

Our City

It is hard to hate someone you know the story of. You may disagree. But in a nutshell, that was what this week was all about for me. It was all about perspective and it made me better.

Last Monday was a scramble and the first day back to school after the holidays. Some of the kids and I were ready; some others were not. It was a scramble because on Tuesday we started the most awesome week in my memory at AFHS; and there was a lot to get ready for. Our FFA Chapter was hosting a segment of Experience State Week with the six National FFA Officers, the six State FFA Officers, and 235 members from nine different FFA Chapters. The High School began a week of Breaking Down the Walls, which included every student from William Thomas Middle School and AFHS and both faculties. Whether students participated in both or just the latter, they came away from the week changed; better than they began it.

Experience State Week with the FFA focused on maximizing one's leadership potential, recognizing others for what they can contribute, and not judging others just because they have a different opinion or view. Do we have differences at AFHS, on the City Council, in American Falls, in Idaho, and across the country? Rhetorical, I know. The point of the National FFA Officers' message, and my opinion, is that our differences do not define who we are as a person, community or country; but rather, it is what we have in common. This is summarized best by the FFA Motto: Learning to do – doing to learn – earning to live – living to serve.

Had Nathan Whittle (Vice-Principal) or I planned it, I would have said we were geniuses. But alas, it was purely an accident and lack of communication on my part that put the Experience State Week and the first part of the Breaking Down the Walls event on top of each other on the school calendar. Breaking Down the Walls was all about taking the time to know one another and judging less. A few words cannot describe the four-day, ten-hour process. Suffice it to say that new friends were made, wrongs between friends righted, life stories shared without saying a word and countless tears shed by students and faculty as we realized the commonalities in each of our stories. It was powerful and I will say life changing for many. Thank you AFHS seniors Emma Reed and Ashley Call for bringing this event to American Falls as part of your senior project. Thank you Mr. Whittle for helping them.

As I sat through the debate on the City's proposed Park Smoking Ordinance at Wednesday's City Council meeting, I couldn't help but reflect back on lessons that had been reinforced Tuesday. I had no idea what I would learn over the course of the next two days. The Council and community remain split on how or even if the proposed Smoking Ordinance should be enacted. In the end I assigned a committee to bring a recommendation back to the Council at our next meeting that will help resolve a majority of the differences. I suspect the current proposed ordinance will be changed, which will prolong the debate another month or so. I am good with that. It is not about doing it quickly; it has to be about doing it right.

The discussions and motions that accompanied the Council's agenda items concerning golf were handled forthwith but correctly. The one item of discussion in the new golf budget centered on being able to purchase food and beverages in the clubhouse with tournament winnings. I fully understand that this has been common practice in the past. However; for the sake of transparency and accurate record keeping this practice will no longer be followed.

Specific line items have been setup within the new budget to delineate all transactions and to keep tournament winnings separate from all other dealings. I know this may not be received well by some; and I apologize for any inconvenience that it may cause. From a record keeping standpoint, it is the fiscally correct course of action. I believe that minus this one exception you will be pleased with the changes coming in March to the American Falls golf course. I hope to see you there.

Thursday after participating in the seven-hour session of Breaking Down the Walls, FFA members Riely Geritz, Maddie Wagoner, Katie Ward and Elisha Anglesey and I headed to Boise with tears drying and hearts still pounding. The National and State officers would be meeting us there for the Rise Conference. Our four FFA members would be joining 150 others from all across Idaho at a conference centered on leadership development and service. I would be attending the Idaho Ag Teacher and FFA Board of Directors meeting. The Rise Conference was a once in a lifetime opportunity for these FFA members to work with and build relationships with each other. Beyond the conference and its leadership workshops the FFA members came together in a community service project that took 8500 pounds of donated potatoes and sorted and packaged them into boxes which will provide 72,000 meals for the Boise Food Bank. Think about over four tons of potatoes, 150 FFA members hand sorting into ten pound boxes, hand writing messages for every box, all while singing and having a great time. How long would it take? I wondered if they would finish by morning as they didn't begin until after 8:30 Friday night. Thirty minutes! That is what it took this group of highly motivated kids. It was amazing to see. The transformation the week made on these for kids was amazing to witness as well.

The decisions that came out of the Board of Directors meetings that I attended will make the Idaho Ag Teachers Association and Idaho FFA better. I was able to review our Idaho Quality Program Standards grant with Dr. Allison Touchstone of the University of Idaho and she provided valuable input for its completion. More importantly Friday morning saw all the National and State Officers, 150 FFA members, 20 or so Ag teachers and just as many Idaho Senators and Representatives enjoy breakfast and share the success that has been the Idaho Agricultural Initiative. Thank you Senator Guthrie for joining us; and I would like to extend my continued appreciation to the entire legislative body for continuing to work forward in making Idaho agriculture, Idaho Agricultural Education, and Idaho FFA the very best they can be.

I wrote recently about needing to recharge and refocus. After this past week, even though it didn't all go according to my plan, I am. The next six months are the busiest part of the year for me. Within the City they hold challenges and opportunities for all of us. For the American Falls FFA Chapter and its members the same can be said. If we can be cognizant of each other's story or at least perspective, many things will be possible. Without question I came through the week a better me; most if not all the students at American Falls High School would say the same thing. In the words of Idaho's FFA Executive Director Casey Zufelt while at American Falls High School with the National and State Officers, "I am so freakin' pumped! This is so awesome! You can see them all getting better! It is so cool!" Yes, it is Casey.

Until next week...