and relatively inexpensive substance, at least compared to prescription drugs. Let's say it even was something you could share with others, and in addition to its medicinal benefits, was a pleasure to consume. The world would be beating a path to your door to get it and doctors would be urging most everyone to take this wonder drug, wouldn't you think?

Think again, when the substance is alcohol. The latest published study of the effect of moderate alcohol consumption on stroke in Hispanic men found the risk cut nearly in half. But the results were issued with the usual disclaimer that people who don't drink alcohol shouldn't take it up, with the usual excuse that there's a chance some of the teetotalers would become drunkards. Really. I'd have to guess that very few alcoholics began drinking because it was good for their health, or that the thought even crossed their mind other than as a feeble excuse for their behavior. Whether you want to blame genes or weak character, let's not confuse responsible social drinking (or even moderate drinking alone) with abuse of alcohol.

Actually, I'm not suggesting people take up alcohol just for their health, either. Some people just don't have a taste for alcoholic drinks of any kind, and for them a cocktail is akin to castor oil. Others may be so convinced of the sinfulness of drink that the feelings accompanying a glass of wine might more than offset the gain.

I do ask why these study results can't be released without the editorial comment? Lots of people suffer heart attacks on treadmills. Others are struck by cars while running on road-sides. But we're still told to get in our 20 minutes of exercise three times a week, because the odds are much greater we will benefit than be harmed. It seems the same is true for alcohol, and we're all grown up enough to make up our own minds about demon rum.

About letters, columns and editorials

The Dallas Post attempts to publish opinions on a variety of topics in many forms.

Editorials, which are the opinion of the management of The Post, appear on the editorial page and are written by the editor unless otherwise indicated. Any artwork represents the opinion of the cartoonist, and columns are the opinion of the author.

Letters to the editor are welcome and will be published, subject to the following guidelines:

- Letters should not exceed 500 words.
- No writer may have more than one letter published during a 30-day period, except as a reply to another letter.
- Letters must be signed and include the writer's home town and a telephone number for verification.
- Names will be withheld only if there exists a clear threat to the writer.
- The Post retains the right to accept or reject any letter, and to edit letters for grammar and spelling, as well as to eliminate any libel, slander or objectionable wording.

In addition to letters, we welcome longer pieces that may run as columns. The author or subject's relevance to the Back Mountain will be the prime consideration when selecting material for publication.



A collection of frozen fir trees. Photo by Charlotte Bartizek.

LETTERS

State-financed sports stadiums are subsidies for millionaires

Editor's Note: The author asked that the Post print this letter he sent to Gov. Tom Ridge.

Dear Governor Ridge, I write in opposition to the commonwealth subsidizing the building of professional sports stadiums in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and anywhere else in Pennsylvania.

A most fitting time to act in the best interests of the commonwealth's taxpayers is

clearly present. It is especially relevant for the Republican Party, leaders in limiting the role of government in the lives of its citizens, to be in such a position. I sincerely hope you will use your office to prevent any such misapplication of taxpayers' money.

There is a common misconception, perpetrated I'm sure by the benevolent team owners, that economic benefits to the local communities somehow result from this state subsidized windfall. Noth-

ing can be farther from the truth.

For the commonwealth to participate in this mockery is an insult. We voters of the commonwealth have already voiced our opposition to financially supporting these gluttonous, greedy, insatiable organizations. There is no justification for public money to be used to support private enterprises under these circumstances.

Why should we continue to pay the millionaire salaries of 36 per-

cent of the professional baseball players in the major leagues and supporting the remaining 65 percent in a lifestyle most of us can never hope to achieve? And don't think for an instant that the magnificent owners are making a penny less than the highest paid players.

Someone has to stop this madness. I hope it will begin with you.

John P. Bergevin
Dallas

A Case for conservation



Alene N. Case

I have decided that being ill is definitely bad for the environment. About 10 days before Christmas, I caught a bad cold which quickly turned into an even worse sinus infection. The first medication regime did nothing. So, I have spent most of the holiday stuck indoors feeling miserable. Now, I am not telling you this to gain sympathy but simply to set the stage for the following reflections.

Think about it for a moment - what is the first thing you do when you are ill? You probably turn up the thermostat. It is virtually impossible to be warm enough. Usually we keep our home at 68 degrees during the daytime when we are here. But, 70 degrees was common when I was ill.

Even more problematic was the fact that I could not go outside. Whenever I tried, I started coughing uncontrollably. That meant that I could not hang out laundry

Reflections after being ill

(there is also more dirty laundry when one is ill) on the many dry, sunny days we had in late December. It also meant that, instead of walking to the post office or pharmacy, I drove the car. And, speaking of the pharmacy, all the medications and tissues that I used certainly took a toll on the environment.

And then, there is all the energy used to heat water for hot cloths and for the vaporizer to run virtually non-stop. And, there are the fast-food or take-out dinners that take the place of those that one would normally cook. You get the idea.

The one thing that I enjoyed doing while I was ill was watching the birds at our feeders. We have had pairs of Carolina wrens, cardinals and purple finches. There have been nuthatches, downy woodpeckers, mourning doves, blue jays, starlings (ugh!), tufted titmice, chickadees, and various sparrows. But, the very best part has been watching the flocks of juncos come and go.

Juncos have always been synonymous with winter for me. They seem to appear out of nowhere with the first snow and stay around until the last flake has melted. I've always loved the contrast be-

tween the white snow and the black of their feathers. The flash of white along the tail when they fly adds to the mystique. In fact, some folks call them snowbirds and I can understand why. (However, don't call them "snow buntings." Those are completely different birds.)

The northern junco lives here all year round. It is native to the northern hardwood forest and, further north, the boreal forest. It tends to feed on seeds in the lower layers of the forest and generally nests on the ground. It is especially at home in hemlocks and other conifers. It does not store food as some birds (like chickadees) do. Perhaps that explains why it is attracted to backyard feeders when snow covers the ground in the woods. If you haven't already noticed, juncos tend to travel in mixed groups of seed-eating birds from one field or feeder to another.

One of the names for the northern junco is the slate-colored junco. My husband and I recently discovered just how appropriate that moniker is. As I said, we have had plenty of time to observe the birds closely. And, we noticed that not all of them were the usual deep black or dark gray. As with

slate, there were some birds which had a distinctly brownish cast. We looked them up in the field guide and learned that these brown and white birds were the females. Why we had never realized this before I cannot say. But, it was exciting to learn something totally new about our animal visitors.

If you also enjoy watching birds at your feeder(s), you may want to join the "Great Backyard Bird Count" coming up in February. Cosponsored by the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, this bird count was first held in 1998 and was so popular that it is becoming an annual event. According to the Audubon magazine, "...14,000 citizen scientists identified and counted more than half a million birds in their yards, local parks, and other areas over three days, creating a snapshot of the distribution of North America's winter birds." February 19-22 are the dates for this year's count. If you are interested in more information, call 1-800-843-2473 or visit the Birdsource web site (<http://birdsource.cornell.edu>) and get involved.

I wish all of us a healthy New Year.

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