

OPINION



RICK MORAIN
GREENERY

AI advancements make column writing a bit easier

I may never write a column again. The other day my sister Deb in Sioux City emailed me about ChatGPT, an artificial intelligence application that writes stuff in the style requested. You may have seen demonstrations of it on TV

(The abbreviation for artificial intelligence, of course, is AI. In low the usual meaning for AI has been artificial insemination. For most people that's about to change.)

The developers of ChatGPT have been able to load virtually everything on the internet into their app. The results boggle. For instance: Deb requested ChatGPT, "Write a 500 word newspaper column in the style of Rick Morain focusing on watching RAGBRAI from the top of the Mahanay Tower."

Chat GPT complied - in eight seconds. It titled the column "A Breezy Vantage: RAGBRAI Spectating from the Mahanay Tower." The first 200 words or so are as follows: "Hello there, cycling enthusiasts and thrill-seekers! It's that time of the year again when the Hawkeye state is abuzz with two wheels, endless laughter, and a dash of sweaty determination. You guessed it right; RAGBRAI is back and this time, I decided to trade my usual bike for a view from the top - the Mahanay Tower view!"

"Now, before I take you on this adventure, let me tell you a bit about the Mahanay Tower. Perched atop the hills, this grandiose structure stands tall and majestic, offering a panoramic view of the low landscape. When you climb up its spiral stairs and reach the top your eyes feast upon the undulating waves of cornfields, the glistening rivers snaking through the terrain, the small towns huddled like confidants in this vast land. It's the perfect spot to soak in the beauty and spirit of RAGBRAI.

"For those unfamiliar with RAGBRAI, it's the Regis-

ter's Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa, where thousands of cyclists pedal their way through the Hawkeye State from the Missouri River to the Mississippi River, covering around 400 miles in a week. It's a celebration of camaraderie, adventure, and low's warm hospitality.

"The first rays of the sun painted the sky in hues of orange and pink as I ascended the Mahanay Tower on that eventful morning. There was an air of anticipation, and from the top, I could see cyclists setting off from the starting point. A kaleidoscope of colors and spandex-clad figures, like a stream of confetti, meandering through the streets - it was a sight to behold!"

OK, I know - the tower is not perched atop the hills, and you take the elevator instead of climbing up the spiral stairs, and there's only one glistening river, and the starting point wasn't in Jefferson. And I don't have a bike.

Nevertheless, the result blew me away. How do they do that? But I did object to it, as I told Deb, because it doesn't sound like me - too flowery. I informed her that I like to steer clear of too many big words: "Maybe ChatGPT could dumb me down (shouldn't be too hard)."

"I'm on it," Deb replied. She contacted ChatGPT again, adding the requirement that it be "written at a 5th grade level." Three seconds later ChatGPT spat out the following (again, I'm reprinting the first 200 words or so of the entire 500-word rewrite). It's entitled "Riding Along with RAGBRAI from the

"Top of the Mahanay Tower": "Hey there, young adventurers! It's your pal, Rick Morain, coming to you with another exciting tale from the heart of Iowa. Today, we're going to take a special journey to the top of the Mahanay Tower and see the awesome RAGBRAI bicycle ride from way

up high! So, buckle up your imagination seatbelts, and let's roll!

"First things first, let's talk about RAGBRAI. What's that, you ask? Well, it stands for 'Register's Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa.' Quite a mouthful, right? But don't worry, we'll just call it RAGBRAI from now on. It's like a big bike parade that travels all across our beautiful state of Iowa, and guess what? People from all over the world come to ride in it.

"Now, let's zoom up to the top of Mahanay Tower. Imagine climbing up lots and lots of stairs until you reach a super tall building. That's Mahanay Tower! And guess what? From up there, you can see for miles and miles. It's like having a pair of magical binoculars!"

"As we settle in at the top of the tower, we can hear the excited chatter and laughter of the RAGBRAI riders down below. The air is filled with joy and adventure as they set off on their bicycles. Their colorful jerseys and helmets make them look like a swarm of happy bees buzzing around.

"From way up high, we can see the whole spectacle unfold like a grand parade. The streets are lined with cheerful people waving and cheering on the riders. Some even have signs with encouraging words like: 'You can do it and 'Keep pedaling!'"

"As the riders move along, we spot a variety of bikes, from sleek road bikes to sturdy mountain bikes. There are even some bikes with funny decorations. Like giant rubber duckies or flashy lights that make them look like shooting stars!"

I don't write for my fifth graders, so my Goldilocks style is probably somewhere between the two versions. If I can fine-tune ChatGPT just right, it could become my avatar, and do my work or me.

You'll know I'm not there yet if my column celebrates giant rubber duckies.



MARY WEAVER
VIEW FROM MY WINDOW

Meeting place reflections

Does Rippey have an UBER service? Is there a bar in town? What is that tall white round building?

Where is the water filling station?

Those were just a few of the numerous questions posed to "local" volunteers on Tuesday July 25, as RAGBRAI riders came into the smallest MEETING PLACE town on the RAGBRAI route. "Locals" were sought out by riders, and Iowa Highway Patrol troopers. Most times, the conversation would begin, Are you a local?

The first word of MEETING PLACE came last February when Mayor Dan Brubaker was contacted by Gannett/RAGBRAI staff. He called me and said, "Hey, they will give us \$10,000 for hosting". That seemed like easy money. "Sure, let's do" was my response.

Lots of planning. Lots of volunteers, lots of donations of materials, and labor, but little Rippey did it.

The RAGBRAI people passed through our town 9 times prior to July 25. The route checking was for traffic flow, availability of roadways, railroad tracks, overnight towns large enough to accommodate etc. A day long orientation was given in Des Moines for Meeting Towns and Overnight hosting communities. In addition, direct meetings with RAGBRAI staff and community volunteers were held two times in the Rippey Community Room.

The town prepared with residents working to fix up, paint, clean up, discard trash, and extra lawn mowing.

Finally, the day of the ride! RAGBRAI riders were coming from Carroll, traveling to Ames. MEETING TOWN means they may connect with their support vehicles, but of course the support vehicles do not travel the same route as the riders. While the riders came from Jefferson, the support vehicles came north from Perry.

We had 5 Greene County

food vendors, along with 35 others who were providing food and souvenirs; Big Red Radio, two bands, plus Signature Rock; two bike repair shops and the mobile emergency room. These were all placed on the Main Street of Rippey. We met the self-generated Rippey established goal of being prepared by 8:00 A.M., but because of the extreme heat, the first riders were in town at 6:20. A few riders remained at 8:00 P.M., but they had their transport vehicle to take them to Ames.

DONATIONS, PROUD, and FEEL-GOOD STORIES ABOUNDED:

The volunteers were provided purple t-shirts identifying the date, the Rippey water tower as a logo, as well as VOLUNTEER written in bold letters on the back of the shirt. These were a donation from Clark Fessler, former 3rd generation Rippey community resident, and CEO of Authentic Brand Sportswear.

Former Rippey resident, David Chase whose Father was a local physician came with his wife to work with the Lion's Club/Fire Department selling pork loin sandwiches. He said his parents loved this community, were buried in the local cemetery, and this was his way of paying back the community.

One woman whose "knees were done", asked Dave Roberts who was working with the Baseball Commission how to get an UBER. He explained that was not available but took her and the bike to Ames.

The Sports Ability team was hosted in the large Community Room of the Rippey Library. The Rippey host was notified that one of the team members left her backpack at the Hy-Vee in Jefferson. The host gave her the keys to her car and let her drive to Jefferson to retrieve the lost article.

A reefer van was donated by the FOOD BANK of IOWA, to provide ice to Greene County and out of town food vendors. 3 pallets of ice, or 2 tons were available thanks to the ef-

forts of Michelle Book, Greene County native, and CEO of the food bank.

Extended generational family members, and friends of friends came to Rippey to serve as volunteer food vendors, traffic helpers, and information providers as the little town hosted an estimated 40,000 persons.

The lead Iowa Trooper stopped me as I was driving in my gator emptying trash bags, saying, "WHERE IS BRUBAKER, I NEED TO TALK TO HIM".

I assumed a problem, so I invited him to ride with me until we found Mayor Dan. He got out, explaining to me to wait for him, and then I observed him shaking hands with Dan, as he expressed thanks for being so well organized regarding the traffic flow of bikers and support vehicles.

The Inspections and Appeals person, after checking all the food vendors, expressed gratitude and thanks that all passed. Two out of county vendors received recommendations, but all food was at the correct serving temperature, and dishwashing was in compliance.

The bikers were friendly, and curious. The question about the tall white, round building, was of course an explanation of grain storage. They frequently called out praise of "THANKS RIPPEY, LOVE YOU RIPPEY" as they exited under the large U.S. flag gracing the Landus Elevator catwalk.

A good friend who is a retired physician, and a gay person, shared she loves the RAGBRAI community. She observed they help each other in an accident, a lost item, or most any need, and never question their ethnicity, their religion, their politics, their life position, etc. before reaching out to assist.

Lots of planning. Lots of volunteers. Lots of donations of materials, and labor, but little Rippey was a successful MEETING PLACE for RAGBRAI.

Your letters

To the editor:

I've been an AFS-USA Volunteer in Jefferson for 40 years and I'm writing to share the value of hosting a high school exchange student in our community.

AFS is a nonprofit leader in high school student exchange with 75 years of experience. We gratefully acknowledge that the high school in Jefferson has partnered with AFS since 1962 and has hosted students from over 25 countries during that time. The high school currently has openings for two more AFS students this academic year. We just need more individuals and families from the Greene County School District to host a student.

I've seen the impact that hosting an exchange student has on people, families, our community, and the schools in Greene County. I know

that we are making a difference in creating a more just and peaceful world.

Cultural understanding has never been more important than at this time in our history. AFS grew out of an atmosphere of compassion and peace following a time of world conflict. The mission of AFS has been to create a future of global friendship between the youth, families, and communities through day-to-day experiences. There are students around the globe waiting to be hosted in American schools to gain understanding of how our respective cultures are unique and what we share in common.

Meet anyone who has hosted a student, and you'll hear a story of lives changed - not just the student, but of the host family as well.

Students represent various countries from around the

globe - European, South and Central American, Asian, African and Australian.

Families represent the diversity of the U.S. and include couples, individuals, and people with or without children. Households can host one or two students for 12 weeks, a semester or school year.

Please consider hosting and become engaged in promoting inclusion and creating meaningful connections within our great community! You will be supported by local AFS Volunteers like me.

For more information on hosting, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,
Jan Rosdail-Aegerter
Local AFS-USA Board Volunteer
janrosdail@gmail.com

Send us a letter

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CONTACT US

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1-800-247-0186
ext. 5705

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WHO ARE WE

Steve Fisher
Central General Manager
stfisher@iowainformation.com
(712) 792-3573, ext. 5207
(515) 386-4161

Trevor Babcock
Reporter
tbabcock@iowainformation.com
1-800-262-5495-5495

Stephanie Carlson
Sales & Marketing Rep.
scarlson@iowainformation.com
(515) 386-4161

Rob Strabley
Design Manager
rstabley@iowainformation.com
(515) 386-4161

The Jefferson Herald

200 N. Wilson
PO Box 440
Jefferson, IA 50129

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