

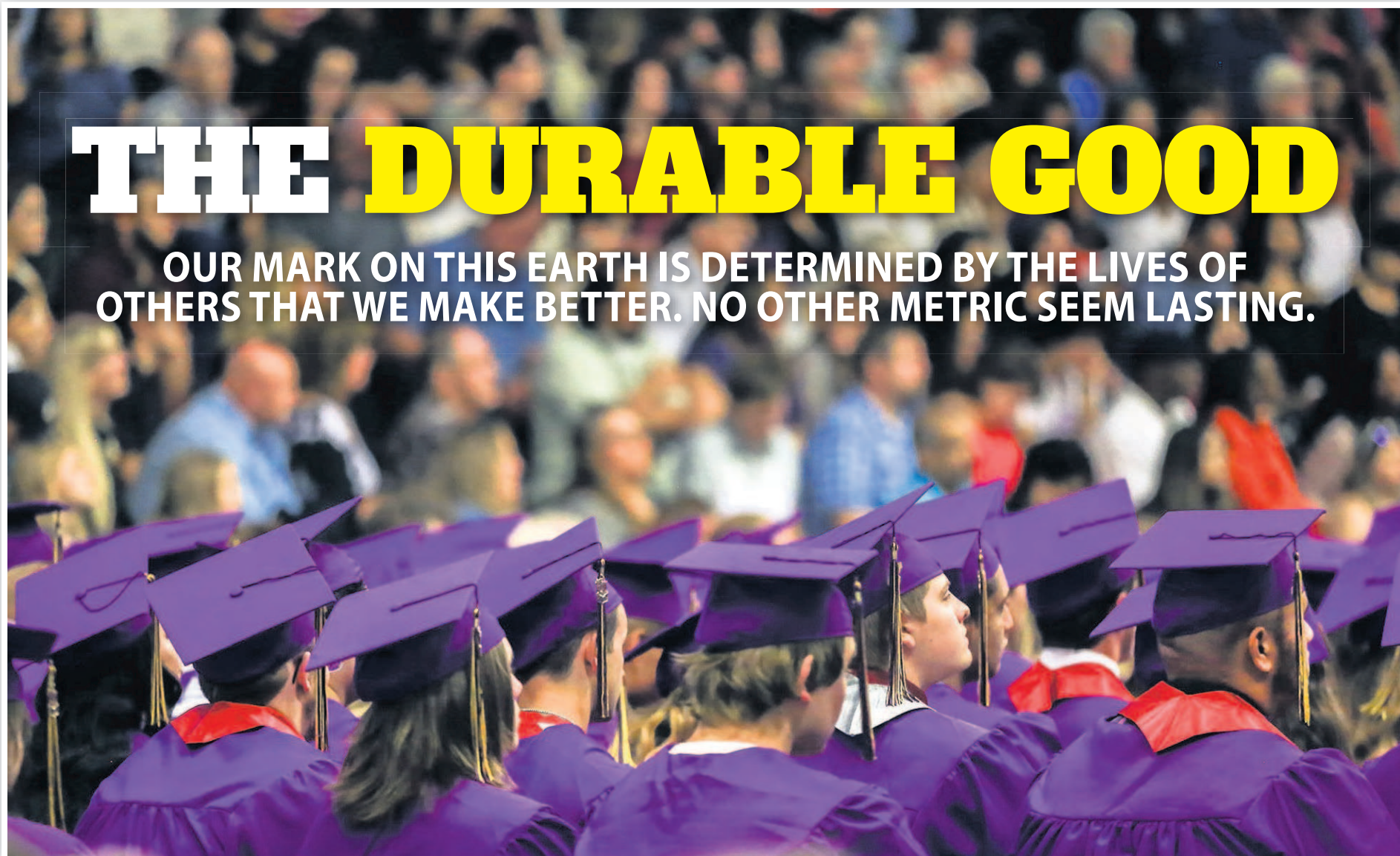
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WEEKEND BREAK

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THE DURABLE GOOD

OUR MARK ON THIS EARTH IS DETERMINED BY THE LIVES OF OTHERS THAT WE MAKE BETTER. NO OTHER METRIC SEEM LASTING.



Kathy Aney/EO Media Group

Members of the 2017 Hermiston High School graduating class and their family and friends listen to one of the speakers during the graduation ceremony in the gym.



Submitted photo

Ed Hunt's first grade class photo. Hunt is at the top row, far right.



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

The Astoria High School Class of 2017 held their annual parade through downtown Astoria.



Danny Miller/EO Media Group

Seaside Principal Dr. Sheila Roley hugs students as they cross the stage during the 2016 Seaside High School graduation ceremony at the Seaside Convention Center.

By **ED HUNT**
For EO Media Group

"Most of the trouble in the world is caused by people wanting to be important" — T.S. Eliot

I graduated from High School 30 years ago this year.

I don't much recall what my ambitions were at 18 years other than aspiring to fame and fortune through the wit of my pen or the sound of my voice.

I'm reaching the point where I need to think more about legacy than aspirations.

We spend our lives collecting totems and objects that signify our accomplishments, our growing economic independence and success. We build messy fortresses of possessions around us. When we need to move on, these great purchases become anchors, keeping us from sailing on the open ocean of our lives.

When Amy and I were first married, years before we had children, we'd stop at antique stores and yard sales looking for things cast off by others. We had a big empty house to fill with furniture and art. Twenty-five years and two daughters later, we are tripping over these material ghosts that will not move on to their afterlife. We sell, we donate, we give away things our children have outgrown.

In sorting this flotsam and jetsam of the ebbing tide, we occasionally stumble upon a treasure — some object heavy with the weight of significance and sentimentality.

Yet objects only hold this power when they symbolize some accomplishment, or some human interaction that evolved our existence on this earth. Touchstones get their power from a life-changing event, a memory of a friend, a loved one lost. These we tuck away.

Beside the roadways now, yard sale and garage sale signs proliferate. We are starting the season of selling and buying things that will not fade away when their utility to their current owners is exhausted.

At the same time, we are surrounded by young people graduating from high school, and heading off to attend college, to serve in the military, to start careers and families.

The contrast is stark in my mind.

Too often we have come to emphasize the building and buying of things, and disparage the service economy.

Yet service comes in many forms, including doctors and firefighters, nurses and teachers — these are all considered part of the service economy, and create improvements in people's lives.

Yet when we measure our economy, our focus is on the manufacturing and purchase of "durable goods."

Something about this term bothers me. After all, what creates more durable good in the world than a teacher?

Service is not some second class to the creation of objects, of wealth, of fame. Our politicians wax hagiographic about factory jobs. Yet service is now the largest part of our economy, and it includes people doing much to make the world a better place than they found it.

We all have at least one teacher or coach that touched us and changed our view of the world.

I have had the opportunity to get a taste of teaching by mentoring young journalists through an internship program. I precepted new nurses, taught EMTs and CPR and crisis intervention. I am gobsmacked when a former student tells me that something I taught them

helped save a life or prevent a violent injury.

I imagine those lives touching others, saving and creating, rippling across time around the world. That is a durable good.

I used to think that every man aspired to immortality by creating something that would still exist centuries after he was gone. Whether it be a novel, a work of art, or carving a farm out of wild forest — some material legacy to pass on. As if doing so keeps our shadow in the world.

Yet the truly durable good is in those who spend their lives teaching, healing, saving and protecting our fellow misbegotten humans.

There is a reason there are never enough teachers, nurses, doctors and police officers. Dealing with people is very hard, taxing on the soul. The people we interact with come to us burdened with a lifetime of baggage, and we have to fight through to make even a tiny impact on mind or body. It is often difficult to see their quiet everyday impacts on the future.



Ed Hunt

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The coast guardsman who plucks a drowning man from the ocean, the firefighter who cuts a woman out of a wrecked car — their monetary compensation pales in the light of the number of lives they change in a career.

Yet their life-changing impacts are by comparison much easier to divine.

It is so much easier to undervalue the service of our daily interactions with other human beings, our generosity of time and knowledge. Patience is the most valuable commodity that no one ever buys. It changes lives.

Who has more patience than parents investing a third of their lives into raising a child — a child stable and kind and imaginative enough to change the world?

Should those children be blessed with good teachers and kind mentors, won't their lives echo outwards across the centuries, immortal in a million unseen interactions of kindness, healing and teaching. Isn't that a durable good?

My father and mother taught me the most durable lessons of my life. My father taught me to work hard and never stop learning. My mom taught me that things are just things, not a one half as valuable as a single human being.

It is no wonder all three of us kids spent our lives serving others. My brother is a paramedic, my sister spent her life protecting children and the elderly from abuse for the state of Oregon.

My sister passed away after only 49 years. At her memorial, hundreds of people came from all over the country. The gathered faces were not her clients, but rather the friends and coworkers, neighbors and children grown to adults that she had touched in her life as a neighborhood mother with a generous heart.

I think of all this in this season of caps and gowns and garage sale signs. Our mark on this earth is determined by the lives of others that we make better. No other metric seem lasting.

It is a hard measure to use. Helping others is hard. Raising good children is hard. Being kind — just being kind to people who don't look like you, or think like you, or worship like you — having simple kindness in your heart for those not of your tribe is hard. Immortality doesn't come easy.

Yet there is only one way to create a truly durable good.

Ed Hunt is a writer and registered nurse who blogs on medical issues at redtriage.com and on other subjects at theebbtide.blogspot.com. He lives in Grays River, Washington.