

FROM THE EDITOR’S DESK

Passing on local endorsements

The race for Union County sheriff is the hottest local election going. Sheriff Boyd Rasmussen seeks a fifth term. Three challengers look to end Rasmussen’s streak. Shane Rollins of Cove is the outsider in the election, having returned to the county in 2014 from a career in military policing and private high-end security. Bill Miller of Elgin is a former sheriff’s sergeant who worked under Rasmussen. He is orchestrating quite a letters-to-the-editor campaign. And Cody Bowen is a deputy now in the sheriff’s office. He headed up the law enforcement union that endorsed Rasmussen in late 2019. He entered the race in January, stepped down as head of the law enforcement association, which soon pulled its endorsement of Rasmussen and in a non-unanimous vote threw its support to Bowen. All of that going on in the midst of the COVID-19 outbreak, which has dominated the news for more than a month.

As editor, I make the call on whether the newspaper goes forward with endorsements. Previous editors held editorial board meetings with the candidates and went the endorsement route. I will not. Some of this is due to the consequences of the virus outbreak. Holding a small edit board meeting with each candidate in the presence of a reporter probably would be the best. But that’s too a big lift right now as we strive to work remotely to cover news under restrictions to maintain safe social distance and to watch hours and the bottom line.

I also think I’m too new to Union County to give an informed opinion on who the best candidate is to serve as sheriff. So we’re asking the four candidates instead to provide brief answers to the following questions:

- 1) What are the top three qualities or characteristics that make you the right person to be Union County sheriff?
- 2) What is an example from your career that shows you would be a good sheriff?
- 3) Some candidates have stated other candidates are relying on misinformation, obfuscation or rumor to persuade voters. What do you have to say about that?
- 4) What is the most pressing issue in the race that you want people to know more about and why?
- 5) If you win, what is the first change you plan to implement in the sheriff’s office and why?
- 6) Which candidate (excluding yourself, of course) would you endorse for Union County sheriff and why?

I emailed the candidates the questions Monday and asked them to respond by the following Monday. The Observer, then, will publish their answers, editing for grammar, punctuation and style.

We also have a race for Union County commissioner between incumbent Donna Beverage and challenger Michael Barry, and we soon will send questions their way. City councils have races as well. We’ll aim to provide brief profiles of those candidates.

I’d also like to remind readers, candidates and their supporters that the deadline for political letters is noon April 22, and the final day we will run them in print is April 25. Limit letters to no more than 400 words. Letters must include the name of the author, their city of residence and a daytime phone number so we can verify the letter. You can send letters to The Observer, 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande 97850, but we prefer you email letters to news@lagrandeobserver.com. Having the letter directly in the body of an email makes it easier to place opinions in the paper.



OTHER VIEWS

The ‘thank you wave’ makes a comeback

Walking my dog Dorothy a few months ago, I didn’t recognize the fellow waving from the white car until he stopped to say hello. Turns out it was Ed, a casual acquaintance, whose wave I hadn’t acknowledged because I couldn’t see him through the tinted glass.

Since then I’ve made it a point to wave at every car that passes on our quiet street. Maybe I know the driver, perhaps I don’t. But the wave can’t hurt; in fact, it’s rather nice. Nowadays, with social distancing, we’re all doing a lot more waving. Folks keep their distance but most wave, salute or signal — acknowledging that we’re in this together. Jerry Seinfeld’s old complaint that people don’t offer a proper “thank you wave” doesn’t hold in coronavirus times. I’ve long been intrigued by simple hand signals. As kids we thought we knew a big secret: If you made a pulling motion with your arm as a truck passed, the driver would respond with a blast of his air horn. Sitting on the observation deck at our local airport I’ve noted that the ground crew — those folks with the orange flashlights — give each pilot a final salute, which is always

About the Author



Peter Funt is a writer and speaker. His book, “Cautiously Optimistic” is available at Amazon.com and CandidCamera.com.

acknowledged with a salute from the cockpit. It’s a civilian version of scenes in “Top Gun” when Tom Cruise and the other fighter pilots salute the guys who send them off the aircraft carriers. Another old film, “The Sting,” features a band of lovable con men who identify each other with a forefinger salute across the nose. It’s believed the origin of hand saluting was in Roman times. A citizen who wished to approach a public official raised his right hand to show he was not carrying a weapon. According to the Armed Forces Museum, the modern salute evolved as a show of respect. “By 1820, the gesture was officially modified to the current version still used in the military today — the touching of the hat. Hand salute, palm down is believed to be an influence of the British Navy, as deck hands were

often dirty and to expose the dirty palm was regarded as disrespectful.” Many of us will never forget the sight of 3-year-old John-John Kennedy saluting his father’s casket as it was carried from St. Matthew’s Cathedral. During the crisis, President Trump favors the simple thumbs-up. Some give the A-OK sign, forming a circle with thumb and forefinger. You might use two hands to make a hand-heart gesture, popularized by the singer Taylor Swift. Or maybe the Hawaiian shaka, a waggle of the upward thumb and forward-pointing pinkie with the middle three fingers curled to the palm. Perhaps just a nod to strangers crossing the street. A hand on the heart, often accompanied by a soft pat-pat on the chest, is better than words when it comes to saying “thank you” and “I really care.” While walking Dorothy the other day I stopped to watch the mail carrier make a delivery across the street. As he pulled away, I felt compelled to offer a military-style salute. He slowed, turned slightly and saluted back. Sometimes the smallest gestures have the biggest meaning.

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