

IN MY OPINION



Jim STINGL

Wooden speller confesses to mistakes

My phone rang the other day. No, it wasn't my cell phone and, no, Packers coach Mike Sherman didn't hear it during a news conference and get all quieter than thou.

It was Art Francis and he was calling to fess up, which is always refreshing in these days of ducking and weaving responsibility.

You know that spelling mistake on the Milwaukee Public Schools sign, he said, the one where the city's name was *Milwaukeee*?

"I'm the one who made it 20 years ago," he said. "They finally got me."

I asked if he was telling me this in private or for publication. It was my column two weeks ago that featured a photo of the flawed sign at the Hamilton-Bell playfield. The sign came down for editing repairs the same day I mentioned it to folks at MPS.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARK SCHAD

Art retired in 1990 after 37 years with the MPS recreation division service and maintenance team. He lettered most of the wooden signs you find at playgrounds and playfields. The task was like an assembly line, he said, and obviously wasn't foolproof. Spelling on wood is trickier than it sounds.

"Say you found the culprit and he admitted it," he said. "I told him someone brought another misspelling on an MPS park sign to my attention. It's at Whittier Elementary School on S. 1st St. Milwaukee is spelled fine, but the north side of the sign says 'recreation' division."

"Now they'll have to check them all," he moaned. "You can't stay mad at Art. Here's a guy who was so conscientious during his working days that he carried touch-up paint in his car. If he saw that someone had defaced a sign with graffiti, he would stop and cover it over."

He misses the job. He still gets together for breakfast with his former co-workers. Lately they've been urging him not to apply for Vanna White's job.

"Hey, we're all human," he said. "Careful there, Art. Quit while you're ahead. Don't play the human card. People have been parsing James Dwyer's confession to see if there was any wiggle-room language in there."

Dwyer is the Waukesha County Board chairman who failed in his recent attempt to become county executive. Last week he augmented his vote total with four rum-and-Cokes and was stopped by police on the drive home. He proclaimed himself sorry, wrong, embarrassed and dumb.

One of my fellow columnists wrote that Dwyer forgot to say dangerous, but for my money I thought it was a pretty decent mea culpa. If he wasn't an elected official, he wouldn't have to apologize at all, except maybe to the judge.

Anyone else care to confess in print? Say you're an oil company executive and you're guilty about gouging us after the hurricanes to feed massive profit increases. Wouldn't an "I'm sorry" feel good right now? Wouldn't a "Here's a

Please see **STINGL, 8B**

Missing woman, freed prisoner crossed paths

By TOM KERTSCHER
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Investigators looking for a missing woman Saturday searched an area near the home of Steven Avery, the Manitowoc County man who served 18 years in prison after being wrongly convicted of a sexual assault in 1985.

A brother of the missing woman, Teresa Halbach, said it was a "red flag" that Avery apparently was among the last people to see her, but he hoped investigators would fully question others as well.

Avery said he feared he was being "set up" as he believes Manitowoc County officials had done 20 years ago.

"I ain't gonna put nothing past them," he said.

Mike Halbach, 23, a video assistant with the Green Bay Packers, said law enforce-

Man who was wrongly jailed for sex crime is questioned



Avery Halbach

ment officials told his family that his sister was last seen Monday afternoon. He said that Teresa Halbach, a 25-year-old photographer who lives next door to her parents in Hilbert, had three photo appointments that afternoon, including one at Avery's home

in Two Rivers, and all three people said she had taken pictures and left.

Halbach said investigators told his family that his sister was on her cell phone with Auto Trader, the magazine for which she was taking photos, at about 2:30 p.m. Monday.

"After that, that's when everything stopped," he said.

Halbach said his parents weren't aware that Teresa was missing until she didn't return calls Wednesday night to her sister. They reported Teresa missing to Calumet County authorities about 2 p.m. Thursday, he said.

Halbach said his sister and

her male roommate work different hours, and it was not uncommon for them not to see each other for a couple of days.

Halbach said his sister wouldn't leave the area for any length of time without telling family.

"Things are leading toward a different direction than that," said Manitowoc County Sheriff's Lt. John Seim. He would not discuss the investigation, other than to confirm that investigators had spoken to Avery on Thursday and Friday.

Calumet County Sheriff Gerald Pagel said investigators were treating the matter as a missing person case and not a crime and that Avery has been "very cooperative."

Pagel said the Avery proper-

Please see **MISSING, 4B**

"I feel proud today. This is a touching experience."

Leo Harper, a member of the Milwaukee Fire Department Honor Guard and a Vietnam veteran



MICHAEL SEARS / MSEARS@JOURNALSSENTINEL.COM

At the 42nd Annual Veterans Day Parade and Day of Honor in Milwaukee, Vietnam War Army veteran Robert Schroeder of Milwaukee salutes the flag as it passes by along Kilbourn Ave. His grandson, Kaleb Schroeder, 4, holds his hand over his heart as the flag passes, as does Mary Kosmicki, 3, of Cedarburg, standing near Toni Brunner of Brookfield.

Shivering — with obvious pride

November chill only invigorates Veterans Day Parade crowd

By SUSANNE RUST
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As the winds picked up Saturday along Kilbourn and Prospect avenues, viewers of Milwaukee's Veterans Day Parade hunkered down, zipped up their jackets and pulled

on their hoods. Yet, in what seemed an almost inverse reaction, as the temperatures dropped, the crowd's displays of enthusiasm and support rose.

Maybe it was the acknowledgment of their own growing discomfort that prompted the parade-goers to reflect

and show their appreciation for the men and women who strode before them: veterans of war — and peace — who'd faced distress, pain and death in the name of this country. Or maybe it was just the physical act of cheering and waving that helped ward off the chill.

Whatever the reason, the support and encouragement demonstrated by the crowd on Saturday was glowing — warming the hearts of those

who walked and watched. "I feel proud today," said Leo Harper, a member of the Milwaukee Fire Department Honor Guard and a Vietnam veteran. "This is a touching experience."

And to some, including Harper, the parade seemed all the more poignant considering the war in Iraq and the more than 2,000 service members who have lost their

Please see **PARADE, 2B**

Florence County to vote again, raising stakes on school funding

By AMY HETZNER
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Florence County residents could save their school district but destroy what has become a symbol for advocates of school-funding reform when they cast their ballots Tuesday in the district's third referendum this year.

WHAT'S NEXT

On **Tuesday**, voters in Florence County will go to the polls to decide the **fate of their school district**.

northeastern Wisconsin school district, their situation has been described as everything from a morass of their own making to emblematic of the trouble that soon will hit more school systems in the state.

It might even have helped another district to pass a referendum last month, with voters spurred by fears their community could become

"another Florence." School board members in Florence County say they had to dissolve because they didn't have the money to provide a quality education for their students.

"I'm inclined to believe it did have some effect," said Sam McGrew, superintendent of the Cuba City School District in southwestern Wisconsin, where voters on Oct. 4 agreed to a spending increase, after two previous referendums had failed.

Now Florence County voters will get their own chance

Please see **FLORENCE, 4B**

Sailboat captain missing after falling into the lake

By SARAH CARR
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A man was missing Saturday night in Lake Michigan after the sailboat of which he was captain tipped, and he fell into the water.

U.S. Coast Guard identified the captain as Jeff Waldman. Milwaukee police said the 56-year-old from Glendale was out on the sailboat with his wife, 18-year-old son and another adult female who is a family friend.

Waldman had worked for years to build the boat himself, and Saturday was its "maiden voyage" out of the Milwaukee Sailing Club at McKinley Marina, according to police sources.

Fire Department officials searched for Waldman for several hours in the afternoon and early evening but pulled in their boats and a helicopter around 5 p.m., once the darkness and water conditions on the lake made the search untenable.

Coast Guard officials said they sent another boat out about 7 p.m., but it remained inside the breakwater because of the poor conditions.

"If we go outside, the water is too rough for us to search," said Coast Guard Lt. Rolando Hernandez, a spokesman.

Officials said a helicopter

Please see **LAKE, 2B**

Polling sites told to lift barriers

High percentage not accessible to elderly, disabled voters

By KAY NOLAN
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Howard Kaufman, a Milwaukee resident who has been blind since birth, is a regular voter at Townsend Elementary School, 3360 N. Sherman Blvd., but says he is denied the privacy most voters take for granted.

Like other blind voters, Kaufman, 51, is forced to publicly state his choices for candidates to a poll worker and then trust that his choices are accurately recorded.

"Technically, two workers, one from each party, are supposed to assist you in voting," he said. "Now you have given your privacy away to three people. You hope that your vote was recorded

according to your wishes. You hope, but you have no way of absolutely knowing for sure. At least in the old days with the big machines and curtains, you and a poll worker could be slightly alone."

As municipalities nationwide grapple with voter identification and other methods to reduce fraud, federal and state officials also are clamping down on another long-ignored problem at the polls — physical inaccessibility.

Polling places nationwide are under federal mandate to have new voting equipment in place by Jan. 1 that will enable people to vote independently and privately, regardless of motor or physical disability or language barriers. Up to \$6,000 per site is available to purchase the machines.

But many Wisconsin polling places are unlikely to meet that deadline, because they also will be required to meet accessibility standards imposed 15 years ago with the passage of the Americans With Disabilities Act.

Kevin Kennedy, executive director of the state Elections Board, says inaccessible polling sites remain common statewide. Results compiled recently from an extensive statewide survey of polling places found that nearly 41% have serious barriers, although many claim to meet the requirements of ADA.

"Of the state's 2,773 polling sites, we determined 1,134 as disability-inaccessible," Kyle Richmond, public information officer, said this month.

The problem is particularly severe in bigger cities — such as Milwaukee — which traditionally use public schools as voting sites.

Phyllis Whitley, a city Election Commission employee, said that 103 of Milwaukee's 202 polling sites are located in pub-

Please see **ACCESSIBILITY, 10B**

ON THE WEB
Milwaukee Election Task Force report: elections.state.wi.us
Click on Forms and Publications

Polling sites called on to improve accessibility

ACCESSIBILITY, From 1B

public schools, 40 of which "will never be ADA-accessible."

Recent surveys by advocacy groups agree with the state Elections Board report, which concluded that many voting places that are described as accessible actually "pose formidable barriers to elderly and disabled citizens."

In fact, 71% of Milwaukee's polling sites visited last November by the Wisconsin Coalition for Advocacy had "one or more potentially critical problems" of accessibility, and 36% had "five or more potentially critical problems."

Members of the mayor's Election Commission Task Force seemed stunned during a meeting earlier this year to hear stories

of voters turned away from the polls, or leaving without voting because they were unable to get past stairs, heavy doors or hallways blocked with election day bake sales.

At one polling site, Franklin Pierce Elementary School, 2765 N. Fratney St., 12 major barriers to accessibility were observed. The only accessible door at this site was locked and had no doorbell, observers found.

Kennedy said school personnel sometimes compound the problem by booting voters out of the gym and sending them down the hall to a room that is cramped or hard to find. And the city's fire stations — which are more likely free of steps or heavy doors — are increasingly closing their doors to voters as

well.

"We can't live with that scenario any longer, from a legal standpoint," Kennedy told the task force. "I can't stress enough the need for leadership in this area."

Susan Edman, executive director of the city's Election Commission, said she recently talked to the fire chief about the issue.

"I told him we have to use them," she said of city fire stations. "There's a group (of existing voting sites) that just don't fit the bill at all."

Officially, polling sites will no longer be excused from accessibility standards after Jan. 1. As part of the 2002 federal Help America Vote Act, communities must have equipment in place by that date that provides

new, alternative ways to fill in the arrows on the ballots. Examples would be:

■ A voice function that would allow the voter to privately speak the names.

■ A touch screen function.

■ A sip/puff function that would allow someone with limited use of his or her hands to activate a device similar to a drinking straw.

Kennedy said recently that federal funding of up to \$6,000 per polling site is available to reimburse communities for the new equipment. Depending on the vendor, the new machines will cost between \$4,000 and \$7,500, he said. Communities were advised last fall to budget about \$4,000 per site to cover installation, programming and



Tom Pyzyk (left) of Nashotah helps his mother-in-law, Julia Sherman of Oconomowoc, back to their vehicle after she voted at the Community Center in Oconomowoc last month.

maintenance, as well as the difference in purchase price, if they choose a machine over \$6,000.

Most municipalities set aside the money, but municipal clerks have been waiting for the state Elections Board to approve one or more manufacturers' products for purchase, said Mike Hoppenrath, Watertown city clerk and president of the Wisconsin Municipal Clerks Association.

Richmond said that the agency is testing equipment from several vendors, and hopes to offer recommendations of at least two or three voting machines this fall.

"This is not going to happen by January 2006," said Brookfield City Clerk Kris Schmidt.

But Kennedy said he will distribute the federal funding only to polling sites that are fully ac-

cessible.

In Milwaukee, no money has been set aside in the proposed 2006 budget to pay for the estimated \$150,000 to \$200,000 it will take to fix barriers at polling sites, John Ledvina, budget analyst with the Election Commission, said recently.

The budget is scheduled to be adopted Friday, he said.

Edman said she had applied for additional funding from the state Elections Board, but Kennedy said that little, if any, funding would likely be available for Milwaukee.

"They need about \$175,000 and we only have a total of \$180,000 available for the entire state," he said.

Ledvina said the city could tap into its contingency fund if funding does not come through from the state.

Neil Albrecht, assistant di-

rector of Milwaukee's Election Commission, acknowledged last week that Milwaukee probably won't meet the Jan. 1 deadline for accessibility. But he said most sites could be made to comply with accessibility standards in time for February elections with relatively simple remedies, such as portable ramps or by setting aside handicapped parking spaces.

Albrecht said only nine city polling sites appear to be so severely lacking in access, based on a recent city questionnaire, that they will have to be abandoned in favor of alternative locations. He declined to name those sites.

But Kennedy said a continuing problem is that many polling places erroneously claim to be accessible. Officials who complete questionnaires often fail to include specific measurements of doorways and halls, or answer other questions about architectural features that determine accessibility.

"It's the problem with self-reporting," he said, citing a case in a small Wisconsin communi-

ty that claimed its polling place was accessible, but in fact, it was in the basement of the municipal building, requiring voters to descend a flight of steps.

"Yet, nearby was a beautiful, brand new fire station, but nobody had thought to move voting there until we stepped in."

Shorewood Village Clerk Kathy Greig said that although all three of the village's polling locations are technically accessible, Atwater School, 2120 E. Capitol Drive, requires people with disabilities to navigate a long, twisting outdoor ramp, open a heavy exterior door, ride an elevator to the lower level and travel through the school's lunchroom and kitchen to reach the voting area.

"If I were using a walker, or if I had just had surgery, I wouldn't be able to vote there," said Greig.

The issue of polling place accessibility affects more Americans than people realize, said Kennedy. The increasing proportion of elderly voters means more people are developing macular degeneration, which reduces vision, as well as difficulty standing in long lines or climbing steps. There is also an explosion in diabetes nationwide, which can lead to blindness and amputation of limbs.

"Disabilities are a hidden issue," said Kennedy. "We definitely have an aging population, and the number of people with vision and dexterity problems is increasing. But we've had to fight the attitude of, 'Let them vote absentee.'"

In Brookfield, Schmidt said, "A good portion of people with disabilities are voting absentee."

Mike Cappelle, 22, who is blind, said, "I want to be independent. I've filled out absentee ballots in the past, but they're kind of a pain. Plus, I want to go out and vote on election day like everyone else. To me, that symbolizes freedom."

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