

Our City

In the spring of 1984, I was getting ready to graduate from the University of Idaho for the second time. The first had been a year previous with a degree in Range and Livestock Management; and after, I declared a second major in Agricultural Education. I chose my second major for three reasons: First was family security (health benefits and PERSI retirement); Second was my love for working with kids; and third it kept me tied to my roots in agriculture. But, first and foremost it was the security it would bring my family. Sally had worked at WSU in foreign admissions as I went to school and it was the benefits of her job that likely saved my life and allowed us to start a family. To do my part I worked three jobs and was a fulltime student burning the candle at both ends, which ultimately put me in intensive care for almost a month due to a virus I caught from Leona, our first child. It was after that ordeal that I decided to become a teacher.

Upon graduation, Sally had done her part and wanted to be a stay at home Mom with Leona and Frances. I took a job in Malta at Raft River High School, because it reminded me of the ranches I had grown up on. We lived in Albion and started the second chapter in our life together. Over the six years that I taught at RRHS, I was recruited by multiple other Ag programs in the Boise valley because of the successes my students at RRHS were having. Neither Sally nor I were interested in moving to the great state of Ada. During my sixth year at RRHS I received phone calls from Richard Ledington, the State Agricultural Education Program Manager, and Pat Charlton, then the principal at American Falls High School. They wanted to start a new Ag program at AFHS and asked to interview me as a possible teacher. Sally wanted to start working again, so we were open to moving. Many of you know the rest of the story.

My point in telling you a bit more of my history is again as a point of reference. I often use my own life experiences to help guide my decisions and how I deal with various situations that arise here in the City. In the last month, we have lost two very valuable employees in Karl Kozain from the Street Department and Isaac Gonzalez from the Water Department. Both have moved to Pocatello and taken jobs with that city. Interestingly, for less money than they were earning here. Which verifies for me that they did it for family reasons. The same reasons I came to American Falls. I don't know the details of their decisions; but I understand them.

A few weeks ago Dan Hammond wrote in this column that we are also losing our Public Works Coordinator Jeremy Peirsol, whose wife was offered a significant promotion with the USDA in their State office in Boise; as a family they made the decision to accept the offer. It was about ten years ago to the month that Mayor Manning and I interviewed Jeremy for the open Parks and Recreation Superintendent position. We took a chance on a kid with a Masters Degree in Public Administration and little to no experience in park maintenance or organized recreation. Jeremy will be the first to tell you that his learning curve in those two areas was steep. I will tell you he mastered the required skills quickly and has since become one of the main reasons we have been so successful in making our city a better place to live.

I don't know of a City our size that has their own grant writer and administrator. A few have a Public Works Director. But, again none have both in the same person. I often hear that no one is irreplaceable and to a point that is true. However, I am not sure if we can find all the skills Jeremy possesses in one person again. In his tenure with the City, Jeremy has brought in

millions of dollars in the form of grants and has become extremely successful as our Public Works Coordinator over the past year. Jeremy will likely leave us in October as he wants to stay through the completion of the \$275,000 paving grant project at Willow Bay and the start of the installation of the new tennis courts. Sadly, he won't be here to help coordinate the culmination of his efforts in completing the nearly \$500,000 Transportation Alternative Program grant that will see the sidewalks around City Park finished and much of Bannock Street reconstructed and improved in 2017 and 2018.

I received a phone call last week from Seth Grigg, the Executive Director of the Association of Idaho Cities (AIC), in regards to Jeremy. He was interested in hiring Jeremy as a public policy analyst with an emphasis in environmental policies as they relate to Cities. Which is exactly what Jeremy's post-secondary education prepared him to do. The short version of the half hour conversation was that I told Seth he would be making a huge mistake not to hire Jeremy. Jeremy should be hearing back from AIC within the next few weeks. I don't know what Seth's decision will be; but I know mine has been exponentially verified over the last ten years.

Jeremy's position will officially open next week. Applications will be available on the City's website or at City Hall. If you know someone who might be interested in the position please put them in contact with me via City Hall at 226-2569. Depending on experience and expertise, the wages are very competitive and the benefits second to none. If you see Jeremy over the next month or so and you appreciate the skate park, the multiple new safe route sidewalks to schools, the new boat docks, all the upgrades at Willow Bay over the past several years, many of our street improvements, the new street signs that are being installed, the new tennis courts, the new downtown and the revamped and upgraded organized recreational program, you might take the opportunity to thank Jeremy for all his efforts in making American Falls the best place to live. I know he and his efforts will be missed by more than those of us at the City offices.

Like the decisions Sally and I began making together nearly 40 years ago, I understand why folks sometimes have to move on and do what is best for their family. I am confident in the weeks and months to come we will find qualified replacements for Karl and Ike; they may not come to us with the same skill sets as Karl and Ike left us with, but they will learn. With luck American Falls will be the right place for them to raise their families and retire like it will be for Sally and me. Jeremy, Karl, and Ike, thank you again for all that you have done for the City of American Falls over the years. Your efforts here have made life better for all of us.

Until next week...