

EDITORIAL

District takes a risk with International School

The Baker School District's Oregon International School, a charter school intended to bring up to 40 foreign students to Baker High School each year and make it more affordable for local students to study abroad, might turn out to be a success both culturally and financially.

Baker School Board members are confident that it will.

But the board and district have also taken a substantial risk, both monetarily and in terms of public perception, by deciding to spend an estimated \$865,000 to buy and renovate two historic homes in Baker City that will be used to house a dozen or so of the visiting students each school year (the others would stay with local host families).

Although the board made those decisions in public meetings, those meetings, including the most recent one on April 12, were done remotely, via Zoom. The meeting agendas were available on the district's website, but the district didn't issue any press releases to announce the proposed purchases. The board needs to return to in-person meetings, as other public bodies, including the Baker City Council and Baker County Board of Commissioners, have done for many months.

As for the International School itself, the concept seems sound. There is a benefit to Baker students to meet, learn and socialize with teenagers from other cultures, and to have a better chance, thanks to scholarships, to visit another country themselves.

The district projects that the International School will produce more revenue, through state payments for visiting students and tuition, than it will cost, starting with its first full year of operation.

And although district officials told board members on April 12 that interest among foreign students has been strong, and that the district likely will have to turn away some applicants, what if the demand doesn't continue over the 14 to 15 years the district projects it will take for the International School to repay the district for the housing purchases? As we've learned over the past two years, a pandemic can almost immediately curtail exchange student programs.

Although it's gratifying to see two historic homes being used, the decision to buy those, rather than newer residences, is itself a risk. Older homes, even after renovations, can be expensive to maintain and, potentially, to repair.

The district's recent history of starting new programs — Baker Technical Institute, Baker Web Academy and Baker Early College — has proved successful. These have not only added educational opportunities for students — and adults, through some BTI programs — but they have helped the district remain on sound financial footing.

That record likely helped convince some voters to approve the \$4 million property tax levy in May 2021, the district's first in more than 70 years. The district is combining that money with a \$4 million state grant and \$4 million from its capital projects fund to make significant improvements to all district schools over the next two years or so, including heating, ventilation and cooling and security. The district will also construct a cafeteria/kitchen/multipurpose building at Baker Middle School. All of the levy dollars are allocated to those projects; none is going to the International School.

Still and all, the board probably lost some of the goodwill represented by the bond passage with its recent house purchases and expansion of the International School, which, however rosy its financial projections, also necessitated significant spending up front, money that has no immediately tangible benefits.

Ideally, those projections will pan out and this latest program, like its predecessors, will enrich the district and its students.

Taxpayers will be paying attention.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



YOUR VIEWS

Citizens need to speak up about ambulance service

Baker County citizens. What is wrong with our people? We all need to wake up to this nonsense going on at the city and county level over ambulance service. Our ambulance service area is facing not having service in the near future unless city/county officials start working hand in hand and come up with a working plan and a solution. From watching the City Council meeting on Tuesday, April 12, 2022, it appears that the city manager is willing to get rid of our ambulance service. His comments lead me to believe that he is willing to cut the medic/fire personnel down in order to save money.

In listening to medical service calls on my scanner, with the current level of personnel available, the fire department is consis-

tently calling for cover to support multiple ambulance and fire calls. This is with them being staffed with three personnel and backup per shift.

We, the citizens, deserve much better than this. The employees deserve much better than this. They deserve to know that when they are working, they have the backup that they can count on. Their families deserve to know that their loved ones are going to have all safety measures being taken care of.

As I well know, at any given time one can find themselves in need of an ambulance with extremely well qualified trained personal a phone call away. I probably wouldn't be here today if it weren't for the excellent care I received from the first responders.

Please Baker City and Baker County people, contact your elected officials and voice your

concern over this matter, your life may depend on it.

Roger Coles
Baker City

Limiting abortion, but what about the babies?

In all the states that are choosing to limit abortion, the so-called freedom states, not one proposal to assist the mother to be, in prenatal care and postnatal assistance. No mention of child care or severe penalties for the fathers not supporting the child until age 18.

Those against this procedure seem to feel they have done their moral and religious duty, but never mind the consequences. Shall we soon have the welfare rolls skyrocket in the great state of Idaho that so many wish to join?

Tom Nash
Halfway

OTHER VIEWS

Editorial from The New York Daily News:

Despite some extremist groups' misguided legal efforts, it remains extraordinarily difficult to legally purchase firearms in New York City. They can still be had on the black market coming in from the persistent Iron Pipeline, but Gov. Kathy Hochul and Mayor Eric Adams have begun cracking down on that smuggling pathway, and buying an illegal gun can be both expensive and dangerous.

So what's an enterprising domestic abuser, drug dealer, or would-be shooter to do? The easy option is to purchase what's called a ghost gun, essentially a disassembled weapon that does not technically count as a firearm, at least not until it is put together in as little as a half hour.

Not only is this as simple as buying a TV or a toaster online, it is perfectly legal, sidestepping gun laws and allowing manufacturers to wield instruments that carry no serial numbers and are virtually untraceable no matter what a background check would have turned up for them. Once a trigger is pulled, they fire just like any other, no matter where they came from.

This long-standing loophole has made a mockery of our efforts to control the spread of these lethal tools, culminating in atrocities like Friday's murder of 16-year-old Angellyh Yambo in the Bronx. The share of ghost guns used in crimes remains low but is rising, driven by the smuggling crackdowns and the relative ease of obtaining them.

With President Joe Biden's announcement of a new federal rule clarifying that serial numbers must be included on components known as frames and receivers regardless of whether they're affixed to the rest of a gun, as well as establishing the kits as firearms themselves for enforcement purposes, we can work to stem this trickle before it becomes an avalanche.

Along with promises to increase federal enforcement and the announcement of a new nominee to run the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, the president is signaling that these workarounds won't be tolerated. It's too late to save Angellyh, but we can keep other families from feeling that immense pain.

COLUMN

Masterful book recounts fire that destroyed Paradise

I have seen plenty of statistics about the fire that decimated Paradise, California, in November 2018, but numbers mean little compared with a passage in a book describing fire victims' skin sloughing away at the gentlest touch, exposing the naked pink flesh beneath.

There is no scarcity of reasons why I prefer compelling prose to a spreadsheet.

Numbers can tell a story, to be sure. But that story invariably lacks the richness of detail that writers can extract from the English language, with its vast deposits of good and powerful words.

Lizzie Johnson mined that ore to great effect with her recent account of the tragedy: "Paradise: One Town's Struggle to Survive an American Wildfire."

Johnson's book, published in 2021, is not an easy read.

It could hardly be otherwise.

She is, after all, writing about a fire, sparked by a faulty electrical line owned by Pacific Gas & Electric, that killed 85 people and destroyed around 19,000 buildings, including most of the homes and businesses in Paradise, population 26,000.

More than three years later, Paradise hasn't come close to recovering — if that word is even appropriate given the scale of the disaster.

About 1,100 new homes have been built in the town that lies in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada, east of Chico and north of Sacramento.

Paradise's mayor, Steve Crowder, said in a November 2021 interview that he expects the city's population will reach the 10,000 mark by the fourth anniversary of the tragedy.

But it's not only the scale of the devastation that prompted me at times to put down Johnson's book, to rest my mind as I might rest my legs by taking a break during a difficult hike.

"Paradise" has a slightly hallucinogenic quality, though Johnson's prose is precise and straightforward, befitting her previous work as a newspaper reporter.

This quality stems from the large roster of people she interviewed, and whose experiences comprise the bulk of the book.

Johnson shifts so often from one person to another, from one small group, brought together by circumstances beyond my ability to understand, to the next, that I sometimes felt as though I needed the equivalent of the cast of characters on a playbill.

The litany of terror is fatiguing as only a tautly crafted nonfiction tale can be.

The depth of Johnson's reporting is palpable on almost every page — she must have spent a considerable time



Jayson Jacoby

with the survivors she interviewed, so encompassing is the detail.

It is the most cloying of clichés to say that a writer "makes you feel as if you were there," but the saying is ubiquitous because it's also apt. Johnson's book absolutely deserves this accolade, overused though it is.

As I followed the many awful journeys that Johnson catalogs I felt that I had a sense, secondhand though it of course was, of how acrid and choking the smoke was, how horrific the heat, how desperate the circumstances.

I suspect Johnson had an ample list of details to enrich her narrative, and she chose wisely. Besides the expected detritus of a wildfire — charred trees and windblown embers and the like — Johnson wrote about pools of melted aluminum that scorched vehicles wept like silver tears. I can't think of a better way to explain the intensity of the heat, both poignant and terrible.

Yet for all the book's hellishly exquisite descriptions, the reality that struck me with the greatest force was how rapidly this city, with a population nearly three times bigger than Baker City's, was all but leveled.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.