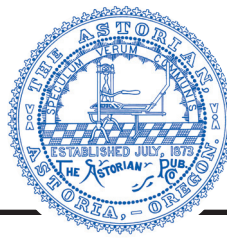


OPINION



the Astorian

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GUEST COLUMN

Let's find reasons to give thanks

This is the year of “for better or worse.” And despite the human ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic, Oregon has much to be thankful for.

We found that essential workers come in all types, from the nurses, doctors and technicians directly caring for COVID-19 patients, to the housekeepers and custodians diligently sanitizing hospital rooms, to the clerks keeping grocery stores humming and the truckers keeping supplies arriving.



DICK HUGHES

And many more. Never again should society take any job for granted or consider it humbler than one's own.

We learned that schools are essential not only for education but also for life-building social interactions among students and child care for working parents.

We missed the traditional moments of graduation season but found joy in drive-thru ceremonies and other such as-best-we-can substitutes.

We discovered that schools can hold online art exhibitions, displaying photos of chalk art created on driveways and sidewalks around town.

We unwrapped our creativity. Distilleries learned to produce hand sanitizer that chambers of commerce distributed for free. Dude-ranch experiences and fire-station tours went virtual. Older youth offered free online tutoring for younger and less tech-savvy kids.

Government agencies developed ways to remotely conduct some building inspections. Streetside dining became a reality, at least temporarily, as cities closed car lanes so restaurants could set up tables on sidewalks and in parking areas. From car dealers to farmers markets, businesses of all types upped their online presence and pivoted to curbside pickup and home delivery.

We showed Willamette Valley lawmakers what it was like to live in the rest of Oregon, where long travel distances often make it impractical to meet in person with state officials in Salem or



Jenny Kane/AP Photo

A patient receives an IV drip as face masks hang from an IV pole at a hospital in Portland in August.

COMPELLING RESEARCH SHOWS THAT EXPRESSING GRATITUDE CAN BOOST MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH. IN THIS YEAR OF GREAT SORROW AND PROFOUND TRAUMA, LET US ALSO FIND REASONS TO GIVE THANKS.

testify at the Legislature. With the Capitol and most government offices closed to the public, everyone has had to meet by phone or videoconference.

We learned much about public health and expanded our vocabulary. We eventually realized that “social distancing”

was not our communal goal, because humans need connections to thrive, but “physical distancing” could keep the coronavirus at bay while allowing opposite-sides-of-the-driveway conversations with neighbors.

We witnessed the adaptability of

the Oregon National Guard. This year saw the guard being deployed overseas, fighting wildfires in Oregon, delivering personal protective equipment and answering phones for the Oregon Employment Department.

We set aside political differences as Oregonians fought those wildfires, rescued neighbors and sought to protect one another's homes and businesses.

We shared a common sorrow at the social, economic and educational losses from the pandemic. We grieved the loss of loved ones to COVID-19, to depression and suicide, and to conditions that went unnoticed or untreated.

We lost businesses and income, or knew others who did. We found that online learning and distance education work for some students and teachers, but not for others, as the pandemic laid bare the inequities in urban and rural Oregon.

Most of all, we rediscovered community.

Bus drivers delivered meals to homebound Oregonians. Schools converted their now-vacant buildings into rest stops for truckers. Musicians banded together for online concerts, and people found ways to support these same musicians, concert workers and others out of work due to event cancellations.

Residents sewed face masks and gave them away. Cities, counties and the state launched loan programs for businesses. Residents stepped up to support their favorite restaurants via takeout and delivery, often adding extra tips in recognition of the staff's lost workdays. Auto dealers purchased gift cards from local restaurants to thank customers for taking a test drive.

Police officers and sheriff's deputies connected with children by reading stories to them on video. We worshipped in different ways, adapting to small-group settings — when they were allowed — and to online religious services.

Compelling research shows that expressing gratitude can boost mental and physical health. In this year of great sorrow and profound trauma, let us also find reasons to give thanks.

Dick Hughes has been covering the Oregon political scene since 1976.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Saddened

In this year 2020, which has but six more weeks left in it, a year of turmoil, dissent, illness and death, I thought that there was nothing else that might happen which would be able to shock, disillusion or depress me. Sadly, I was wrong.

Nov. 22 passed with little to no public notice taken of the anniversary of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. For me, as I am sure for many others, that day in 1963 will live in infamy as much as Dec. 7, 1941, or Sept. 11, 2001.

Every one of us who was alive and at least of school-age on that day, Nov. 22, 1963, will most likely remember exactly where he or she was, or what he or she was doing, when the tragic news first came over the radio and then over television.

I am saddened by the fact that our public discourse has diminished to the level that the media can focus attention on whether it was hair dye or mascara that dripped down Rudy Giuliani's face, but cannot give proper and honorable consideration to, and commemoration of, the death of one of our greatest presidents.

BARRY L. PLOTKIN
Astoria

Our response

I crunched some numbers on Nov. 13 for fun to compare our response to that of another country, New Zealand. The numbers were adjusted to account for differences in populations.

If the U.S. had used the response that New Zealand did for COVID-19, our total to date infections would be a little more than 132,000; not the 10,965,000 that we have had.

Also, the death toll would be about 1,655; not the 249,000 who have died so far. Statistical reports show President Donald Trump's rallies led to 700 deaths of the 30,000 people he helped infect, according to Stanford University researchers.

The New Zealand prime minister was also reelected in a landslide victory, attributed to that country's coronavirus response.

I know how some people hate numbers they don't like, but I thought people ought to know how much better we could have done on this pandemic.

RICK NEWTON
Warrenton



LETTERS WELCOME

Letters should be exclusive to The Astorian. Letters should be fewer than 250 words and must include the writer's name, address and phone number. You will be contacted to confirm authorship. All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar and factual accuracy. Only two letters per writer are allowed each month. Letters written in response

to other letter writers should address the issue at hand and should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Discourse should be civil. Send via email to editor@dailyastorian.com, online at bit.ly/astorianletters, in person at 949 Exchange St. in Astoria or mail to Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 210, Astoria, OR., 97103.

Curious

The “Lean in ... potholes” letter to the editor on Nov. 21 left me curious.

I love that The Astorian prints diverse opinions, especially when they break my previous assumptions. I personally love

the wide range of colors Astoria's businesses and residential areas sport. It's one of the things that makes our town unique.

Whether we like it or not, tourism is important to our town's economy, and standing out from other seaside destinations is beneficial. But I respect that

not everyone feels this way, as this letter reminded me.

I admire the effort the owners of the Odd Fellows Building went to in cultivating public opinion through online voting when they won grant money to repaint their building. Purple wasn't my vote, but I think it looks great — anything was better than the awful Band-Aid color it was before.

Video Horizons might have benefited from this strategy, as I agree that their color scheme isn't as aesthetically pleasing as the rest of the block on Duane Street.

Is there an accessible way to gain community opinion and support when privately owned businesses make changes to their building facades? Should they bother? I don't know the answer, but in my opinion, any paint job is better than a derelict beige, white or off-white one.

ANDREA McDERMED
Astoria