

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

"I never considered a difference of opinion in politics, in religion, in philosophy, as cause for withdrawing from a friend." —Thomas Jefferson (1800)

## One Year In – Taking Stock and Reaching Out



that we've confronted and overcome as a community since then.

And make no mistake — there have been successes. Last fall, the city purchased pallet shelters from Lane County that provided a warm, safe place to sleep for many during the season's cold-

**From the City Council's desk**  
*Ward 2 Councilor Jon Stinnett*

est nights. Local organizations and volunteers should be commended for adapting their efforts to ensure the success of this project.

The past year has seen the approval of multi-unit housing developments that will help alleviate Cottage Grove's profound need to fill this niche in its housing market. This new construction will provide opportunities for many to build their roots in Cottage Grove or remain in the community they love.

Take a walk around Cottage Grove these days, and you're sure to see some fantastic new businesses, envisioned and opened by courageous entrepreneurs in challenging times. They deserve our patronage and our best wishes.

Yes, successes large and small can always be found in a community such as Cottage Grove, one that gives its all and is proud of its ability to fight its way through adversity.

And of course, adversity has abounded in the last year. The "freeze" we entered into in November to combat the spread of the coronavirus cast a pall over the entire winter, and in many ways, the second lockdown proved more difficult to weather than the first. Now, a nastier variant of the virus threatens to take an even more terrible toll on our com-

munity.

Like just about everything that happens to us these days, the virus — and attempts to curb and prevent it — are viewed through the lens of a national political climate that increasingly divides us, threatening our ability to mobilize against a

common enemy. In fact, it's terrifying to think that even in a close-knit small town like Cottage Grove, we might be getting used to thinking of each other as the main source of our collective troubles, rather than partners in the betterment of our community and society.

Nowhere is this more evident than on social media, where our local conversations often contain all the vitriol and negativity we can muster. It's truly disheartening to think that those who witness these conversations from afar might believe that this nastiness is pervasive in Cottage Grove, that this is how we talk to each other and treat each other in other settings.

Last summer, spurred to action by the drastic turns of events that defined 2020, I ran for City Council with the hope of making a difference here in the home I've come to love. I'd reasoned that my background as editor of this newspaper for a decade and knowledge of city systems would help me become effective as a public servant. I also thought that I possessed the ability to ask the right questions, to help bring information about city processes and decisions to the public and create a stronger connection between Cottage Grove and

its government.

A year later, I can honestly say that I don't know if my notions about my own potential as a councilor have proven correct. Today's political climate brings intense doubt along with its uncertainty. I've become reluctant to weigh in on local social media conversations, having witnessed the relentlessness with which an earnest attempt to convey the truth can be attacked and discredited, and how quickly such interactions can become negative and disturbingly personal. It's been difficult at times to find a way to connect with my constituency in a positive, meaningful way.

Still, the examples of resilience I constantly witness among those around me compel me onward, as does the notion that I'm not alone in my times of skepticism and even despair.

Humans are at their best, I firmly believe, when we work together despite our differences. With the help and encouragement of those around us, we can accomplish just about anything. By viewing each other as enemies, we undermine our own potential to make progress and create a better world for those who will follow us.

And so, having made a short story extremely long, I'll simply close with the questions I posed to the people of Cottage Grove a year ago — how can I help? What do you love about your community? What needs to change around here for the betterment of each of us? Who are we, and who do we want to be?

It's my sincere hope that our ongoing conversation can bear fruit and bring positive change. I can be contacted at councilorstinnett@cottagegrove.org anytime, and I can't wait to hear from you.

### LETTERS

#### FINDING 'PROOF' ON THE INTERNET

Imagine if the internet had been around when AIDS hit.

First, there would've been a die-hard group of folks who found online 'proof' the virus wasn't real. Then, after the disease became rampant, they would've found 'proof' it was no worse than common herpes.

After the death toll became too large to ignore, they would've found 'proof' that only gay men died from it. They would've found 'proof' that wearing condoms wasn't effective in preventing the spread of the virus. They would've found 'proof' it was all a huge conspiracy designed by Big Pharma to make lots of money.

If the internet had been around in the early 1980s, AIDS would've killed over half a million Americans in less than a year and there'd

still be folks who'd swear it wasn't real. There'd be anti-condom demonstrations. There'd be parents who'd pull their kids out of school if condom-use was being promoted. Anyone caught buying condoms would've been accused of 'living in fear.'

Sounds completely insane, doesn't it? Sure does ...

—Matthew Emrich  
Cottage Grove

#### MORE DRIVER AWARENESS NEEDED

Dear Hit and Run Driver,

Sometime during the first week of this month you exited a parking space in Cottage Grove. You were parked to the left of my car and pulled around the front of it. In the process, you hit my car, impacting the driver's side front fender.

I must admit that you were per-

sistent because you kept going. This continued the damage to my car from the fender around to the right side of the front bumper. How nice of you.

I can only assume two things: either you were not aware that you hit another car, which is reason enough to disqualify you from driving a car; or you knew you hit a car, did not care, and continued driving your car until it lost contact with my car. This would also preclude you from driving a car.

Please consider this. What if it was a small child next to your car? A senior who couldn't move out of your way fast enough? What do you think of your possible lack of awareness or not caring while driving your 3,000 pound weapon?

—Steve Themmes  
Cottage Grove

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#### Letters to the Editor Policy

The Sentinel welcomes letters to the editor as part of a community discussion of issues on the local, state and national level.

Emailed letters are preferred. Handwritten or typed letters must be signed. All letters need to include full name, address and phone number; only name and city will be printed. Letters should be limited to about 300 words. Letters are subject to editing for length, grammar and clarity. Publication of any letter is not guaranteed and depends on space available and the volume of letters received.

Letters that are anonymous, libelous, argumentative, sarcastic or contain accusations that are unsupported or without documentation will not be published.

Letters containing poetry or from outside The Sentinel readership area will only be published at the discretion of the editor.

#### Political/Election Letters:

Election-related letters must address pertinent or timely issues of interest to our readers at-large.

Letters must: 1) Not be a part of letter-writing campaigns on behalf of (or by) candidates; 2) Ensure any information about a candidate is accurate, fair and not from second-hand knowledge or hearsay; and 3) explain the reasons to support candidates based on personal experience and perspective rather than partisanship and campaign-style rhetoric.

Candidates themselves may not use the letters to the editor column to outline their views and platforms or to ask for votes; this constitutes paid political advertising.

As with all letters and advertising content, the newspaper, at the sole discretion of the publisher, general manager and editor, reserves the right to reject any letter that doesn't follow the above criteria.

#### Send letters to:

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