

## Our City

Think about a quantity of ten percent. Ten percent of something you use every day. We will revisit that thought in a bit; so please keep it handy.

This past week was focused almost entirely on community for me. More precisely how to make us better as a whole. How to keep from continually losing some of our very best parts.

In last week's Press you will recall that I wrote about the "nones" and gave credit where credit was due to the families of the Rockland 4-H, their FFA members and advisor Andy Nelson. Please don't confuse either with a lack of pride I do have in and determination that I do have for all the students in the American Falls school system, our Ag program and FFA Chapter. Three weeks ago I was in Indianapolis with the National FFA. Specifically, I was one of 21 other Ag teachers who were charged with judging 619 National Chapter applications, twice. You may remember that last April our Chapter was selected as Idaho's best, based on this same application. At the national level the National Chapter applications are awarded one, two, or three gold stars. Three is the very best. The American Falls FFA Chapter is perennially a Three Gold Star Chapter and will be recognized as such again, one of four in Idaho this year. The Chapter was also considered as a Model of Excellence, an award given to the ten highest scoring chapters in the country. While we were close, we did not make the top ten. To say that I am proud of our kids, their FFA Chapter, and the support given to us by our community would be a considerable understatement.

On Monday and Tuesday of last week I worked with three of our FFA officers Skylyn Sprague, Hadlee Anderson and Abby Rowe to finalize our Chapter's Program of Activities (POA) and prepare for our first Advisory Committee meeting of the coming school year. While a third of the POA relates to student development, the vast majority of it involves the Chapter working with and giving back to the community.

As the three FFA officers and I met with the Ag program's Advisory Committee Tuesday night much of the agenda dealt with how the Ag program can better provide what our community partners need. Beyond employees that are responsible and dependable, our community partners need employees with the right back ground and real life experiences. Yet, so often the students with that very potential leave "home" for someplace else. The most valuable decision stemming from the meeting was a commitment as a community to do a better job of growing our own. Too often young folks leave American Falls for something bigger and better, yet what many of them find in the end could have been found right here at "home." We have the basics of the plan outlined and much of the infrastructure of this employer/employee pipe line is available although it needs some restructuring to be a real benefit to both. The FFChapter, the Advisory Committee and the American Falls FFA Alumni will be working to that end in the months and years to come.

As an aside, I spent a few hours Wednesday evening working with the 2016 Ag Issues team. I mention it because the team's issue will be centered on immigration. Of the seven, two are first-generation residents and three are first generation citizens. All seven are poised with the world before them and they epitomize the type of student agriculture and agribusiness so desperately search for. We need to figure out how to grow them into those careers.

Thursday found me in Pocatello at two meetings; one dealt with future city projects and the other on the lack of available people with welding skills so desperately needed in the region. Many companies which are dependent upon competent welders to help facilitate the growth they are ready to implement find themselves stalled because of the lack of a skilled work force. Interestingly, we had a very similar conversation with the Advisory Committee two days previous. The results of the conversation were similar. We will be working with local and regional businesses dependent on welders, the ISU welding program, and the Department of Labor to help fill this critical void.

Thank you Tammy Ramsey for all your efforts on behalf of the American Falls community through your involvement with the Katherine Winters Little Theater and the wonderful Music in the Park series. The finale last Thursday evening was very good. That the proceeds of this annual series will be used to build a performing arts venue in the City Park is awesome as well. I was pleased to see Troy Braselton and Delane Anderson at American Falls Days trying to raise funds for the very same thing; thank you gentlemen.

Don't be surprised in the months and years to come if you see the City of American Falls working closely with the Falls Irrigation District (Idaho Ground District 120) as a member of the Idaho Ground Water Association (IGWA). In a meeting in Burley last Friday municipalities all along the Upper Snake River Plain were informed that ground water use by not only agriculturists but cities as well would need to be lowered by 240,000 acre feet collectively over the next decade. What does that mean for us as residents of Water District 120 and American Falls? If we want a future that provides for community growth, based on the general information given at the meeting I think it means a ten percent reduction in domestic water use. As a city I think it makes a very good argument for the reuse of our clean water leaving the treatment plant. The reuse issue is one I discussed with Jim Mullen of Keller Associates during my first Thursday meeting last week. I believe it has real potential.

A ten percent reduction. How much is that? The average American Falls person uses about 136 gallons of water per day in home, the national average is 110. That number goes up considerably as homeowners water lawns and gardens through the growing season. But, just considering in-home use it would mean I would take a three to five minute shorter shower each day to save 13 gallons. No, it is not much; although it all adds up. At this point it is still only a thought of mine and by no means required of anyone, but make no mistake somethings will change in the way we all use water. It is unavoidable at this point according to Idaho water law and recent rulings by the Director of Idaho Water Resources. And, as part of a very agricultural community, it is something we all have a vested interest in.

As you consider your ten percent, also tuck away that news from Magnida was received last Friday. They have selected KBR to be their general contractor. If all goes well and according to plan they should reach financial close in early 2016 and be ready to start their project. As a community, I know we can be ready and willing to grow. Do you what you can to keep our very best parts and people here. I look forward to working with you toward that end.

Until next week...