

Campus Love, Support during COVID-19

Cascade Connections

by Dr. Karin Edwards



There's an African proverb that says, "A mind, once stretched, never returns to its original state." I would like to suggest a corollary for the COVID-19 era: A society, stretched by a pandemic, cannot return to its original state.

Our collective response to the novel coronavirus outbreak resembles the character of the American nation itself -- which is to say, it has brought to the fore both the best and worst aspects of the human spirit. We have seen selfless acts of generosity, kindness, and self-sacrifice; and we have seen foolish displays of bravado, risk-taking and willful ignorance.

And we have seen, as we always do in times of crisis, the worst consequences of the pandemic fall upon members of marginalized communities.

Amid the chaotic landscape of life during a pandemic, one undisputed fact stands out: No one is beyond the reach of COVID-19. The novel coronavirus kills rich, poor, black, white, brown, straight, queer, conservative, and liberal people alike, with elegant precision. It respects neither boundaries nor borders, neither status nor privilege. The virus has come for us all.

Thus it is that, during widespread suffering, we have seen an outburst of goodwill and unity that evokes the best memories of


the period immediately following the September 11 attacks. People are sewing protective masks in their homes. Neighbors are checking up on each other, offering to make shopping trips on behalf of the most vulnerable. Friends and loved ones are reaching out to each other, across the distance, just to offer words of love and encouragement. Every day, we see the outpouring of gratitude and appreciation for the unflagging efforts of front-line health care workers.

At the Cascade Campus of Portland Community College, where I am campus president, the acts and gestures of love and support are enough to bring a tear to my eye. The Cascade Food Pantry -- which distributes thousands of pounds of food per month in the best of times -- after being forced to shut its doors, has arranged to mail grocery store gift cards to needy students in lieu of food. Prior to PCC closing its physical facilities, staff rushed to get laptops and other necessary pieces of technology in the hands of students so that they could continue their studies from their homes. Our Campus Learning Garden staff are bagging and distributing fresh produce to students. Faculty, staff, and students alike have set up networks of support in order to stay connected.

And all of us who are staying home are, to one degree or another, sacrificing mobility, income, and all the social interactions that help define the human experience, all to "flatten the curve" and protect those most vulnerable to COVID-19.

With all this altruism going on, one


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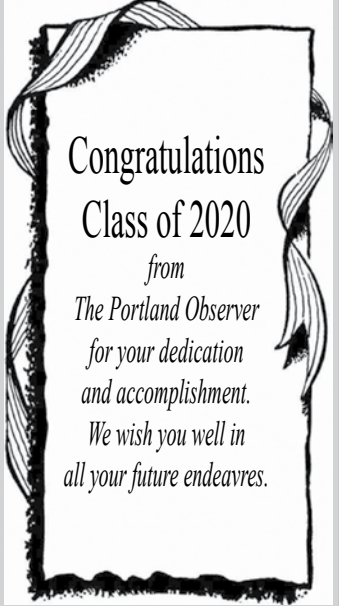
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