

Our City

It had been a tough two days and the week was young, Tuesday, October 24, 2017. Actually, it had been a tough 18 months since losing for the first time ever in April of 2016. Rebuilding was difficult and often brought tears to their eyes as the pressure mounted through the following April as they reversed the loss of the previous year. With the exception of two they were all new to the team of seven and they were scared of further disappointment and the tradition that had been established over the past seven years. Their biggest test loomed with the coming dawn. Seven others looked at me with scared uncertainty as they were about to venture into what we hoped would begin a new tradition.

Wednesday morning, October 25, came soon enough for the 14 American Falls FFA members who were competing with the best of the best in the National FFA events in Indianapolis, Indiana last week. And, unless you have been there to experience it, it is almost impossible to appreciate the intensity, pressure and expectations felt by those who come to compete. Yes, it does sound cliché. If you have the chance, talk with Travis Mills, parent and School Board member, who was with us last week.

The Ag Issues team of Valeria Montelongo, Lindsay Beck, Angelica Hernandez, Mitsy Ledsema, Shanice Allen, Jadon Allen and Odalis Gonzalez went on to deliver a solid effort in the preliminary round of the national contest in their effort to carry on the tradition. In the Premier Chapter interviews Ruben Gutierrez and Aliyanna Broncho represented the Chapter and the J.R. Simplot Company extremely well in our annual collaborative effort of the Fast and the Farmers photo/agricultural literacy booth during the Simplot Games. Mckinnon Bradley, Bailey Guymon and Trevor Povey were equal to the task in their National Chapter Models of Excellence interviews as they did their part in establishing a higher expectation for the Chapter, State and Nation.

Thursday morning found us in the semi-finals with the best of the best of Ag Issues and the team delivered a remarkable effort. As Travis Mills and I chatted about the skills and abilities of the students he had seen competing at the national events I made a bit of an off-handed comment as I said, "It's easy to teach them to speak; but it is really hard to teach them to think." I didn't really know what I meant until the next day when I watched the Kuna, FFA Chapter of Idaho compete in the semi-finals for Parliamentary Procedure. Her name is Katie Hettinga and I have not seen or heard her like since our own Riely Geritz; both think and speak in paragraphs, not text characters or mere sentences but complete paragraphs. It is an art lost on the cellphone generation and is the difference I believe between very good and great in these types of competitive events, and life, where "kids" can positively transform before your eyes as rudimentary attempts at answering questions give way to eloquence.

To see that transformation in my students makes me proud, to see the smiles on their faces as it happens makes me happy. There are 8,568 FFA Chapters in our 50 states and two territories. Of those, just over 40 qualified to compete in the National Ag Issues event, 30 qualified to compete in the Premier Chapter interview process and only 10 qualified to compete in the National Models of Excellence interview process; Idaho has never had a Model of Excellence Chapter. When you exceed expectations and come up just short of being first in the Nation disappointment is understandable and to a degree we all were as results were announced on

the National stage. To be among the top 5 or 10 in any National FFA competition is exceptional and the American Falls FFA Chapter was in all three events. To our local potato producers and businesses who choose to contribute to our Chapter to make opportunities like this possible I want to thank you on behalf of every member, as your generosity has influenced and I dare say changed the lives of the members who attended and competed at the 90th National FFA Convention this past week.

If you are wondering what if anything all the above has to do with our City or community, I encourage you to speak with Travis Mills or any of the parents of the students who returned from Indianapolis this past weekend. You may be surprised at the short and long term effects and dividends.

Until next week...