

OUR VIEW

Laying a foundation to help others

The recent effort by Eastern Oregon University students and faculty to collect food donations for Union County residents is one of those feel-good moments every community should look to and rejoice.

The project also once again puts the spotlight on an ongoing challenge locally where there are people who continue to struggle to feed their families.

That's why efforts like the one sponsored by the university are so important and send the right message. That message is simple: We care about our neighbors.

The need for many is a year-long battle. While the emphasis every holiday season is rightly placed on helping those who are in need, the demand for assistance — especially with food — doesn't evaporate as soon as Jan. 1 arrives.

In fact, an argument could be made that other periods during the year reflect an even greater need.

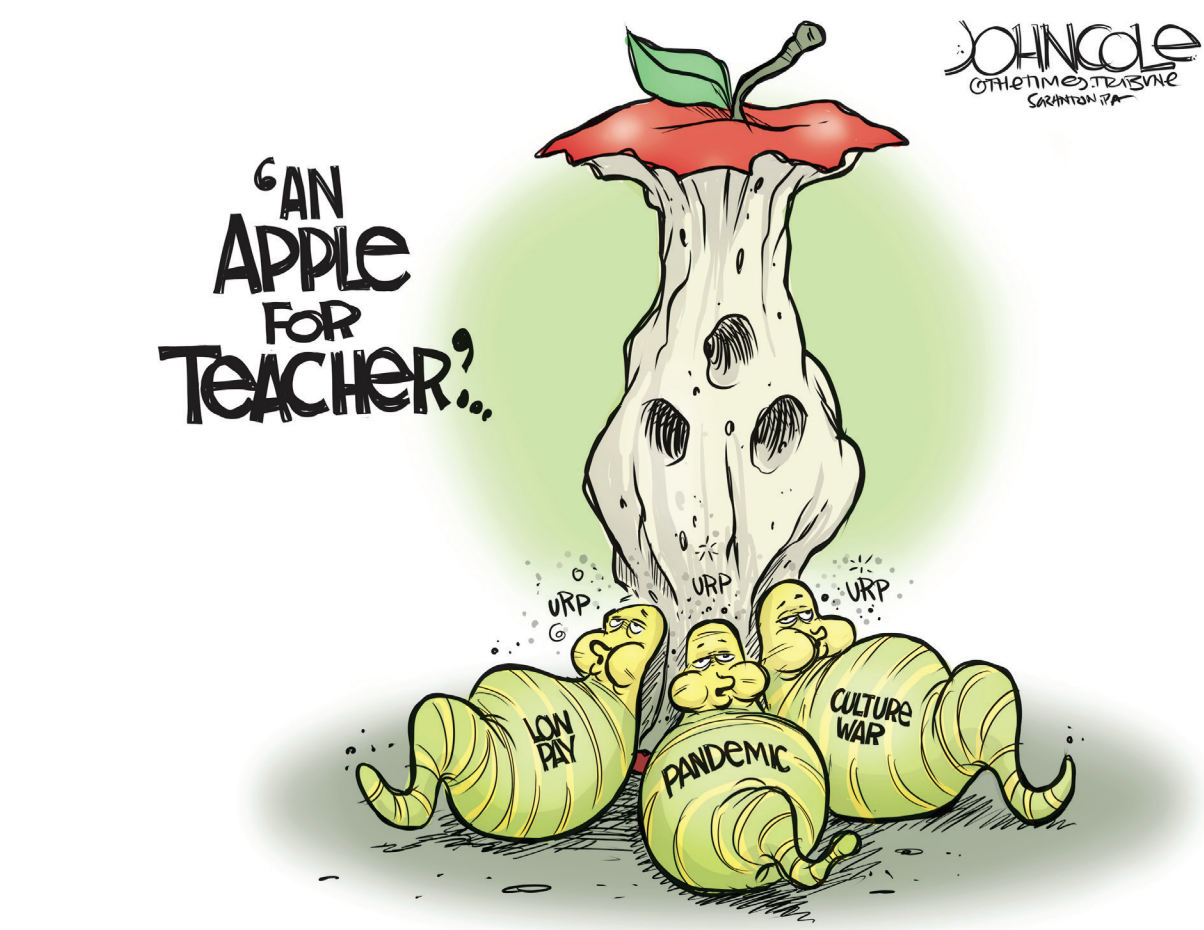
The takeaway on the issue is also straightforward. Those who struggle and need such basic survival items as food are with us every day of every month during the year.

That's why the food collection effort by the university is so important. More efforts such as that need to be undertaken throughout the year. The more we can do to help those who are less fortunate the better the entire community will be in the long run.

We should not be a community that accepts the fact that there are men and women and children in our midst who must scramble to find food. In a nation and state as great as ours, that is just a fact we should not have to accept. We have basic human rights obligations to ensure children do not go hungry. That those who are struggling receive needed help.

It isn't an easy challenge to overcome, but working together we can, as a community, lay a foundation for a framework that helps those who hit hard times and need a help up.

The food donation program by the students and faculty at the university deserves praise and we must all do as much as we can to help those who are less fortunate in our community.



More Oregon teens are inhaling toxins



GARY ALLEN
OTHER VIEWS

“Don’t be a butthead.”
“Smoke free is the way to bee.”

The ugly truth. Even with decades of memorable warnings and data, people are still taking up the deadly habit of smoking, still facing the same — and even new — health risks. February marks Children’s Dental Health Month, a perfect time to call out the prevalence of vaping (using e-cigarettes) among adolescents.

More than 2 million middle school- and high school-aged U.S. teens reported vaping in 2021. In Oregon, just more than 25% of 11th graders and 13% of eighth graders said vaping was their entry into smoking. The most recent Oregon Healthy Teens Survey report also shows that roughly 60% of students believe that vaping every day poses only a moderate, slight or no risk at all of general harm.

As a leader in the oral health field, I suppose that doesn’t surprise me. I mostly remember the anti-tobacco campaigns that featured a smoker with yellow teeth or a hole in the throat. Traditional cigarettes in the past few decades haven’t seemed to be mistaken for a low-risk habit, perhaps because of those campaigns.

Today, e-cigarettes have health risks just as deserving of public health campaigns and just as serious for young people, including risks of mood disorders and addiction, as well as serious impacts on oral health.

Clearly, there is a need to raise awareness about just how harmful it is to vape.

We know COVID-19 has intensified the problem.

“Adolescents who experienced pandemic-related severe stress, depression or anxiety, or whose families experienced material hardship during the pandemic were most likely to use substances,” researchers note. Though national data indicates teen substance abuse remained the same or declined overall during the pandemic, the number of kids using nicotine products jumped.

Life changes from COVID-19 may have reinforced vaping as the predominant method of nicotine consumption among young people because vape pens are easier to conceal at home than alcohol and have a false reputation for being safer than regular cigarettes. But nicotine isn’t the only cause of adverse health effects we need to worry about.

Research shows vaping increases inflammation throughout the body, raising the risk for life-threatening health issues such as stroke and cardiovascular disease. A study published in the Journal of Adolescent Health suggests young adults who only vape are five times more likely to get COVID-19 than their peers who smoke traditional cigarettes or do not use either product. Vaping also severely impacts oral health, which is directly related to increased risk for long-term threats of dental decay, gum disease and cancer, and compounds many of the other health issues mentioned.

E-cigarettes contain toxins including formaldehyde, cadmium, nickel and lead that damage the skin and make it more prone to infections and acne, as well as worsen psoriasis and rosacea. Chemicals in e-cigarettes, like propylene glycol, vegetable glycerin and acetaldehyde, can harm

both hard and soft tissue in the mouth, while nicotine reduces blood flow in the mouth, resulting in gum disease and even permanent loss of teeth.

The majority of teenagers report that candy flavors were the reason they first tried an e-cigarette. Perhaps ironic, these flavored vapes, such as “tutti frutti,” “bubblegum” and “cotton candy,” increase risk for cavities and other oral disease just like actual candies. Vape flavor additives double the growth of bacteria in the mouth that cause tooth decay, while also decreasing the hardness of tooth enamel by 27%, limiting natural protection against that bacteria.

Poor oral and overall health in adolescence frequently leads to even worse oral and overall health during adulthood.

Educating youth and empowering them with refusal skills to resist marketing and peer pressure ensures fewer young people are harmed by e-cigarettes. It’s why we must support the national, evidence-based CATCH My Breath school program, which reduces students’ likelihood to experiment with vaping by 45%.

But it’s time to bring in reinforcements. Open conversation with adults outside of school is key to helping teens make healthier decisions for their future. Take the time to educate yourself and then talk about vaping with the teens in your life.

The health of a generation depends on it.

Dr. Gary Allen, an Oregon native, is vice president of clinical services for Advantage Dental from DentaQuest in Redmond. Dr. Allen received his degree from the University of Oregon Dental School and a master’s degree in oral biology from George Washington University.

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THE OBSERVER

An independent newspaper founded in 1896
www.lagrandeobserver.com Phone: 541-963-3161
Periodicals postage paid at Pendleton, Oregon 97801
Published Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays (except postal holidays) by EO Media Group, 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande, OR 97850 (USPS 299-260)
Toll free (Oregon): 1-800-781-3214
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