

Our City

“Is everyone in American Falls that ignorant, arrogant and foul mouthed?” The question was posed to me about one of our youth teams as I sat in the Law Offices of Racine, Olson, Nye, Budge and Bailey waiting for Sally to finish up work so that we could enjoy an evening out with friends. I humbly replied, “No.” Then apologized to the offended parent.

I learned a true life lesson when I was nine and almost 25 years ago from Dick Brulotte as we were getting ready to return from a real butt whipping at Fruitland. I had only known him a month and the kids didn't really know either of us. As we went into the locker room to check it before leaving, what we found was appalling. Without a word Dick went to the bus and got everyone back off and they spent the next 20 minutes cleaning the filth and mess they had left. Then the lesson came. The short version, “How you act, what you say, the way you treat people and how you leave a place, even in defeat, defines you. Not only does it define you, but it defines your parents, your school and your community. What you do and say paints everyone in American Falls with the same brush because you may well be all they know and remember of American Falls.”

The disturbing thing for me is that I had a similar question asked by a different person in regard to the same group of kids, coaches and parents a day later. It bothers me that as a community we are being labeled because of the actions of a few. In the grand scheme of things it may be easy to brush off the actions of a few kids, parents and coaches but the stain has been left and the folks that think of American Falls in a negative way talk to others; they talked to me and one didn't know me from Adam other than she heard I was the Mayor. I will always contest that how we win and lose in life is just as important as winning or losing and in the grand scheme how our kids learn to do both ultimately does matter. If we are charged with teaching, coaching or raising kids it is more so. American Falls – better is possible in this regard – be the example that is emulated not detested; please see that our kids do the same.

More positively, congratulations to Student Council Advisor Tracy Woodworth, Head Football coach Tony Cade and the American Falls Beavers for a great Homecoming week. Tracy and Tony thank you for being the right example. To the boys and girls soccer teams, girls volleyball and cross country teams and coaches thank you for the positive difference you make.

As I sat through the Power County 4-H and FFA Sale Committee meeting last Wednesday, the question of, “what are we teaching our kids” was the theme. It wasn't an agenda item but a lot of what was discussed came back to that principle and concept that what and how we teach them matters. The lesson I learned when I was nine is rooted in the 4-H pledge: I pledge my head to clearer thinking, my heart to greater loyalty, my hands to larger service, and my health to better living, for my club, my community, my country and my world. Mere words, but so powerful if and when practiced and developed. It was those words that brought me to teaching, coaching and public service. They and the people who taught me their true meaning made me who I am.

The two contended items of discussion dealt with a judge's ability to award white ribbons and beginning project weight limits for lambs and pigs. On the surface one may question how either relates to what 4-H or FFA teaches their members. A white ribbon disqualifies an animal from the sale because its quality is deemed to be less than acceptable for regular retail consumption – typically that means the animal is either too thin or fat or it lacks muscle and structural merit to place it in a salable grade. One of the tenets of 4-H and FFA is to teach responsibility and best management practices. Most often when a project animal grows poorly, it is due to the lack of proper nutrition, poor herd health practices and

occasionally inferior genetics. Nutrition and herd health usually correlate to a member's ability and willingness to feed and care for the project; which comes down to the expectation set by the parents and what the member learns in regard to both management areas. Evaluating genetic potential is a completely different skill and it requires that the member have a fundamental knowledge of the species and more specifically the breed and its growth characteristics; it is a higher order skill and one that can take years to learn. The point in my mind has always been that 4-H and FFA provide a valuable means by which responsibility, work ethic, hands-on and assessment skills can be taught. Too often I think kids and parents enroll in these projects because of a paycheck at the end and do very little from beginning to the end in developing a salable product. In my opinion that is entirely the wrong reason for being in 4-H or FFA which is why I made the motion to allow a judge the discretion of awarding a white ribbon. The motion passed but was contested and I understand why; sometimes an animal for whatever reason just doesn't perform as expected even with all the best management practices but again in my opinion it is the rare exception. And the intent of the motion was to assure as parents and leaders (me included) that we are teaching our kids the right things. The motion to eliminate the maximum spring weigh-in weights for lambs and pigs also passed; however, while I understand its intent I am mixed as to its merit and again what it will teach our kids.

The youth soccer season is complete and I compliment Chris Fehringer, the City's Organized Recreation manager, and all the volunteers for making the season successful. While I am not adept at basketball, I am excited about the new academy format that is being implemented by our Parks and Rec department and the head girls and boys basketball coaches at the high school. The academy format focuses on teaching the kids the fundamentals of the game in a structured manner so that as these foundational skills are developed the players can perform better in a competitive environment. My girls had to suffer through the indignity of me being their basketball coach in their early years of competition when all I knew was that the round ball went in the hoop; I wish we would have had the foresight to implement this academy approach. I believe this new approach will vastly increase the skill level of teams as a whole.

As youth basketball gets underway, throughout town fall projects are being completed. Parks, Willow Bay and ball fields are being sprayed for thistle. Willows are being removed from around the docks at Willow Bay and the Arborvitae tree was cut down at Well #3 (by the golf course) so that the roof can be repaired before winter. Our ordinance officer, Judy Fehringer, is making a last sweep of our alleys for obstructions that could impair emergency access and regular thru traffic. Next week will see the west half of the 100 block of Madison paved from Oregon Trail past the rail crossing; allowing D&B Oil to finally pave their parking lot. As funds allow next year, it is our intent to try and complete the paving of Madison to Fort Hall.

The City's fiscal year ends this week on September 30 and with it Debbie Erickson's employment as she enters retirement. Please join us at City Hall in the Council Chambers on Wednesday, September 30, from 2:00 to 4:30 in the afternoon for Debbie's retirement reception. She will be missed. I wish her and Clay the very best in the years to come.

The conversation in Sally's office sobered my mood as we met Rick and Kerry Phillips for dinner. Knowing that I am far from perfect and have done things that made no one proud and may be disappointed those who taught me better brought several emotions to the surface as I listened to Don Williams in the Stephens Performing Arts Center. Lyrics pulled at my memory and heart reminding me of those who taught me to be the right example but I know I sometimes disappointed. I will do better. What we do and say matters and knowingly or not each of us reflects on the other.

Until next week...