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PINION

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OUR VIEW

Tip of the hat,
kick in the pants

A big tip of the hat to several organizations and volunteers who stepped up this past week to help out during the holiday season.

A big shout-out to Blue Mountain Community College for hosting a Christmas Eve meal in Pendleton, and to the Community Fellowship Dinner committee for its meal on Christmas Day in Hermiston.

The individuals involved in the food drive at the Fellowship Hall at the Milton Seventh-day Adventist Church also deserve to be lauded, as they helped more than 200 families as Christmas approached.

The efforts show that spreading holiday cheer was common in our local area, and such events as the Giving Tree initiatives at Hamley’s and Rite Aid show community spirit is strong. That should be good news for us all.

These events are also just one more example of what caring community

members can do when they unite for a good cause.

A kick in the pants to Washington state lawmaker Rep. Matt Shea, who apparently played an active role in the 2016 standoff at the Malheur Wildlife Refuge near Burns, and then journeyed throughout the West meeting with far-right extremist groups.

Shea was suspended from the Washington state House Republican caucus last week and that was the right move. When one is elected to office, whether it is at the federal, state or local level, voters expect a certain degree of decorum and thought to be exhibited. Shea’s efforts were neither.

A tip of the hat to all of us out there that have made, or will make, New Year’s resolutions. We wish all good luck with reaching their goals in 2020. The new year is, indeed, a good time to look toward the future and make a decision for change. Making a real change takes dedication and commitment, and we hope all of those who



Staff photos by Kathy Aney
Micah Olivera delivers plates to diners during the BMCC Christmas Eve dinner on Monday afternoon at the Pendleton Convention Center.

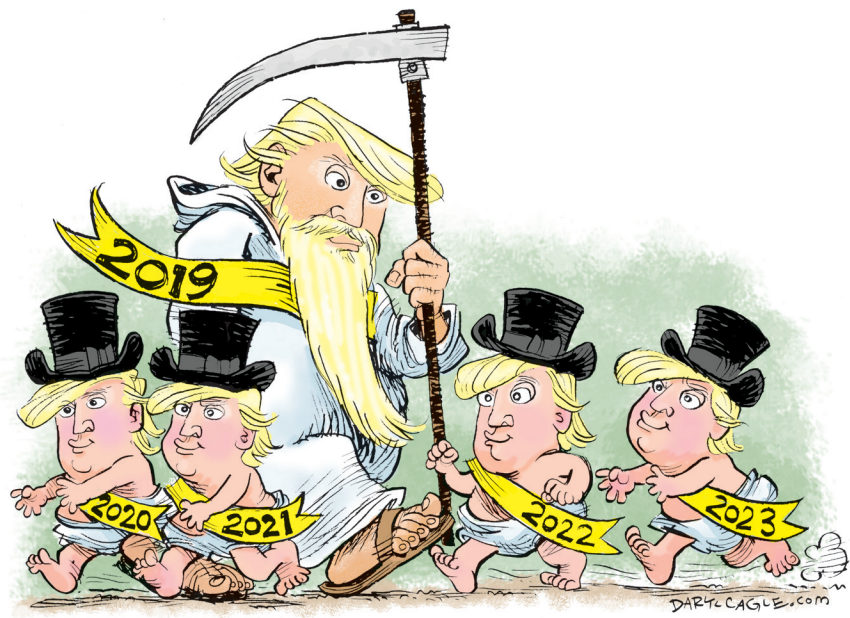
do decide to go down the New Year’s resolutions route are successful.

A kick in the pants to the individual or individuals who stole, and then torched a Les Schwab Tire Center service truck last week in Milton-Freewater.

The Milton-Freewater police and the Umatilla County Sheriff’s Office are investigating the matter, and we

hope that their efforts will prove fruitful soon.

This particular crime was noteworthy because of the way it was executed. Such a willful display of criminal intent should be a shock to the community. If anyone has information about this crime, they should contact the Milton-Freewater police or the sheriff’s office.



OTHER VIEWS

Clean energy now for Oregon

After Oregon’s Republican senators left their jobs during the last legislative session, instead of working on our clean energy needs, we need all of our state representatives ready to show up and produce results on clean energy during the short session beginning Feb. 3.

There is talk already of a possible repeat walkout or other avoidance tactic, despite the urgent need for us as a state to address climate change. Our legislators, all of them, need to hear the clear message that we need and expect robust state legislation to address climate change this legislative session.

Our homes, environment, and livelihoods are already threatened. Our children and grandchildren are rightfully fearful for their futures. Further inaction and/or roadblocking in the Oregon Legislature is absolutely unacceptable.

Sen. Chuck Thomsen and Rep. Anna Williams, I urge you to commit to passing meaningful legislation this session to fully transition Oregon to a clean energy economy. We need a firm commitment and a firm delivery date, with clear implementation plans and enforceable benchmarks along the way. Nothing less will move us out of the climate crisis we have collectively created.

**Lara Dunn
Hood River**

FROM THE TRACTOR SEAT

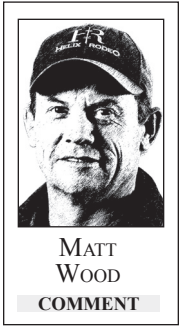
Traditions are what
bind us together

Traditions are an important binding mechanism in the human experience and oral history is an integral component in passing traditions from one generation to countless subsequent generations.

A few nights ago, I sat in a church pew next to my son, Willie, and, upon extinguishing our candles used to illuminate the words to “Silent Night,” I commented to him that our family had likely been singing that song for more than 150 years. The hymn was composed in 1818 by Austrian church organist Franz Gruber to complement or, more correctly stated, complete, a poem written two years earlier by pastor Joseph Mohr. Even though those two fellows were Catholic, the song quickly spread to be used by other denominations throughout Europe.

Many of my ancestors were practicing Lutherans — the “original” Protestants. My maternal great-great-grandparents were reindeer-herders from Lapland, the northernmost, sparsely populated region of Finland. Family lore states that they — like millions of other immigrants to the “New World” — left their ancestral home near Rovaniemi in the 1880s and settled in the Blue Mountains above Weston, where the hills and trees reminded them of home. They became firmly planted in their new surroundings and raised 10 children in a house comprised of a kitchen, 2 or 3 bedrooms, a fireplace and little else. They cut firewood to sell to their “plains” dwelling neighbors and relatives and raised cattle and (hopefully) enough hay and vegetables to get everybody through winter so they could start the whole process all over again come spring.

My paternal great-great-grandparents, on the other hand, were “Volga Deutsch” — ethnic Germans who relocated to the Volga River area in what is now Ukraine. They were allowed, at least for a time, to keep their German language, heritage and religious practices intact as they helped “modernize” this region drained by Europe’s largest river and controlled by Russia, which at the time of my ancestors’ migration was under the rule of former German princess-turned-czarina Catherine the Great. My ancestors were mechanically inclined, innovative wheat farmers who emigrated to Bruderheim, Alberta, Canada, when the geopolitical winds of change blew in and the Russian Crown decided that not only were more farmer/soldiers needed by the Army, but they needed a few of their work horses, too. Willie and I have both decided that if the military decided to confiscate any of our “modern



horsepower” (in fact, old Caterpillar tractors) that we, too, would be slightly more than suspicious and perturbed.

A few vestiges of the traditional practices of my forebearers remain evident on our place today. We are still growing wheat and pasturing cattle, although the bovines belong to the neighbors. We are still routinely breaking farm equipment and repairing it, although the blacksmith shop of Great-Great-Grandpa Wilhelm has been supplanted by a portable welder, and just as was the case with our Laplander and Volga Deutsch kinfolk, we cast a cautious eye toward Russian leaders, especially those who are former KGB agents.

During the Christmas season, we practice other traditions that we now have in common with many of our modern neighbors. In the spirit of Clark Griswold (contrary to popular belief, our local Helix high school is not named for him but, rather, for our town’s former doctor, John Griswold, who died in 1922 the year before our “new” high school opened) we hang lights on the garage and chicken coop. We also trekked to the Blue Mountains and, just down the road from my Finnish great-great-grandfather’s place, cut a Christmas tree and brought it home.

I discovered in my rudimentary research in the World Book Encyclopedia and that new-fangled “World Wide Web,” the Christmas tree tradition has its origins in England about 200 years ago. According to the National Christmas Tree Association, Oregon is the largest Christmas tree producer in the United States with approximately 5 million of the nearly 30 million Christmas trees sold annually in the U.S. coming from our state.

There are roughly 350,000 acres planted to Christmas trees in the U.S. and, on average, it takes 7 years for a tree to reach its typical, marketable height of 6 or 7 feet.

Incidentally, another family tradition of ours is watching the Charlie Brown Christmas cartoon from 1965, which includes, along with some goofy kid humor and refreshingly basic pre-CGI animation, Linus’ simple, yet eloquent, soliloquy about the first Christmas. Apparently that special also prompted a precipitous decline in the sale of aluminum Christmas trees, something that turned out to be a flash-in-the-pan fad rather than a tradition.

Matt Wood, a community columnist for the East Oregonian, lives and farms near Helix.

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