

## Our City

Most things are dependent on their foundation; whether it is a single structure, surrounding infrastructure, a basic skill and yes even people as a whole. The past week reinforced that for me; the value of a proper foundation in all things human or otherwise. The right foundation provides for a solid future even if the accompanying structure develops faults or disrepair. Of course, maintenance of any foundation and that which is built upon it is critical for the long term. And, sometimes, the foundation must be rebuilt because what is atop is too valuable to let falter or fall. Thus, the importance of our City's personnel and our schools' teachers. Each is the founder and custodian of our future.

As Deputy Clerk Teri Miller, Clerk Robyn Herndon, Councilwoman Kristen Jensen and I worked through interviews to try and find a replacement for the "face and voice of the City," Debbie Erickson, I recognized similarities in all the candidates; yet there were differences as well. Any interview is about finding the "right fit" for the job and oftentimes it comes down to the seemingly really small details in finding that fit. I thank each applicant for their genuine desire to become a part of the City. For me the biggest differences came down to two foundational characteristics that I try and teach every day. The interesting thing was those two things were the same things Teri, Robyn and Kristen noticed. Both traits typically reflect how one deals with nerves and pressure. Not many things impose pressure and expose nerves as an interview for a job you know will provide a better life for you and your family. In most cases, but not all, the fluidity of thought translated to speech and meaningful eye contact reveal the foundation upon which the rest is built. On paper the candidates who were interviewed were fairly similar; in person they separated themselves. It is the teacher in me that prompted this paragraph, the Mayor would have left it alone. I hope some readers may learn from it. My students will tell you no sentence should start with "Um," and if you want to engage your audience, eye contact is critical. The new "face and voice of the City" will be Minerva Chaqueco; she is the right fit for the job.

After the interviews on Tuesday, I made my way to the American Falls High School Leadership team meeting where we discussed and planned the coming year. It was sobering yet full of promise. As we reviewed the results of our new standardized State test, or ISAT 2.0, we knew going in they would be lower. The entire State was. But, we find ourselves below the State average on each of the three tests for reading, language and math. Which, as Mr. Hansen points out, "We have room to improve." Yes, we do.

Jeff Sayer, Director of the Idaho Department of Commerce states, "A student's hope, engagement and economic status is a 30 times greater indicator of success than test scores." At AFHS our mission statement is, "We Believe, WE WORK, We Achieve." As to Director Sayer's statement, we at American Falls High School influence a student's hope and we are charged with engaging them every day. As the team discussed our way forward one thing became abundantly clear. That is that many of our students lack a critical foundational piece which allows their peers to succeed where they often fall short. It is not what you might think. The thing that I like about the new test is that it measures a workplace and college readiness trait that the old test did not. It measures a student's ability to problem-solve, to dig into the details of a written passage and find meaning and then express that meaning in their own words. It requires that students apply basic math, algebra and geometry to real problems and discover the answer. The test requires a foundation of perseverance and a willingness to stick-to-it

even when the problem is difficult -- a real life skill, ask any employer. As a teacher and even more as an FFA advisor I try to fortify perseverance in all my students; yet often I glaringly fail. As a teacher and advisor I have to do better; better for every student. I have to foster hope, engage students in the life-long benefits of perseverance and model for them that it is OK to fail but that what they do after failure determines the foundation on which they are building their lives. No, it is not a new concept, but it is harder than hell to teach even to the majority of our most fortunate students. Imparting this one life skill in my students is the driving reason behind why I teach. That I fail so often is draining. Yet the successes I do manage lift me up and reinforce the will to persevere when others may falter, fall and quit.

Another person quit this week in the Water and Waste Water department. We lost Lee Love to Lamb Weston and it was most likely my fault as I should have found a way to keep him here, I make mistakes all the time, I know. That Dale Mounce decided to take a job at McCain's in Burley for "personal" reasons probably could not be avoided. I sympathize with Superintendent Pete Cortez and his frustration, it will take some persistence from both of us but I have a plan that I believe will stem the flow.

Our Street and Grounds departments have been working together to improve the flow of storm water that collects at Van Buren and Fort Hall. Crews have been working with the Union Pacific to improve the drainage problem that continually backs up storm water at that location. As it turns out there is a long since buried drainage system within the U.P. right-of-way. The system was excavated and cleared this past week with the hopes that it will eliminate the back pressure that causes the flooding at Van Buren and Fort Hall. This unearthing of long buried infrastructure indicates to me that our City's planners of old indeed had the foresight to lay a proper foundation, a foundation that got lost with time, but was rediscovered because Jeff Nelson, Mark Scherer and Karl Kozain had the persistence to find a solution to a recurring problem. While the reestablished drainage system may not completely solve the issue at the intersection, it is expected to dramatically decrease it. Great work gentlemen!

If you have been to the golf course this week, you may have noticed that the back wall is missing from the first cart storage shed. The foundation was bad, the wall cracked and the roof was sagging. Doug Pankratz is rebuilding the foundation and wall which in turn should level the roof. The storm water drainage from this roof as well as the other structures located parallel to the railroad track has been causing erosion damage to the ground adjacent to the track and will be mitigated before it causes structural damage to the rail bed and the buildings.

Yesterday I attended a writing workshop taught by Troy Singleton, our English department chair, and beloved teacher within the school. I was a bit apprehensive as folks tell me frequently how much they enjoy reading these ramblings; yet, I am not sure they like them for their structure and format. As we began learning about single paragraph and multiple paragraph essays, I realized that my junior high English teachers Stan Vogt and Ruth Johnson along with Melba Rae Barnett at Highland built a pretty decent writing foundation in me. Mr. Singleton's maintenance of the foundation was very welcome and extremely well done. Troy's students love him because he is a brilliant teacher; that he is a great builder and custodian of the English language may escape some of them.

Until next week...