

# An Opinion: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly of Social Media

By Scott Laird

In today's world we get our news and information about current events, about our community and about each other from a variety of sources- television, radio, the internet, social media, word of mouth, sometimes even from newspapers.

Social media is a unique source of information because it allows both the sharing of news, thoughts and ideas, as well as providing a place for interaction between the sharers.

It has become a powerful tool that can either tie us together or drive us apart.

We have come to rely, even depend on the internet and platforms like Facebook and texting as a positive way to stay connected with friends, family and loved ones; to share our experiences and important moments with those far away. In Vernonia we've successfully used Facebook to create Community Bulletin Boards to share local, pertinent and timely news about upcoming events, road conditions, and local businesses or services, including specialized pages to provide knowledge about specific issues: lost and rehoming of pets, virtual garage sales, and farming, gardening and country living.

Our world has become so much more dependent on social media as our link to current events, news and information as well as a way to connect with our community. But many people are coming to the realization that sharing

so much information may not be in our best interest.

We've found that instead of becoming a place to share and debate ideas, thoughts and opinions, social media is becoming a place where people criticize and put down those who see the world differently. It's become a place where, instead of learning from other's points of view, we tend to defend our own to the bitter end.

Today, because of social media, many of us know more about our friends, neighbors, co-workers, acquaintances, fellow citizens and even strangers than we ever would have before; about their religious beliefs, their stance on social issues, their political leanings. We know more about people's values, morals, and conduct. In the past we would never know so much about the personal lives of the clerk behind the counter at the store, the person sitting across the table from us at a meeting, or our neighbor sitting next to us in church. And we know these things about their family members, and even their friends. It runs the gamut from their views on abortion or immigration to knowing what they are having for dinner or when they last took a shower.

We face an overload of personal information we never had before.

This interconnectedness and information sharing creates a burden on all of us who participate in using social media. We have to resist the urge to form opinions about those we disagree with or who support opposing

arguments. Knowing as much as we do, may make it harder to want to be friendly towards, work together with, or want to help someone who we know sees the world so differently than us.

The anonymity of social media allows us to say things to people we would never dream of saying to their face in conversation and to treat people with a sense of contempt and disdain that makes polite society shudder. It can be a feeding ground for bullies who force their opinions and use name calling and threats to control a conversation.

Yet in a small community, we're really not very anonymous. That person you were arguing with this morning on Facebook just might be standing in front of you in line at the grocery store this evening.

Arguing on social media rarely convinces anyone to change their mind. In fact what we're usually doing is driving a wedge deeper between us and those we disagree with. We're seeing it in national political issues where the gap between the right and the left widens each and every day. And we know there's the potential for it to happen on a local level.

We can chose to use social media as a tool to stay connected, share useful information and help each other. Or we can chose to use it as a weapon to try to force our opinions and viewpoints.

The choice is ours.



VERNONIA'S  
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reflecting the spirit of our community

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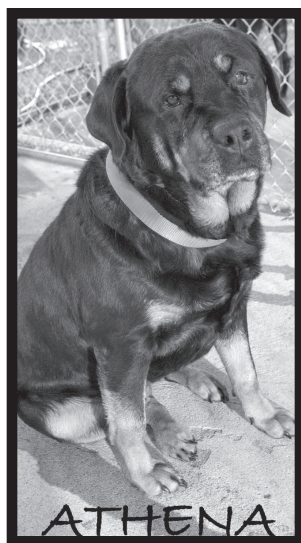
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