

**EDITOR'S DESK**

## The spirit of the holidays is alive and well in our community

Anyone who wonders if the local community is a giving place needs to look no further than the recent Community Fellowship Dinner at Hermiston High School.

The event, which can trace its roots back to the 1980s, was once again operational this Thanksgiving, and the people who made it possible through donations or through giving their time deserve a great deal of praise.

The event has persisted through the coronavirus pandemic, and its resilience is a testament to the volunteers who flock to help.

In 2020, the dinner furnished more than 1,000 meals for Thanksgiving and for Christmas and this year 1,000 pounds of turkey were used.

The dinner should be — and really is — a prototype of how a community can come together to help. The key, of course, are the donations and volunteers. This year donations helped fuel the event, but it is the volunteers, ordinary people who just want to lend a hand, that should resonate for residents.

The donations this year included \$9,000

from the Subaru Corporation and funds from other concerned individuals. The funds mean the event can plan as any leftover money is ploughed back into future dinners.

As a society, we spend a lot of time assessing problems and then finding solutions. Those problems — for better or worse — tend to be the focus. Yet the community dinner event shows what is possible when a group of people get together and decide to make a difference.

That's not always an easy thing to accom-

plish. We are all busy. We all have other priorities. But when we decide to take a little time to shift the focus to help each other out good things happen.

Volunteering is, indeed, an important piece of a healthy community. The reward isn't a monetary one but one of accomplishment and the sense that helping our fellow residents makes a real difference.

The people who organized, volunteered, and donated to make the dinner possible should be lauded. They helped the community and that is a high honor.

**PETERSON'S POINTS**

# Hooray for a new brand of athletes in Umatilla



**Erick Peterson**

In "Rocky IV," Rocky Balboa looked upon his future opponent, the U.S.S.R.'s Ivan Drago, and thought of him as a machine. Though the Soviet powerhouse would later prove himself to be a mere mortal, his strength and will gave others the impression he was something beyond human. I think many people like sports for this reason; it gives us an opportunity to see people transcend into something higher.

able to call themselves participants in a new sport at their school. The teenagers appeared in front of a recent Umatilla School Board meeting and advocated for their sport, called esports, a.k.a. electronic sports.

Esports refers to competitive video game playing. Playing individually or in teams, esports participants have gained an increasing amount of legitimacy. Their events are now a billion-dollar industry, and even the International Olympic Committee has taken notice. We may see esports in the Olympics in 2028.

As a 46-year-old, I am somewhat new to this, and I have struggled to keep an open mind. As a child, I first played video games in a neighborhood arcade. When my family traveled to bigger towns, I got to play machines in pizza restaurants and grocery stores.

It was not until I got my first home consoles that my playing took off. In Atari 2600 games against my sister, I battled her to be the Frogs N' Flies champion. Later, we would go head-to-head in games on the Nintendo Entertainment System and the Super Nintendo.

My life, for much of my childhood, revolved around gaming. I read gaming magazines, and I discussed gaming with friends. By the time I was starting to notice competitive gaming, though, I had already lost interest. I stopped being a gamer toward the end of high school, about the time

I stopped reading comic books. It was just too childish, I thought.

Now that I look at what gaming means to people, I am jealous. I see the passion of the young Umatilla High School students, and I wish my own past love of gaming had been acknowledged and legitimized. Maybe then, I would not have felt guilty for my interest, and I may have even pursued it into adulthood.

Perhaps I would have even had the courage of the UHS students who delivered a presentation in front of their school board. Those youngsters showed a lot of courage as they advocated for a sport that some other people might disparage. And to their credit, the school board approved the efforts of the young gamers.

A UHS team will soon be competing in esports. In the near future, we will have the opportunity to witness these kids as they display the fortitude shown by athletes in other sports. We will see the eye of the tiger in their eyes. And, as Rocky looked upon a murderous Drago, we will be wondering if these young athletes are machines.

In reality, though, they will be athletes who are playing machines. And I could not be prouder of them than I am right now.

*Erick Peterson is the editor and senior reporter for the Hermiston Herald.*

**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

### What can I do about climate change?

We know the answers. Reduce, reuse, recycle. Buy local. We are told we are personally responsible for stopping climate change. But lots of slogans and most of the emphasis on person responsibility as the way to address climate change come from a campaign by large corporations that are major polluters. Yes, we need to monitor and manage our personal carbon footprint but that is not nearly enough. We need to get governments and corporations to quickly stop supporting fossil fuels if we are to reduce enough in time.

We need to vote for climate activist candidates for public office. Government leaders set the policies that lead to a livable world. By ourselves we can't end subsidies for the coal industry. We can't improve the electric grid to effectively use renewable sources. We need public officials who will lead us to do these things together.

We need to sign up, speak up for climate action. Many groups work to stop climate change and mitigate the effects of the change. By joining one or more organizations, you get counted, and politicians and large corporations care about those counts.

We need to speak up at all levels; with our friends, with the readers of the local newspaper, with our state and federal leaders. (Politicians and corporations count letters, too.) We need to speak up when it is uncomfortable to do so. Understand the issues, but don't wait for perfect knowledge.

We need to share with those who are suffering now from climate change. Share with people whose homes were destroyed by wildfires or hurricanes. Share with people whose wells have been contaminated by rising sea waters or whose crops were reduced or destroyed by drought.

If not now, when? We are told that turning from burning fossil fuels would hurt people and cost too much money. There are immediate wins for everyone from reducing air pollution from burning fossil fuels. It's estimated that 350,000 Americans die every year from air pollution alone. The public health benefits of cleaner air would pay for the costs of getting off fossil fuels. There would be transition impacts for people whose livelihood is tied to fossil fuel industries; those need to be addressed by short-term government programs. But in the not so very long run, the environmental benefit yields economic benefits too. The damage from climate change and the costs of the transition away from carbon only get bigger the longer we wait.

**Lindsay Winsor  
Milton-Freewater**

**COLUMN**

# From here to anywhere: Rethinking the Whitman lie

Blaine Harden's book "Murder at the Mission: A Frontier Killing, Its Legacy of Lies, and the Taking of the American West" is dedicated to "The Tribes of the Columbia Plateau," but it tells a story important for every American, especially those of us who live in the Northwest.

A student in the first class I taught at Blue Mountain Community College wrote about the impact of the Whitman Mission story on his own life. On the school bus ride home from the traditional fourth grade field trip to the monument, he got in a fight with a non-Native classmate who taunted him about his Cayuse heritage.

Now the story told to visitors at the Whitman Monument has been modified, but when I hear people com-



**Bette Husted**

plaining that if schools discuss racism some nonminority children might feel "discomfort," I think of my own student and the impact of that field trip on his grade school years.

Harden's book probes the missionary story to its uncomfortable roots. We locals know the story of Marcus and Narcissa Whitman — or think we do — and why some Cayuse men attacked and killed the Whitmans after 197 people who had taken the doctor's medicine died (about half of their tribe at that time) and after it was clear that they were threatened with loss of their own land. We know about the trial in Oregon City, the five warriors who were hung; sacrificed, one of them explained, to save

their people.

Some of us are aware of the terrible price the Cayuse had been paying and would continue to pay for the decision of a few, the suffering inflicted by volunteers and soldiers as they hunted down anyone they could find. I'll never forget the poem Althea Huesties Wolf read at First Draft describing a grandmother's memory of children's frozen bodies hanging in brush where they had been tossed.

But Harden's research taught me much about this story that I hadn't known. Apparently there was so much infighting among these Calvinist missionaries — Whitman and Spalding and their supporters — that the board decided to end both missions. Whitman made an arduous solo journey East to persuade the board to reconsider, thus

saving his and Spalding's jobs.

However, the story taught in history books for decades was the one Spalding spent his remaining years trying to convince newspapers and eventually Congress to believe: that Whitman had made that journey to save America from the British.

Totally untrue, says Harden — and inspired mostly by Spalding's intense hatred of Catholics, against whom the anti-immigrant feeling of his era was directed. But popular "histories" echoed this Manifest Destiny version of what had happened: Oliver W. Nixon's book "How Whitman Saved Oregon" was subtitled "A True Romance of Patriotic Heroism, Christian Devotion, and Final Martyrdom."

Clearly, it was a history told by the victors, and a

story with echoes of today's nativist views and fear of the effects of truth. And definitely a story of might makes right: In 1848 an official statement declared the Cayuse land "forfeited by them, and justly subject to be occupied and held by American citizens."

Harden's book, though, ends on a happier note, stressing not only survival but the resurgence of the contemporary Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation — stemming from rights their leaders preserved in the 1855 treaty and from an address to Congress by President Richard Nixon in the summer of 1970 "to create the conditions for a new era in which the Indian future is determined by Indian acts and Indian decisions."

Harden focuses on the work of tribal leaders whose

names we recognize — William and Antone Minthorn, Les Minthorn, Bobbie Conner, Judge Bill Johnson — whose careful land use planning and legal work prepared the way for the recovery of water and fish, for Wildhorse Resort & Casino and a working economy for the Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla people.

What about Whitman College, whose longest serving president saved the school from early bankruptcy by spreading Spalding's patriotic lie? Daring to trust students with the truth, a 2017 exhibit asked them to "think carefully about the appropriateness of any monument to the Whitmans — including the college itself."

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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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