

Commentary...

It all comes back to culture and community

By **Jim Cornelius**
News Editor

A remarkable thing happened last month in a sport so obscure that many Americans likely do not even know it exists. Thirty-five-year-old Lowell Bailey became the first American ever to take a gold medal in the World Championships in the sport of biathlon.

Biathlon combines cross-country skiing and shooting in perhaps the most physically grueling and mentally challenging of the winter sports. Imagine it: Ski-racing till your heart is pumping like a mighty bellows, then calming your breathing to the point where you can hit a series of five targets at 50 meters. Misses force penalty laps on the ski course. Do it four times of the course of 20 kilometers.

3WireSports.com ran a fine article about Bailey's achievement.

"What Lowell Bailey did ... is arguably the hardest thing to do in sports: to win when there is no evidence you can," Alan Abrahamson wrote. "When all you have is belief. And you, your family, your community, your team have had to sustain that belief — in this instance, on behalf of your country — for more than 20 years."

What struck me was how much emphasis the story put on community. Bailey grew up in Lake Placid, New York, among a host of avid and capable winter athletes, who knew that if they were to compete on a world stage, they'd be going up against

the giants from Scandinavia and Eastern Europe.

"They were by no means the Bad News Bears," their coach Kris Cheney-Seymour said, "but they also weren't the prodigies. The dream was born. Probably they and their internal sport mechanisms bought into it first. Their parents were unconditional. And the community believed as well. Every step along the way was, in some ways celebrated, but also there was an inner belief that they could always do it."

Nordic combined skier Billy Demong said, "I have always been a bigger believer in groups and culture. We had that when we were kids growing up. We showed up. We pushed each other."

Belief and action — both are necessary to "do it," whatever "it" may be. Sisters is extraordinarily fortunate to be the kind of community that believes — and acts.

Last weekend, the Sisters Folk Festival hosted young musicians from across the region and out-of-state to celebrate and support their efforts as songwriters. But the Americana Song Academy for Youth was about more than simply handing out "atta-boys" and "atta-girls." It was work. The young artists, like Demong's young athletes, showed up and pushed each other — to dig deeper, to be braver, to reach higher.

The Sisters Science Club believes — and they put belief into action with education programs for youth and adults in the community

alike. It's serious work. And it's serious fun. They've got a whole series of events lined up to celebrate science in the month of April — events we can all attend and help out with.

Faced with a deadly winter, Sisters volunteers and churches created a shelter for those in real need. Last week, Rio Restaurant and Three Sisters and Cook Contracting provided food for 15 people at the shelter, and Rio and Sisters Athletic Club partnered up to feed 100 people at Bethlehem Inn. Any time you want to help with that, Roberto Cardenas will take

50 percent off your meal at Rio.

All through this heavy and apparently endless winter neighbors have shoveled neighbors' roofs and driveways, towed their friends out of snow bogs and generally helped each other pull through.

The examples abound... This is what a healthy culture and community does. And despite our divisions, it's still who we are.

There's a lot of loud and ugly noise emanating from our national political culture right now, and we've heard it here in our own community. It's easy to get distracted by

it, discouraged by it, even enraged by it. Maybe we should take some time to shut it off, or at least turn down the volume.

There's plenty to do right here at home that has nothing to do with whom you voted for last November and what you think of who's in charge in Washington. Set it aside, at least for a while. Let's show up and push each other to do great things. Who knows? Maybe we'll have a hand in something extraordinary, even incredible. Maybe someone we celebrate and push today will win when there's no evidence they can.

Classic Sisters...



PHOTO BY JERRY BALDOCK

It's an iconic panorama: Horses in pasture overlooked by the Three Sisters in their winter blankets.

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