

Our City

The title I have always given this column is “Our City.” When it is published, the editors always use their take away as the title, which is their prerogative. I have often been inclined to insert my life experiences into these ramblings because as a citizen of our City I feel like you should know what makes me tick. That way, when I make decisions that affect you in my position as Mayor, you have some background that gives you insight beyond what may at the time be printed. My ramblings often include bits about fishing and school or FFA because they are a big part of who I am, but they always tie into what I see happening and believe is important in our community. Although, while I often write about personal experiences I have seldom if ever made a decision predicated on my personal set of values. As Mayor I believe as a community we are a collective.

Take last Wednesday’s City Council meeting as example. I won’t rehash the history of the proposed no smoking ordinance; as I have written about it several times. The public hearing on the proposed amended ordinance was agenda item number two. A local tv station and several citizens were there to take part in the democratic process. Citizen comments and letters were overwhelmingly opposed to the proposed ordinance. Council debate and deliberation was split as was their vote to abandon the ordinance. As citizens you should appreciate that you are well represented.

I have not expressed my opinion on the issue because I didn’t want to sway the undecided or uncommitted. I believe folks ought to form their own opinions on issues and then express those well thought out beliefs when warranted. Sally suggested to me last week that not speaking out on the issue may be a lack of leadership on my part. She is probably right. She usually is. No, really, she is.

My personal belief on the matter is that a person’s right to smoke in a public venue is preempted by the next person’s right to breathe clean air. But, that is not how I voted to break the tie. In this singular position as Mayor I have been elected to represent the whole of our community. I view that at times vastly different than when I was a member of the City Council, where there were five other voices and opinions that rightly represented a diverse set of ideals and citizens. As I listened to the opposing public comment and Council deliberation, I saw that it would come down to my vote. Quite honestly I didn’t struggle with the decision to abandon the ordinance; forgoing my personal belief was the right thing to do in light of the public testimony. After the abandonment of the ordinance, the Council voted unanimously for a resolution that would provide signage and encourage voluntary smoke-free areas in City shelters, permanent restrooms, playgrounds and ball fields. If at such time smoking in these areas becomes a problem for more citizens as a matter of public record, I am sure a similar ordinance will be proposed. I would ask that you please be cognizant of each other’s rights and wishes as you visit our public parks and other outdoor facilities.

The Council’s above actions will not change anything on the Golf course. They don’t really change anything in the parks either, other than the request that people not smoke in certain areas. While there will be no signage, I am asking smokers to think about where they choose to smoke, especially if there are kids or people with compromised health around.

Denny Howell told me yesterday that 12 of the 13 new Yamaha golf carts will be here on Monday. Some of you have been out enjoying a few rounds of golf, “on the house” as it were, over the last few weeks. The course is set to open this Wednesday, February 25, for official play as the carts, some refreshments and merchandise become available. Unfortunately the transfer of the liquor license is taking longer than anticipated so you may need to forgo the purchase of a “cold one” from the Clubhouse for a little longer. Denny and Cody are continuing to work together both inside and outside the clubhouse. Ya, Denny is pretty handy on a mower too. I need to thank Cody for all his extra time helping Denny with the point of sales system and clubhouse preparation. They work very well together; I think you will like them as a team. As a City I already see the value in the direction we chose for the golf course.

On another positive note, the bids were open last Wednesday for the electrical and irrigation improvements to be done this spring at Willow Bay. I am very pleased to announce that our own S&J Electric was awarded the bid as the general contractor and Ryan’s Sprinkler will also be hired as a subcontractor on the irrigation installations. S&J’s bid came in within our budget to complete all the associated upgrades to the northern-most camping area, funded by a grant written by Superintendent Peirsol last year. I have known Shane Lott of S&J, and Ryan, since my early years of teaching and coaching at American Falls High School. As a matter of fact, Shane was our FFA Chapter’s first Sentinel. Yes, we are a small town. I have taught hundreds of students like Shane and Ryan who eventually enter the real world and make a real difference as business owners, employers and members of our community. They and the hundreds like them make me proud of what I do as an Ag teacher, FFA Advisor and former coach.

“Our City,” American Falls, was recently recognized as one of Idaho’s top ten safest places to live. Chief Wilkinson and his department are exemplary in what they do day in and day out, much of which goes unnoticed by the rest of us unless we need them.

Yes, Our City, American Falls is a collective; and we remain – the best place to live.

Until next week...