

The busy season for everyone

A recent chance dinner meeting with a friend from high school made me ponder the subject of work. We had both worked on a truck farm, growing and harvesting fruits and vegetables starting at age 14.

The months of June and July are perhaps our most productive in terms of work accomplished in our farming operation. We literally work seven days a week and generally 10 to 12 hours (sometimes more) a day.

We are usually finishing our first cutting of hay at the beginning of June and deliver the bales somewhere for much of the month. We are frequently fertilizing our summer fallow land in preparation for September wheat planting and rod-weeding, the same to set our moisture line and to kill weeds germinated by the spring rains — which have come in happy abundance this year.

We are also tuning up our combine in preparation for mid-to-late July wheat harvest and, by the second week of July, are trying to put up a second cutting of alfalfa hay in the mornings and evenings before or after “work.”

For the past decade or so, I have also been pursuing a career as a builder and usually have a project or two in various states of completion or, to the chagrin of a few owners, incompletion.

My son, Willie, 20, therefore must bear the brunt of the farm workload. This responsibility has forced him to eschew such

things as video games, summer baseball beyond Little League, and any semblance of time spent in the house during daylight hours.

He has driven combine since age 11, done most of our seeding since age 13 and has been custom haying since age 15. One direct result of this lifestyle choice has been the opportunity he has had to acquire — as George Carlin would say — “stuff.” He currently owns four pickups, three trucks, five tractors, two sets of grain drills, two hay rakes, a swather, a combine and a shop full of tools. He has one more payment due on a hay baler ordered brand new but still cannot legally own a six-pack of beer. He leases 1,600 acres of beautiful, bountiful Helix farmland.

His sister Annie, 16, has become one of his greatest supporters. When not occupied by her summer activities of lawn mowing and tending the family garden plot, she helps him load the hay wagons and drives a second tractor raking hay when the disappearance of dew by 7 a.m. requires two outfits to be going by 5:45 a.m.

She is also readily available to give big brother a ride home or a lift to another field after dropping off a trap-wagon, tractor or an implement in preparation for the next operation.

A recent development furthering her ability to help has been turning 16 and acquiring a driver’s license. While this little card is by no means as important to one’s

ability to operate a vehicle or tractor as is common sense, a degree of caution and the ability to work a clutch, it is nonetheless recommended and endorsed by mothers everywhere.

Annie has made a few purchases to celebrate the fruits of her labors (a second guitar, another lawnmower, a trailer to haul great-grandpa’s inherited riding mower, etc.) but has been somewhat frugal in establishing a nest egg to someday augment her financial situation in pursuit of a college degree at an as-yet-undetermined institution of higher learning, preferably hundreds (or perhaps thousands) of miles away from the hayfield both literally and metaphorically.

I would never claim that my kids are without fault. After all, half of their DNA is mine. I would also not be so ignorant as to fail to recognize that there are kids everywhere who work hard and there have always been examples to prove this (think of J.R. Simplot).

I am, however, proud of my own two kids and glad that they have heeded their old man’s admonishment to work hard and be honest. Free college for everyone might be a grand pursuit, but I believe choosing a college you can afford and working at the same time as you are attending school is much more practical advice. My college faculty advisor once told me that “equality of opportunity does not guarantee equality of circumstance” — nor, I would add, should it.

Too often I find myself in the role of a curmudgeonly old grouch. I’m actually a fairly pleasant optimist most of the time who genuinely enjoys visiting with people from all walks of life and varying points of view. What I do not enjoy, however, is the



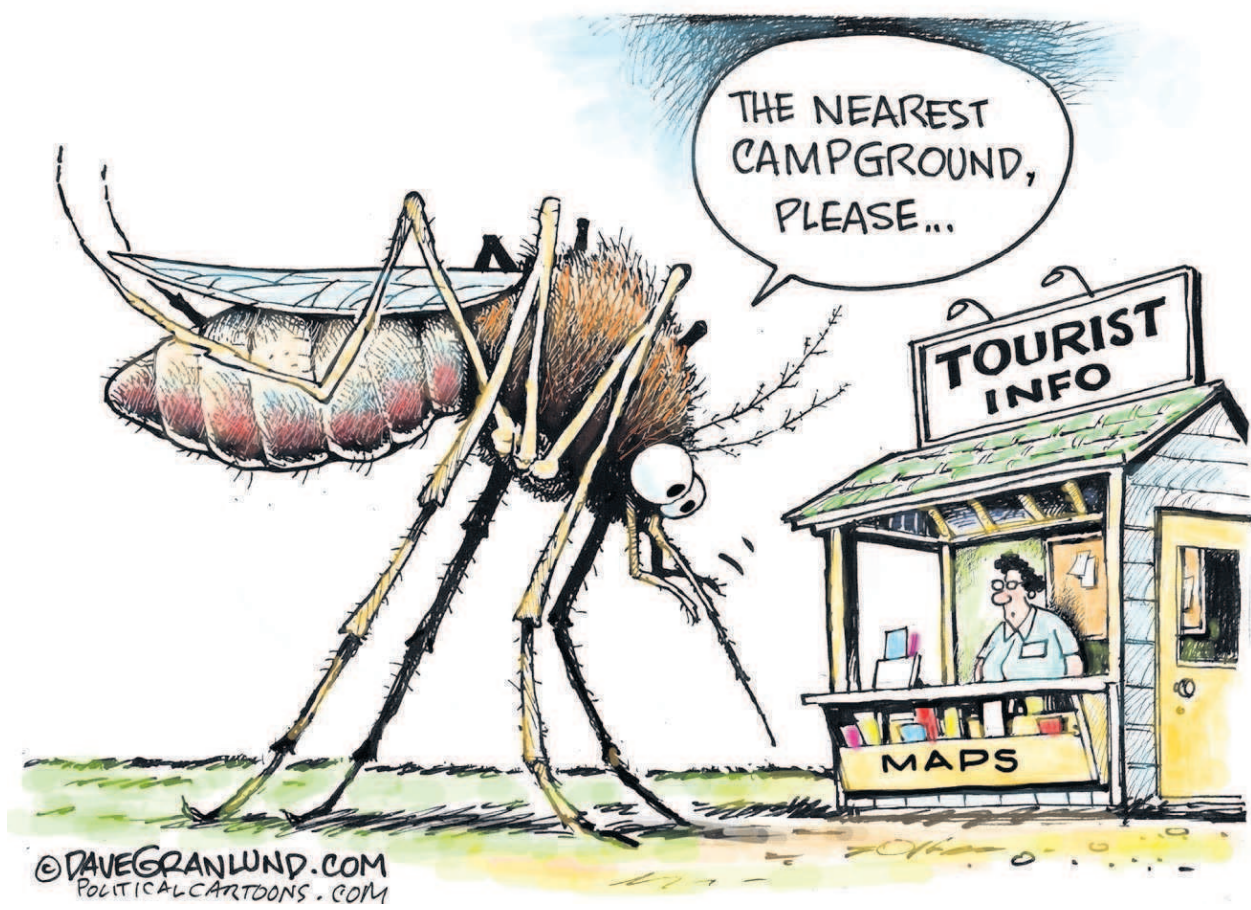
MATT WOOD
FROM THE TRACTOR

mantra preached by some that we should all be entitled to the same comforts and conveniences no matter how hard we work — or don’t work.

Thomas Jefferson was at his wisest when he observed that the harder he worked the luckier he became.

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Matt Wood is his son’s hired man and his daughter’s biggest fan. He lives on a farm near Helix, where he collects antiques and friends.

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Lessons learned from minimum wage hike

By The San Diego Union-Tribune

A University of Washington study of the fallout from Seattle’s sharp increase in the minimum wage may have grim implications for the big increases now being phased in in California and in San Diego.

From 2014 to this year, Seattle raised its minimum wage from \$9.47 to \$15 an hour, a 58 percent increase. The study found that last year — when the minimum wage reached \$13 an hour — job losses mounted and the number of hours went down in affected industries, costing the average low-wage worker about \$125 a month. This contradicted previous

studies which generally showed little or no effect from modest minimum-wage hikes.

The study excluded multisite employers (or about 38 percent of all city workers) and has not been peer-reviewed, but because researchers had access to an unusually large database — and because Seattle’s wage hike was so big — some economists are ready to conclude it bears out fears the nationwide push for higher minimum wages would have unintended and unpleasant consequences.

In 2014, with minimum wage at \$8, California leaders approved measures that will steadily increase its minimum wage to \$15 by 2022. In

2016, San Diego voters approved a measure that at least initially phased in even bigger minimum wage hikes — to \$11.50 this year — and indexed the wage to inflation beginning in 2019. Perhaps the Golden State’s results will be different than Seattle’s. Or perhaps the warnings that higher minimum wages will lead to more automation and fewer jobs will come true.

Whatever happens, the best response to income inequality isn’t a steadily climbing minimum wage. It’s an education system that puts much more emphasis on high-value job skills. That should be a bigger focus before too many people are left behind.

Quick takes

Hermiston brush fire caused by fireworks

A very good reason to keep the weeds down and lawns maintained.
— Any Bakker

There is so much fuel for wildfires. My neighbors are cited but still not in compliance with codes.
— Bc Clarity Carlton-Martin

No Fourth of July fireworks in Pendleton

And that’s sad our city cares more about whiskey, beer or music more than family activity. Good job Eagles for not doing it this year. For real, thank you for the years past. Pendleton needs to get their priorities in right place
— Jean Tyke Matson

The only problem with Pendleton is the people that want to blame everything on someone else. The

reason for no fireworks, is the people of Pendleton didn’t feel like donating to the Eagles fund for the show. Its not the Round-Up’s fault, it’s not the businesses’ fault, it’s not Wildhorse’s fault, and it’s not the governments fault, it’s the lazy, whiny people of Pendleton who are at fault.
— Chris Schuening

Rainbow Gathering hits high gear near Seneca

My parents followed the rainbow people. They exploit every resource around them. What hypocrisy. My parents were disgusted and never returned.
— Christopher Waine

They came to Woodland, Washington, years ago and let me tell you the mess they left, the things they stole from the stores and all the ruckus they caused was unbelievable. Granted I’m sure not all of them were to blame but for the

amount of damage that was caused, it was a good portion of them.
— Megan Taylor

This is so wrong ... people enjoying themselves.
— Anthony Loveday

West Nile virus found in Umatilla County

Yeah it’s because from just above the mouth the water barely flows. Dam it up with an overflow culvert to keep it flowing instead of blasting chemical agents and the problem would almost eliminate itself.
— Brandon Warren

The mosquitoes are so bad this year. I’m trying everything I know to keep them at bay in my yard, but nothing is working.
— Ele Creel

Be aware if you notice an increase in dead birds around your house.
— Kindra Shalynn Haimberger

Some hunters just aren’t

R ighteous condemnation of hunting and hunters has become standard fare in America, and as our 21st century citizens separate themselves ever further from the natural world, their arguments and stereotypes become increasingly bizarre. As an example, I cite Bill Maher’s HBO show, “Real Time.” I think Maher deserves respect for speaking harsh truth to power, often in the vulgar language that, these days, power so often deserves. But on one recent night he dismissed hunters as mere sadists who enjoy slaughtering chipmunks, and to that I take offense.

The habits and mindsets of hunters vary greatly, and as evidence of this I’ll present portraits of two men who represent the extremes. The first, an educated man named Miller, always hunts mountain quail, the most challenging North American game bird. The birds earn their name by living in the steep, high-elevation habitat of the West Coast, usually in forests of oak, pine and fir, often near creeks where thick brush affords them heavy cover.

I’ve gone with Miller to the isolated area he favors, a vast, grassy valley far from any trace of civilization. It’s a two-hour uphill walk from anywhere you can park to get there. A healthy creek courses through the valley, and quail are often found in willow thickets and stands of buck brush close to the water. Once flushed by a dog, the birds fly up steep mountainsides into old-growth forest. Chasing them is exhausting work. Miller calculates that he covers at least 15 miles of rugged country for every quail he takes home.

“Anybody who eats meat should have to kill it once in a while,” he says. “And I believe in working for my food.”

Miller also calculates that by breaking up coveys when he hunts, he has more than doubled the valley’s mountain quail population. There were two large coveys when he discovered this place, and now, years later, there are five.

The second hunter, a lawyer named James, enjoys shooting pheasants. He invited me to accompany him once, to what he told me was his favorite place. It turned out to be a 10-acre stubble field with a 1950s ranch-style house near the middle of it. We parked in a paved lot



MICHAEL BAUGHMAN
Comment

and walked into a makeshift office reeking of cigarette smoke. A smiling man sitting behind a cluttered desk greeted James and explained that everything would be ready in 10 minutes.

James and I sat on a couch to wait, making small talk. Behind our host was a window, and I watched a pickup truck roll across the field and stop no more than 100 yards from the house. A young man climbed out and, one by one, lifted pheasants

out of a large crate in the truck-bed. He held each bird by the legs and swung it around in fast circles upside down for several seconds, then

dropped it into the stubble. I counted 20 dizzy and disoriented pheasants, all of them deposited on less than an acre of ground.

At that point I remembered an appalling account I’d read of former Vice President Dick Cheney bragging to friends about shooting 75 pheasants on a single afternoon. I’d wondered how that could be possible. Now I thought I understood.

Our host told us we could hunt. The fat rooster pheasants, all without tails, having spent their lives crammed into cages, could barely get off the ground. James began shooting them, while I purposely missed my shots. We were watched by the proprietor and the young man from the pickup, and the black Lab that retrieved the dead and struggling birds brought the birds to them. They stuffed the animals into a burlap sack. By then I’d stopped shooting. I’d rather have been in a farmer’s chicken coop with a hatchet.

In less than half an hour, James killed all 20 pheasants provided. All I wanted to do was to leave.

But first, back inside the house, we had to wait until the birds had been run through a plucking machine. While that was happening, James wrote out a \$500 check and handed it to the man in charge, both of them smiling happily now.

“Sorry you didn’t care for it much,” James said as we walked to the car. “But that’s my idea of fun.”

Fun? Not so much, and whatever we did that day, please don’t call it hunting.

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One of the great lessons of the Twitter age is that much can be summed up in just a few words. Here are some of this week’s takes. Tweet yours @Tim_Trainor or email editor@eastoregonian.com, and keep them to 140 characters.