

EDITORIAL

Fire, and the fragility of history

How quickly 129 years of history can be all but erased.

In the case of Huntington’s landmark Oregon Commercial Company building, constructed in 1890, it took all of a couple hours.

The fire last week that demolished the building and severely damaged two adjoining structures dramatically altered the familiar skyline of the town of 440 residents in the southeast corner of Baker County.

In this case it appears all but certain

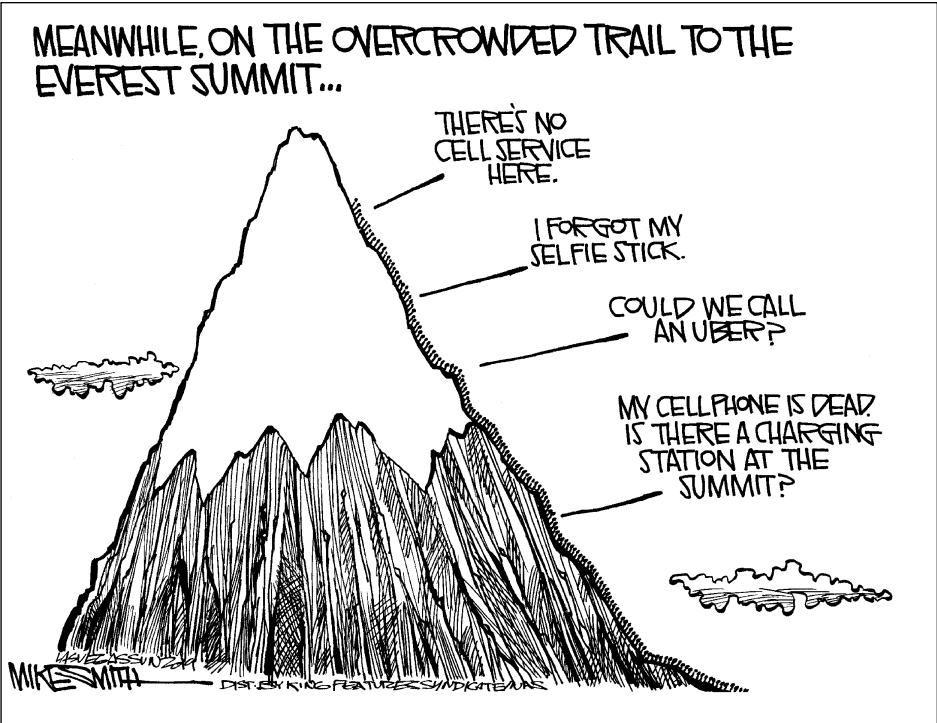
that the fire wasn’t an accident but rather arson.

Regardless, the episode offers a reminder that none our landmark structures is invulnerable. All the more reason we should cherish the architectural legacy we’re so fortunate, in places such as Baker City, to enjoy.

It’s a sad time for Huntington.

But it’s gratifying to see the community rally by planning a fundraising meal on Saturday.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



Letters to the editor

Letters are limited to 350 words. Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days. Writers must sign their letter and include an address and phone number (for verification only). Email letters to news@bakercityherald.com.

Your views

City should reconsider ban on marijuana dispensaries

Been back in Baker City a week now. It’s hard not to have admiration for how clean and organized the town looks these days.

But I see hypocrisy at work as well. I see bars and breweries. But not marijuana dispensaries. The whole point of marijuana legalization was to someday have parity with alcohol. Where is it? Are the voters saying they prefer alcohol over weed? Even with the terrible history that alcohol brings with it in the form of such things as domestic violence, car accidents and poor health? Why on earth would you embrace alcohol over weed if you understood the difference?

It’s an honest question, isn’t it? It’s one that begs an answer free of political bias.

Besides, marijuana is also used as a medicine now. Half the people I see inside dispensaries have grey hair. They’re not there to get high. They’re there because marijuana

is highly effective in addressing all the little aches and pains you get with aging. It allows many to give up their big pharma medications. You know, the ones that eat holes in your stomach...

At some point, this “sales inside the city limits” question is going to come back around on the ballot. I urge you to change it. Dispensaries generate considerable tax revenue. If you don’t allow business to help carry this cross, you have to make the taxpayers do it... That means you. I’ve heard griping over how the city needs more money in its coffers. You will find no better solution to that in the modern day than this.

And to the farmers out there. Hemp would grow really well around here. It’s an incredibly tough fiber. And you can use the plant for everything from animal feed to hemp oil. It produces a variety of marketable products. I know folks like to hold on to history. You’ve built the town’s current reputation on

it. I myself am a huge history buff. But it is the 21st century. There’s a lot of money going up and down that interstate every single day. Baker City isn’t getting much of it because you don’t have the right kind of bait on your hook.

Let’s change that.

Dan Collins
Baker City

The difference between Veterans Day, Memorial Day

Memorial Day is a federal holiday in the United States for remembering and honoring people who have died while serving in the United States Armed Forces.

As of 2018, the United States Census Bureau reported Memorial Day honors more than one million men and women who have died in military service since the Civil War.

Many people confuse Memorial Day and Veterans Day. Memorial Day is a day for

remembering and honoring military personnel who died in the service of their country, particularly those who died in battle or as a result of wounds sustained in battle.

Veterans Day and Memorial Day have different histories.

Veterans Day is commemorated in November and honors all those who have served their country, including those who have passed away. However, it’s primarily focused on thanking those who have served who are still alive.

I ask a simple question. How many of those honored in the 2019 Memorial Day Service at Mount Hope Cemetery died in service to their country? Should they have been honored? Indeed so, but in my humble opinion their honors should have been during Veterans Day celebrations and not on Memorial Day.

Bobbie Danser
Baker City

Alert the Nobel committee: Doughnut cereal

The magicians who create breakfast cereals have been ignored for far too long by the elites who claim to decide what constitutes scientific progress.

I am pondering a phone and email campaign directed at Scandinavia.

Scientists fiddling about with atoms and genomes and the like might think they alone are entitled to Nobel prizes. But who among them has managed the immeasurably more impressive, not to mention tasty, feat of cramming miniature powdered doughnuts into a cereal box?

The snobs in Stockholm wouldn’t recognize genius if it was sitting in front of them in a bowl with cold milk and a spoon.

I was introduced recently to a revolutionary product from Post, one of the heavyweights of the cereal business. My glucose level, I suspect, will never quite recede to its pre-exposure plateau.

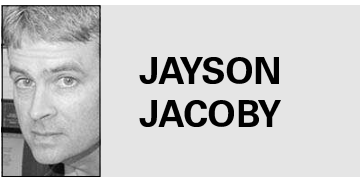
This cereal, as is common in the processed food game, boasts an invented word — “donette.”

Hostess, which is in cahoots with Post on this landmark venture, came up with that moniker decades ago for its bite-size doughnuts. (It is, of course, trademarked.)

“Ette” is the French suffix that signifies a diminutive version (or in some cases a specifically feminine one) of some item.

In this instance, however, I believe Hostess’ goal was not to elevate its miniature doughnuts’ culinary reputation with faux French prestige, but rather to convince customers that even if they scarf down a dozen, well, they’re awfully small and so the caloric damage is roughly equivalent to a fistful of carrots.

Donettes, as anyone knows who is even an occasional patron of a convenience store, usually come in a cellophane-wrapped six-pack of goodness.



JAYSON JACOBY

As with full-sized doughnuts there are multiple types, all of them scrumptious to the point of physical addiction, including chocolate frosted, glazed, double chocolate crunch and maple glazed.

But it is the traditional powdered sugar version that Post’s artists — and I don’t believe I’m misusing that word here — have replicated in the form of a breakfast cereal.

Theirs is by any measure a monumental accomplishment.

The cereal donettes, in deference to their fate of being deluged with milk, are rather more crunchy than a traditional doughnut (or donette, if you prefer).

But to me (and in particular to my mouth), this in no way detracts from the blissful experience of munching a spoonful.

Each piece is slathered with a most convincing version of a regular doughnut’s sugary outer layer.

I believe it’s even more decadent than the “real” thing.

Because the cereal pieces are already floating in milk, there’s none of the fumbling necessary when you’re trying to chase a bite of doughnut with a swig of milk.

No messy dunking of a crumbling pastry, and the potential for sticky splashing, required.

Each bite thoroughly coats the mouth with a sweet, velvety texture that is unlike anything I had previously experienced.

It’s quite wonderful, really.

And I daresay more gratifying, at least on an emotional level, than the work of the three scientists who received the 2018 Nobel prize in chemistry.

Frances H. Arnold of the California Institute of Technology was

awarded for his research into “the directed evolution of enzymes.”

The other half of the award went jointly to George P. Smith of the University of Missouri, and Sir Gregory P. Winter of the MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology at Cambridge, “for the phage display of peptides and antibodies.”

These are notable accomplishments, although ones appreciated mostly by that minority well-acquainted with peptides.

But have these eminent scientists transformed breakfast from a mundane event to one very nearly rapturous?

I’ll let the Nobel committee chew on that one.

Turns out we Eastern Oregonians are more environmentally sensitive than our urban counterparts.

Although not in the way you might have thought.

If, indeed, you believed it to be true in any respect.

Despite our sometimes being branded as simpletons who either don’t know, or don’t care, that we’re befouling Earth by raising cattle and growing crops and cutting trees and digging up minerals, what we don’t do very often, comparatively speaking, is buy new vehicles.

I was fascinated, and not a little nonplussed, to read in my favorite car magazine, Car and Driver, that residents of Oregon’s Second Congressional District, which takes in everything east of the Cascades and a wedge west of the mountains in the Medford area, own the oldest fleet of vehicles among the 435 districts in the U.S.

The average vehicle hereabouts is 14.7 years old, according to Auto Alliance. That’s about 3½ years older than the nationwide average.

Which is to say, we ruralites are quite frugal in our consumption of

nonrenewable resources.

A car, after all, is responsible for pollution long before its internal combustion engine burns its first dollop of fuel (I am excluding here electric vehicles, which at this point barely rate a statistical blip, although this is changing, and a good thing that it is). A vehicle consists of hundreds of parts, all of which contain materials that must be dug out of the ground or produced in a factory. Iron ore and bauxite, suffice it to say, do not as a rule flow into processing plants, as water through a dam.

It’s true that new cars, in general, use less fuel, and produce fewer pollutants, than older cars.

But the difference in efficiency between a brand new car and one that’s a decade old isn’t great — and certainly not enough to offset the amount of resources that go into constructing a new car.

The Car and Driver story had no other information about the Second District, so I perused the Auto Alliance website.

It contains overviews from each congressional district, and these reveal some interesting differences among Oregon’s five districts. Some of these surprised me. Others, I suspect, most longtime Oregonians could have predicted.

Among the surprises is that there are quite a lot more registered vehicles in the Second District than in any of the other four, even though their populations (as is required) are quite close.

In 2018 there were 846,000 registered vehicles in the Second District, 72,000 more than the runner-up — the Fourth District, which covers the southwest corner of Oregon and, like the Second, is largely rural.

I don’t believe this is a coincidence.

A plausible explanation, it seems to me, is that rural residents are more likely to own multiple cars in

part because our lifestyles require, or at least encourage, the use of multiple types of vehicles.

Because we typically have to drive farther than our urban counterparts for a host of reasons, ranging from shopping to vacations to visiting family and friends, we have ample reason to own a fuel-efficient, conventional two-wheel drive passenger car.

But a goodly number of us also spend quite a bit of time outdoors, and the nature of backroads means we also need a four-wheel drive rig capable of enduring the punishment of boulder-ridden tracks in the woods and sagelands.

This manifests itself in an Auto Alliance statistic that shocked me not at all.

Residents in the Second District, and to a slightly lesser extent the Fourth, are much more likely to own a pickup truck.

In the Second District, pickups make up 31% of the registered vehicles, and in the Fourth District 27%.

The comparable figures for the other districts are 22% (Fifth District, Central Willamette Valley, but also incorporating extensive rural areas); 18% (First District, the northwest corner); and just 15% (Third District, primarily the Portland metro area).

In a related category, drivers in the Second and Fourth districts are also more fond of diesel rigs — most of which, based on availability, are pickups.

In the Second District about 9.4% of registered vehicles have diesel engines, compared with 7.1% in the Fourth District.

The diesel rate dips to 5.5% in the Fifth District, 4.4% in the First and 4% in the Third, where I suspect the unique aroma of combusted diesel is about as popular as “Trump/Pence 2020” bumper stickers.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.