

Pythagoras in diapers

A couple of years ago my wife and I were in the Pendleton Convention Center, watching a basketball game between the Coyotes and the Cougars. The Cougars were chomping some serious Coyote butt, 40-21. During a foul shot at the other end of the court (after Coyote #22 was jerked to the floor by his ponytail), we scurried up the out-of-bounds line and wedged ourselves into the fourth row of the bleachers behind a group of teenage girls with greasypaint paw prints on their cheeks and wearing white T-shirts emblazoned with Magic Marker slogans like “Scott is soooo hot” and “Number Nine is mine. Hands off.”

A couple of minutes later, while I was watching the Cougar point guard bring the ball up the floor with that stop-and-go, dribble between-the-legs, shuck-and-jive stuff that nobody but the Globetrotters tried to do until 20 years ago, Caty nudged me in the ribs and pointed with a finger in her lap to the girl sitting in front of her who sported raspberry Koolaid hair, designer-mangled jeans, and a real live three-month-old baby balanced between her knees.

The baby girl (I assumed because of the pink headband and dress) was staring up in the trussworks that supported the domed roof of the basketball court, her eyes following the glulams from where they anchored to the wall plates, up to the center of the court and then back down, back up, back down, like a tiny engineer figuring snow load. I am a father and I know that my kids are way smarter than I, so it was not difficult to believe that the child actually understood what it was seeing. My mind, as is its propensity, skipped across

the blue pond of the little mathematician’s eyes right into the story of Pythagoras and the bean field.

Pythagoras was a Greek, born about 575 B.C., on the island of Samos in the Aegean Sea. At the age of 30, after having studied the teachings of Thales (“You can’t stick the same foot in the same river twice”), and having run into difficulties with the local authorities about his idea that maybe Greece wasn’t the actual center of the universe, Pythagoras emigrated to the southern portion of what is today the Italian peninsula, to a small Greek settlement called Crotona.

Lacking any stonemason or olive picker skills, Pythagoras set himself up as a teacher of mathematics. Math was a new science, and he soon had 300 students in his unusual school. For instance, for the first five years of enrollment, the student was required to maintain absolute silence in the classroom, to wear only a short skirt, male or female, to adhere to the diet of strict, non-ovo (eggs), non-lacto (milkshakes) vegetarianism, and to never, ever, on punishment of expulsion, eat a single, solitary bean.

Pythagoras left no written record of why he was legumaphobic. Aristotle, roughly his contemporary, does list a few reasons why Pyth asked his students to abstain from beans, including “because they are destructive” “because they are like genitals,” “because they are like the gates of Hades, the stems alone of all plants being without joints,” and because “a chewed bean placed in the sun smells of human semen or of murderously spilt human blood.” Aristotle also notes that

the students were forbidden to touch white roosters.

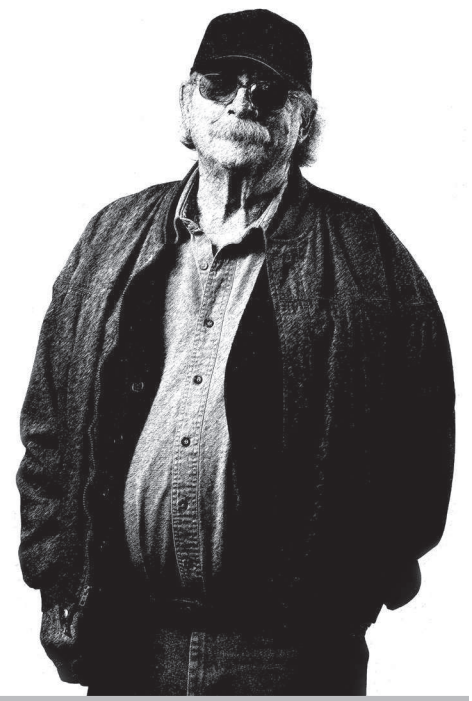
But Pyth and his students did figure out some important stuff. Any concrete worker laying out a foundation knows the Pythagorean Theorem: In a right triangle (one with a ninety-degree angle), the sum of the squares of the lengths of the short sides equals the square of the hypotenuse, or long side. Or: A times A, plus B times B, equals C times C. (Concrete workers know this as the 3,4,5 rule)

Pyth and the kids took the relationship between numbers a few steps farther, suggesting that there existed a harmonic relationship between the objects in the night sky, and that if a person studied the heavens while imagining a bunch of triangles in the sky, one must come to the conclusion that the ground one was standing on was just a big ball spinning in space.

Bigshots don’t like to hear that the ground they walk on is not the focal point of all divine activity. The churchy Italian ruling class took issue with the new cosmology, and, finally, when Pythagoras was in his early 80s, the bosses sent troops out to find him and get rid of him. It is testimony to his dietary restrictions that he was able to flee at such an age. And flee he did, with 10 of his top students, toward the southwest into the flatland agricultural areas of southern Italy.

He almost made it to safety, to the home of an influential father of one of his little math wizards. When Pythagoras arrived at the edge of the guy’s farm, however, with the posse hot on his tail, he stopped, sat down in the dirt, refused to move, and waited to be caught. The father was a bean farmer. Rather than set foot in a field of beans, Pythagoras was apprehended, and executed, in Metapontum, Italy, in 493 B.C.

There is a footnote to this story. Recently, a couple of scholars, Robert



J.D. SMITH
FROM THE HEADWATERS
OF DRY CREEK

Brumbaugh and Jessica Schwartz, have made the argument that the Pythagorean prohibition of beans is best understood as a “commonsense injunction aimed at preventing acute hemolytic anemia in individuals with a hereditary deficiency of glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase in their red blood cells, or favism.” In other words, certain people under the age of 15, about 2 in 10,000, are allergic to fava beans, even to the touch. Those were the types of beans grown universally in pre-Christian Italy. So maybe the old mathematician was not totally off his rocker after all, and sacrificed his life to save a couple of his young students.

J.D. Smith is an accomplished writer and jack-of-all-trades. He lives in Athena.

YOUR VIEWS

Murdock understands role of public safety

Please join me in voting to re-elect George Murdock as Umatilla County commissioner, Position 1.

As the undersheriff for Umatilla County, I and Sheriff Rowan have worked closely with Mr. Murdock and our other county commissioners to grow and improve the sheriff’s office. Mr. Murdock understands the important role that public safety plays in the vitality of our county, and has made it one of his top priorities.

He has a wide variety of knowledge and experience in education, business, and management, to name a few. George is approachable and is easy to work with. I’m proud to call George and his lovely wife, Donna, my friends.

With your support, we can look forward to working with Commissioner Murdock for many years to come!

Jim Littlefield
Hermiston

Say no to George Murdock

I voted for George as commissioner in the last race, but will not vote for him this time. You see, I received a flyer yesterday from the Re-Elect George campaign, and I say it lacks of integrity and honesty. Let me explain:

George had a photo of the Harkenrider Center dedication with two of our Senior Center board of directors, Willard and Judy Fordice. Nice, but the photo was taken several hours after the dedication that George did not attend. I know, I was at the dedication. He was at a wedding and showed up right about the time the Fordices were closing up. He and his wife wanted a tour. The Fordices obliged. Then George pulled a photo op and left.

In my five years working on this project, have I ever seen or heard of George’s involvement? I did not see him on the long range planning committee, the site selection committee, or the numerous times I and others went to city hall to council meetings garnering support from the council for the center. In addition, nor has he aided in the financial aspect through grants or personal contributions, like many of us in the project have done. Just a shame!

It is sad when a politician uses these types of photos to make it look like he had any tangential involvement to the process, which he did not. I will vote for Rick Pullen now, as well as my family and friends who know well about how the Senior Center came to be. It was from my and others’ steadfast, daunting, and long involvement of hundreds of personal hours that this happened, and not your one photo op in the center, which is dishonest.

George, you were dishonest in this flyer and integrity lacking, and people in the county should send you packing.

Perry W. Hawkins
Hermiston

Vote no on Measure 105

Part of the state and local taxes I pay fund public safety: our state police, county sheriff, and city police. It is a big job and we need to keep those resources focused on keeping our highways and communities safe. Measure 105 would expand that job without providing additional funding and without improving public safety. It removes the prohibition that keeps state, county, and local law enforcement agencies from looking for or arresting people whose only violation is being here without proper documentation.

Our state and local resources can already work with INS when needed to respond to crimes. We don’t need them to do the work of INS by detaining people just because they are undocumented. People who aren’t documented commit crimes at a much lower rate than the general population; seeking them out and deporting them is not a priority for protecting us. Part of my federal taxes pay for immigration management. That work should stay at the federal level so we have a clear picture of what it costs and a clear picture of the extent to which our immigration system needs reform.

I am a Christian and my religion, like many others, tells me to treat my neighbor as I treat myself. Everyone

benefits when everyone can live without fear, regardless of the circumstances under which they came to Oregon. Everyone benefits when everyone can approach law enforcement officials for help without worrying about being detained because of lack of documentation. Everyone benefits when no one is asked, based on the color of their skin, to prove they are here with documentation.

Measure 105 is not in the best interest of Oregonians. I urge you to vote no on this issue.

Lindsay Winsor
Milton-Freewater

Walden has failed to use his powers for good

The *East Oregonian*’s endorsement of Greg Walden to represent ORD2 in Congress is a great disappointment. Yes, Walden holds significant power in Congress. But when that power is used to further the interests of out-of-state corporate donors over the well-being of this district’s citizens, he is part of the problem, not part of the solution.

The most notable problem is his leadership in support of a piece-by-piece dismantling of the Affordable Care Act. The ACA is a step in the right direction toward ensuring that everyone has health care coverage, and without fear of denial or higher premiums for age or preexisting conditions. Other problems, to name a few, include Walden’s votes in support of tax cuts for the rich and against a livable minimum wage, votes for the fossil fuel industry and against renewable energy, and votes for cutbacks to Social Security and Medicare, paycheck investments entrusted to the government, which most have paid into throughout our working years.

Walden proudly touts how much legislation he has sponsored and passed, but is it the best legislation for the issues facing our district and country? My answer is a resounding no. Why is the opioid crisis only an issue worthy of legislation now that it’s election time? Why are tariffs and the resulting government aid better than our farmers’ being able to profitably sell their wheat and other crops?

A vote for Walden is a vote to continue the mean-spirited policies of the current administration, policies which create fear, distrust, and chaos — both nationally and internationally — policies which favor the rich at the expense of the ordinary citizen. Continuing these policies does not create the Oregon or America that I want for myself or my family and friends.

When I cast my ballot, I’m voting for a return to policies that support the ordinary citizen! I’m voting for clean energy, for environmental protections, for health care for all, for humane immigration policies, for laws which do not apply solely to women, and for laws which maintain separation of church and state. I’m voting for Jamie McLeod-Skinner. I urge you to join me.

Helena Wolfe
Hermiston

Murdock doesn’t know how to coast

Our vote is for Commissioner Murdock.

In a recent letter to the editor it was noted that the candidate running against Mr. Murdock “is not a candidate who will sit back and coast like his competitor” and “he truly loves Umatilla County, not just a select group or city whom he can benefit from.” These statements are far from reality.

We have found Commissioner Murdock to be a man of his word, sets goals and gets things done. Commissioner Murdock is a kind and generous person who has the time, desire and experience to serve our county well. He is thoughtful of all community members, is not afraid to make tough decisions and stands behind them.

His altruism should also be noted but Mr. Murdock needs no fanfare. His work in community action and Rotary is a small glimpse of working and doing for others. If you want a commissioner who has never “coasted” through life or work, re-elect Commissioner Murdock.

Roger and Paula Hall
Pendleton

Measure 102 will ease housing crisis across Oregon

By DOUG CHRISMAN

Across our state, Oregonians are experiencing a housing crisis. As one of our state’s leading affordable housing developers, we believe we have a responsibility to ensure that everyone in our state has a safe and affordable place to call home. Chrisman Development has rehabilitated over a thousand affordable apartment homes across our state, particularly here in Eastern Oregon, for seniors, people with disabilities, and families just starting out.

Our work is focused on ensuring we maintain our affordable housing for the long term. Many of our properties were built decades ago, and have been the only source for affordable housing in some of our smaller communities. Every week, our property managers hear from members of our communities, looking for an affordable place to call home.

Over the years, we’ve learned that putting together the pieces of funding needed to finance affordable housing is a large and complicated puzzle, and we don’t always have all the pieces. In fact, every year Oregon leaves some federal housing dollars, a very important piece of the puzzle, off the table. Money from the federal government goes unspent in Oregon each year because we don’t have the local matching funds required to unlock those resources.

Why? One reason is that Oregon’s constitution prohibits local governments from working with affordable housing developers to build affordable rental homes with locally approved bond dollars. This constitutional ban means that if local governments want to use locally approved bond dollars, they must own and control any housing built with bonds, and cannot use those dollars to leverage other resources — like federal tax credits — to build affordable housing. It also means that local governments cannot access the expertise of affordable housing developers. We’ve built that extensive experience in building and maintaining affordable housing over our decades of work, and we’d like more Oregonians to benefit from what we know.

Put another way: when we’re putting together the puzzle to build new or maintain existing affordable housing, we can’t use local bonds to finish the picture. Right now in Oregon, voters can approve bonds for affordable housing, but our law is outdated and simply makes it too expensive for smaller local governments to build homes. That’s why federal matching funds are so vital to making progress, and why we’re advocating for Measure 102. It is a bipartisan solution that would easily fix the problem, and it would fix it without a tax increase. It simply makes good sense.

Measure 102 is a very small change to the Oregon Constitution that could yield huge results. Local governments from around the state would have the flexibility to build more affordable homes in our communities, while ensuring accountability.

We know our state also has a strong system of accountability in place to ensure that affordable housing dollars are well spent — they target people with the lowest incomes in our community, and our system of accountability ensures that the housing is affordable for the long term. Ultimately, this is about ensuring all Oregonians have a place to call home. We believe it’s not only our responsibility, but the community’s as well. We urge you to vote yes on Measure 102.

Doug Chrisman is the president of Chrisman Development, Inc. in Enterprise.