

Our City

Two weeks ago I signed a proclamation brought to me by Debbie Skaar and the Idaho's Children's Trust Fund. Too often it is easy not to mention the uncomfortable, distasteful or outright repulsive behavior of our fellow man; it is much easier to merely ignore it or at least sweep it aside and say, "It doesn't affect me." It has been said that, "There can be no greater measure of a society than how it treats its children." If you have the opportunity to work with kids regularly, the signs of abuse can be evident if you know what to look for. Even if you don't work with kids, there is a reason to be concerned and care as child abuse costs every one of us something. And, as dark as it sounds the number of instances of abuse is indeed a measure.

But, here are some things that may be more quantifiable. Child abuse costs those of us living in Idaho over \$350 million annually; \$80 BILLION nationally. On average in Idaho 20 new cases of child abuse are reported each day. Over 80% of cases reported involving abuse or neglect are committed by a parent. Children under the age of four are most vulnerable with over 60% of maltreatment cases being that of neglect. Darker still, one in four girls and one in six boys are molested before they are 18 years old; the heinous part is 93% of these victims know their abuser. In my mind there is no lower form of life than a predator who preys on children. I teach 160 kids a day. There are roughly 1500 children in our school district. You can do the math. No community is exempt. No amount of sunshine can shed the darkness these victims live in; so I was pleased to sign the Child Abuse Prevention Proclamation for the fourth time as mayor and I will simply say we have to do better as a society.

Doing better is what Kimberly Walker is all about. In a meeting last Tuesday of the Fired Up Afterschool Program, Walker took the members of the program's advisory board through an encouraging agenda. During the 2016-17 school year the program served a total of 44 second and third graders, 20 fourth graders, 20 fifth graders and 39 students from the middle school. The staff of the program includes Director Walker, seven certified teachers, six paraprofessionals and seven high school students. The program began last September and will conclude on May 11. The summer program this year will begin on July 24 and conclude on August 10; it will be held at the middle school Monday through Thursday from 8:30 am until 2:30 pm.

The really good news for our community is that Kimberly was successful in her application for a grant that will continue to fund this wonderful program for five more years. The total of the grant amount was over \$750,000 and it will be divided into payments over the course of the five years. This grant will serve more than 100 second through eighth grade students in our district each year. In an email preceding the Advisory meeting Walker stated, "We are so excited! As you all know, many of the students in American Falls need and love this program. I am delighted to continue this journey as the afterschool program director." We are indeed delighted to have Walker in that position as well and look forward to working with her to make better things possible for so many children.

My continued thanks goes out to the American Falls Birding committee for their efforts to provide family friendly activities for all. The committee and I invite you to participate in the upcoming American Falls Family Bird Festival being held Saturday, May 13th. Free registration will be at 9:00 am at the AF Public Library parking lot. This will be the fourth biannual

American Falls Family Bird Festival. Last year well over 50 species of birds were identified by participants. Join in a fun day of birding and adventure. What a great way to enjoy what we hope will be a sun shining spring day in Idaho. The goal of the committee is to have lots of kids and parents attend and learn about the wonders of birds. I have it on good authority that this free event is designed with families in mind and is not strenuous and that kids of any age will have a good time. I encourage you to take the opportunity to enjoy one of the many great things about our community; there is seldom better time spent than that with family and it too is a measure.

Until next week...