

By The Way

Odds & Ends From Around The County

NFL-sized graduation gift

At the start of last week's commencement ceremony, Ashland University President Frederick Finks reminded members of the class of 2014 to silence their cellphones but made an exception for Jamie Meder, the defensive lineman some analysts projected would be chosen in the NFL Draft.

"Jamie, you may keep your cellphone on in case the NFL calls you," Finks said. "And of course, if they call you, we need to know that they've called."

Meder graduated with a Bachelor of Science in criminal justice, and though he did not get selected in the draft, he will be signing a free-agent contract with the Baltimore Ravens. Not a bad graduation present.

Former superintendent takes post with Buckeye Central

Former Ashland City Schools superintendent Mark Robinson has been hired as the new superintendent of Buckeye Central School District, as was reported by the Mansfield News Journal on Friday.

Robinson had the same position in Ashland from 2008 to 2011, when he announced his retirement and then accepted a superintendent's position with Niles City Schools. He stayed in that position for a little more than a year before resigning and then taking a position with the Ohio Department of Education as a Race to the Top Student Growth and Alignment Specialist.

Robinson is a native of Willard.

From the police logs

Police received a report Thursday night of a group of teenagers wielding a ladder to climb up a barn in the 1500 block of Orange Road. According to the officer's report, the boys were trying to retrieve a shoe.

CONTACT YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

State

■ Gov. John Kasich; Riffe Center, 30th Floor, 77 S. High St., Columbus, Ohio 43215-6108; Phone: 614-466-3555.

■ Sen. Larry Obhof; 1 Capitol Square, first floor, Columbus, Ohio 43215; Phone: 614-466-7505; Website: www.ohiosenate.gov/obhof

■ Rep. Dave Hall; 77 S. High St., 11th Floor, Columbus, Ohio 43215; Phone: 614-466-2994; Website: www.ohiohouse.gov/david-hall

■ Rep. Mark J. Romanchuk; 77 S. High St., 11th Floor, Columbus, Ohio 43215; Phone: 614-466-5802; Website: www.ohiohouse.gov/mark-j-romanchuk

County

■ Commissioner Barb Queer, 110 Cottage St., Ashland, 419-282-4363.

■ Commissioner Michael E. Welch, 110 Cottage St., Ashland, 419-282-4266.

■ Commissioner Philip Leibolt, 110 Cottage St., Ashland, 419-282-4354.

City of Ashland

■ Mayor Glen Stewart, 2342 Twin Leaf Court, 419-289-8622 (office) or 419-289-6255 (home), mayor@ashland-ohio.com

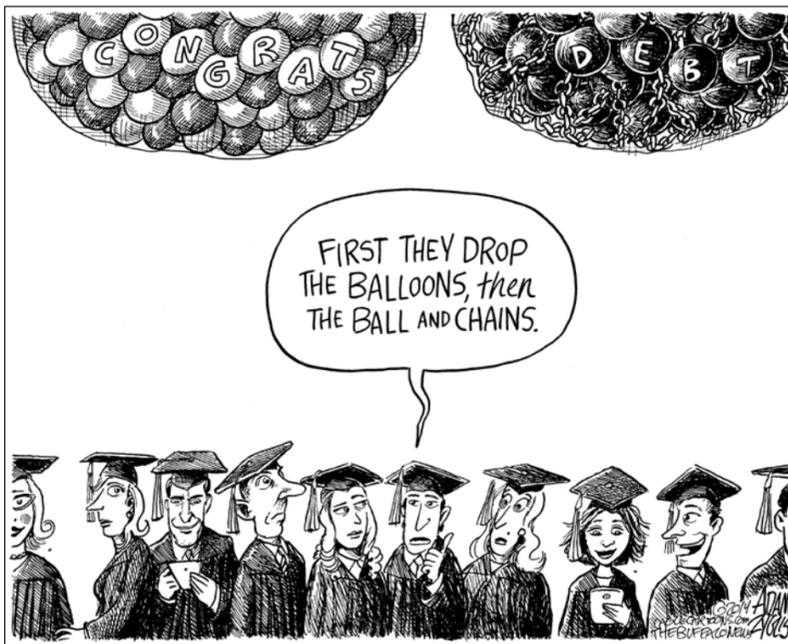
■ Council, Ward 1: Duane Fishpaw, 1322 Park St., 419-281-2162, dvfishpaw@zoominternet.net

■ Council, Ward 2: Robert M. Valentine, 1226 W. Main St., 419-289-7623, val7@zoominternet.net

■ Council, Ward 3: Ruth Detrow, 421 Center St., 419-289-7504, brdetrow@zoominternet.net

■ Council, Ward 4: Sandra Hedlund Tunnell, 376 Sandusky St., 419-651-9881, alphagreek@zoominternet.net

■ Council, At-Large: Council President Stephen L. Stuart, 76 Vernon Ave., 419-281-7618, sstuart@zoominternet.net



Welcome home, Johnny and Jane

I tend to get songs stuck in my head quite often. In recent weeks, it's been

"Do you want to build a snowman?" from "Frozen," interspersed with "Ah, Holy Jesus," a Lenten hymn, and the lovely Madelyn Simone's most requested ditty, "The Ants Go Marching One By One, Howaah, Howaah." Unfortunately, the ants song is reflective of my kitchen counter as the tiny ants have dropped in for their annual spring visit.

The melody of the ants song is one that dates to the Civil War, when Patrick Gilmore borrowed the tune of "Johnny Fill Up the Bowl" to create the song that struck home on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line: "When Johnny comes marching home again, Hurrah! Hurrah!" Gilmore captured the desire for the safe return of loved ones and the grateful welcome home of the community when he sang about cheering men, shouting boys, pealing church bells and the waiting laurel wreaths of greeting.

For all the promised gaiety of Gilmore's song, the adjustment into civilian life isn't always filled with shouts of victory and welcoming arms when Johnny and Jane come marching home. For the World War II veteran, often the return home became one of silent memories, held closely to protect loved ones from the atrocities of Pearl Harbor, Normandy, Buchenwald and the Bataan Death March. Whatever my dad saw in the jungles of the Philippines may have haunted his dreams, but he never spoke of the horrors of war to his children.

For the veterans of my youth, their return often was met with jeers instead of cheers, as the country was roiling with unrest in regard to the Vietnam conflict. A number of years ago, the Salvation Army sponsored a "reunion" weekend that brought the replica of the Vietnam Wall to Akron. Grief and gratitude mingled at that wall just as it does in Washington, as a nation continues to come to grips with the disservice it did to its young men and women.

Veterans of Desert Storm fared a bit better. I've got a picture of our youngest son, probably about 18 months old, tapping on a snare drum as he waits to follow

alongside the band in the welcome home parade in downtown Cleveland. In contrast, the frequent deployments of Iraq and Afghanistan have changed the landscape of goodbyes and hellos, and have been challenging for our military and their families, especially those slipping in and out of civilian life with the National Guard.

We read about the suicide rate among veterans, the breakdown in military families and the increasing number of homeless veterans, and we wonder what we might do to help.

"Being shaken to the core by war is a deeply human reaction," retired U.S. Army Col. David Sutherland and psychologist Paula Caplan tell us, and they offer practical ways an individual or a community can provide a better welcome home to our veterans.

Here in Ashland and Richland counties, a veteran-focused listening initiative is being coordinated by The Ohio State University at Mansfield, North Central State University, Ashland University and the Richland County Veterans Administration. This "Welcome Johnny and Jane Home Project" connects local residents with veterans, providing a safe environment for veterans to tell their stories. You can learn more about it online at www.ncstatecollege.edu/cms/listen2vets.

Local veteran Adam Boyce suffered a traumatic brain injury while serving in Iraq, and now assists fellow veterans through the Veterans Service Commission in Mansfield. As he tells his story, he helps the listener recognize the costs associated with military service. "Some wounds," he said, "you can't see."

Songwriter Patrick Gilmore may have gotten carried away in 1863 with his descriptive phrases in "When Johnny Comes Marching Home," but one line serves as a poignant reminder to us: "And let each one perform some part, to fill with joy the warrior's heart."

Kaplan and Sutherland call us to action in similar words today: "As our military men and women continue to return, scarred and battered, American communities must not isolate veterans. Listen. Help veterans heal on their own terms and at their own speed."

Welcome home, Johnny and Jane. Thank you and hurrah!

■ JoAnn Shade, a retired Salvation Army major, can be reached at gracednotesministries@gmail.com.

Republicans' Benghazi boogeyman

In order to function like a properly greased money machine, the GOP requires a chew toy. Something to snarl and wave and get a good growl on. Railing against easy-to-digest injustices is the perfect lubrication. Nuance — not their strong suit. This party calibrates with pitchforks and 55 gallon drums of oil.

Their specialty is publicly declaring abhorrence for manufactured boogeymen. Communist takeovers of the world — bad. Muslim President born with a racist agenda in an African country — bad. Socialist health care that kills old people — bad. They, wrapped in a flag holding high the cross — good. Having never met a dead horse they didn't enjoy beating, the Party of Lincoln is prone to continuing their battering to microscopic detail.

But after 51 attempted repeals, all the sweet cream goodness has been beaten right out of Obamacare, what with the world not coming to an end and all like everyone said. And drat the luck, no death panels. Lousy timing, with a mid-term election looming like Godzilla at the end of an alley.

So now the hordes of upraised clubs have moved onto a new target. Demonstrated by House Speaker John Boehner throwing a large number of his Capture The Senate Majority election chips down the Benghazi Rabbit Hole. Let the inquiries begin. For the 14th time.

Republican Senators are jealously clamoring for similar grandstanding opportunities, but chances of Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid granting that request are smaller than Donald Sterling

headlining the Apollo.

The issue concerning the death of four Libyan embassy employees excites the base to where they vibrate and leak green froth from their nose while their voices go up two octaves. The major difficulty is negotiating the fine line that separates energizing the tea-drinking troops from politicizing a tragedy. And rumors of Benghazi tote bags don't help.

I can't wait for Ted Cruz to start a new nationwide dance craze via Youtube video: "Doing the Benghazi Boogie. Take 2 steps back. Look around. Point your finger. Shake your head. Shake your contributions cup. Shake your tail feather. Take 2 steps back."

Even after holding 13 hearings on the subject, Republicans are determined that this time, they'll get the truth. To such disturbing mysteries as why Susan Rice wore a pink blouse when she went on the Sunday talk shows. A signal? How many brain tumors were affecting Hillary Clinton? Why wouldn't Barack Obama get off the phone with Benjamin Netanyahu? Were they celebrating? And who exactly do Republicans hate more: Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton?

Yes, the answer to these and many more questions will be cloaked and shrouded and obscured but why Republicans have lost consecutive Presidential elections will definitely be highlighted in day-glo skywriting. At a certain point the American people grow tired of washing off the horse blood.

Afterward, a consultation with Geraldo Rivera might be in order, because this investigation is destined to come up emptier than Al Capone's Vault. The only good news is the term "impeachment" has yet to be bandied about. And for that, we should all get down on our knees and thank ... Joe Biden.

■ Will Durst is an award-winning political comic. Email him at durst@caglecartoons.com.

GOP hopefuls seek inner-city education

Has Sen. Rand Paul flip-flopped on the issue of voter ID requirements?

A year ago at historically black Howard University, the Kentucky Republican defended his party's push for voter identification card requirements, saying they hardly compared to the racist voting restrictions of the old Jim Crow South.



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But in recent interviews, he's changed his tone, if not his tune. He doesn't oppose voter ID requirements, he says, but he wants his party to stop talking about them.

"Everybody's gone completely crazy on this voter ID thing," he told New York Times reporter Jeremy Peters last Friday in Memphis. "I think it's wrong for Republicans to go too crazy on this issue because it's offending people."

Mainly black people, that is, among other minorities and advocates for low-income voters who tend to be burdened most by such laws. Paul earlier made similar comments in an appearance with former senior Obama adviser David Axelrod at the University of Chicago Institute of Politics.

What's going on? Paul's people say his views have not changed but, in my view, his sensitivity to how much minority voters hate voter ID laws and other issues has vastly improved.

I mocked his earnest but woefully unsuccessful racial outreach visit to Howard early last year as "whitesplaining," a popular term in some circles for a white person's act of explaining sociopolitical events and history to audiences of color as though they were ignorant children.

Since then, Sen. Paul has done a smart thing: He embarked on a listening tour. He has visited black, Hispanic and low-income communities across the nation. He has met with clergy and other community leaders to learn about real problems and problem solvers.

And he's not alone among presidential hopefuls on such a cross-cultural quest. I recently sat down with House Budget chairman Paul Ryan of Wisconsin in his Capitol Hill office, to discuss his own listening tour to more than a dozen cities and communities since his 2012 GOP vice presidential run.

As a self-described policy wonk and former aide to Rep. Jack Kemp, a famously popular white conservative in minority communities, Ryan candidly described a wish to carry on in Kemp's tradition, even as he aspires to gain Kemp's ease at communicating with diverse communities.

"Look, I was born in 1970 in Wisconsin," he told me. "What I'm learning is that what you're saying and what people are hearing are not always the same thing."

Yes, he was referring to his infamous sound bite on a radio show that triggered charges that Ryan was blowing a racial dog whistle to far-right whites: "We have got this tailspin of culture, in our inner cities in particular," he said during the radio discussion of poverty programs, "of men not working and just generations of men not even thinking about working or learning the value and the culture of work. ..."

Coming from a leading white Republican, his "inner city" reference was heard by critics as a clumsy critique of black culture.

"I think of everybody — Hispanics, Asians, whites. That's the inner city I know," he told me. Ryan offered examples of programs in his home state and elsewhere that try to "reconnect" people from various income and ethnic groups together through religious and other civic organizations to fight poverty with social, educational and economic opportunities.

"The point I was trying to make," he said, "is that we need to reintegrate people (from diverse communities) to make a difference."

One can argue, as I often do, as to whether Ryan's or Paul's budgetary and legislative ideas will help that reconnection or make it worse. But disagreements are where honest debates should begin, not end.

Ryan's and Paul's media stumbles illustrate how hard it is for any productive policy debate to survive in today's racially and emotionally charged political atmosphere. Issues on which we disagree should not be allowed to block progress in those areas on which we agree.

Ryan and Paul appear to be trying to meet that challenge. The big unanswered question is how far their conservative base will let them do it.

■ Email Clarence Page at cpage@tribune.com.

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 www.times-gazette.com

Publisher
 Troy Dix • ext. 212
 tdix@times-gazette.com

General Manager/Editor
 Ted Daniels • ext. 211
 tdaniels@times-gazette.com

Advertising Director
 Mark Krakar • ext. 224
 mkrakar@times-gazette.com

Circulation Director
 Deb Borsman • ext. 230
 circ@times-gazette.com

How To Contact Us
 Main number 419-281-0581
 Local 419-281-0581
 Louisville & Perrysville 419-994-5600

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