

Our City

Generosity, the greater good, and growth have been on my mind lately. As have Albert Wada and Shane Tilley; Bill Schatz and Lyndon Porath; Chris Fehringer; Doug and Grant Neibaur; Doug and Tyson Ruff; Garn, Steve and Brian Theobald with R&G Potato; Gary, Jared and Jordon Gehring; Greg Pahl; Jim and Alex Tiede; Kevin Ramsey; Kim West; Klaren, Kenny, Kamren, Pete and Kael Koompin; Lance Funk; Lee, Jason and Thomas Kress; Loraine and Thayne Driscoll; Mike Schritter; Monty, Tyson, Tanner and Colby Funk; Nate Schreoder; Ritchie Toevs; Sid Allen; Wilbur and KrystKrien and Will Rowe. For twenty five years these members of our community have supported a fledgling program. After a quarter century, one would not expect it to still be considered young necessarily. But, considering the vast majority of its brethren began in the 1930's and 40's, 1990 is pretty young; especially in terms of generations of students. It has been my experience that folks tend to invest where they see opportunity. Although sometimes the greatest opportunities are accompanied by great risk; which is why the generations matter at times. Experiences within the program matter whether they are actual, perceived or witnessed, for they measure the investors' Return on Investment(ROI). The true value really is the difference made; input plus growth equals the return on investment.

Too often things within our society tend to be measured with a single number because it is convenient, easy to qualify, manipulate and interpret. But seldom in terms of people's lives does a number show the actual ROI. For 25 years American Falls farmers have invested in our agricultural education program. Twenty-five years ago they had no idea if they would see a return on their investment, yet they donated to support the kids in hopes that it would. Today those same farmers continue to support the students enrolled in our Ag program, many of whom are products of that very program. Honestly, to most kids that graduated more than ten years ago I was more of an athletic coach than an FFA advisor; which is a fair assessment. The support the two generations of Ag students at American Falls High School have received has been nothing short of phenomenal. That investors in our program continue to see value in what is taught and more importantly learned, retained and put into practice drives me daily and keeps me awake some nights for I am not sure I always deliver the expected return.

I felt that way last June when not a single competitive team placed in the top five at the State Career Development Events (CDEs) in Moscow. Last Friday I felt the same way as I did a final grade check only to find after weeks of prodding and reminding I had students ineligible to participate in our National FFA competitions this week. Thankfully teachers made time to grade late papers and tests. To the teachers who chose freely to make that extra effort, I thank you. To the students and their parents who volunteered to step in to cover, just in case, I thank you as well. I am not sure the right lessons were taught as I bent to the needs of the greater good. Time will tell as it always does.

Last Saturday the American Falls FFA Chapter and over 60 of its members participated in our annual River Walk. The River Walk involves cleaning up trash from the Pipeline boat ramp up river from the Chicken Riffle, along McKinley to the Frontage Road and from Willow Bay Café along the beach past the park. After the service project the FFA members held a Chapter meeting where they debated how to best address student performance in the classroom and involvement in FFA activities that require them to miss school. The result from the debate was that no FFA member would be allowed to participate in an FFA activity if they had a single

grade below a C a week prior to the activity or competition. I am very pleased to say that as a group they get it. "School comes first and we are here to learn, we are here to make ourselves better so that we can pay back what has been so freely given to us," is an excerpt from debate offered by Maddie Wagoner. The motion to adopt the new policy into our Chapter's By-laws passed unanimously. After the meeting the Chapter members and a few guests loaded a bus and headed to Albion and the Haunted Mansions where a frightful time was had by most.

As I read City Council candidates' responses to questions in the Press last week and what they all believed to be our City's greatest challenge my mind again returned to where it seemed to be most of the week and a quality return on investment. The candidates all made valid points in my opinion. Beyond their points I would also add that our greatest challenge is to provide the highest quality services we can for each of our citizens. Those services are epitomized in the people we employ, their continued training, their willingness to go the extra mile, to be on call and available whenever needed - their selflessness to the greater good. Our greatest challenge day-in and day-out is to meet that expectation from each citizen. If we fail in that regard little else matters. The purpose of City government is service.

To that end I have asked Clerk Herndon to place a suggestion box in City Hall. The box is intended to solicit anonymous constructive input from employees and citizens as to how we can do a better job as a City serving you. After I return from the FFA events next week the superintendents and I will review the contents of the suggestion box and develop a plan to better serve you. I certainly do not mean to imply that we haven't been providing quality service, but I firmly believe one can always make their best better. Sometimes an outside or different perspective reveals a new way forward, I am always looking for a better way forward. I am well aware that a "suggestion box" at City Hall is not a novel idea. But, frankly I know peoples' lives are busy, usually too busy, to attend City Council meeting and offer input, unless it is something that directly affects you at the time. The suggestion box will remain available at City Hall and its contents will be reviewed the last week of each month. Constructive suggestions will be placed on the Council agenda for the following week. Again, help us help you.

The longer I teach and occupy the Mayor's chair the more I realize the interdependence that exists in our community. My students are dependent on the generosity of our local farmers and the will of an Advisory Committee who believes that no child will be denied the opportunity to participate at any level because of financial circumstances. Our farmers in turn rightfully expect a return on investment demonstrated by the students they invest so much in generation after generation; students who intended to learn to "work efficiently and think clearly with such knowledge and skill as they can secure. Students who believe that they can exert influence in their home and community which will stand solid for their part in that inspiring task" (E.M. Tiffany, FFA Creed, 1933). A task and community dependent upon its citizens to realize that our neighbors' futures may well be our own. To see value in service and help when help is needed. To offer a better way forward if one is sought. For each other, make American Falls the best place to live. To give each other our maximum return on investment.

Until next week...