

# Looking for a solution? Get involved!

**J**ust solve it. How easy is that? It seems like one of the easiest concepts known to man, but in reality, just solving a problem can cause more trouble than is originally anticipated. I am writing about this because working together to solve problems is essential to have a successful community project. On KAN STEP projects, Shane Holthaus and I are constantly faced with problems, from design issues to mechanical. While both Shane and I have experience to help with these projects, we don't live in the communities that we travel to. Any personal problems are, shall

*Pete Koenig  
KAN STEP Tech*



we say, out of our realm of expertise? So we lend an ear to someone who wants to tell of his or her woes with neighbors, but ultimately, we can't do anything about those problems. We can give

advice and tell them what we would do but until the two parties get together and "hash it out", nothing will be solved. I would like to give an example.

Recently on one of the KAN STEP projects, a handwritten note was left on a job site, expressing that a neighbor did not like the way one aspect of the project was being done. That neighbor ranted and raved about how incorrect the method being used was. He griped to everyone at the local coffee

shop. He apparently talked to everyone about it except the one person who might have been able to change the design. That person is the

his job to "get things changed". Well, I don't know about anyone else but it is just common sense to me that if you have a problem with

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architect. When KRWA got involved, we alerted the architect to the concern. What a surprise! This was the first time the architect was advised of the concern. The neighbor's excuse was that he told enough people and it wasn't

someone's dog, you don't tell someone else's cat and expect the problem to go away! Go to the source and solve the problem. In this case the source was the architect and when instructed to speak to him the neighbors reply was



*Working out the details in advance is necessary for any successful project. Here, Scott Fulton, President of the Carbondale E.L.M. Foundation; Dan Hall, BG Consultants; John Ryan, then mayor; Shane Holthaus, KRWA KAN STEP Tech and Marilyn Graham, Program Manager, Kansas Department of Commerce Community Development Block Grant Program, review and discuss options for Carbondale's new community building project late in 2003.*

"I shouldn't have to." That may be true but the professional consultant was willing to meet with the landowner to try to find a remedy.

### Small town politics

I believe one of the reasons that the KAN STEP program and projects it builds are such a success is because they are being constructed in small communities where there is a real need and where there will be an appreciation for them. It seems that in larger cities, new buildings and utilities are added as a routine matter. In Formoso, Selden, Whiting or Corning, any project is readily noticed. On most projects, people learn quickly to solve any problems early on. If there was a discrepancy in the plans, the thing to do is call the engineer or architect and solve the problem.

People ought not be so intimidated to avoid relaying a problem to someone that can effect a correction or change. Sure, it's sometimes easier to complain to a neighbor or friend or anyone else who can't do anything about a problem. It should not be difficult to talk to the architect, grant administrator or the tech from KRWA.

### Barriers to communication

I think I understand some of the reasons why there are barriers to communication. It seems to me that many people avoid bringing up issues or concerns because they do not want to have any involvement or inference of them becoming in any way responsible. If a person calls the bank about an overdraft, whom do they talk to? Too often, it's a computer. If someone calls their credit card company to ask questions, do they speak to a representative or to an electronic voice telling them where to send their payment? Even when speaking to your satellite television provider we have to "be patient,



*On a brisk and sunny day in Delavan, volunteer workers peel old shingles from a roof.*

because our automated menu has changed." The biggest insult to people is to get a talking voice or some abstract background music instead of someone real who cares enough to take the call, communicate with the customer and solve the problem. Shane Holthaus in his November

2003 *Lifeline* article, writes, "Communication and the way we communicate are the keys to every relationship." Communication requires the ability to express oneself in a calm and poignant manner. Communication is the cornerstone to "getting stuff done."

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So, what is the key to getting a point across? What is a person to do to ensure that their feelings will not get overlooked? Well, this is tricky and it is going to take a lot of practice, but I think that with the right amount of concentration and persistence, it can be accomplished. It may take years of dedication and painstaking hours to learn this new and bold process but I think Kansans have it in them. Here we go! It has been my experience that a person can make his or her feelings known if they just do it. What! Where's the revelation? What's this secret we've been building up to disclose? It's "just do it!" Yes, folks, that's it. It doesn't require a PhD. It requires a simple willingness to lay it on the line. Instead of bouncing an idea from a neighbor to a friend to the coffee shop owner to the assistant coach of your kid's little league team, just take the idea directly to the source. In the circumstance that I described at the outset of this article, if the neighbor of the KAN STEP

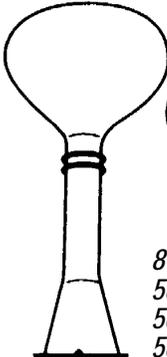


*Together up high, workers on the KAN STEP fire station project at McFarland, Kan. communicate to properly place and nail trussed rafters.*

project had gone to the architect in the beginning, instead of waiting until the project was well underway, a modification might possibly have been made to everyone's satisfaction. But

given the current circumstances, the critical part of the project that determined whether or not his issue be changed or not was already completed and there was no turning back. Would something different have been done? Well, we'll never know because it wasn't his job to "get things changed."

Take it upon yourself to get things changed that will affect your life. If we all just wait around for someone else to do it, we will undoubtedly go through life discouraged and upset. I have found in my short time of working here at KRWA that getting in contact with someone from this office is a sure way to get those things changed. I'm proud to be associated with an organization that helps 'get things done.' I hope KRWA can continue to provide the types of services that are benefiting so many systems and communities in the state.



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