

Our City

“I don’t believe we’ve been introduced,” I said as I extended my hand to shake his. He replied that we actually had 25 years ago when he was one of my students. But, I am getting ahead of myself. The American Falls FFA Ag Issues team and I were at the Lion’s Club meeting last Tuesday as the team joined the Lions for dinner prior to presenting their forum. As Esther Giesbrecht set out the buffet, we all mingled and chatted amongst the Lions. I didn’t recognize one 30-something year old gentleman so I went over to introduce myself. He was absent the traditional Lion’s vest and pins, and I had no lead as to who he was; so I just stuck out my hand. “Yes, we have. I am Jared Hall.” An expletive flashed through my mind as I looked closer. He was big and tall in high school but he had really grown up in the years since. As it turns out Jared and his family are returning home to American Falls so that he can assume the duties of his father-in-law Bob Cox with the local Farm Bureau office. Bob is retiring after decades of service to the company; I wish I could say it is on his own terms but for those of you who know him realize it isn’t, as he continues to battle mesothelioma. F’n cancer! But, even in life’s most difficult moments sometimes good things come to pass. American Falls is so lucky to have Jared and his family return home, what a valuable contribution they make. My heartfelt hope is that Hall’s return brings some sense of relief and hope to the Cox family as well.

As Council members Jensen, Hammond and Hofmeister along with Clerk Robyn Herndon and I began working through the preliminary budgeting process, we looked for places to provide relief for our citizens who need it most. In going through the early numbers from the golf course we found many things to be encouraged about and praised the efforts of our Golf Pro Denny Howell and Superintendent Cody Moldenhauer. We haven’t yet gotten the “numbers” from the County or State yet we spent much of the time figuring out how to balance wages and benefits in light of the recent reorganization. The fees we pay for water, sewer and garbage were discussed at length as none of us wants to increase that burden; but we are bound by our oaths to insure not only those services but the infrastructure that provides them.

I have written in the past about trying to offer a similar program through the City as the County offers in their Circuit Breaker program. This program provides a small measure of help to families truly struggling to make ends meet. However, any funds expended by the County through this program are reimbursed by the State. If the City is to adapt a similar measure, those costs would be shared by the service user as there is no reimbursement mechanism for the City. So it turns into a question of the greater good. It is not difficult to make a valid argument for either side. Robyn will be getting numbers and figures from the County and the discussion will continue as we learn more about how such a program will affect each of us as the budgeting process continues.

A similar discussion was directed at the City’s ability to offer water services only to property owners who are trying to sell their vacant homes and want to keep their yards presentable for prospective buyers, but can’t afford to continue to pay for garbage and sewer they are no longer using. The City offered this service in the past but found all too often that it was being abused, so it was discontinued. Like so many things it only takes a few selfish individuals to spoil a good faith effort on everyone else’s behalf. It is on the agenda for this week’s Council meeting, I believe we are ready to give it a second chance. I wouldn’t hold my breath on a third.

I like that you no longer have to hold your breath as you pass the Waste Water Treatment plant on your way to the river. I also appreciate that the new plant will serve this community well for decades to come. I am particularly glad, but nowhere near as much as Superintendent Pete Cortez, that the entire thing is nearly done. The substantial completion walk-through was conducted last Friday on the new maintenance shop in preparation for the ribbon cutting and open house on June 11th from 3:00 to 5:00 pm. Please join us! I cannot thank Pete enough for his continued diligence and efforts.

Diligence and efforts were rewarded last night as the Class of 2015 graduated from American Falls High School. The class wasn't as big as when Jared Hall graduated 22 years ago, but there was no shortage of great kids much like Jared. Beyond the wonderful speeches by Salutatorian Madison Breeding and Valedictorian Riely Geritz, the thing I will remember is the number of 50-year graduates that were able to attend. I was standing in the very back corner behind the stage (I am a door monitor during the ceremonies) so it was difficult to hear, but I believe 30 of a class of 31 were able to attend. Many of the Class of '65 I know; man you guys rock! As they all stood up in the center of the gym they appeared more like family and close friends rather than just classmates. It was way cool to see, and I must commend Tiffani Anderson, class of 2015, for the great sketch she gave of the class of '65. Well done! I shouldn't have been surprised, as I have had her in class for several years; but she surprised me.

I very much appreciated the reflection and humor of Madison Breeding's address, as did her classmates. As she spoke my mind reflected too on her outstanding efforts as a freshman on the 2012 Ag Issues team. They do grow up fast don't they? One of Madison's Ag Issues teammates, another freshman, Riely Geritz. While I hope her words of encouragement and potential were not lost on her classmates and the rest in attendance, they pulled at my heart strings as my eyes dampened with tears.

As I shook the hands and hugged all the 2015 graduates I was proud of what we all do in this School District, kindergarten through 12th grade. We are a good team! As we concluded the budget meeting Thursday night, I was filled with a sense of pride also, as efforts of the Council in the end always reflect the needs of the greater good. And that my friends, like the efforts of so many educators, is no small thing.

My efforts with students, teacher in-service training and taking a few days to recharge will have me out of town several days this summer. During the times I am absent I have asked Council members Hammond and Jensen to contribute to this column. I am sure you will find Dan's and Kristen's contributions and insight as welcome as I do.

Until next week...