

# OPINION

4A | MAY 27-28, 2023

THE FOLLOWING EDITORIAL represents the view of The Joplin Globe's editorial board. Members of the editorial board are: **Andy Ostmeier**, editor, aostmeier@joplinglobe.com; **Emily Younker**, managing editor, eyounker@joplinglobe.com; and **Jerry Willis**, design editor, jwillis@joplinglobe.com.

## OUR VIEW

# Ask yourself: Have we earned this?

**A**lfred Akers has a question. For you. For me. For all of us.

Have you earned this? Have you led a life worthy of the sacrifices made for us?

This is the right weekend to ask that question. Someone at the Globe had the foresight to preserve every story of the men from Joplin who died in World War II. They clipped out the articles, pasted them on graphing paper and stored them in a folder that we still keep.

The clippings are yellowed and brittle 80 years later, and have to be handled with care, but each is a powerful story of sacrifice and true patriotism that we urge our community to remember today, of ordinary men and women who responded to extraordinary events.

- **ELTON WRIGHT** worked for the DuPont Powder Co. in Joplin. He was killed in action in Germany in 1945. He was the third war casualty and second fatality that family suffered.

- **U.S. NAVY PETTY OFFICER FIRST CLASS WALTER ROBERTS** became the first Joplin man to die in World War II. He was on board the USS Arizona the morning of Dec. 7, 1941. His is among the more than 900 bodies that remain entombed on the ship.

- **STAFFSGT. FRED JOHNSON** was killed in France in September 1944. He had worked in the mines before the war. His brother, **VIRGIL JOHNSON**, had been killed in France a month earlier.

- **R.J. FRANKENSTEIN** went from playing center on the Joplin High School football team in 1941 and serving as mayor for the annual senior class "City Day" to joining the U.S. Army paratroopers in 1942. He was killed in action in Belgium in 1945.

- **JAMES LOCKHART** was a Joplin firefighter who was killed in action while serving on an aircraft carrier in the Pacific.

Then there is our favorite: **ALFRED AKERS**.

Orphaned at age 8, with no next of kin, he spent most of his life fending for himself. When war broke out, he was working at the Millford Miller Produce Co., living in a room nearby.

No one thought Akers would make a good soldier. He had long ago dropped out of school. The dispatches reported later that Akers even had trouble staying in step after he enlisted. "Wilder than a new beer," his fellow soldiers said of him.

But in combat, the self-reliant Akers proved a born leader, rising to sergeant in the U.S. Army. Twice wounded, he received the Purple Heart with Oak Leaf Cluster, Bronze Star, Silver Star and numerous other honors.

One of his platoon said of Akers: "If it was dangerous, he'd do it himself."

Akers was killed in Italy in 1945.

He was 28 years old when he died, but that was not to be his last selfless act. Throughout the war, Akers had been buying war bonds, and he instructed the men in his unit to make sure, "in case anything happened to me," that the money went to orphans. They did as he asked.

He is buried in an American Cemetery in Italy.

In the movie, "Saving Private Ryan," James Francis Ryan, standing before the grave of Capt. John Miller, says: "I hope that at least in your eyes I've earned what all of you have done for me."

The question wasn't meant for him.

It was meant for you. For me. For all of us.

This is the right weekend to ask it.

"In Flanders Fields" by John McCrae

In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place, and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.  
We are the Dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders fields.  
Take up our quarrel with the foe,  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch, be yours to hold it high,  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.

in memory of all who gave their lives  
in service to our country

COUNTERPOINT  
Baskin 5/19/23

# Saving students means limiting cellphones, social media access

**O**n Tuesday of this last week, the U.S. surgeon general made a formal announcement declaring that social media poses a "profound risk of harm" to children and adolescents.

The state of Montana just banned TikTok.

The state of Utah just passed a law requiring explicit parental consent for children to have any social media accounts.

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is proposing to give million-dollar grants to school districts that restrict students' cellphone use.

Make no mistake, I consider all of this greatly encouraging news, but the persistent temptation will be to filter this issue through the same partisan lens that too many of our initiatives are now subjected to. That would be a mistake. The toxic effect of social media on our youth is not a partisan issue.

To this point, one of the leading proponents of this sea change has been Missouri's own Josh Hawley. A Washington Post article from January 2022 titled "Josh Hawley was Democrats' go-to ally in the battle against Big Tech. Then came Jan. 6" details how Hawley spearheaded many bipartisan legislative initiatives to reign in the nefarious influence of social media on children, but then after the Jan. 6 debacle, Democrats considered him untouchable.

Shame on them.

Hawley's spirit of bipartisan collaboration wasn't complete though. His 2021 book, "The Tyranny of Big Tech" indicts "woke capitalists" and "liberal corporations."



**BRENDAN COONEY**

Columnist

Shame on him. Creating healthy information environments for children to live in isn't only a concern for Republicans or Democrats. This is everyone's concern. In our current environment,

making a partisan appeal will now automatically alienate a large portion of the voting public, making the possibility of meaningful change very small.

The true issue at hand has to do with what many writers are now calling the "attention economy." Essentially, the tech corporations of this country are competing for our attention, and the competition is fierce as we each have only 24 hours a day in which it can be granted. More and more corporations are entering into the competition each year, and so the products they are making are using increasingly base appeals — of both political persuasions — to grab that attention of ours. No wonder we perceive the world as being so horrifying at the moment. In other words, the problem of partisan politics is exacerbated by Big Tech, and so Big Tech cannot be checked with partisan politics. We have to rise above the problem in order to solve it, and yet it continues to feed on itself.

In our own community I and few others are doing our best to raise awareness of these issues. At the end of April, we pitched our no-cellphone challenge to the students of Joplin High School — to go a week of

school without their device. More than 170 students took the challenge and many commented on what a relief it was to be without it. Many students know it is unhealthy for them, and yet they cannot stop themselves from looking at it. The comparison that has occurred to me before is that it's as if they were trapped in a casino (the social media apps operate on the same psychological principles as a slot machine). If even a healthy individual was trapped in a casino, it wouldn't be terribly long before they succumbed to playing the games that entertain but have such an otherwise insidious effect. Just like it would be preposterous to hold AA meetings in a liquor store, it is equally absurd to attempt school in just such a casino.

The rule-makers in our own schools cannot wait on Washington to make the decisions for us. We need protections for the attention of our young students in their most formative years, and we need them on the first day of school in August. The bedrock of a healthy democracy is the qualities such as sociability, empathy and literacy that our public schools have the essential task of instilling in our citizenry. If Missouri teachers are going to fulfill that most vital mission of creating tomorrow's society today, then we need administrators who will be vocal and intentional about creating school environments that are healthy for children. That can begin with limiting the access that students have to social media and cellphones.

**BRENDAN COONEY** lives in Joplin. He teaches English composition at Joplin High School.

# Communities need local newspapers to tell their stories

**N**ewspapers have often been called the first draft of history. It is an apt moniker.

Newspapers create a public record of the daily lives of ordinary women, men and children while accurately reporting on the activities of local government.

Historians and genealogists have long relied on community newspapers for their research.

Newspaper archives can be used to trace family lineage, property ownership and other relevant facts from the past that might otherwise go unrecorded.

Perhaps it is not something we often think about, but when we lose a community newspaper, we lose a piece of ourselves. We lose a large part of our history.

Perhaps we take newspapers for granted simply because the local paper has always been a part of our lives.

We know we can read about what is going on in our community in the local paper.

We find out what city and county government or, sometimes more importantly, the board of education is up to by reading it in the newspaper.

We probably just take it for granted that the local newspaper holds the powerful accountable, defends



**JIM ZACHARY**

Guest columnist

the First Amendment, protects the public's right to know and advocates for free speech.

But if the local newspaper wasn't doing those things who would be? Most likely, no one.

Where would we find coverage of the local sports scene were it not for the newspaper? If we

want to know what to expect from the opposing team at Friday night's high school football game, we know that each week we can read a game preview or get analysis from last week's game in the sports section of the newspaper.

Children and their parents can't hardly wait until the honor rolls are published so they can cut the page out of the paper and paste it in a scrapbook. Of course, when newspapers disappear, that part of childhood is gone forever.

Think about some of the other things the newspaper covers, things like school plays, musicals, 4-H events, academic competitions, debate team victories and all the other great things happening throughout the year.

Of course some readers go straight to the obituary page when they get each edition of the paper, and that is certainly understandable. It is so very interesting to read about people's lives, their families, the places they lived and the things they accomplished.

When there is a local election, the newspaper is how you find out who is running for office and learn a little bit about each candidate, what they stand for, how they answer difficult questions and what we might expect if that person is elected to office. But, once again, what if there was no local newspaper?

Where else would you check out the food scores that measure the cleanliness of the restaurant before you decide where you are going to eat?

Then, there are the advertisements, which stores have sales promotions? Where can you get the best deals? As long as there is a local newspaper, you can just check out the ads in the paper.

Granted, you may not agree with everything you read in the paper. That's OK. None of us agree with everything we hear people say or see people do in our daily lives but we still love being a part of our community.

Newspapers also tell us the great stories of the women, men and children who call this great place home.

The newspaper makes us feel, causes us to think and in so many ways enriches our lives by keeping us informed.

Like everything, the newspaper may cost us a little more than it used to, but it is still an incredible value when you think about just how much local news and information it gives you access to with each edition in print and each day online.

Every now and then a generous reader will send a donation to the paper, sometimes with a note just saying something like "thank you for keeping us informed."

The newspaper doesn't ask for donations.

But, if you can't imagine our community without a local newspaper, please consider subscribing because that is exactly what it takes to keep newspapers — the first draft of our history — in our lives for years to come.

**JIM ZACHARY** is the editor of The Valdosta Daily Times, CNHI's director or newsroom training and development and president emeritus of the Georgia First Amendment Foundation.

## YOUR VIEW

### Profit also drives alliances between press, government

Geoff Caldwell's recent column (Globe, May 20) about the abuses the American people suffered at the hands of our own government agencies shows just how far unrestrained power will go to maintain that power.

This collusion between government agencies and the press is not a new event and has been happening for as long as I can recall.

Are these alliances only about politics? I don't think so.

The recent stories about Dominion and Fox news suggest profit is a strong motivator.

**James Graham**  
Pittsburg, Kan.

### Increased transit funding a huge win for Missouri

The 2023 Missouri Legislative session wrapped up in mid-May with a historic move in support of public transportation.

The Legislature approved HB4, which includes \$10 million in general revenue and another \$1.7 million from the State Transportation Fund, totaling \$11.7 million in transit funding from the state. It is now up to Gov. Mike Parson to sign the bill into law.

This will be the second consecutive year Missouri has increased its transit funding. In 2022, the state invested \$8.7 million in transit, marking the first substantive investment in transit in more than two decades. The 2023 investment represents a 34% increase over 2022, and a more than 580% increase since 2021.

This critical funding will help provide the local match required to enable transit providers to secure some of the \$91 billion in federal funds earmarked for transit as part of the \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Federal funding support requires a 50-50 match for transit operations and an 80-20 match for capital programming. Missouri providers have been working diligently to identify local funding sources through sales tax, private contracts and more, but the most significant missing link up to this point has been the lack of state funding.

This is a huge win for every county in the state. Thank you to the state of Missouri for making transit funding a priority and helping to maintain and expand transit accessibility.

**Kimberly Cella**  
Executive director  
Citizens for Modern Transit  
Missouri Public Transit Association

## Verse

*'For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.'*

Psalms 30:5

## Write us

We reserve the right to edit letters for length, clarity, good taste and libel.

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# Who on Earth would prefer downtown? Lots, it seems

I should have skipped Downtown Joplin Alliance's Loft Tour a few weeks back. Because, even after I had bought a home and receiving well-deserved ribbing for it, the tour's nine finished, furnished or under-construction lofts made me want to plant a "For Sale" sign in my front yard and give apartment living another go.

I wasn't alone in that sentiment. As my friends and I made our way into each building, we passed group after group eager to get a glimpse into downtown life — and perhaps plan a move of their own. DJA reports that a total of 200 people participated in this first-ever event, a number I imagine will grow next year as many unfinished units are completed.

The tour made it easy to let your imagination run wild. Would you choose jaw-dropping views from the Frisco Station Lofts or the artistic vibe of the Muir?

How would it feel coming home to the playful YMCA or the historic Olivia?

Would you hang curtains over the stunning — and enormous — windows at the Pennington, or display artwork on the exposed brick walls of the Columbian Building?

Would you secure your spot at the Independent or Houghton Block apartments, or buy a condo at the Hollcroft?

What would your life be like downtown?

Mine was happy and exciting. My Brick & Mortar loft was the most beautiful apartment I have ever rented — sorry, San Francisco and Paris landlords. Although more expensive than other complexes around town, it felt like a steal coming from larger cities. I could grab coffee or lunch on foot.

restaurants, the Cornell Complex, Empire Market and Landreth Park are all accessible on foot. They also love knowing that their building is over a hundred years old.

"I feel connected to Joplin and its history in a way that I never have before," Shawn says.

They also wish for more — a small grocery store, pharmacy and dry cleaners, for starters. More restaurant options, especially a diner for breakfast. They remind me, however, that millions of dollars are being invested in downtown, and they look forward to being joined by more residents in the near future.

Kayla is a 30-year-old certified occupational therapy assistant who rents downtown with her husband. She, too, loves being in proximity to local businesses for easy date nights or attending Third Thursday. But her favorite part of downtown life is her loft.

"My husband and I moved downtown because we loved the space and its charm. We have gorgeous 12-foot-tall ceilings and windows, a beautiful brick wall, and other unique original features we couldn't find elsewhere in town. We have really loved living here," she says.

She does think that the city needs to do more to address downtown's homeless population but still feels that life there has been perfect for the couple at this stage in their lives.

"We have greatly enjoyed living here for the past three years and if I could go back in time, I would still choose to live in our loft. It has been a wonderful home for us."

Time and word count restrict my ability to gather more witnesses, so you'll have to join me downtown to see for yourself. Let's be respectful while passing through — people live here, after all.

More and more each day.

**KIMBERLY ZERKEL** can be reached at [news@joplinglobe.com](mailto:news@joplinglobe.com).

Globe columnist

Kimberly Zerkel

Photo: John Hacker

Paula Callihan, with Historic Murphysburg Preservation, talks May 6 with Amy and Nate McFadden during the Downtown Joplin Alliance's lofts tour. They were in the lobby of the Olivia Apartments building at Fourth Street and Moffet Avenue.

GLOBE | JOHN HACKER

I'd meet friends in the evening or hop on my bike for weekend visits to Bookhouse Cinema or the Frisco Trail.

When family drove over, they always found parking. I never felt unsafe. Sure, there were challenges.

My main issue was grocery shopping without a car. Then there was traffic noise — from semi trucks on a Monday morning or cruisers on a Friday night. And being so close to our police and fire station meant living with sirens throughout the day.

But is my portrayal accurate? I understand there are counterarguments — rent is still too expensive for many and, regardless of me never having safety issues, others might not say the same.

Instead of daydreaming along-

side me, you might ask: Who on earth would live downtown?

Turns out, quite a few people.

Tyler is a 24-year-old medical school student who chose downtown for being fun, trendy and walkable. You can see him out with his dog night and day, heading to dinner at Club 609, or popping over to Midwestern Built for a workout.

He finds his apartment affordable, especially compared to previous homes in Chicago and Charleston. He loves downtown restaurants and gathering with med-school friends at Chaos Brewery.

I nod along as he tells me, "Although Joplin is a small town, you can find anything you're looking for if you look hard enough."

Tyler simply wishes for more —

more spaces to gather and create community, more restaurants with healthy salads and sandwiches to grab on the go, more locations open late enough for him to enjoy a glass of wine after completing school work. He believes that additional options would persuade more young professionals to call Joplin home.

Shawn and Suzanne are college administrators who recently sold their house to rent a downtown apartment, although they are looking to purchase a condo. The couple has always wanted an urban living experience.

"Downtown Joplin is experiencing a bit of a renaissance and we wanted to be a part of it," they tell me.

Like Tyler, they love how walkable downtown is. Favorite

Photo: John Hacker

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# Community gardens can help provide more than just fresh food

In recent years, community gardens have gained popularity as alternatives to address the growing crisis of food deserts, particularly in central cities.

But community gardens offer opportunities for much more. The personal, communal and environmental benefits are many.

In addition to being a fresh and healthy food source, a community garden can also help close many societal divides.

The first is closing the food production and nutrition knowledge gap.

Many of us don't have a clue about how the food we eat gets from a seed to our plate. Working in a community garden can help close that gap.

A community garden provides great opportunities to better understand the priceless value of nature's bounty, not only the privilege of enjoying the vegetables and fruits it yields, but also our obligation to learn and practice the best methods to appreciate, protect and sustain it as we adopt healthier habits to sustain ourselves.

What a great way to better understand, first-hand, some of the issues around the impact of climate change and global warming on the production of our food supply.

The soil preparation, planting of seeds, transplanting of plants, weeding and harvesting are all opportunities to learn about many aspects of how our Earth and environmental work so well together to meet our nutritional needs.

These stages of the gardening process also present natural settings and circumstances for us to learn more about our neighbors, of all ages, near and far. We can escape and

# Two brothers, two letters and one family's unimaginable sacrifice

You've read of the wars and the battles. You've read the names as I tell their stories — their selflessness of their sacrifice. From the Revolutionary War forward, over 1.3 million men and women have given their lives that we have ours.

In all the years I've been writing this column, the greatest honor of having this space each week boils down to two days: Memorial Day and Veterans Day.

And it is again my privilege to introduce you to two more young men whose names are among that 1.3 million.

The telegram is dated Feb. 21, 1945: "The Secretary of War desires me to express his deep regret that your son, 1st Lieutenant Madison E. Gillaspie has been reported missing in action since twenty one February over Phillipine Islands. If further details or information are received, you will



**GEOFF CALDWELL**

Guest columnist

0773618. Air Corps, was reported missing in action 21 February 1945, the War Department has entertained the hope that he survived and that information would be revealed dispelling the uncertainty surrounding his absence. However, as in many cases, the conditions of warfare deny us such information. The record concerning your son shows that he was the pilot and sole occupant of an F-5 (P-38) reconnaissance plane which

be promptly notified."

One year and a day later, Feb. 22, 1946, another letter is written: "Dear Mr. and Mrs. Gillaspie:

"Since your son, First Lieutenant Madison E. Gillaspie,

departed from Lingayen Airdrome, Luzon, about 10:15 A.M., 21 February 1945, and failed to return from a photo reconnaissance mission to points northeast of Manila and south of Laguna de Bay. A P-38 plane which is believed to have been your son's aircraft was seen to fall to earth southwest of Norzagaray, Luzon. Searches were initiated immediately.

"In view of the fact that twelve months have now expired without the receipt of evidence to support a continued presumption of survival, the War Department must terminate such absence by a presumptive finding of death.

"I regret the necessity for this message but trust that the ending of a long period of uncertainty may give at least some small measure of consolation. I hope you may find sustaining comfort in the thought that the uncertainty with which war has



**Zachary Woods, 12, fastens screws to a trellis last year at the Empire Market Community Garden.**

GLOBE FILE

— working them and sharing the harvest — were wonderful sources of bonding, caring for neighbors and fostering a sense of community, and a shared destiny.

Each year, I find myself planting all kinds of vegetables, and much more than I can ever use. I love preparing the soil, planting the seeds, setting out the starter plants, even weeding.

It is all so therapeutic — head-clearing, problem-solving, idea-generating, communing with nature — and fulfilling in many ways, at least for me.

But nothing gives me greater pleasure than to share the vegetables and fruits with my neighbors, my church, the telephone repairman, the lawn care team, even strangers who may stop and ask for directions.

Once the gardens are finished and prepped for the next season, I continue to share frozen and canned foods with family and friends.

They in turn share with their friends whom I don't even know.

Community gardens and our personal garden can reach and spread goodwill, near and far, in ways that we may not imagine.

The point: In this arguably divisive, and hate-filled time we seem to be confronted with, let us use this season for gardening to get back to cultivating and nurturing our common humanity.

Food or sharing a meal has always been used to convene, to gather and establish a setting and environment where there could be a meeting of the minds, healthy discussion and a time for healing.

The same can be achieved with a garden, whether organized and maintained by members of a community, or your very own.

Furthermore, community gardens need not be confined to growing food. There are great benefits if you prefer to grow flowers.

Whether vegetable and fruit gardens, rose gardens, wildflower gardens, sunflower gardens — large, medium or small — let this summer be a time for personal renewal and growth as we share the experience with family members, friends, neighbors, even strangers.

We need as many positive interactions with each other as we can get to help us along.

**JANICE ELLIS** has lived and worked in Missouri for more than three decades. She is the author of "From Liberty to Magnolia: In Search of the American Dream" and "Shaping Public Opinion: How Real Advocacy Journalism Should be Practiced." This column first appeared in the Missouri Independent.

Geoff Caldwell

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