

OPINION



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OUR VIEW

Give thanks, but help others in need

The word “Thanksgiving” resonates throughout our great nation as an opportunity to pause to count our blessings. Of course, for many it is often an opportunity for family gatherings with turkey dinners followed by televised sports. But even those without religious leanings can take a moment before we settle into watching Chicago vs. Detroit or Buffalo vs. Dallas to celebrate the abundance of good we see around us. Here on the North Coast, we have much to celebrate, not least the beauty of our Columbia River and Pacific Ocean setting. Perhaps in these divided times it is the one thing we can all agree on — that we have something here that is truly worth protecting.

The story of our national holiday is embroidered in the fabric of American life. Thanksgiving has its origin in the 1621 feast staged by Puritan settlers who fled persecution in England, endured an arduous ocean journey, then survived the first year of the Plymouth Colony. They joined with Native Americans to celebrate the first harvest, and set the table for every celebration that followed. Our two greatest presidents had a hand in cementing Thanksgiving’s place in U.S. culture. George Washington proclaimed a day of thanksgiving for victories in the revolution that created our nation. And Abraham Lincoln solidified the regularity of the celebration during the Civil War. As we recall this rich heritage, and savor all aspects of our nation of plenty, we should pause to commend those on the North Coast who are doing their part to help the less



Katie Frankowicz/The Astorian
The Clatsop Community Action Regional Food Bank helps people in need.

affluent among us with the basic necessities of life. There can be few higher callings than providing shelter from the winter cold, offering nourishing food and a helping hand to those for whom the modern times are a daily struggle for existence. We must never forget that our less-fortunate neighbors are part of the fabric of our community. The manner in which we treat them is a reflection of the depth of our humanity. Those working for Clatsop Community Action are dedicated to helping people meet housing, food and other basic living needs. This happens in large part through a regional food bank that has seen soaring increases in the amount of meals and food supplies. An astonishing 1 in 4 residents of Clatsop County qualify for emergency food assistance. Seniors on fixed and limited incomes, plus way

too many children, make up a large proportion of this number. While we can lament the iniquities in an economic system that has created this, it’s pleasing to take a moment to commend those seeking to meet the needs of those less fortunate. One such group, Filling Empty Bellies, seeks to help the homeless with meals and laundry services in Astoria. Its motto is one we could all adopt and learn from. “We serve meals without discrimination or judgment, because we believe in love, humanity, empathy, connection, second chances, and in the worthiness of every human being.” Its founder began making sandwiches for eight people. Now helpers feed up to 50 people a day, six days a week. Extra services include haircuts, advocacy, baby supplies, school supplies and clothing for children, plus referrals to other

resources. Helping Hands operates shelters and reentry programs in Astoria and Seaside that help the homeless. From small beginnings 15 years ago, it has grown to serve about 200 people a night in Clatsop, Tillamook, Lincoln and Yamhill counties. It has an emphasis on sobriety; its leaders seek ways to restore independence for those they help. North Coast churches play their part, too, providing practical help that goes beyond spiritual care. Some support the Astoria Rescue Mission, which provides shelter and practical support for those its leaders call, “the least, the last and the lost.”

It is a mission that those who operate the Astoria Warming Center seek to follow. From mid-November through mid-March, organizers watch the weather and open the basement of the First United Methodist Church as a temporary refuge when temperatures drop below 37 degrees or it is too rainy. This project will become even more important following the closure of church shelters in Warrenton and the Long Beach Peninsula. All these groups need money to support their commendable operations and we call on readers to give generously. But all also need volunteers to step forward and play their part in providing these important but necessary nongovernment social services. Those who provide these services — most as volunteers — risk exhaustion and burnout. They need some respite. As we seek to build a truly caring society, helping others who are less fortunate than ourselves must surely be the goal of us all.

A THANKSGIVING PROCLAMATION

The first national Thanksgiving proclamation was issued by President Abraham Lincoln on Oct. 3, 1863, during the Civil War. It was written by U.S. Secretary of State William Seward. The year that is drawing towards its close, has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature, that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever watchful providence of Almighty God. In the midst of a civil war of unequalled magnitude and severity, which has sometimes seemed to foreign States to invite and to provoke their aggression, peace has been preserved with all nations, order has been maintained, the laws have been respected and obeyed, and harmony has prevailed everywhere except in the theatre of military conflict; while that theatre has been greatly contracted by the advancing armies and navies of the Union. Needful diversions of wealth and of strength from the fields of peaceful industry to the national defence, have not arrested the plough, the shuttle or the ship; the axe has enlarged the borders of our settlements, and the mines, as well of iron and coal as of the precious metals, have yielded even more abundantly than heretofore. Population has steadily increased, notwithstanding the waste that has been made in the camp, the siege and the battle-field; and the country, rejoicing in the consciousness of augmented strength and vigor, is permitted to expect continuance of years with large increase of freedom. No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy. It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowl-

edged as with one heart and one voice by the whole American People. I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens. And I recommend to them that while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty Hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquillity and Union. In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the United States to be affixed. Done at the City of Washington, this Third day of October, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and of the Independence of the United States the Eighty-eighth.

The first national Thanksgiving proclamation was issued by President Abraham Lincoln in 1863.

