

VIEWPOINTS

EDITORIAL

\$26M for dome seems like a lot

The Manitowoc County Courthouse is an impressive structure with the dome on top of it being one of the highlights—but is it worth \$26 million to taxpayers to restore the dome to its original grandeur?

A majority of Manitowoc County Board supervisors apparently think so as they recently voted 16-9 to fund a \$30 million renovation project of the courthouse.

About \$4 million of that amount would be to replace windows and update the building's heating and cooling system. Those types of things are understandable as a building needs to be properly heated and cooled for its occupants and good windows and efficient HVAC systems will save money in the long run.

But \$26 million for a dome? At a time when people are struggling with inflated prices for everything else and the country may be on the doorstep (or already there) of a recession?

Board Chairman Tyler Martell of Manitowoc was quoted in the Valdres Journal that, as a history teacher, he appreciates the significance of the dome and the need to preserve history for future generations. But Martell was one of the supervisors who voted against the long-term borrowing plan because he said future generations of taxpayers—through the year 2045, as a matter of fact—will bear the responsibility for paying for the dome renovations.

Martell also said the dome is structurally sound so this is an issue of aesthetics and not safety. He also admitted that the committee he chaired which studied the project for nine months might not have spent enough time exploring alternatives.

Discussions have focused on putting a glass dome on top of the courthouse as it had in 1906, but a county resident pointed out that a hail storm took out the original glass dome and it was replaced with a stainless steel dome. That resident suggested that the county polish the existing dome and it would look just fine—for a whole lot less money.

Another resident suggested that this issue should go to referendum which is a fair suggestion given the amount of money involved and the questionable necessity of the project.

Yet another idea floated during the discussion involved using a county sales tax to pay for the project. While it is true that out-of-county people who spend money while visiting the county will help to fund the project, it also is true that sales tax increases are often hard to sunset and are believed to negatively impact low-income people more than anyone else.

The word "preliminarily" was used in connection with the County Board's approval of this borrowing plan which would indicate there might still be an avenue to reconsideration. There was discussion about only proceeding with an engineering study at this time. Again, the Manitowoc County Courthouse is an old but still impressive structure which serves many purposes. But do taxpayers really need or want to spend \$26 million on its dome? —Mark Sherry

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COLUMN

Best weather in North America?

I don't know about you, but I think this has been some of the best summertime weather I've seen in a long, long time.

Day after day in June and July have been filled with sunshine and temperatures which have not been too hot. That might not be true by the time you're reading this—more on that in a moment.

For a while in late June there were concerns that there was too much sunshine and not enough rain-filled clouds passing through the state. While I'm guessing we still could use more rain, we have received enough to make for some pretty lush farm fields throughout the region. While the corn struggled to get to the "knee high by the 4th" adage, just three weeks later it towers over the heads of even the tallest farmers. I always say that with the right amount of rain, sun and humidity, you can almost see the corn growing in July. It will be interesting to read about yield numbers when harvest comes around, but I'm guessing everything is going to work out just fine.

Another huge benefit of the early dryness is the continuing lack of mosquitoes, at least in my observation. I remember just a couple summers ago when they were so horrible that they almost made it impossible to enjoy the outdoors. I confess that I despise those little bugs so much that I really wasn't bothered too much by the June drought.

Maybe I should knock on wood as I say this next sentence, but we sure are lucky to be living where we are this summer. As a matter of fact, there might not be a better place to be in all of North America right now than Wisconsin and the Upper Midwest.

BEHIND THE FRONT PAGE

By Mark Sherry



As you know, the whole southern half of the U.S. has been baking for weeks with no end in sight. All of us can remember past years when we've had stretches of days in a row in the 90s, but can you imagine weeks in a row topping 100 or 110 every day? I recently heard a news report—I think out of Texas—where the nighttime low was 92. Yikes! And here I've been opening our bedroom window at night to let in the cool air of those nights in the 60s.

Yes, we are still dealing with some of that Canadian smoke but it's a lot better than dealing with some of the terrible floods experienced on the East Coast over the past month.

We are supposed to get a little toasty on Thursday of this week but my trusty weather website says the low 90s for Thursday, then dipping back down into the low 80s and even the upper 70s for highs over the next week.

What am I planning to do during the peak of the heat on Thursday afternoon? I'll be playing 18 holes of golf. If I'm tempted to complain about the heat, I'll remember that just 12 weeks from now there could very well be something white on the ground which isn't my golf ball.

COLUMN

Gleaning today, and years ago

RUTH'S REFLECTIONS

BY RUTH WASMER



"I saw them!" I told Hubby excitedly at supper last Thursday evening. "I saw the gleaners!"

I was as excited as our 6-year-old grandson when we were driving on USH 151 one Sunday morning. He suddenly said, "I saw the pond!" What pond, you might be wondering? I'll admit I was confused, too. "The pond that Wau-pond (Waupun) is named for!" he explained, with typical childhood logic.

I was, in fact, driving south on USH 151 again on Thursday afternoon around 5 p.m. on my way to Fond du Lac. What I call "the gleaners" is the annual stately (that means slow if you were in the line of more than 50 cars I counted backed up behind) procession of pea viners as they made their way north on the highway toward the village of Pipe. In addition to the pea viners, there were several service trucks following them, probably carrying spare parts, tires, etc. The harvest season for peas is only a couple weeks, so they can't allow any lengthy breakdowns.

I'd seen the group a couple weeks ago way out in a farm field near Fox Lake. They appeared postage-stamp sized from that distance, as they lined up along with several semi-trucks waiting to rush the harvested peas to the canning factory.

There were eight of these huge, specialized combines, and they looked like the same machines that I've seen over the years driving down the main drag in New Holstein on their way to the next field of peas to harvest. I haven't seen them on the road in recent years, but they always remind me of the elephant section of an old-fashioned circus parade. They are several different brands and colors, but the one that I look for is the pewter-hued "Gleaner" brand harvester.

Many years ago, the gleaners were mostly poor women that followed the harvesters out in farm fields, picking up the leftover grain or whatever plants that were missed. Back then, instead of large machines, the harvesters were men with scythes or sickles, and they sometimes purposely left some of the crop standing to help those hungry people.

Since childhood, I have known the account of Ruth, my namesake Biblical figure, who was a widow and did go out in the fields to glean

what she could to help her family survive. Her story wasn't about peas, but barley, and it has a happy ending, with Ruth married to the field's wealthy owner, Boaz, and eventually becoming King David's great-grandmother.

More than 40 years ago, I actually had the chance to glean after the pea viners, when I lived on a hobby farm outside of Denmark, Wisconsin, next to a field of peas. The pea viners picked that field in the middle of the night and moved on to the next place before daylight. The neighbors who owned the field called early to say that I was welcome to go out and scavenge the missed pea plants, but that I better do it right away. I went out before chores and filled a bucket with the fresh peas from the corners of the field that were missed by the harvesters. We shelled them and put them in the freezer right away. Later that afternoon and the next day, the air was filled with a sickly-sweet aroma as the peas went bad. I'll never forget that smell.

Many years later, we've planted peas multiple times in our gardens, but have had mixed success with them. When we lived out in the country, the local deer population helped themselves to the young peas nightly until we put up an electric fence. That worked, but our harvests were often only a handful or two of peas.

In the past weeks, I have also seen another interesting part of farm life—a crop duster at work. My first thought when seeing a small plane plunging from the sky is always that it is about to crash land. Thankfully, the skilled crop duster pilot not only smoothly pulls out of the dive close to the ground, but simultaneously delivers an even spray of whatever crop treatment is required, all without disturbing the rows of plants on the ground. It makes for another dramatic presentation for someone like me, who grew up as a city kid and is still learning about life in rural Wisconsin.