

God Is My Co-Pruner: Spica In Pluviam Meterentur Updates from The Institute of the Exploding Mole

By Tom Coughlin

The Growing Season is upon us. A part of me has been expecting a killing frost to arrive any night now, ice-roasting the roses and clobbering the new growth on the kiwi---tiny promising flower buds, pretty red leaf-stems, and all. I like to think of that skeptical part of myself as wisely wary, but I have to admit it's looking like an extraordinary season awaits. In fact, other than those two days with hailstorms recently, I cannot remember a day I've looked outside and didn't think, Monarchs and milkweeds!--this is going to be good for the garden. Now watch---it'll be perpetual three o'clock on a dull afternoon from here to October now that I've written that, but it's hard not to notice that, so far, Invictus Sol has really been invicting.

There're flowers on the strawberries, plums, pears, and apples, green fruit on the gooseberries and currants and even ripe ones on the honeyberries. We have peas and lettuce up, but also beets, broccoli and the three types of runner beans we've decided

to grow this year instead of other more heat-loving edibles. On the ninth, we'll pick up some tomatoes at the Community Garden Plant Sale and complete the first iteration of this year's garden. Things are looking so encouraging that we'll try growing a third variety this year, and a full-sized one at that. (Persimmon--a big, fat, sexy, eponymously named, short-seasoned, indeterminate variety that has, for reasons yet obscure to me, sometimes produced magazine scrumptious slabs of tomato in our shady space).

I have a shift at the upcoming plant sale, with its dozens and dozens of tomato varieties on offer, and in addition to familiarizing myself with said cultivars, I need to work on conversationally keeping my root rot from my root-knot, my blights straight and my wilts right.

That's a task in itself, and since I won't be likely to discuss such things in detail with many

of you while there, I thought I'd include some highlights from the Updates of the Institute of the Exploding Mole, taken from April's meeting, Focus On Slugs. It's always encouraging to receive feedback from those who share our concern for biodiversity and sustainability in the Upper Nehalem Valley. As ever, we are grateful for the far-seeing support of our supporters.

Work continues to enhance slug tendency toward apophallation. So far subjecting populations to round-the-clock episodes of 18 Kids and Counting has produced inconclusive results, but researchers remain guardedly hopeful.

Taking another approach to slug infestation, we are pursuing options regarding slugs as a comestible commodity. Tasting panels at our slug hatchery have so far been lukewarm to our caviar efforts, but we remain

committed and are encouraged when we recall the early failures of our Vespud Breeding Program, which eventually led to our delectable, and very popular in the Singapore market, Wasp Mustard.

Further research into Greek Slug Yogurt has been discontinued.

We are very pleased to announce we are in the process of concluding negotiations with both the Swedish Academy of Wholesome Arts and Chamber of Commerce which will clear the way for our most promisingly lucrative endeavor to date: The reintroduction of the European black slug (*Arion ater*) as the source of the world's premier ox-cart axle grease. We have every reason to expect domination of the Greater Upper Uppsala market. "Slicker than the squeaks---Arion Axle Grease!"

Supporting Local Fire Protection

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and keeping their files up to date. We need to make sure we're meeting the needs and addressing the aspirations of our volunteers, so that we can see where they want to go and assist them in getting there. It's become imperative—we need another body here. We can't continue giving the level of service if we don't.

Measure 5-245 is a bond for equipment. We recently purchased a used engine from Banks for a heck of a deal. The last bond we put out was in 2000 and it matured and was paid off in 2010. In reality the District should have immediately put out another bond.

VV: Why is it so important to have a paid Training Officer?

CS: We've used volunteers in that role for a long time. The average time span that a volunteer lasts in that role is about three years. And every training officer that we've had since I've been here, has not only stepped down from training, they've resigned from the department completely. They get so burned out because there is so much extra work. And the worst part is, the people we give the training responsibility to are usually some of our best volunteers and then we end up losing them. They're going to their regular jobs for forty hours a week and then they are volunteering here and then putting in all this extra work.

VV: Why is it hard for you to find volunteers?

CS: Volunteerism is way down across the board, not just in fire service. It's because society is always so busy. In addition to this levy for the Training Captain, we're also applying for a grant for a

Recruitment/Retaining Officer. The Recruitment/Retaining Officer would be an advocate for the volunteers. They would go out and find them, bring them in and get them what they need.

Volunteers are supposed to be able to finish and be certified as Firefighter I within a year to a year and a half. We have volunteers who have been here for three years and still aren't certified as Firefighter I. It's because our training schedule is so full, if a volunteer misses a particular piece of training, it can be a year before we get back around to that training section for them to get signed off on it. That can get very discouraging for our volunteers.

By having a dedicated Training Officer we can open up the drill schedule and be more flexible. We can create a more stable and sustainable training program to meet the personal needs of our volunteers. If we can do that then hopefully we can grow our volunteer base.

If we get funding for both those positions I believe it will make a big difference. I think it will help facilitate and speed up the process. It keeps the volunteers interested and helps retain them.

VV: Why do you need to purchase more equipment?

CS: The National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA) recommendations make it hard for small departments that can't afford to meet them, regardless of the amount of safety or maintenance we put into a piece of equipment. If we had an incident and ended up in court they are going to ask why we weren't meeting recommended standards. We have equipment that is out of date. The recommendations state that our first out vehicle should not be any older than ten years, the reserve vehicle can be ten more years and then another five years for a backup vehicle-- so a total of twenty-five years. We just got rid of our forty year old rig, our tender/pumper is thirty-four years old and our first out vehicle is now fifteen years old.

Our aging apparatus not only lacks the horse power to go up hills, but it lacks the safety features that are in today's equipment. With our purchase from Banks we were able to upgrade from a forty year old to a twenty year old. It still has its share of issues that will require continual maintenance on our part. That leaves us with our pumper tender, which is also an outdated rig that we've had to do some severe engine work on just to band aid it and keep it running.

The idea is to create a succession plan for our apparatus portion of *continued on page 15*

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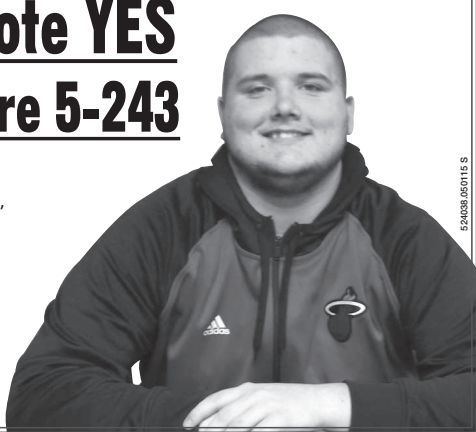
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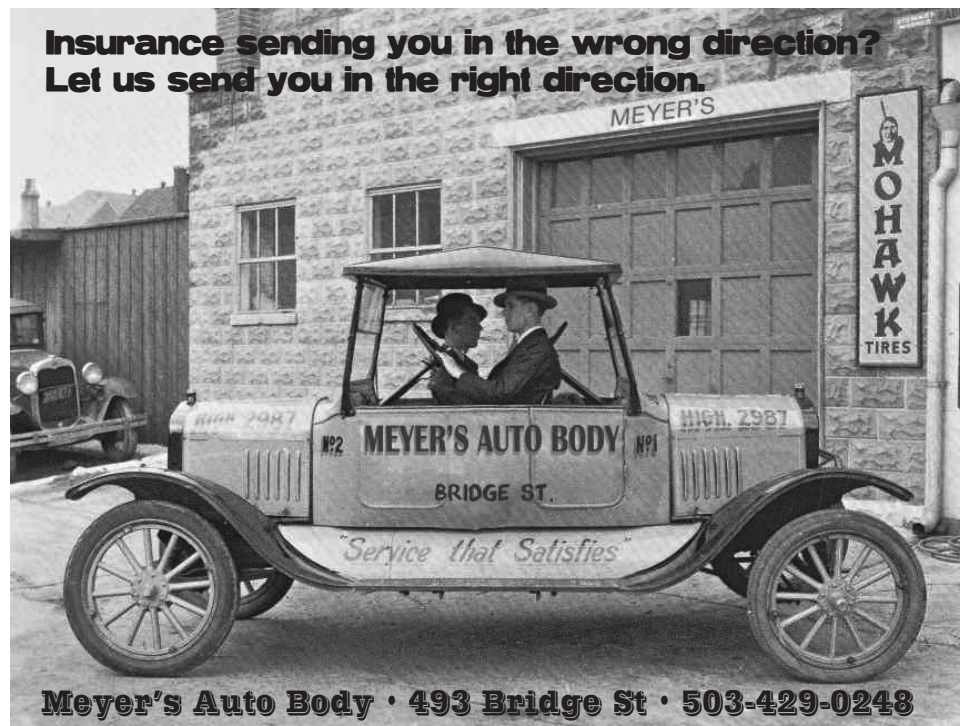


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