

Ron's Rants

Ron Middleton
Staff Writer

Are we too connected?

There was a time, not too long ago in fact, when the telephone was one of the most mysterious objects in the home.

As the ring of the telephone would break the silence of family night, there was an air of excitement as to who the caller was.

It seemed like back then everyone was happy to get a phone call, like it was a special event. Now, you just pray that it is a human being on the other end of the line. Then came the invention of the answering machine, and of course the habit of "call screening."

There's nothing more frustrating than knowing the person you're calling is screening their calls because you do it yourself, and not being entirely sure if they are home or not.

So you leave a message that sounds something like this:

"Heep... are you there?... I know you're there... Hee, it's me... pick up the phone... 'em man... Hellooooo..."

"Heep"

Every day, you end up with about 10 messages that all sound exactly like that with no names, numbers, or reason they called like you asked in your outgoing message.

That was also a time of unparalleled creativity with outgoing messages.

I can remember sitting and writing and practicing the delivery of an outgoing message, some even timed with music.

To be peg on "heep," that is the question, with "Also Sprach Zarathustra" (the theme from 2001: A Space Odyssey) playing in the background, was one of my more memorable ones.

I even tried one of those where you act like you're having a conversation with the caller then break the news that they are actually talking to a machine.

Hey, it seemed funny at the time.

Now all the guesswork has been taken out of phone calls. With Caller ID and 69 it's really difficult to surprise someone on the telephone.

The only ones who have beaten the new "system" are telemarketers and bill collectors.

But we have adapted. "Unavailable" on the Caller ID equals "Let their machine talk to my machine and we'll sort it out later."

And the good days of just leaving the phone off the hook are over.

Now if you can't get someone on their cell phone, you call their cell phone and if that's off you can still try their pager.

SEE ARE ON 5



Commentary
Column yields lifetime supply of combs

Head of the Holler



Yes, Virginia, there still is a Stanley Home Products dealer. Several of them, actually, within the leadership of the Richmond Register and Flemingsburg Gazette. I now have a lifetime supply of Stanley men's combs, no matter how long I live, with offers of more if I should need them. I appreciate the response to my column about my broken comb and broken car, but so far nobody has sent or offered me a new 1992 Laguna Euro. I'll be waiting. You wouldn't believe all the stuff that has showed up over the years in response to columns. Lots of caps. Shampoos. Gift certificates.

T-shirts. Jewelry. Pocket knives. Paint can openers. Darts of moonshine. A real journalist, a working paid reporter or editor, with scruples and an obligation to report fairly and avoid being influenced, would immediately return anything that could be construed as a gift meant to influence news or editorial coverage. Being just a columnist, one of the lower life forms, I feel no such obligations.

I don't write news anyhow. And, of course, I don't do any favors in return for gifts.

I just keep the stuff, or give it away, and feel no pressure at all to provide any further mentions or endorsements. It's no secret to readers of this column that I am an unabashed fan of WD-40, duck tape, GM vehicles, Lowe's, the

Kentucky Folk Art Center, Colt and Winchester, Jim Bean in the Foodies Catalog, Lewis's End and L.L. Bean, Lev's, Bald Hill, Gimlet, Case knives, Intel, processors, Democrats, dogs, babies, grandchildren, chainsaws, pick-up trucks, string trimmers, Fleming County, Harley Davidson motorcycles, work boots, leather vests, and baseball caps.

And, of course, Stanley combs. Schaeffer pens, unscented soaps and shampoos, Right Guard, Old Spice, Bic lighters, bluegrass music, peanuts, medium rare beef, Winstons, grapes, good writing, and Elvis.

I don't write news and, same if I don't. I don't do any corporate sponsorships.

I appreciate Jon Estes of Richmond and Clifene Staggs of Berea for making it possible for me to continue combing what little hair is left on my lopsided head, and to the others who offered assistance. This all may seem to you,

much ado about nothing. An old comb broker. Readers come to the rescue.

To me, that's a big deal.

Over the years a relationship has developed with many "Head of the Holler" readers that ain't being kin, up close and personal, and I love hearing from the people who find something, somehow, worth reading in at least a column every now and then.

So feel free to comment. My e-mail is garybarker@netscape.net; my home address is RR 1, Box 606, Bald Hill, KY 41041.

If you come up with the car, don't ship it. Just let me know, and I'll come and pick it up.

With every hair combed into place.

Contact the author at garybarker@netscape.net or via e-mail at jesus.angelfire.com/jbarker to 2001

It's Your Money



detriment of their long term savings. This not only affects the personal finances of individuals, it affects all of society on the most profound level. The result is that as the baby boom generation

approaches retirement with little saved, the government — and the taxpayers — may be left holding the bag.

How do we, as public policy leaders, promote short-term sacrifice in order to ensure long-term economic stability? This question, among others, was the topic of my first "Savings Roundtable" held in Lexington this week. Serving as a brainstorming session to open the dialogue on these crucial issues, I was joined by civic, business, political and academic leaders from across the state.

During an intense 90-minute roundtable discussion, we discussed a myriad of concerns as well as several possible solutions. Among them:

Women and savings: When it comes to long-term personal financial health, women are often at a significant disadvantage.

Not only do women make 76 cents to every dollar a man earns, but only a third of these women are offered retirement plans. Further, half of all working women take time off from work to care for their families, thereby diminishing their potential retirement income.

Women tend to save less than men and also tend to make more conservative — and often less lucrative — investment decisions.

How to reach your City & County Officials

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- Council Members**
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Tommy Vaughn
Sandy Ritchie
Betty Barton
Charlie Fay
Frankie Hughes
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Nicholas Galt Maunce
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- Magistrate**
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- Magistrate**
Avery Thornsbury
- Magistrate**
Jeff Randolph
- Magistrate**
Steve Hamilton

PROGRAM FROM 4

The cost of long-term care is rising faster than inflation and projected to grow by 5 percent a year. Roundtable participants discussed the need for a thorough examination of options to promote savings for long term care. Policy possibility should we develop a state prepaid long term health care program, modeled after Kentucky's Affordable Prepaid Tuition plan?

College students and credit cards. While credit cards are a way of life, and most companies act responsibly, it is clear that some bad actors in the industry are preying on vulnerable Kentuckians, who wind up building mountains of enormous credit card debt.

This is particularly true on college campuses, where companies often spread from cafeterias to classroom building tempting these students with free T-shirts, soft drinks and pizza.

Further, some minors are receiving solicitations at very early ages, not knowing how they appeared on the vendor lists. Should we pursue legislation such as that

pending in California, which would regulate credit card marketing to college campuses?

Building savings for Kentuckians with lower incomes: One third of all income comes from savings and investments, yet half of American families have total savings of \$1000 or less, and 53 percent of American workers earn \$18,000 or less.

In Kentucky, this problem is especially acute among minorities and our beleaguered family farmers. What is the policy potential of such proposals as that of British Prime Minister Tony Blair who seeks to provide every newborn child with a savings account? Is there a reasonable way to encourage all Kentuckians to save?

To follow up on the progress of this exciting meeting, I am appointing a Commission later this summer. The Kentucky Commission on Savings will have two primary objectives:

- 1) to identify and develop the curricula for
- 2) to propose legislation, where necessary, to protect Kentuckians from predatory practices and create programs that encourage savings for retirement and long term health care.

This if no 30-day or 60-day project. Instead, I look forward to many months — even years — of intensive policy discussions, to seek the broadest consensus possible and to ensure the viability of any solutions that are developed.

Any program we develop will reflect my personal vision of the role of government. Unlike some who feel we should remove government entirely from our lives, and others who want government to solve all of our problems, I prefer the so-called "third way": where government, equips people with the tools they need to solve their own problems. With this approach, I believe we can truly help all Kentuckians thrive in the new 21st century economy.

Study Hard in School to Earn scholarship

Marci Aubrey has some advice for Kentucky high school freshmen: Study hard in school and earn a Kentucky Educational Excellence Scholarship (KEES) award.

The Bellarmine University sophomore should know, she uses the KEES award she earned in high school to help pay her college expenses.

"It's really important to keep your grades up in high school because that money is an advantage," said Aubrey, a 2000 graduate of Nelson County High School. "When you start high school, you don't think about it too much. But when you're a senior, it hits you—Oh, my gosh! What am I going to do to get the money for college?"

By keeping their grades up and getting a good ACT score, Kentucky residents attending eligible certified high schools can earn KEES awards to help pay for higher education.

They will earn a base award if they receive at least a 2.5 or higher grade point average (GPA) in high school. If they earn a least one base award, they will get a bonus award if they receive at least a 15 composite score on the ACT (or an equivalent score on the SAT).

The bonus award is based on the highest ACT composite score the student achieves before graduating from high school. Base awards range from \$125 for a 2.5 GPA to \$500 for a 4.0 or higher GPA.

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ARE FROM 4

If you can't get them that way, there's always the internet connection... email, and instant messaging services like ICQ, MSN Instant Messenger or even, uh, AOL Instant Messenger.

So you're bombarded with all of these messages and you have to call this very persistent person to tell them you were only in the vary.

bathroom. It just goes to show you, you can't escape your loved ones, even in the bathroom.

Maybe it's not Big Brother we need to worry about, because it looks like we have a lot of Little Brothers.

That's just my opinion. Actual user opinion may vary.

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