

# Ted Here.....by Ted Almen

Did you receive this week's paper in the mail? If you are reading it now, then likely... unless you are one of the minority of our readers who choose to pick up your copy at a news stand.

The Village Ink newspapers -- Kerkhoven Banner, Clara City Herald and Lakes Area Review -- depend heavily on the United States Postal Service. For all of our papers' tenures they have been postal delivered... we have never had door-to-door delivery.

And for that important service, we are among the larger customers of our local post offices. We pay handsomely, at least by my way of measuring, to the tune of about \$100,000 per year for the three publications. By far the largest chunk goes for the Lakes Area Review, it being a free-distribution newspaper. And we have endured one rate increase after another (at least seven since 2017) that has driven our delivery cost up about 32 percent in the last six years.

Now, at this moment, our two U.S. Senators and the Postal Department are in a bit of a pissing match over customer service and employee workloads. The Senators have taken on the USPS over what they have been told by people working in post offices that the Postmaster General and his policies are diverting attention away from the original mandate of delivering regular mail to concentrate on appeasing one big customer in general... Amazon.

That monstrous mutation of the old Sears Roebuck catalog has flooded America with brown boxes marked with a familiar swoosh. I'm looking at one in my office right now. It's ease of ordering and attractive prices have been a bane for brick and mortar stores, Amazon not being burdened in any way by the responsibility that usually goes along with being a part of a community.

Instead, the half a trillion dollar company is using the infrastructure of the People to help facilitate its success. While much of its freight goes through private servers such as United Parcel Service or FedEx, in recent years it was estimated that nearly two-thirds of Amazon packages flow through the postal system. Amazon was -- and probably still is -- the single biggest customer of the USPS.

For a quasi-public agency that has been losing money for decades, that might be a good thing. But not necessarily, if it shuts other businesses out in the cold. According to the Postal Department's own mission statement, it is to "...provide the nation with reliable, affordable, universal mail service."

Let it be known here and now that we -- the publishers of Village Ink -- have nothing but respect and appreciation for the work being done by our local postal workers. Sonja, Seth and Chad have all bent over backwards to help get our newspapers delivered on time. When the papers are dropped off at their offices, they deliver. Same for the rural carriers, and the other local offices that get our papers.

But it also should be known that once our bundles leave the local control is when the trouble begins. Never before in over 40 years doing this have we had so many complaints about delivery outside of the local realm. And why is that?

Well, as was explained to me by one clearly frustrated postmaster, bundles of mail leaving his office end up being trucked through the towns where they are destined, to a distribution center in the Cities where they may languish as other mail is dealt with first. And only then do those newspapers get routed back to where they were initially aimed.

It used to be almost a joke when I would receive calls from subscribers in Texas or Arizona or California telling that they would get two issues in the same delivery, always weeks after they were printed. I just figured that was the price of living so far away from the newspaper office.

But when I hear of people living 15 miles away not getting their paper the next day or two, or week, then it becomes clear that there is a problem. Several fellow publishers I know have been forced into driving a circuit of area towns to drop newspapers off at the post offices in each. That's the Postal Department's job, and one they are still being paid for even when the publisher is doing it him or herself.

'Efficiencies' such as this aren't efficient. It might work okay for the Postal Department to ignore basic service to customers such as us, but those savings are being paid for by the people getting slow or no service. (It's not just our newspaper either. I've recently had two employees who did not receive their paychecks more than a week after they were mailed.)

In the fight between Senators and Postal Department, I have to side with the former. They don't make a living that depends on an efficient and fair delivery system. But we do. So does multi-billionaire Jeff Bezos, I understand. Just one of the differences between the two of us is that I hear he's not complaining about service.



## Confessions of an ink-stained wretch...

**KMS students should know there's no end to what they may 'experience'**

by Lee Egerstrom

From Thanksgiving on, this has been an unusual holiday season for remembering people who we enjoyed over the years and recalling others who influenced our lives in important ways.

Close to home, a sister-in-law's good guy husband died in Tennessee after a long illness. We miss him.

I also lost a friend who greatly shaped my life in recent decades by suggesting I write a book about how Midwest farmers and rural people were reshaping their local economies. I didn't know, but he was a book publisher.

Some nights, as families are want to do, I get on the telephone with siblings who are former Kerkhoven natives now living in Arizona and Southern California. An older brother, Daryl, from the Kerk class of 1957, has a lot of stories to tell from past connections.

He recently lost an important one. Norman Lear, the screenwriter and producer who profoundly shaped television programming over the past half century, died on December 5 at the age of 101.

Lear wrote a memoir as funny as some of his TV shows, 'Even This I Get to Experience,' published by Penguin Press in 2014. Front and center in his "Acknowledgements" section is a thank you reference to his production company's financial officer, my brother Daryl.

For younger readers who may not know, Lear and his Tandem Productions group created sitcom shows in the 1970s and 1980s such as All in the Family, Maude, Sanford and Son, One Day at a Time, The Jeffersons, Good Times and a few other wild ones like Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman.



One night at a dinner party at the Minneapolis Grain Exchange, I was explaining this new business structure I was seeing take shape in Minnesota and North Dakota. One person sitting at the large round table asked me if I could write a book about this.

He was Ray Howe. I didn't know him. He explained he had a small book publishing business at Rochester, Lone Oak Press, which published both fiction and nonfiction.

Ray later sold his business and died at Red Wing in November. That requested book became my 'Make No Small Plans,' a 1994 book playing off a theme from a Chicago World Fair. It described and named the New Generation Cooperatives (NGC) business model that was an Upper Midwest response to the weak agricultural economy.

This 'experience' changed my life and led to my writing or contributing to 16 books on economic development. Lone Oak Press published four that I wrote or co-authored, and brought attention to economic developers and theorists around the world. The University of Illinois Extension Service, universities and publishers in the Netherlands, Germany, Finland, Japan and at least one South American country (Brazil) followed.

No one knows just how encounters may be life changing when you "experience" people or things.

Today's students at KMS may never meet mentors more unlike each other than Normal Lear or Ray Howe. But they will meet and "experience" people who will change their lives forever.

## Guests will be coming; Do you know where your gun and ammunition are?

by Rachael Joseph MinnPost

Two high school students from Cooper High faced charges last month after bringing loaded semiautomatic weapons to school. Also recently, a heart-wrenching incident unfolded at a children's birthday party in St. Paul, where an unsecured firearm claimed the life of a 12-year-old boy, leading to the arrest and charges against his 14-year-old brother. It's a glaring reminder that negligent gun owners should bear the responsibility when tragedy strikes.

I became personally acquainted with the devastating impact of gun violence when my aunt, Shelley Joseph-Kordell, was killed in a shooting at the Hennepin County Government Center in 2003. Since that tragic day, my advocacy for gun reform and

survivor rights has been unwavering.

Collaborating with individuals like Kristin Song, who lost her son Ethan to an unsecured firearm, we pushed for Ethan's Law in Minnesota to enforce safe storage practices. However, faced with opposition from suburban and rural county sheriffs, progress has been slow.

Despite the simple and effective measures recommended by both the National Rifle Association and the National Shooting Sports Foundation — keeping guns unloaded, locked and separate from ammunition — resistance persists. In 2023, our efforts faced strong pushback, emphasizing the need for legislative courage.

Gun safes designed for secure storage are readily available, yet the grim reality remains: Guns continue to be

the leading cause of death for American children and teens. With 4.6 million children living in homes with unlocked and loaded firearms, the urgency for responsible ownership cannot be overstated. Studies confirm that households practicing both firearm and ammunition lockup experience significantly lower risks of self-inflicted and unintentional injuries among children and teens.

During the coming holidays, children will be visiting friends and family. A simple question about gun ownership and storage could save lives. It's time for our elected leaders to prioritize the safety of our communities and pass legislation that protects our children from preventable tragedies.

Rachael Joseph is the founder of Survivors Lead and lives in Minneapolis with her family.

## FIRST AMENDMENT

**Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.**

## WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR!

Email [kbanner@tds.net](mailto:kbanner@tds.net); mail to Banner, Box 148, Kerkhoven, MN 56252; or simply drop off at the office.

# THE KERKHOVEN Banner

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