

EDITOR'S DESK

It's time to build on Hermiston's success

As I prepare to leave Hermiston, I have been thinking about what last bit of parting advice I might give the community.

I'd like to talk about what I believe are the main three categories of people who live in any town. These are the builders, the complainers and the focusers.

The builders run the community. Some of them do so in overt ways, as city councilors or school board members or the founders of a non-profit such as Made to Thrive or Sweet Potato's Closet.



Jade McDowell
NEWS EDITOR

Many do so much more quietly. They're the ones who called and reserved the community center for an event you enjoyed recently, or got their employer to donate prizes for a silent auction that funded the nonprofit helping out your neighbor. They add their name every time someone passes around a sign-up sheet at church asking for volunteers or meals.

A builder makes a difference to their community, and if they leave, that loss is felt.

Complainers know just as much about what is going on in their city, but their contributions to the situation are often unproductive.

They are waiting to pounce on every idea, explaining why it won't work or should have been done differently. Sometimes they have valid points that deserve to be listened to, but they simply fling those



Bricks at the Hermiston Public Library display the names of donors who helped build it.

points into the fray and then sit back, expecting someone else to put in the work to come up with a viable solution and implement it.

A classic complainer can be spotted in the Facebook comments, throwing out suggestions and criticisms that make it crystal clear they did not actually read the article. In typical fashion, they are so eager to make a cutting remark they aren't willing to pause to educate themselves on the basic facts of the situation and see if their initial reaction makes sense.

The final category I'll call, for lack of a better word, the focusers. These are people who focus on their lives — their job, their family, their friends

— rather than on getting involved, either constructively or critically.

Being a focuser doesn't make someone a bad person. Lots of good people are focusers.

Some people need to be focusers, because they're working 60 hours a week and taking care of their children and their elderly parents, and if they try to take on any more they're going to have a literal nervous breakdown. Other people just simply get caught up in day-to-day life, and would rather focus on spending time relaxing with their family on a Thursday night than sitting through some sort of committee meeting. That is completely their right.

I think the problem that Hermis-

ton faces is it has an unusually large number of focusers. That's probably less of an indictment on the city's character and more a product of its demographics, which are skewed heavily toward young, working class parents who have many demands on their time. You can see the evidence of focusers in statistics, such as Hermiston's voter turnout, which is consistently one of the lowest in the state.

The greater Hermiston area has some amazing builders. I've had the privilege of interviewing so many of them over the years, and they inspire me. They have made some great improvements to this community during my time here, because they have been willing to think big and other builders have supported their vision.

Some of those builders are getting burned out, though. They're spending too many sleepless nights at the Warming Station because not enough people volunteer there. They're struggling to do the same amount of volunteer work at age 75 as they did at age 60 because the new 60-year-olds aren't stepping up.

If Hermiston is going to live up to its full potential, it needs to find a way to turn more focusers into builders. It's possible — I've watched it happen when some people have gotten a small taste of community involvement and it has blossomed into something more.

I'll be cheering this area's successes from afar from now on. I hope to see spectacular things in its future.

COLUMN

Hermiston community going the extra mile for students

Education is a marathon, not a sprint. And most of the students, families and educators in the Hermiston School District at some point in the past 15 months experienced hitting the metaphorical wall.

There was no precedent for the 2020-21 school year, and the very real social, emotional and educational impacts affected everyone. Every day brought new challenges.

The strain of switching educational tactics multiple times — first online learning, then hybrid and finally in-person with safety measures in place — took its toll. Students and teachers both need consistency to function and perform at their best, and the 2020-21 school year didn't offer much stability or predictability. We closed out the academic calendar in need of a breather.

The good news is, just like marathon runners train to get over the wall and finish the race strong, the Hermiston School

District is here to make sure students can find their second wind and start rebuilding both speed and endurance. We have teachers eager to help that process and strong community support for the students.

That work began when we started bringing students back into the classroom and will continue through the summer. Making sure each student has an opportunity to make up for the lost classroom hours is critical.

I am extremely proud of the nearly 380 students who crossed the stage at graduation in the face of historic adversity. They are powerful role models for the younger students who will follow. Every graduating class has a unique character and personality, and the Class of 2021 will be remembered for their resilience.

Hopefully we'll all learn from their example. Coming back from an unusual, difficult year will take patience as educators evaluate where each student is academically and helps bring those who have fallen behind back up to their potential.

And we can't forget the emotional strain. It has been a hard

year, with so many missed opportunities for our kids. Sports, activities, time with friends and family, and many of the usual milestones of growing up were delayed or skipped entirely. We can't take that for granted.

But there's also a lot to celebrate. In the fall we will resume school with full classrooms and what we hope will be a full extra-curricular calendar. The strain and uncertainty will be behind us and we can look toward the future.

As a final note, I am grateful to this community for its ongoing support of its students. We've missed seeing you all at sporting events, school plays and concerts, and all the other usual school functions. But we've felt the support.

The nice thing about a marathon is there's still a lot of race left to run. As our students find their stride and their teachers coach them along the way, having a community cheering them on makes all the difference.

Dr. Tricia Mooney is superintendent of Hermiston School District.



Tricia Mooney

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dream Team coverage deserves kudos

This is a very belated letter written to express my appreciation for the wonderful job Jade McDowell did covering the Dream Team last spring. She was so kind and supportive and did a great job interacting with our special athletes.

I was saddened to read that she is leaving our area and wish her the best of luck in her new endeavors!

I also want to commend Ben Lonergan for taking pictures of the Dream Team athletes that truly captured their joy and enthusiasm for the sport.

Kristi Smalley
Hermiston

CONTACT YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

**U.S. PRESIDENT
JOE BIDEN**

The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500
Comments: 202-456-1111

**U.S. SENATORS
RON WYDEN**

221 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510
202-224-5244
La Grande office: 541-962-7691

JEFF MERKLEY

313 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

202-224-3753
Pendleton office: 541-278-1129

**U.S. REPRESENTATIVE
CLIFF BENTZ**

2185 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
202-225-6730
Medford office: 541-776-4646

GOV. KATE BROWN

160 State Capitol
900 Court Street
Salem, OR 97301-4047
503-378-4582
Email: www.oregon.gov/gov/Pages/share-your-opinion.aspx

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Please contact the editor at editor@hermistonherald.com or call (541) 564-4533 with issues about this policy or to report errors.

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No personal attacks; challenge the opinion, not the person. The Hermiston Herald reserves the right to edit letters for length and for content.

Letters must be original and signed by the writer or writers. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Writers should include a telephone number so they can be reached for questions. Only the letter writer's name and city of residence will be published.

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