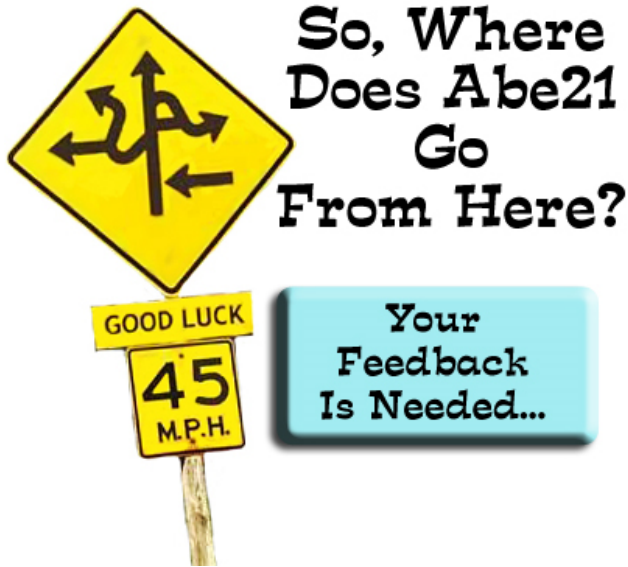


A Better Elbert



**So, Where
Does Abe21
Go
From Here?**

When we first decided to start a community website the notion was to have voices from both sides of the political aisle have a place where they could go and toss around ideas. The idea was to stimulate a dialogue that might bring us together as a community. As a point of historical reference, the website predates the West Elbert County Sun. The frustration that fueled the site's inception was that neither the Ranchland News nor the Elbert County News was willing or interested in doing any writing about the real issues facing Elbert County. Both papers did not fit the description of being the "fourth estate."

During the toll road fight, week old information was worthless. The internet was our only choice because our information had to be disseminated very quickly. We thought if we had a large enough pool of writers from which to draw, the site would forever be full of interesting debate. Issues could be discussed in a timely fashion instead of waiting a week or two to make it in the paper. Unfortunately, the people who said that they were interested in being contributors lost interest very quickly when they discovered that writing about issues wasn't a cake walk. Contributors also began to feel some discomfort at all of the transparency and the remorse of posting what you believe for God and everybody to see. Elbert citizens were unaccustomed to all of this.

It is not to say they did not like reading A Better Elbert. The numbers of visitors suggested that they enjoyed it a lot. They just did not like writing. Okay, it was somewhat naïve to believe that we had community leaders who would also like to bare their souls on a deadline for no compensation. Go figure. That is when we tried expanding into the public service, clubs, social calendar conduit for all of Elbert and the few remaining contributors would offer editorial comments on recent events in the county or at the BOCC meetings. We thought it was important to pressure the BOCC to post their meetings, agenda, minutes, etc. online so that an inquisitive public could come to ABE21 and see and hear for themselves what our local politicians were doing.

That of course was time consuming, frustrating and personally expensive. The BOCC still has not implemented the entire program of informing the public about their meetings on the internet that they said they would a year and a half ago. Of course every time the BOCC stonewalled me on one of these issues, it just put up another red flag for the people at ABE21.

Then came the decision to run for the BOCC and as you might imagine, ABE21 took on another new dimension. The sight began to be more and more under the physical control of our gigantic staff and the board members over at Mycroft and Associates. My role was to run my campaign, continue writing and report back to Mike Phillips, our brilliant editorialist, co-editor/webmaster. Notably, Mike is the only one who has any influence over MJ McShay, the cartoonist that we found living chained to a tree in the woods. I don't even know what language he speaks; some Gaelic brogue that is always slurred by the copious amounts of peppermint schnapps that he drinks from a tin cup.

It was always our intention to take ABE21 to this point and then decide what to do with it. Is it still relevant? Does it provide the public with information that it still wants or needs? ABE21 has been a labor of love that has taken an exhaustive amount of work. We have never received any monetary compensation for what we have done. We never meant it to be something that was so much work, because as I stated earlier, we always thought that there would be more community voices.

We need your input. We have good numbers. We know we have regular readership. But if we are to keep going, we need to know what our readers want. Look for a couple of surveys on the site. Take the time to fill them out. Better yet, write me at Robert@abe21.net and tell me what your thoughts are about the site and where we should go from here. If there is no response, then we will know that ABE21 no longer has any value and we can close shop and all move on with our lives. We still have the chain and can take McShay back into the woods. We are waiting to hear from both friends and foes on this topic.