

OUR NEW NEIGHBORS

New doctor finds the right fit in Hermiston

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

Orthopedic surgeon James Whittum studied medicine in Ohio, completed his residency in Chicago and worked at hospitals in New England, but when he decided to look for new employment this year he turned his attention west.

"I was looking for an area that was growing, that was a little more economically vibrant, but still a smaller, more rural community," he said.

Whittum joined Good Shepherd Health Care System in Hermiston as an orthopedic surgeon this year after moving to Echo in September with his wife Rita. The couple has two young adult children who did not come with them.

For Whittum, Good Shepherd offered what he describes as an

impressive staff, physical facilities and equipment for a hospital of its size.

"The people I am working with are top-notch for a small community hospital," he said. "The quality amazes me."

He chose orthopedics in medical school after initially planning to be a primary care provider. As he got a peek inside the life of a physician, he realized that he often got frustrated with people who expected a doctor to fix them but wouldn't follow the doctor's instructions.

"It's my job as a physician to help you as a patient, but you as a patient have to help as well," he said. "(In primary care settings) I say, 'Mrs. Smith, you have high blood pressure, you need to take this medicine,' and Mrs. Smith says she doesn't like that medicine."

Fixing broken bones, injured

tendons and other orthopedic specialties tends to be "more concrete," Whittum said. He looks at X-rays, notes where things don't line up correctly, and takes action.

"It's more hands on," he said.

Whittum has more than 25 years of experience in the field. He said in medical school he was told that every five years what he learned would become outdated and he's found that to be true.

"It's an evolving field, and I embrace that," he said. "Change is good."

That change goes beyond just using different procedures. Twenty-five years ago, it wasn't common for patients to come in with ideas for treatment from the internet. While Google can be informative, Whittum said, there is also a lot of misinformation and claims that don't match the available data.

Whittum said he has enjoyed

EDITOR'S NOTE

This story is part of an annual series by the East Oregonian called "Our New Neighbors," which introduces the community to people who have moved here in the past year.



Contributed photo

James Whittum is an orthopedic surgeon at Good Shepherd Health Care System in Hermiston.

getting to know his patients, his neighbors and others in the area. The demographics here are younger and more heavily Latino than other places he has worked, and it seems like "everyone is a transplant" from another city.

He said this side of the country seems to be friendlier than the places he has lived on the East Coast.

"Everyone is certainly approachable," he said. "People are excited to meet you."

COLUMN

The parable of the car wash: There's always another way

The past decade brought us many wonderful things, from life-changing advances in technology and medicine to worldwide decreases in poverty and illiteracy.

It also brought us an increasingly divided nation — or perhaps a nation where long-standing divides are increasingly on full public display thanks to social media and 24-hours cable news.

For those who believe such a divide is a bad thing, I would like to suggest a few New Year's resolutions that will help each of us, as Gandhi so aptly put it, be the change we wish to see in the world.

First, let's retire the

childish notion that all people of a certain political party are evil or stupid or wrong 100% of the time. Sharing a video clip or other example on social media and claiming that it's evidence that Republicans or Democrats are all (fill in the blank) is no more helpful than sharing a photo of a single cat to "prove" that all cats are black.

The truth is that most, if not all, of the issues our country faces are immensely complex and have no easy answers. In some cases, certain solutions are verifiably more effective than others. But in many cases, what we have are two groups of people who weighed the pros

and cons and came up with a different answer because they value different things.

Case in point: I once was participating in a car wash to raise money for an extracurricular group I was part of, along with two people I'll call John and Emily. Partway through the fundraiser, John pulled me aside.

"Can you try and keep Emily from being the one filling up the buckets?" he asked. "She doesn't put enough soap in them, so it takes longer to scrub the bugs off the cars."

A moment later, Emily pulled me aside.

"Can we get John to do something besides fill up buckets?" she said. "He puts way too much soap in them, so it takes too long to rinse off the cars."

The confidence each had that their way was right

made an impression on me.

Maybe you're the type of person who believes there is, in fact, a single, indisputable "right" answer to how much soap should have gone in the buckets and everyone else is an idiot compared to you for not seeing it. Or, maybe you feel more like I did: The amount of soap in the buckets was "right" for each person, based on their preferences of getting the washing or the rinsing done more quickly. And at the end of the day, both amounts of soap got the car clean.

I'm not saying that people shouldn't advocate for their own preference for "soap" in our nation's collective bucket. Constructive discussion can help the best solutions rise to the top.

What I am saying is in 2020, let's agree to stop

contributing to simplistic "everyone's a total hero or complete villain" thinking.

Let's grow out of the immature name calling and act like adults (yes, I'm looking at you, people who think you're being clever or helpful by commenting "Flush down Kate Brown" or "Trump is orange hehehe" on everything).

Let's develop the humility to realize that all human beings, including ourselves, are very frequently wrong, in ways we never even realize.

Let's resolve to not share anything via Facebook, text, email, word of mouth or other mediums that we haven't made a good faith effort to vet.

I am constantly disappointed by the number of seemingly intelligent people I am friends with on social

media who constantly share fake quotes and made-up "facts" that are easily debunked with a 30-second Google search or just some basic critical thinking.

Let's stop seeing serious issues such as national security or health care in terms of scoring "points" for your "team."

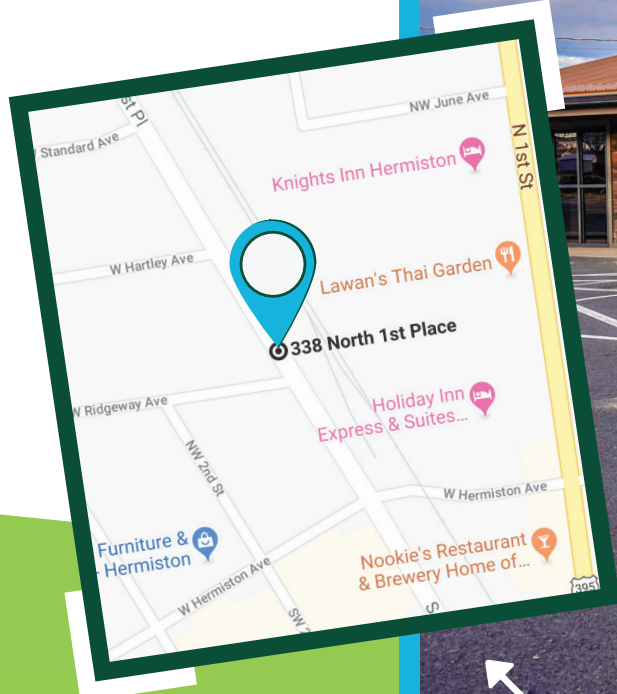
Instead, let's all resolve to do a better job of finding common ground. Instead of endless debates about whether global warming is a hoax or will kill us all in 20 years, the world would be a better place if people put down their keyboards and spent that energy on planting a tree or picking up litter together.

We can't control the national dialogue, but we can hold ourselves accountable for our own contributions to it.



JADE MCDOWELL
COMMENT

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