

EDITORIAL

Quiet streets are welcome

The upheavals caused by the coronavirus, unprecedented in the memories of almost everyone alive today, could serve as the plot for a dystopian novel or film.

When the social fabric begins to fray, we tend to expect trouble.

A hurricane or other natural disaster begets looting, or riots spawn widespread lawbreaking unrelated to whatever prompted the initial gathering.

And so it was encouraging to hear from police officials in Baker County this week that nothing of the sort has happened here since the campaign to control coronavirus has closed so many businesses and public institutions and so drastically altered our lives.

Police have been patrolling as usual. They’ve noticed a decrease in traffic — hardly surprising, with so many people trying to stay home as much as possible to thwart the infectious virus. But it’s what police haven’t seen — a rash of crimes that might have been committed by people enticed by the unusual circumstances — that’s noteworthy.

These times are trying enough without having to worry about cretins taking advantage of the situation.

Which is not to say we needn’t be vigilant.

The anonymous scammers, who are nothing if not creative, have conjured new schemes that rely at least in part on changes wrought by the coronavirus.

As we’re striving to make sure those most vulnerable to the virus, including seniors, are healthy, we should also make sure they’re not being snared by a scam.

We’ve seen plenty of disreputable behavior; to be sure. But people who buy more toilet paper than they need, though selfish and thoughtless, are at least preferable to actual criminals.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



Your views

**Thanks to all who are helping during a tough time**

I want to thank our governor, Kate Brown, our senators, Merkley and Wyden, and our representative, Walden, for all their hard work in keeping our state ahead of the game as much as possible.

I also want to thank all the people still working and risking getting infected by someone so we can still get our groceries,

buy gas, all the restaurants that are doing delivery and takeout to those who want and need it. I would hope my fellow Bakerites join me in thanking you. I hope most of your customers are thankful but I know some are angry because they can’t always find what they are looking for, but I hope they realize it is not your fault but lies with the hoarders who are scared and buying too much at once and those hoarders who think they

are going to buy things up and sell them to make a profit. We can forgive the ones who are scared and I hope we have no one in Baker that is of the latter of the hoarders looking to make a profit.

So thank you once again and I pray you all stay safe and protected during this time.

**Theresa Copeland  
Shirley McLin  
Baker City**

OTHER VIEWS

Trump’s bickering is petty, unseemly

**Editorial from New York Daily News:**

The man in the White House who plays a leader on TV pitched another fit, this time at governors like New York’s Andrew Cuomo who, desperate for aid to save their citizens’ lives, had the gall to press Washington to send more respirators from the federal stockpile and deliver other aid on something better than the sluggish pace so far established.

“It’s a two-way street,” said President Trump Tuesday. “They have to treat us well also. They can’t say, ‘Oh gee, we should get this, we should get that.’ We’re doing a great job.” (Wednesday, rewriting history with lightning speed, he tweeted that it’s “Fake News that

I won’t help them because I don’t like Cuomo (I do)”

The president is transparent: Kiss the ring or your constituents may suffer. If the idea weren’t obscene enough, the same man making that demand is simultaneously waging petty open rhetorical warfare against governors who happen to be Democrats.

Trump’s foolish claim that Cuomo “rejected buying recommended 16,000 ventilators in 2015 for a pandemic, established death panels and lotteries instead” is a blatant lie, thoroughly debunked.

Last week, Trump attacked another Democratic chief executive who had

dared question the federal response, Gretchen Whitmer, as a “failing Michigan governor.” And Trump lashed out at Gov. J.B. Pritzker of Illinois for doing the same.

We’ve long known that like many of the dictators he admires, Donald Trump demands those seeking his help to genuflect in his presence. When he is on the receiving end of criticism, however serious or substantive, he reacts like a child who just happens to have the full power of the federal government behind him.

In the midst of the worst public health crisis of the 21st century, this is the national leader we’re stuck with.

Appreciating art; and shaming homeowners

The great thing about art — perhaps even the greatest thing — is that you needn’t be an artist to bask in the reflected glow of those who are.

I’m thinking here of art in the broadest sense.

A talented writer’s prose or poetry can stir the soul of a reader who couldn’t distinguish between an adjective and a gerund.

And even if you struggle to sketch a stick figure, the sight of a certain painting or sculpture might forever change your viewpoint not merely of art, but of the world in general.

If that isn’t close to defining art, then I’ve never understood its purpose.

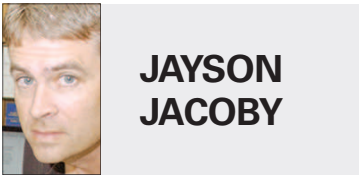
That said, I believe that having even a token familiarity with a particular medium can heighten your appreciation when in the presence of a skilled practitioner.

I had such an experience recently at the Churchill Dancehall in Baker City (PCV, this was — pre coronavirus).

I listened to Rob Scheps, a jazz saxophonist, perform with the Matt Cooper Quartet, featuring pianist Matt Cooper of La Grande, percussionist Andres Moreno and upright bass player Laurent Nickel, both of Portland.

I’ve never played any of those instruments, so integral to jazz, but I dabble with the guitar.

The quartet had scarcely launched into its first number — although “slinked” might be the more apt verb, given the sometimes languid rhythms of jazz — when I



recognized how immense the gulf is between tinkering with simple chords, and performing complex music with an almost carefree competence.

I was a trifle awestruck.

Except for a couple of high school years when I caught several hard rock shows at Portland’s Memorial Coliseum — AC/DC being the most memorable, even though Malcolm Young, the greatest rhythm guitarist in rock history, missed that tour — I have been an infrequent concertgoer.

But I hardly needed the credentialled ears of a music critic to understand that Scheps, Cooper, Moreno and Nickel possess the sort of talent I had rarely heard in person.

This is an experience both exhilarating and, to anyone who has strummed a guitar or blown a horn, however feebly, humbling.

Most of us, I suspect, have a bit of the dilettante in our nature, a tendency to believe, at some level, that we could produce art if only we had more time.

Sometimes when I manage to coax sounds from my guitar which superficially resemble the song I was imitating, I can briefly fantasize that I am capable of true proficiency with the instrument.

But the reality is that I haven’t

the time — nor, I readily admit, the talent — to ever progress much beyond the level of beginner.

Spending a couple hours listening to professional musicians such as Scheps, Cooper, Moreno and Nickel emphasizes this point. But unlike so many other instances that highlight my relative ineptitude, I didn’t feel even a trifle bitter.

Instead I relished the simple joy of listening to true masters flex their musical, which is to say artistic, muscles.

It is far easier to find condemnations of American suburban sprawl than to find celebrations.

I would not relish the task of defending, on any but utilitarian grounds, the ubiquitous boulevards of fast food chains, gas stations and acres of asphalt parking lots that lie across the landscape of hundreds of cities. These arrow-straight arteries of commerce are so similar that in the absence of a distinguishing characteristic — a palm tree, say, to at least let you know you’re probably south of the 40th parallel — you’d not be able to tell Atlanta from Albuquerque, or Portland, Maine, from Portland, Oregon.

There is a blatant banality to these zones — a sense that we customers, as we wend our way between the yellow lines of drive-through lanes, are little removed from lab rats confined to an experiment that involves labyrinths and hunks of cheese (not double cheeseburgers with bacon, alas).

It is cliché to criticize America’s car-centric city planning both for its dehumanizing aspects as well as for its sheer ugliness.

But I have read few if any treatises on the topic as piquant in their disgust as those leveled by author James Howard Kunstler.

I recently read Kunstler’s “The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America’s Man-Made Landscape.”

I am a latecomer to the book, which was published in 1993.

But Kunstler’s descriptions reflect contemporary conditions — indeed, given the population trends in the ensuing 27 years I suspect his dismay has only deepened since he finished the tome.

I understand, and to some degree share, Kunstler’s disdain for the sameness of much of America’s modern business development.

But I began to lose my interest in, and patience for, his attitude when he started in on average American homeowners.

Indeed, Kunstler saves some of his most biting prose not for profiteers who built those soulless commercial strips, but for people who, he acknowledges, simply want their own “version of the American Dream.”

Kunstler specifically calls out the standard ranch home, but I feel confident in saying he would feel even more appalling the place where I have rested my head for almost 25 years — a double-wide manufactured home.

“These housing ‘products’ represent a triumph of mass mer-

chandising over regional building traditions,” Kunstler writes, “of salesmanship over civilization.”

He goes on to write, with palpable repugnance, about the “scruffy lawns littered with the jetsam of a consumerist religion.”

It happens that I have a lawn. And it’s occasionally littered with jetsam, mainly in the form of toy lawnmowers and volleyballs. But the turf is well-tended rather than scruffy because I like my kids and grandkids to be able to get their feet grass-stained on occasion, out in the good clean air.

Kunstler attempts to explain what he perceives as the lack of “charm” of the typical American house as a reflection of our culture’s obsession with television and advertising. He concludes his screed by arguing that Americans, with their plain ranch houses and their toy-strewn yards, “preferred fantasy. They preferred lies. And the biggest lie of all was that the place they lived was *home*.” (his italics)

Were Kunstler’s bigotry not so blunt I might have admired his sheer arrogance at presuming to know so intimately so many millions of people based on a cursory glance at a relative handful of front yards.

But mainly I was offended.

I happen to believe that what defines a home is the love of the people who live within its walls, not what those walls are made of or how they’re fitted together.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.