

Preservation of Cheyenne's historic properties

By Friday evening, I like to have the upcoming issue of the Cheyenne Herald "laid out" and most of the stories written.

I like to have.

I seldom do and I work on the paper through Sunday afternoon and transfer the pages electronically to the printer by Sunday night. I have until about 5:00 am Monday morning but I'm not big on staying up all night to complete what I should have finished sooner.

On this final Friday before completion, I had a message when I returned to Chateau Herald, asking that I return a call.

I did and the woman told me she had sent me an e-mail as a letter to the editor and it would explain the reason for her call. I explained that I didn't have a letters to the editor section because of the size of my publication and, if I did, there wouldn't be room for my own words. And ads.

If a "letter to the editor" gets my interest, I will use it as a springboard to a column or story and develop it with the writer.

The caller belongs to a neighborhood advocacy group called "Save Old Cheyenne" and I read the e-mail as quickly as I could get to it. Being kind of an "advocate" myself, at least according to the WT-E, the concerns expressed in the e-mail did interest me.

And I thought I had something to add to the story from recent past and further back past experiences.

This advocacy group would like to see more teeth in the authority of the Historic Preservation Board. I hate to be the bearer of bad tidings, but that Board has less teeth than a newborn. It is sort of a sham "board" that can wish for something not to happen - which is generally the demolition of a property designated as having historic value. When it comes right down to it, the property owner holds the ultimate authority to demolish his/her property as he/she sees fit.

Historic neighborhoods and historic buildings are disappearing. More by the year. With a governing body lacking principles, organizations like hospitals will be given carte blanche to take, destroy and displace properties and people. Any.

This group is concerned about the Lakeview and Rainsford Historic Districts, as well they should be as neighbors.

Unfortunately, they will have nowhere to turn. The hospital wants the houses gone (moved or demolished doesn't much matter to them), the city governing body wants to do anything the hospital wants to do (as do the county commissioners who have no authority here except to appoint different hospital board members), and the fictional Historic Preservation Board has no authority to prevent either the moving or demolition of old houses.

Several years ago, some of these city officials (who were not city officials at the time), in tandem with the WT-E, used the threat of a "wrecking ball" being used on the former UP depot to try to scare residents into donating more money for the Segrave Joint Powers Board to waste.

Those who wanted the depot preserved - and there was never any doubt that it would be - countered with the argument that they would get the National Historic Preservation Board to step in and save the depot. The cavalry would arrive.

Uncertain just what stroke or interest a Washington D.C. "Board" would have in Cheyenne, Wyoming, I called the National Historic Preservation Board in D.C. and asked the head man what they could, or would, do if anyone were dumb enough to try to demolish the magnificent depot.

He told me something like, "Look. As I speak with you, I am in a basement office in one of the worst federal office buildings in D.C. For starters, how much importance does it sound like they place on our work? In answer to your question, the most I could do is write a letter, asking that they think twice before demolishing an old railroad depot that you've described as beautiful and historic. Beyond that, I have no power. I have no authority."

We have a hospital that has displaced dozens of people from their homes at Nob Hill - to build a new hospital which is unlikely to ever be built. Their hired agent threatened those owners with the use of eminent domain. The executive director of CRMC told the Cheyenne Herald the guy was out of line and was not supposed to use that threat. So what did they do? Hired him to acquire the property around the hospital. Kinda gives their credibility a little slapping around.

If one of the neighbors wanted to demolish one of the same "historic" houses to build a 4-car garage, he'd have no chance. But a hospital? It's not if, it's when. Different rules apply for them.

WT-E has editorial board opening. Will they name a woman?

Once again, Cheyenne's daily newspaper has an opportunity to put its action where its mouth is.

Quietly missing from the paper's editorial board listing is the "night editor," who had been a part of the so-called "editorial" board for a few months.

There is no editorial board, of course. Content decisions are made by one person. And he found that being the mere "managing editor" was insufficient so he gave himself an elevation to "executive editor." No more money, just a name.

That's kind of like being the "head baker" at a bakery in Buford. "Head" over whom? "Executive" over whom?

Nonetheless, there is the opening.

The daily was relentless in their criticism of Cheyenne Frontier Days, which for a century would not name a woman to head a committee. When tossed back at them, the WT-E for a short time did have a woman on its "editorial board." She now has a far better job than the daily could provide her and the WT-E has no woman on its editorial board again.

When it has chances to appoint one, they chose to name a fifth man to the board. There is always a token woman on the citizen advisory pair, or whatever it is now

called.

The WT-E doesn't have much of a farm system from which to elevate a woman to the editorial board. Cindy (McCraken) Marek should be the obvious choice but she must refuse to buy into the charade of having a token female on the Eckhardt-dominated "board."

Cindy is not only entitled - she is capable.

That is probably what disqualifies her - that and the fact that she's too smart to want to waste any time watching the ship sink journalistically when she can continue to improve the bottom line as national advertising executive.

The WT-E could elevate a woman photographer like Shauna Stephenson again or the capable newsroom receptionist. They've been careful not to promote women to meaningful positions so their choices do remain limited.

How can they once again name a man to this do-nothing editorial board and save face? Why doesn't CFD raise hell about the lack of a woman in this highly invisible position? How can a legitimate newspaper refuse to have a woman's point of view on its editorial board? Did I actually write "legitimate" in the same story as "Wyoming Tribune-Eagle?" Sorry Cheyenne Herald readers for that gaffe.

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Cheyenne Historic Preservation Board Meeting

will have a hearing on the properties in question in this area on

May 22, 2008 at 6:00 pm
City Council Chambers
in the Municipal Building
2101 O'Neil Avenue

Attend to support Save Old Cheyenne Advocacy Group
www.saveoldcheyenne.com