

Birth of a Book WAY2GO TEXAS!

by Stefan J. Lonce

With state governments desperate for money, you would think DMVs would try to sell more vanity plates.

But that's not happening. Vanity plate fees typically go to states' general funds, not to DMVs, but the DMVs must pay to screen, manufacture and deliver new vanity plates. Motorists sometimes sue DMVs that refuse to issue controversial vanity plates, and frequently win in court: the First Amendment's right to freedom of speech applies to license plates.

Because I want to persuade more Americans to add to the 9.3 million vanitized motor vehicles in the USA, I'm excited by what's happening in Texas, where the DMV has outsourced the sale of vanity plates to My Plates, a for profit joint venture.

My Plates offers 21 different special license plate designs, which can be vanitized. The plates are still manufactured by prisoners, and My Plates shares revenues with Texas.

My Plates has also created clever posters and brochures promoting vanity plates for Texas DMV offices, which every DMV should do, but which almost none have.

Kim Miller Drummond, the spokesperson for My Plates, is vanitized: her plate says **14KIM**. "Having a vanity plate allows me to express myself on my license plate, and I like the pink color of my [special] plate," Drummond said.

Because Texas is growing so fast, it needs to issue 7-character plates, to replace its current 6-character plates, and is issuing a new standard license plate, with a design chosen in an online vote.

In contrast, beginning on April Fool's Day, New York will begin issuing the ugly new "Empire Gold" license plate, with garish gold and blue colors, which was designed in secret. That's undemocratic and will cost New York money: motorists are less likely to vanitize if they dislike their state's license plate design.

Governor Paterson concocted the Empire Gold plate to force us to pay a \$25 new plate fee, to help close New York's massive budget deficit; he dropped the new fee after County Clerks, who administer DMV offices upstate, persuaded thousands of New Yorkers to sign online petitions.

New Yorkers should choose, in an online vote,

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EMBRACING VANITY IN TEXAS

Next September, My Plates will hold the first-ever vanity plates auction in the U.S., for 7-character Texas vanity plates. But My Plates doesn't like the term "vanity plates," even though that's what everyone calls them. I say, "Embrace vanity! Without vanity, writers, artists and other creative people wouldn't show off their work, to everyone's detriment."

No one knows what the most popular vanity plate messages are; before I co-authored the first-ever vanity license plates survey with the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators, which represents the DMVs, no one even knew that Americans have vanitized 9.3 million motor vehicles.

My Plates (www.myplates.com) has decided to auction **COWBOYS**; here are some suggestions for other vanity plates to auction:

**COWBOYZ, COWGIRL, IMHAPPY,
EATBEEF, BEEF4ME, LONGHRN,
LONESTR, DALLAS1, AUSTIN1, HOUS-
TON, STETSON, LUVUMOM, LUVU-
DAD, LUVUSON. 14TEXAS, 1ALAMO1.**

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Birth of a Book...

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whether to keep our current plate, which is a pop art classic, or replace it with the Empire Gold plate, or another design.

To sell more vanity plates, the NY DMV should:

- Train clerks to ask motorists if they want to vanityize when performing other transactions;
- Redesign the DMV web site's home page to include a prominent link to the "personalized plates" order page;
- Hold quarterly online contests for the funniest, cleverest, most compelling, or other categories of vanity plates, with winners getting free plates;
- Offer vanity plate gift certificates, and promote them as affordable, fun gifts;
- Reduce the vanity plate application fee from \$50 to \$20, which would cover the DMV's expenses for issuing new plates.

By and large, the NY DMV does a GR8 job. If the DMV were given a vanity plates marketing budget and allowed to keep part of the \$31.25 annual vanity plates fee, to pay for education and training for DMV personnel, it would promote vanity plates and generate more revenues for the State. The remainder of the vanity plates fees should go to a real

lockbox account to pay for highway and bridge construction, which the Legislature couldn't raid.

That's why I'm working with Assemblywoman Sandy Galef to have the DMV to adopt my ideas. Sandy is a veteran legislator and former teacher, who recognizes a good idea when she hears one; all New Yorkers benefit from her idealism and effectiveness.

New York's 264,000 vanity plates generate about \$8 million annually for New York. The key to dramatically increasing vanity plate revenues is to stimulate demand with the online contests. Motorists have told amazing stories on their vanity plates, like the Texas mother whose vanity plate says **2LB7OZ** -- a celebration of the survival of her prematurely born baby.

I'm writing *LCNS2ROM - LICENSE TO ROAM: VANITY LICENSE PLATES AND THE GR8 STORIES THEY TELL* to recount some of the GR8 stories motorists have told on their vanity plates. Visit my web site, www.vanityplatesbook.com, and download a copy of the partial mockup of *LCNS2ROM* (click on THE BOOK page on the web site), and send me your comments (email me at stefanlonce@vanityplatesbook.com).

Vanity plates are fascinating and fun... so I say, "Vanityize, everyone!"



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