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Cartoonist Kirk Walters has been parodying local headlines since 1988

BLADE STAFF

In 1988, a young cartoonist at The Blade named Kirk Walters submitted a multi-panel strip he'd drawn in the hope the paper would consider running it on the editorial page just once.

To his surprise — and delight — then-editor Bernard Judy ordered the strip published the very next day, thus launching a 30-year love affair between northwest Ohio and "Maumee Dearest."

All comics have a point of view, but editorial cartoons are inexorably linked to the hot topics of the day, be they local, state, national, or international. Parody, says Mr. Walters, is the key to their effectiveness. His job is to distill the public discourse into a visual snapshot. Make people laugh, he figures, and they'll better digest the folly run rampant in their everyday world.

"Editorial cartoons have to do with current events, what happens in the news," says Mr. Walters, 63, now in his 39th year (and third newspaper) as an editorial cartoonist. "What you do is dictated by what's going on in the world.

"I'm trying to get people to think. If they laugh, if they like it or don't like it, I don't really care. ... But getting people to think these days is extremely difficult to do."

He says it helps that humans are an innately visual species.

"People remember visual images more than the printed word. When JFK was assassinated, what people remember weren't the editorials but the picture of John John saluting his father's coffin."

As indicated by today's Magazine page, Mr. Walters' sketchbook isn't limited to "Maumee Dearest." His single-panel cartoons are nationally syndicated by King Features and appear in a host of newspapers.

Yet his favorite subjects to lampoon remain decidedly local.

"I like doing local things, because that's what always get the most reaction," says the father of four. "You do a Carty (Finkbeiner) cartoon, and they're all talking about it. I like to jump around. One day it's local; the next day you're doing a cartoon about the Middle East. You're all over the place, so it's not the same thing day after day."

Mr. Walters has a special fondness, though, for Jack McFlak, the primary voice of "Maumee Dearest." He describes him as being "sort of like the (former Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs) Andrei Gromyko of city politics. He's survived every purge, every turnover. I always say politicians come and go, but bureaucrats are forever."

While Mr. Walters considered becoming a playwright early in life, the fact that he couldn't stop drawing cartoons in his notebooks as a kid pretty much foretold his fate.

"Everybody thinks that cartoonists were the class clown in school," he says with a laugh. "They were in the back of the room watching what everybody else was doing. They were taking notes, thinking 'I can use this material later on in a cartoon.'







