

Our City

The loud and long string of expletives was impressive as I entered City Hall early last week. I could hear them halfway down the hall as I entered the back of the building and encountered Jeff Nelson, our Building Administrator and Street Superintendent. Further down the hall I glanced at Clerk Robyn Herndon in her office as she gave me a “it’s been one of those days” looks. The colorful vocabulary was coming from one of our senior citizens and they were addressed at Judy Fehringer, our Ordinance Officer. I signaled for Jeff to follow me as I headed to the Police side of City Hall and our upset citizen. Jeff slid past me, as he knew the gentleman. As Jeff engaged him in civil conversation it became apparent that the “Alley Cleanup” was a pretty “big blanking” deal. To be fair most of us get upset when things affect us that we didn’t know were happening and don’t understand. Such was early last week at City Hall as folks in town received notices to trim their trees that infringed into City alley right of ways. Do you ever feel good about yourself because the people you work with are so darn good at what they do? I did as I watched Jeff de-escalate the situation and explain what exactly the City was doing in the alleys; Robyn and Judy had been doing it all day which explained the look I received moments earlier. The gentleman left happy and grateful for the service the City was providing. As he passed me, he nodded thanks. I returned an understanding smile.

Folks often ask me, “How do you put up with all the complaints?” To be honest I really don’t get many as the City’s employees field the vast majority of them, just as Jeff had done. Usually the ones that make it to my office are just confirming what they have previously been explained or they are of a nature that they need Council consideration. Our employees have pretty phenomenal people skills, those “soft skills” that are so hard to teach but are invaluable in the work place and especially in public service. To me they are invaluable; often more so than technical expertise. Technical skills are comparatively easy to install.

I was informed yesterday by Public Works Director Jeremy Peirsol that Mark Scherer and Karl Kozain will have finished their last Local Highway Technical Assistance Council (LHTAC) class this past week and will be receiving their Road Master certification a bit later this fall. You may recall that both Mark and Karl received their Roads Scholar certification about two years ago when then Street Superintendent Whited received his Road Master. Similarly Isaac Gonzalez and Brian Morris recently passed tests in Water and Waste Water certifications. Jeff, Jeremy and Chris Fehringer are preparing for their CDL tests and will finish that process within a week or so. Jeff and Jeremy will also be taking part in the LHTAC training and gain similar certifications to Mark’s and Karl’s in the next few years. It pleases me to no end that all of our City employees choose to take advantage of continuing educational opportunities; beyond their people skills it is another thing that makes them so valuable. I applaud their initiative.

Jeremy was exercising a high level of initiative as he sat in a dentist’ office last week and worked on finding several cost savings grants. One such opportunity involves working with Idaho Power to develop a hydraulic model that will optimize the efficiency of our pumps. This collaborative effort could provide savings of up to 25% of our \$82000 power -- \$20,500. He is also working on a Department of Water Resources grant that will cover 40% of costs of SCADA (supervisory control and data acquisition) like systems for parks and golf irrigation systems to improve our irrigation efficiencies and conserve water. Willow Bay could look

different if Jeremy is successful at acquiring a \$200,000 grant that will provide for the paving of the campground. And, if successful, our City signs will get a \$30,000 facelift through an LHTAC grant Jeremy is in the process of completing. It was an LHTAC grant that refinished Fort Hall Avenue and much of McKinley Street this past summer. Jeremy continues to work with our partners at JUB Engineering as we try to gain the funds to finish the meandering sidewalk and other park amenities to both North and South City Parks. I failed to ask him if he was in the actual dentist's chair as he worked on these applications – that would be way impressive!

Superintendent Pete Cortez made two new hires this week. Welcome back Darren Dahlke and welcome Brett Hensley. You may remember Darren as a hometown boy and past City employee. Sometimes it is nice to find out that the grass is just as green in the pasture where you were raised as it is on the other side of the mountain. Sometimes you have to miss what you had before you realize what you lost; I learn the hard way sometimes, too.

Many of my students are similar, but in their case it is often associated with growing up. Sometimes it is not the lesson that is intended to be taught that teaches the real lesson. Such was the case during our first Biology field trip last week where we sampled marcoinvertbrates in the river below the dam. Students were told the day before to dress warm and wear shoes they could get wet or bring some type of wading boots. Some did, many did not and one went barefoot in nice clothes and knitted shawl (neither choice turned out well for her). Cé la vie. But this week when we do a full day of stream surveying on the upper Portneuf and Pebble Creek, I doubt many will make the same mistake; but some will.

Last Tuesday was a really cool day in my Ag Communications classroom as the students were teamed into FFA Officer groups and reciting the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of an official FFA meeting. Most of these kids are terrified to speak in front of anyone much less their peers. But as a group they did awesome and some individuals truly shined; three surpassed my highest expectations. On Wednesday as the students completed their journal of accomplishments for the week I made about 20 calls to parents to express how pleased I was with their son's or daughter's achievements. It is kind of mean the way I do it -- as I have the kids call which ever parent may be available saying in a concerned voice (we are working on speaking techniques), "Mom, Mr. Beitia needs to talk to you about me!" Mom or Dad are not in the habit of getting calls from school and if they do they generally have reason for concern. So when the phone got handed to me, there is some trepidation in their voice and when I proceeded to tell them how awesome their child did I can feel them light up with pride. It was super COOL! The parents of three students who surpassed my expectations were the most proud, and rightfully so. I saw a glimmer of the "soft skills" so in need in the real world last week in many of my students. But the freshmen in my communications class showed the most.

This Wednesday the ninth graders will have the opportunity to meet and interact with potential employers as management and human resource personnel from Simplot, Lamb Weston, Petersen Manufacturing, Driscoll Potato, Lance Funk Farms, ISU and the City present a panel discussion on the importance of "soft-skills" in any workplace. This panel discussion is one of the first of many steps we are taking on the advice of my Advisory Committee and industry professionals to try and start growing more of our own future employees. Hopefully stemming the gap in our agricultural and technical skills workforce. Soft-skills learned early become invaluable, paying dividends to both the employee and employer throughout a career.

Until next week...