

Government openness lost champion in August



‘Judge’ Angle would have been ‘incredible asset’

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I intended to write this column last month, but felt that the membership needed the reminder about political advertising as we hurtled toward election day. But now that the dust for '06 has nearly cleared and soon all the votes will be counted, I want to go back and take a moment to reflect upon someone we lost in late August who was important to Missouri's sunshine law.

I'd known Clyde Angle for years. As your hotline attorney, I get a lot of calls and emails from folks who want to talk about the sunshine law. Some want to ask me questions. Some want me to work for them to get access to a record. Some want me to beat up on public officials for them.

So when those calls come in and I realize it's not from a newspaper, I end up getting cynical in a hurry because I need to be working on other things. Clyde started out as one of those callers, bothering me at inopportune times and wanting me to explain things to him.

In fact, Clyde started out by wanting me to give him a copy of a sunshine law lawsuit I had filed so he could copy it. You can imagine the kind of effect such a statement has on someone who considers the legal work they produce their workproduct, much the same way you consider the stories you write your workproduct and don't want to see them reproduced by someone else for free.

At first, I was pretty rough on Clyde. But once I realized I was talking to another attorney, I tried to warm up a little, particularly since he often had little tales of the work he was doing to tell me, showing me that he was making a small difference in the attitudes of the public officials whom he was harassing.

As the years went by, Clyde often called to talk about his work, and soon he called to say he was on the city council in Jefferson City. Then his calls were about his efforts to turn that organization around, since they were constantly doing things wrong (and, I had to admit, Clyde knew what he was talking about).

Not long ago he called to tell me he'd filed suit against them. The case dragged on for some time. Then this spring, he called to say he was close to settling it, and he wanted to bring me in to do a sunshine law seminar for them as part of the settlement.

I assume it got settled this summer and perhaps the Missouri Attorney General's office actually did the final seminar. But it was exciting to know that Clyde had accomplished his goal in raising awareness of the law among his fellow council members.

And then, suddenly in late August, I was astounded one morning over breakfast to see a short notice in the Kansas City Star that there had been an accident on the road between Columbia and Jeff City and a candidate for Cole County judge had been hit and killed. And there was Clyde's name.

I had no idea Clyde was running for the bench. What an incredible asset he would have been as a member of the judiciary in the county where our legislature sits. And how shocked I would have been the first time I'd have walked into that courtroom for a sunshine law case to see my old buddy Clyde ready to preside.

His obituary said his practice specialized in trust and estate planning. But not as far as I'm concerned. Clyde specialized in the sunshine law. He lived it. I'll miss hearing from him.

And it causes me to think about how many other ordinary citizens in this state do their small part day in and day out to help us in our efforts to keep public officials on their toes when it comes to the sunshine law.

Elsewhere in the magazine is a story about Harold Coons. You probably don't know Harold. I don't. But Har-

old got mad at the City of Platte City, where the board of aldermen held a special meeting to discuss annexation without giving proper public notice or posting a proper agenda. So he filed suit.

Early in October, the matter was settled with the city council agreeing to rescind the annexation ordinances and to pay the plaintiff's legal fees in the sum of \$12,000.

Earlier the city had sung a different tune. "Anybody can file a lawsuit," the city said when the suit was filed, calling the aldermen's actions a "technical glitch."

Well, \$12,000 is not exactly a glitch. And if perhaps the aldermen had been a bit more "technical" from the beginning, Mr. Coons would not have had to sue them.

But he's just another citizen helping us do our job. Thanks, Howard! And thanks again to Clyde for all he did for us during his lifetime – a life well lived.