

EDITORIAL

Small acts can have big effects in our community

The pandemic has given many of us reasons to be thankful for things we might previously have taken for granted.

This is certainly so as we move into the holiday season.

We can eagerly anticipate events such as the downtown Christmas parade, which, like so many favorite community traditions, was canceled in 2020 but will happen this year so long as the Chamber of Commerce gets enough entries.

(If you're interested, check the Chamber's website, www.visitbaker.com.)

We can also appreciate that unlike a year ago, the virus has mainly been on a downward trend. A year ago, the number of COVID-19 cases in Baker County was rising toward what was, until the delta variant surge started in late July 2021, the peak of the pandemic during December 2020.

All residents 18 and older are now eligible for a booster vaccine dose, an opportunity everyone should take advantage of.

And in contrast to the situation last year, there are no limits on occupancy for our beleaguered restaurants, so festive dinners are easier to plan.

But as we celebrate this most magical of seasons, and revel in a return to holidays that should feel closer to normal than the 2020 versions, let's also rejoice that we are all members of a community which consistently burnishes its reputation for generosity.

You've read about examples of this recently in these pages.

A group of volunteers strives to find forever homes for dogs and cats.

A fundraiser draws crowds to help a family whose lives have been overturned by COVID-19.

There are undoubtedly dozens more examples.

So as we prepare for the unique joys of this season, let's each of us try to perpetuate that spirit of selflessness that is our community's greatest attribute.

It needn't be anything grandiose.

Maybe a neighbor needs help raking leaves or stacking firewood.

Or you know someone who would appreciate a hot meal delivered to their home — and even more so, someone who stays for a conversation after the warm package has been set on a table.

How about making a phone call to a friend you haven't talked with since summer?

We all have limitations, of course.

Some of us can't afford to buy a dinner or other gift.

Some of us can't wield a rake or lug stovetop lengths around.

But smiles cost nothing.

And speaking kindly isn't likely to strain any muscles.

When so much that we read and see and hear is marked by anger and bitterness, by tears and regret, surely we can all muster, in the waning days of 2021, some action, no matter how modest, that reflects the brighter side of our nature and gives us all reason to hope for a 2022 that is defined by happiness and optimism.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



Your views

Baker City Council shouldn't pass on Daugherty's experience

Many of us remember the city budget debacle of 2016, when the promised gains of third party ambulance billing and a potential land sale did not materialize and the Baker City Fire Department positions that were funded based on that revenue were at risk. This led to a much maligned "public safety fee" that offset the approximate \$180,000 annual shortfall for three years. I want to thank Randy Daugherty for volunteering for the budget board after those mistakes were made and helping guide the city back to a reasonable

and balanced budget with a healthy carryover from year to year. We were able to sunset the safety fee while maintaining our staffing levels due in no small part to his fiscally conservative approach and business/employer experience.

Unfortunately we appear doomed to repeat the mistakes of our past as this council spends money and funds new positions without the input, expertise, and long-term vision the Budget Board and the Public Works Advisory Committee members have to offer. To try and paint Mr. Daugherty as having anything to do with the previous budget shortfalls

shows ignorance that can easily be corrected by the city's archived council and budget minutes.

Councilor Waggoner has stated that he wants someone to fill the council vacancy who is "not really a business owner." I would argue that Mr. Daugherty's skill set as an employer and budget watchdog is exactly what this council is missing. Accepting criticism is part of the job, and the fact that Randy is willing to put his money where his mouth is and do the work is an opportunity this council shouldn't pass up. Baker City can't afford it.

Loran Joseph
Baker City

Letters to the editor

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• The Baker City Herald will not knowingly print false or misleading claims. However, we cannot verify the accuracy

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• Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days.

• The writer must sign the letter and include an address and phone number (for verification only). Letters that do not include this information cannot be published.

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Online humor from a most unexpected source

Government bureaucrats are known for many things but humor, I submit, wouldn't make the top 10 on anybody's list.

Indeed I suspect many people would argue that the larger share of bureaucrats, at least while engaged in their frequently dour business, are utterly incapable of anything resembling comedy.

(Intentional comedy, anyway; bureaucrats are prone to doing amusing things, unwitting though these may be.)

Given the relentless banality characteristic of government operations — and in particular the way they communicate with the public — I always get a particular thrill when I run across an exception.

My wife, Lisa, for at least the past couple of years has occasionally rushed up, still chortling, to show me a Facebook post on her phone.

The page is maintained by the Portland District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

This agency, which builds and manages dams, by any reasonable measure ought to rank as an especially straight branch of the federal government.

Dam engineers, who are after all engaged in a serious business — their foul ups could flood cities and kill a lot of people — aren't renowned for getting up to the sort

of hijinks normally associated with fraternities.

But the employee who manages the Portland District's Facebook page relentlessly refuses to issue communications that seem to be the product of a microprocessor rather than a human brain.

Chris Gaylord, a public affairs specialist at the district, has overseen the district's Facebook page, among his other duties, since the fall of 2019.

The page's most persistent trait is its wittiness.

Gaylord said his first attempt to inject not only humor, but also a sense of humanity, into the Corps of Engineers was an internal publication distributed only to agency employees.

That effort, which involved the installation of water bottle filling stations, was well-received, Gaylord said, so during the Christmas season in 2019 he decided to try a similar approach with the Portland District's Facebook page.

"It's social media so it should be social," Gaylord told me in a recent phone interview. "It can be funny."

Ever since Gaylord, as he puts it, "flipped the script," comments from the public on the District's comedic Facebook page have been almost exclusively positive, he said.

"Humor keeps people engaged



JAYSON JACOBY

and interested," Gaylord said.

Which is to say, it encourages them to check the page frequently.

And that's the goal, Gaylord said.

The next time the Corps of Engineers needs to use the Facebook page to get vital information to the public — a flood, for instance — more people are likely to see it than was the case before Gaylord revamped the page.

And of course a post about a potentially dangerous situation would be rendered in more straightforward terms, he said.

In the meantime, though, Gaylord will continue to enliven the internet with what I consider a beacon of good-natured humor.

He said his efforts have also encouraged some of his colleagues to contribute ideas for potential posts. One of those led to an Oct. 4 post. It's sort of an announcement that is not exactly scintillating, but which government agencies usually leech of the tiniest shred of humanity.

But Gaylord, with the assistance of a co-worker, will have none of this.

The Oct. 4 post reads: "Recreational boaters can now pass through our three lower #ColumbiaRiver navigation locks during daylight hours only — which eliminates the possibility that vampires will be travelling down the Columbia as the nights grow longer. Sorry, vampires. You'll have to resort to draining people's energy via the internet (or else send a familiar through on your behalf during the daytime)."

The post concludes with a parenthetical:

"(We did not consult the Vampire Council.)"

Here's another example:

On Oct. 1, in recognition of National Body Language Day (an event which somehow has managed to elude me until now), the page had a post lampooning the tendency for engineers to deflect attention, by way of pointing, from themselves to the inanimate objects they work with.

Gaylord's post, which refers to this as the "Engineer Point," says the gesture "says so much at once, including:

- "I'm an engineer. I'm awkward. If I have to pose for a photo, then I'm going to direct your attention to something that isn't me."
- "Look at that spalling."
- "Look at that cavitation."

• "Really just fill in the blank for any object you could be looking at."

• "I just really like pointing at things."

• "I am extremely uncomfortable."

On Sept. 28, which is National Ask a Stupid Question Day (another unofficial holiday I have, until now, missed), Gaylord had a post saying, "Of course, there are really no stupid questions. But we've definitely been asked some that have made us go, 'Huh?'"

I don't as a rule recommend anyone browse a Facebook page, but I'm pleased to make an exception for the Portland District.

Nor is the mirth limited to Gaylord's words.

He also makes deft use of photographs — doctored photographs, in most cases — to augment the humor.

Gaylord's responses to comments are clever, too. And, perhaps most refreshing of all, given the onslaught of invective and nastiness that is a hallmark of social media, almost all of those who comment seem to appreciate, as I do, this beacon of joviality from such an unexpected source.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.