

Jonathan Schechter – “Corpus Callosum” Column
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Social notes from around the valley.

Jackson, WY – On Saturday, August 8, Mr. Paul Bruun married Ms. Jean Williams. The ceremony was held at the Presbyterian Church in Jackson.

Officiating was the Reverend Dan Abrams, a former Jackson resident and long-time friend of the groom. The Reverend Abrams set the tone for the joyous occasion when he began the service by inquiring: “Who said the age of miracles is over?”

The bride was resplendent in a white off-the-shoulder dress, complemented by an eight foot-long silk train and white lace veil. The groom wore a traditional black tuxedo with vest, his white ruffled shirt highlighted by a dapper red bow tie. At the reception, a natty black tam-o-shanter rested atop the groom’s perfectly-coifed bald pate.

Music for the ceremony was provided by pianist Judy Bayse, who played pieces ranging from opera to a hymn. Alison Kyle lent her magnificent voice to an aria from *Madame Butterfly*, “Hello Young Lovers” from *The King and I*, and “One Hand, One Heart” from *West Side Story*. Ms. Kyle provided an elegant counterpoint to Rick Schreiber’s country-bluesy rendition of Guy Clark’s “Coat From the Cold.” At the ceremony’s end, the wedding party and guests joined as one in singing “How Great Thou Art.”

A reception followed at the scenic Circle EW ranch of Liz McCabe, co-publisher of the *Jackson Hole News&Guide* (who arrived at the church in grand style in her bright red, mint-condition, 1963 Cadillac). Under a large white tent offering protection from unseasonably cool temperatures, guests were entertained by local favorites Shelley and Kelly, and dined on sumptuous southern barbeque prepared by Bill Boney’s Dining In Catering and a caterer from South Carolina brought in for the occasion.

Among the guests at the wedding and reception were a number of local and national fishing luminaries, including Howard Ballew, Jay Buchner, Jack Dennis, Tom Montgomery, and Scott Sanchez. Also in attendance were some of Mrs. McCabe’s *Jackson Hole News&Guide* colleagues, including co-publisher Michael Sellett, co-editor Thomas Dewell, and co-editor Angus M. Thuermer, Jr. (who nearly upstaged both the bride and groom by wearing full Highland regalia, including a kilt and his own natty tam-o-shanter).

Attracting nearly as much attention as the bride and groom was Bert Raynes, recently identified by the *Chicago Sun-Times* as “a beloved local” and “some kind of local luminary.”

Before the bride and groom cut into a cake shaped like a giant fishing reel, several guests offered toasts and, in some cases, roasts. The bride’s guests from her former home in Summit County, Colorado were in turns wistful at the fact their friend was moving, and thrilled over her new-found happiness. Many of the groom’s fishing friends combined “barb-less” teasing with their own good wishes.

Unfortunately, some of the toasts were drowned out by the roar of jets passing overhead, as Mrs. McCabe’s ranch, located in an in-holding in Grand Teton National Park, lies directly under the landing path of the Jackson Hole Airport. In response, some guests expressed their desire to see the airport shut down, feeling there is something fundamentally wrong with having a commercial airport operating in a national park. Other guests pointed out that closing the airport would clearly disrupt – if not significantly harm – Jackson Hole’s economy.

Your correspondent believes that economic considerations will prevent any significant changes to the

airport's operations for decades. However, he also believes that because the Jackson Hole Airport is the only commercial airport in a national park, it should be held to a much higher standard than any other. Specifically, your correspondent urges Grand Teton National Park to mandate, and the airport board to embrace, having the Jackson Hole Airport become the world's first carbon-neutral airport, and do so within five years.

There are two facets to becoming a carbon-neutral airport. The first and easier one involves offsetting all of the carbon dioxide produced by all flights – commercial and private – into and out of the airport. This can be done almost immediately by adding a carbon offset surcharge to landing fees. This wouldn't add much to the price of flying to Jackson Hole – whether commercial or private, a plane's greenhouse gas emissions can be completely offset for just one-to-two percent of its hourly operating cost (and for many private jets, less). And by spending that money to buy offsets, the airport would provide the Jackson Hole community with a double benefit: It would make ours one of the world's greenest airports; and it would put Jackson Hole at the forefront of ecotourism, which is clearly the future of tourism.

The more challenging facet is “greening” the airport's operations. The airport has already made great strides in this direction, and has clear plans to do more. After offsetting greenhouse gas emissions, the airport could then use any surplus surcharge money to fund moving this process along more quickly.

Three basic objections can be raised to the surcharge concept. The first is that since airlines are struggling, we shouldn't be adding to their costs. However, airlines are always struggling – that's why we subsidize them through programs like JH Air. And since Jackson Hole is already subsidizing the airlines, we're certainly in a position to ask for things in return.

The second objection is that we shouldn't be gouging passengers by adding a surcharge to their tickets (or their private planes' operating fees). Such arguments are silly on their face – do we really think that people flying on commercial flights can't afford to pay an extra one-to-two percent for their ticket? Or that people flying private planes can't afford an extra one-to-two percent in the cost of their flight?

A more critical point is the obverse: By not requiring aircraft to offset their greenhouse gas emissions, we're currently subsidizing individual behaviors which have clear societal costs. Decades ago, we subsidized factories by not requiring them to address the pollution they emitted into our oceans, rivers, and air. Today, we recognize that such behaviors have a clear cost, and that this cost must be borne by someone. True, we consumers are ultimately the ones who pay, because factories simply pass their costs along in the form of higher prices. However, while all of us pay for cleaner air and water, all of us also benefit.

Someday we'll apply the same standard to greenhouse gas emissions. And someday some airport will be the first to take that step. When it does, that airport will reap huge p.r. benefits; that's the opportunity Jackson Hole can seize today.

The alternative is to continue to subsidize the pollution created by people who choose to fly to Jackson Hole. Right now, those people get to pollute for free. That's a tough reality to defend.

The third basic objection – and by far the most serious – is that carbon offsets are like Papal Indulgences: You don't stop the sinning; you simply provide wealthy people a way to buy their way out of their sins. While this is true, it's also beside the point.

The essential fact is this. If we truly want to eliminate the greenhouse gas pollution associated with the Jackson Hole Airport, our only choice is to shut the airport down. Since that won't happen, we then must make a second choice: determining whom we want to have pay for the cost of those gases. Right now, the public subsidizes that cost. The alternative is to pass that cost on to the passengers and planes creating it.

That's it – the only important question. And while no one will argue that carbon offsets are the best *possible* tool for offsetting greenhouse gases, what matters is that they're the best *available* tool: they work, and they're cost effective. Game, set, match.

So, in a nutshell, when it comes to addressing airport-caused greenhouse gas emissions, all those who care about Jackson Hole – both officialdom and public alike – must choose one of three options: shut the airport; offset carbon emissions through adequate (if less-than-perfect) tools such as carbon offsets; or continue to subsidize the costs of greenhouse gas pollution caused by some of the most well-off people on the planet: those with the means to fly into and out of Jackson Hole. By default, we currently choose the latter; your correspondent's hope is that this changes, and changes soon.

Fortunately, the issue of carbon offsets did not factor into the wedding events, as the happy couple is not flying anywhere for their honeymoon.

Mr. and Mrs. Bruun will reside in Jackson Hole, Mr. Bruun's home for the past three decades.

Snake River, WY – In a press release issued on August 9, 2009, a representative of the Snake River's cutthroat trout population offered warmest wishes to the newlyweds. "On behalf of all fish of all species and all sizes living in the Snake River, its tributaries, and all other regional watersheds, we wish Paul and Jean only the best. August 8 was a great day for the happy couple. Additionally, because most of the best fishing guides in the northern Rockies were at the wedding, it was also the greatest day in history for Snake River fish of all sorts. In fact, we are so happy for Jean and Paul that we urge them to renew their vows at least once a week during every upcoming summer and fall, and to be sure to invite all of their fishing friends to each and every renewal."