

Over the Back Fence
For Friday May 16, 2008
Approx 620 words

Temporary detours
By Alva Wood

For years, the Ladies' Aid has had a monopoly on community yard sales. Between them, Nellie Rinehart and Florence Armitage usually got almost every resident of the village working at the sale in one way or another. One crew came early to set up the tables. Another worked shifts selling everything from ornamental ashtrays to battery-powered nose-hair trimmers. A third shift came to clean up after the sale.

Naturally, all the people involved brought their spouses and children around to check out the wares. Which meant that the sale was always a huge success.

But Florence is growing older. She doesn't organize people with quite the same vigor she used to. She assumes that just because Isabella Adams brought her sugarless butter tarts last year, she'll bring them again this year.

But she didn't. Because no one remembered to ask her.

So the bake table looked a little thinner this year. The children's wear, a little sparser. The plant table, a little less green.

To make matters worse, the crowds dried up after the first hour.

The sales staff wandered around the tables buying each other's discards because they had nothing better to do.

Then Tessa Vanderkam drives up to the church hall with some bad news. "Did you know that the River City SPCA is having a car wash to raise funds for canine dental care in the parking lot at the curling arena?" she asks.

Florence did not know. Of course, a River City organization wouldn't realize that they should have checked such things with Florence first.

Then Janie Smith arrives. "Mom," she says to Nellie Rinehart, "did you know that some kids up at the next corner have set up a sign pointing to SPCA fund raiser?"

Nellie grabs a large carton and a felt marker and hastily letters a sign: "**YARD SALE!!!! THIS WAY!!!!**" with a huge arrow.

"You get up there and stand at the side of the road and point them our way!" she orders.

Before long, Astrid Bowers appears. "Who are those kids up at the corner?" she asks. "They're standing in the middle of the road directing traffic towards the curling arena!"

"This," Florence announces, "is War!"

As it happened, our village is in the middle of building a new Main Street out of what used to be Hill Road, or maybe it was the other way around. Freddie Fallis has decorated the whole area with enough orange-and-black "Detour" and "Road Closed" and "Under Construction" signs to look like a Hallowe'en party.

Of course, no construction crews are working on a Sunday.

"Come with me," Florence commands, grabbing Sam Burkholder's arm.

Under Florence's direction, Sam drives his rusty pickup truck to the construction site.

"Grab some of those signs," Florence orders.

"Isn't that illegal?" asks Sam.

"We're not stealing them," Florence assures him. "We're just borrowing them."

"What if someone drives into this and gets hurt?" Sam protests.

"No one in their right mind is going to drive through here," says Florence, staring down three blocks of jumbled rocks and earth that look like a landslide had hit.

The two of them set up "Local Traffic Only" signs up the road from the corner where the kids were directing traffic. Their "Detour" signs led to a series of side roads that, by some astonishing coincidence, came out across from Florence's yard sale.

When they went back, the River City kids waved them around the corner towards the arena. Part way there, they set up a "Road Closed" sign on a sawhorse barrier. And another "Detour" sign. Which, amazingly enough, also came out at Florence's yard sale.

Business picked up remarkably well after that.