

DEAN
RIDINGS

OTHER VIEWS

Who cares about public notices? You should

One of the great things about living in the U.S. is that our city and county governments are required to keep their citizens informed about their actions. One of the ways they do this is through public notices — the informational notices that have been deemed to be of importance to local constituents. They are required by law to be disseminated by an independent third party to a broad audience within the community.

An example of a public notice is a request to rezone a piece of property from residential to commercial. The ramifications of such government action are obvious, and it's in the public's interest to be able to monitor and provide input into such activities. Public notices are currently required to be published in the newspaper.

There have been recent attempts in several states to change the law so that public notices are no longer required to be published in newspapers. The motivation for eliminating the newspaper publication requirement is typically from one of two sources:

- Sometimes it comes from a legislator who doesn't agree with the editorial position of the newspaper and may seek to remove public notices as a way to get back at them.
- And sometimes, it is a sincere approach to save the city or county money.

While saving money seems to make sense at first blush, when you weigh the impact on the community — losing transparency and the ability to keep citizens informed — the costs are minimal and worth the investment.

Public notices have been around since the first Congress, and newspapers have been the designated recipient of public notices since the beginning, when radio, TV and the internet didn't exist. We now have dozens, if not hundreds of media choices; there are more forms of communication than ever before. With such a multitude of choices it begs the question of what's the most effective medium, and are newspapers still a viable option? Broadcast TV, cable and radio often have a representative audience. However, it just isn't cost effective to produce ads and buy airtime for public notices, and those ads don't explain the complex issues as well. Plus, it isn't feasible to go back and watch a public notice ad that ran in an earlier time period.

What about a city or county just posting the notices to their own website? This is the most significant challenge that newspapers often face in the public notice debate, but this carries two significant problems:

- Government websites don't provide the same proactive notice as newspapers. Most newspapers have at least 10 times the audience that city and county websites have, making newspapers and their websites far more effective.

- Newspapers provide independent verification that the notice was provided. It is not too far of a reach to imagine a city official "burying a notice" on the city's website or limiting the length of time it is seen if the notice was thought to be problematic. When a notice is in the newspaper, the publisher is required by law to verify that the notice is printed according to the statutes. This provides the community with the information it needs. With a newspaper, it is easy to document when the notice was published in print and online, and exactly what it said.

While there are many websites that have large audiences, most are specifically targeted at a specific interest, and not for a local (geographic) community. Public notices, by their very nature, are local and only have value to the audience who live in the impacted area. The laws in most states require that the public notices printed in newspapers must also be posted to the newspaper's website, so the right audience is reached in print and online. Plus, the most interested observers of a community and its government typically read the local newspaper; there are typically few or no other entities that provide news about the city and county. It is rare to find a local website with an audience more interested in the actions of their government than that of the local newspaper.

Newspapers charge a reasonable fee for publishing public notices — usually significantly less than the commercial rates charged to other advertisers. This covers the newspaper's expense and may even provide a small profit. Considering the important role that newspapers play in their community, this is a worthwhile investment in an institution that provides news and information that is rarely available elsewhere.

Let your state legislators know that you value being able to access notices in your newspaper and that they are worth the investment. There is a cost to keeping citizens informed, but the costs of not doing so are much higher!

Dean Ridings is CEO of America's Newspapers, an association committed to explaining, defending and advancing the vital role of newspapers in democracy and civil life.



Life is a team effort — embrace it

LINDSAY
MURDOCK

FROM SUNUP TO SUNDOWN

I could feel it coming. The air began to change and the clouds seemed to take a shape of their own. My bones started to ache. A storm had been lingering on the horizon, and there was no longer a way to avoid it.

It had been there all week. An occasional gust of wind. Periodic downpours. And even a cold front or two. I couldn't stop it. I couldn't detour it. But oh, how I tried.

Maybe if I had closed the curtains. Maybe if I had driven a little to the west and then the north, or even the south — as fast as I could. Maybe if I had chosen different words. Maybe if I hadn't hit send.

Maybe if ...

Life is full of "maybe ifs, and honestly, I'm sick of making excuses. Excuse like:

Maybe if I had gone to bed a little earlier.

Maybe if I had worked a little harder.

Maybe if I had spent my time a bit more wisely.

Maybe if I stopped thinking, and started doing.

Maybe, maybe, maybe.

The storm hit, and it hit hard.

A kink in my neck.

A sore throat.

A birthday party a couple hundred miles away.

A pile of bank statements.

A mountain of school work.

A stack of bills.

A heap (or five) of laundry.

Dirty bathrooms.

Dirty dishes.

Dirty floors.

Dirt, dirt and more dirt.

The wind started blowing first, and as it blew the piles seemed to scatter. Just when I thought I had it figured out how to manage/manipulate one pile at a time, the piles multiplied. And with the wind came tears as well. Tears of exhaustion. Sobs of overwhelming frustration. Gasps for fresh air as the dust and dirt swirled. Pride wiped away.

I sat in the chair in the corner of my bedroom, swiveling it around to face my closet door mirror. I saw so much emotion in the reflection staring back at me. The mom who had just told her two boys to get out of her sight as she cleaned up every little piece of trail mix they had spilled on the floor. The wife who lost it at the kitchen table when no one would say a word to her request. The woman who had kneeled down and scrubbed and scrubbed and scrubbed — only to find more dirt. The daughter who called and couldn't muster up any words between the sobs. The sister who whispered that she was sorry she wasn't there.

And then I saw it. From the corner of my eye. The sign that reminds me to look at the big picture. The framed photo that portrays so much of my life, with one simple word that has kept me here in the storm.

Commitment.

Here. Living this life that is often as far from glamorous as it gets. Living this life that has taught me, and allowed me, to see, look for, and be the good — even in the bad. The reflection that continues to prove so much about who I'm becoming. A woman of weakness, but at the same time, so much strength. A woman filled with fear, but at the same time, so much hope. A woman filled with insecurities, but at the same time, so much confidence.

I had made a mental map of what I thought would happen, what I thought should happen.

I had set some expectations of the people I care most about without even realizing it.

I wanted to be like the point guard on a basketball team, maneuvering my way through each and every conversation, meal, spill, battle, choice and discussion of the day, with a slam dunk and a victory at the end.

Day well done. That's what I wanted.

The funny thing is, every time I set expectations of the who, what, when, where and how in my world, I'm suddenly watching my day happen from the sidelines on a hard, cold bench — alone. Everything I'd been doing and learning at practice had been forgotten. The coach's voice was muffled by the roaring crowd and my own self-talk. Expectations do that to a person, over and over again.

They muffle and hide and even distort the Voice you're supposed to be listening to. I expected some help. I expected respect. I expected some thanks. I expected, I expected, I expected. But when I tried to manipulate, and control, and weigh in with my opinion on every little thing, I suddenly slipped from being the player with the best shot, the best defense, the best ball control, the best free-throw percentage — to a bench warmer. All the things I had been doing to prepare for the "game" were gone.

I had practiced and practiced and practiced. I had spent hours shooting free throws.

I had read play books and spent time each day talking to and listening to the coach. And then the game began, and I forgot everything. I forgot that I was part of a team. I forgot that I actually had to maneuver my way around live human beings with real feelings and emotions instead of a cone. I only saw myself.

Watching myself cry that day did something to me. The mirror seemed to magically show me truth. I saw my reflection, and the pathetic quiver my chin makes when I cry, but I also saw humbleness. I saw brokenness, but I did not see failure. I saw a member of a team who was trying to win the game that day on her own, but I also became a member of a team who knew it was time to ask for a "timeout."

To be a part of a team you have to practice commitment. Commitment to your teammates, not just expectations for your teammates. Commitment to your coach, and not just at practice. Commitment to your fans, and biggest supporters, not for the glory, but for the opportunity to share life and excitement, and even heart-stopping plays.

Bring on March Madness.

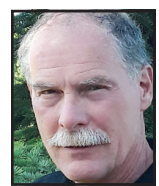
Bring on the storms.

Bring the rain.

I've got a great raincoat and trusty muck boots, the best team in the world, a coach with an amazing winning streak, and the most loyal and faithful fans. And that seems to be more than enough.

Lindsay Murdock lives and teaches in Echo.

Get a handle on inflammation before it handles you

JOHN
WINTERS

HEALTH CARE ESSENTIALS

What inflames you? While inflammatory speech and inflammatory thoughts can distress us psychologically and are definitely factors which affect our overall well-being, I have chosen in this column to focus on body inflammation, which causes chronic disease and aging.

Health experts consider the cause of inflammation a classic chicken-or-egg question. While injury and illness can cause inflammation, inflammation itself can cause or worsen injury or illness. Either way, it's smart to treat inflammation if it is present. If you have symptoms or test results indicating the presence of inflammation, or if you just happen to be getting older, understanding inflammation is important.

Inflammation is the body's appropriate healing response to injury, infection and illness. If you sprain your ankle, cut your finger or get an infection, inflammation is created by the body to clean up the mess and heal the tissues. This is effective short term, but if extended for a longer period of time than necessary, it can contribute to tissue damage and chronic problems like cancer, diabetes, arthritis, heart disease, Alzheimer's disease, depression, anxiety, allergies and skin problems, as well as other conditions.

When triggered, inflammation floods

the injured area with blood carrying immune cells and healing factors. This is what causes redness, heat, swelling and pain. Doctors know your body considers endless details when choosing the best response. For example, staph infections can be serious, so the body usually walls off these infections, creating a cyst. Products of other infections and injuries are generally allowed to circulate throughout the body. Your immune system homes in on foreign chemicals, toxins and even particles with the wrong electrical charge to find the injury.

Once the source of injury is found, immune cells poison or engulf and digest the bad guys. Pretty ruthless, but don't worry, these murderous immune cells are very discerning eaters. The health, experience and memory of the immune cells all play a role. Experienced immune cells are why adults don't get all the sniffles kids do. The liver, spleen and lymphatic system all help with the cleanup, so they are important to consider as they work with all of the other systems of your body to regain health and balance.

While the causes and effects of inflammation are complex, the treatment can be simple. Take every reasonable step to decrease inflammation and to treat the root cause of inflammation. Set up your life to be more "anti-inflammatory" and less "pro-inflammatory." New information tells us that your actions make the difference; you do have more control than previously thought!

An "anti-inflammatory" diet includes nuts, produce, fatty fish, olive oil, avocado, beans, whole grains, green tea, and even coffee and dark chocolate. A "pro-in-

flammatory diet" includes excess meat, dairy, sugar and processed foods. And, an "anti-inflammatory" lifestyle includes moderate fun physical activities, plenty of rest, clean air, pure water and not too much stress or alcohol or inflammatory thoughts, political or otherwise.

If these steps to prevent or reduce inflammation aren't enough, you can treat inflammation more directly. Conventional treatments include steroids and NSAIDs, which usually treat the symptoms effectively, although they do not address the root cause. This appears to work in the short term, but other problems like heart disease may later develop. Modern medicine often treats the pain caused by inflammation using powerful drugs without acknowledging or treating the root cause of the pain or considering the side effects of certain medications. We Americans consume 80% of the world's opiate painkillers. Safer ways to treat inflammation include ginger, turmeric, fish oil and vitamin D. Blood tests for signs of inflammation include hs-CRP, ESR, homocysteine, procalcitonin and insulin. Ask your doctor about these.

Inflammation can cause or worsen any of the diseases listed above, and any of these diseases can cause inflammation. Paying attention to the importance of inflammation is always wise, so if your symptoms or blood tests indicate something's smoldering, get on it. You do have the power to make a healthy difference for your body, and your mind.

John Winters is a naturopathic physician, who recently retired after operating a practice in La Grande since 1992.