



What we post but do not say

Sentinel reporters discuss Cottage Grove's social media landscape

BY JON STINNETT AND MATT HOLLANDER
The Cottage Grove Sentinel

Jon Stinnett: Matt, as the Sentinel's reporter on the scene for the Monday, June 8 Cottage Grove City Council meeting, you witnessed an impassioned exchange on the role of social media in local government, with two sides seemingly split over the possibilities and pitfalls, the power and the danger of social media in shaping the public discourse, particularly the local political conversation.

The interaction of local elected officials with the public through social media platforms has ramped up in earnest lately, particularly through the exchanges between members of the public and two City Councilors; the growing influence of social media seemed to gain steam as the debate surrounding the referendum efforts to place the Main Street Refinement Plan on the ballot before voters neared its deadline.

It's obvious by now that Cottage Grove interacts with the world and with itself on social media every day, but last Monday may have brought the first occasion that such interaction found itself in a very real public spotlight and at the forefront of the local political conversation.

As a communicator myself, I'm certainly more interested in examining the growing role of social media in the daily life of this community and beyond than taking sides in Monday's argument between two public officials. On that note, I'm curious what aspects of the dialogue interested you most? What did you take away as a journalist and a social media user yourself from that discussion? Does a deeper conversation need to happen, and if so, where should the community direct its focus?

Matt Hollander: I'm glad that you're not asking me to score the fight, because I don't think I could. It was an impromptu conversation that lasted less than 10 minutes. However, even in that brief amount of time, I was struck by how challenged we as a society are in talking about social media. Sure, many of us use and consume it on a day-to-day or even minute-by-minute basis, but that hardly makes one an expert in its efficacy as a communication tool.

You outlined a variety of recent social media issues that have come up in Cottage Grove, including how elected officials interact with constituents or how the city interacts with citizens. I think most would agree that these are very separate con-

versations, but at the June 8 City Council meeting many of these issues became part of the same discussion and it became convoluted rather quickly.

A deeper conversation on social media is on the horizon for the City Council. As I noted in the article, City Attorney Carolyn Connelly intends give a presentation on its role in local governments. I'll be very interested to hear what she has to say and how the city's elected officials respond. However, it sounds like you're equally interested in how the wider community is going to resolve the social media problem. How can you compel

dering, so it's no surprise that the growing influence of social media has caught us a bit off-guard in this small community.

I'd agree that the many issues related to social media use in Cottage Grove became convoluted at the most recent council meeting, though it's understandable this early in the public conversation. It's helped me sort out and try to keep the issues that deal with the medium in question (in this case, Facebook and other social media) separate from those that concern the message. (Many aspects of the disagreement on Monday concerned both what was said

just that — a platform for communication — and very little else. How we use that platform is up to all of us, and in Cottage Grove, groups, individuals, businesses and other organizations make real, meaningful and positive contact with each other on Facebook every day. To undo or stop this contact would be a disservice to this community.

We are free to choose to offer up many aspects of our own lives for the online consumption of others to any degree we wish (or not at all), and when the words and actions of our digital selves closely mirror those of the people we strive to be in

Facebook, and I think we agree that numerous posts include information taken out of context to support a particular point of view or info that's just flat-out erroneous. It sounds like several councilors believe that social media is a place to foster political conversation, but I'm not sure if those conversations will lead to authentic engagement. In fact, I think it will do the opposite.

Do you see a benefit to supporting an online platform for political conversations?

JS: In theory, any conversation can be beneficial, online conversation most definitely included. And in this day and age, it seems as if many are inclined to engage in this form of conversation above all others. But the political landscape is often one of sound bytes and abstractions, of easy answers to complicated problems, as you've pointed out. It seems to me that, regardless of the medium, our political talk in the future needs more substance than style, more message than medium, more truth than slant. More important than the venue in which we choose to converse will be the subject matter that fills the conversation. Our problems, our challenges as a society are not virtual; our solutions must also be very real and involve those who live, work and play in this community every day. Whether social media can offer an avenue for this type of talk in Cottage Grove has yet to be determined, but it's easy to hop online these days and understand that we have a long way to go.

MH: I'll confess that I'm not a very political person, but something I've definitely learned from covering the Council is that the most polarizing topics are rarely so black-and-white. I think we as a society tend to gravitate toward extremes because it's easier to comprehend and defend our positions as either all-good or all-bad. And nowhere is that phenomenon more prevalent than on social media.

You and I have perused some of the recent dialogue on on

real life, I believe fruitful, honest and fulfilling communication will surely thrive.

With regard to navigating the "social media problem" and the need to be fair and objective with each other online (not to mention honest, accurate, thoughtful, etc.), I'd only suggest that we not lose sight of the humanity involved in all our social interactions, that we strive to never forget that there are human beings behind the keyboards, phones and tablets that constantly upload tiny slices of our daily lives onto Facebook and other platforms. For in truth, sites like Facebook offer

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people to be fair and objective with each other in a rather lawless and virtual world? I'm afraid I don't have an answer.

JS: It's certain that we have more work ahead of us as a society to unravel the implications, not just of our social media interactions, but of the digitization of many processes and relationships that in years past required more direct, person-to-person contact (contact which, of course, we're obviously also still far from perfecting, as last Monday's council meeting also demonstrated.) These are questions the experts are still pon-

dering, so it's no surprise that the growing influence of social media has caught us a bit off-guard in this small community.

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Offbeat Oregon History

The small-town police chief who was executed for murder

BY FINN J.D. JOHN
For the Sentinel

Back in 1948, the small Oregon town of Sandy had a problem. Its police chief, W.C. Stoneman, had resigned due to illness. And after a search, the city administrators had started to realize Stoneman had been underpaid.

Put simply, they could not find a law-enforcement professional who would take on the job of Sandy Chief of Police for

the \$150 monthly salary they were offering.

They did find one candidate for the job, though. He was a local fellow by the name of Otto Austin Loel, a relatively recent arrival who had made a number of friends since coming to town. His only criminal record was a drunken-driving conviction from back east — at that time drunken driving was widely considered to be a minor infraction, like a speeding ticket.

Best of all, outgoing chief Stoneman recommended him. Stoneman had worked with him when the two of them were night merchants' policemen (essentially, security guards) before Stoneman became chief. Stone-

man said Loel was a rough-and-ready character and a good fellow, if a little overly fond of an alcoholic beverage or two of an evening.

That was good enough for the city council, the members of which were as loath to part with money as anyone might be. And so, although Loel didn't seem to cut the proper figure of a police chief, the job became his.

Regrets started trickling in soon afterward. The new top cop turned out to be a bit unpredictable. Other Sandy residents later recalled that he was cheerful and talkative one minute, and surly and snarling the next. He didn't bother with a uniform, but he often could be found drinking beer in a city tavern sporting a leather motorcycle jacket, with a pair of six-shooters slung cowboy-style on his hips and a

pair of handcuffs dangling from his suspenders.

The city judge offered the most frank and disdainful analysis of Chief Loel. Loel, he recalled, was "a shifty-eyed, half-shaven roughneck who boasted, bragged and lied."

He was a day-drinker, so he spent a lot of time in the tavern, regaling anyone who would listen with stories of his service in the U.S. Navy during the Second World War and slaking an obviously prodigious thirst with glass after glass of cheap suds.

It wasn't the kind of situation that could last very long, and it didn't. Shortly after Chief Loel was hired, a new mayor was elected, a resident named John Mills. And several months after that, Mills, never much of a Chief Loel fan to start with, happened to be in a tavern with the

chief when, nicely liquored up, Chief Loel launched into a spirited denunciation of the personal character of several city council members. Furious, Mayor Mills walked up to him, stripped him of his gun and badge, and fired him on the spot.

Not surprisingly, Loel left Sandy soon afterward. And the town got busy trying to forget about the whole thing.

That wouldn't be so easy, though. Not with the kind of headlines that started popping up in the Portland Oregonian just a few years later.

It seems that after leaving Sandy, Loel had ended up in Compton, Calif. There, one January day in 1954, he was drinking in a local tavern and talking about an upcoming road trip to Syracuse, N.Y., when one of the other bar patrons, 31-year-old

Elizabeth Jeanne Henderson, asked him if he'd be willing to take her with him as far as Newark, Ohio, so she could visit her relatives there.

Elizabeth and her husband, both regulars in the tavern, both considered Loel a friend. Soon an expense-sharing deal was struck, and the two of them were on the highway in Loel's snazzy 1947 Buick, headed east.

When they got to Oklahoma City, Loel and Henderson stopped and got a hotel room for the night. By the next morning, Loel had driven on alone. And the maid coming to make up the room got a nasty shock. The room was spattered with blood, and Elizabeth Henderson's body, partially undressed,

Please see **OFFBEAT**, Page 5A

Preserve your vision: Prevent (or reverse) diabetes

BY JOEL FUHRMAN, MD
For the Sentinel

Diabetes is a serious disease that poses considerable risks to the vascular system, particularly to the crucial and delicate blood vessels of the eyes. Diabetes is the leading cause of blindness in adults.

Nonrefractive visual impairment refers to a visual defect that cannot be corrected with glasses, and



diabetic retinopathy is a common cause of nonrefractive visual impairment. Retinopathy is quite common among diabetics; about one-third of diabetics over the age of 40 have diabetic retinopathy. Retinopathy can lead to serious vision loss, preventing sufferers from driving and living independently.

A study has uncovered an alarming upward trend in nonrefractive visual impairment and provides evidence that the diabetes epidemic is likely the cause. Nonrefractive visual impairment increased by 21 percent among adults between 1999 and 2008—a dramatic increase in a short period of time. When broken down by age, the largest increase in prevalence occurred in younger people—20 to 39 years of age, compared to older age groups. This is a stark finding that predicts climbing rates of disability among middle-aged and younger adults in the near future.

The researchers then looked

to the risk factors for this type of visual impairment to find the potential underlying causes. The risk factors include older age, poverty, lower education level, lack of health insurance and diabetes. Diabetes rates increased by 22 percent among U.S. adults from 1999 to 2008, and the other risk factors remained relatively stable, suggesting that the increase in visual impairment was due to the increase in diabetes.

Once diabetes is diagnosed, the damage to the body progresses over time, and the risk of complications progressively rises. Having diabetes for at least 10 years was linked to greater risk of nonrefractive visual impairment, and a greater proportion of the population had been living with diabetes for at least 10 years in 2008 compared to 1999; in adults younger than 40, this proportion doubled. Type 2 diabetes is becoming more common in younger populations, and therefore diabetes is

beginning to do its damage earlier in life, bringing dangerous complications, such as vision impairment, earlier in life.

This is alarming data that begs for action; it indicates that medical advances toward better glucose control are not preventing vision loss due to diabetes. Managing glucose with drugs is not enough—we must get rid of diabetes to get rid of the risk.

For type 1 and type 2 diabetics, the risk of vision-related complications can be dramatically reduced with a Nutritarian eating style plus frequent exercise. The vegetable-based dietary program described in my book "The End of Diabetes" is the most effective dietary approach for those with diabetes and is much more effective than drugs. For a Type 2 diabetic, this approach results in complete reversal of the diabetic condition for the majority of patients. For a Type 1 diabetic it eliminates the excessive highs and lows, dramatically reduces insulin

requirements and prevents the degenerative diseases common in later life in those with type 1 diabetes. Both type 1 and type 2 diabetics can maintain excellent health, proper eyesight and quality of life into old age. Now is the time for us individually and collectively to utilize modern nutritional science to save our vision and save lives.

Dr. Fuhrman is a #1 New York Times best-selling author and a family physician specializing in lifestyle and nutritional medicine. His newest book, *The End of Diabetes*, debunks the fake "science" of popular fad diets and offers an alternative to dieting that leads to permanent weight loss and excellent health. Visit his informative website at DrFuhrman.com. Submit your questions and comments about this column directly to news-questions@drfuhrman.com.

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