

Our City

Much of last week was spent figuring out a way forward in our Water Department. In what I thought was a productive and informative meeting last Thursday I emphasized the importance of continuing education and certification with all of our water and waste water employees. Ways were discussed to better document time spent in each area for potential certification within the two departments. In water and waste water continuing education credits are not solely enough to qualify an employee for higher certification; hours spent doing the actual tasks associated with a level of certification are also required. While current employees work to become certified as a Water II operator the City will be contracting the services of Lee Love a former employee who now works for Lamb Weston. At last week's City Council meeting direction was also given by the City Council to advertise for a Water II operator / department foreman; those advertisements will be placed this week.

Also last week a new City project came up for discussion with the public, both by myself and this year's FFA Ag Issues team. You may recall last fall I wrote about receiving a USDA Rural Development (RD) grant for \$15,000 and applying for an Idaho Gem Grant of \$50,000 to determine the feasibility of a potential hike and bike trail from Seagull Bay to Massacre Rocks State Park. The USDA RD grant has allowed us to contract with JUB Engineering to map potential trail routes, meet with various land owners both public and private, and apply for the larger Gem Grant. The final paperwork for the GEM grant was submitted last week. The FFA Ag Issues team and I spoke to the Chamber of Commerce on Thursday about the trail. It was met with favorable comments and acceptance at this initial stage as a means for potential positive economic impact to local business. Regardless of the final route between Seagull Bay and Massacre Rock State Park it will be the longest trail of its kind between Coeur d'Alene and southern Utah which in itself could help turn American Falls into a destination rather than just a stop to somewhere else. Much work still needs to be done and many voices are yet to be heard. These are the beginning stages. Even if everything goes right any on the groundwork is still at least two years away. That being said, I was encouraged by the Chamber's input and that of all the public land owners who we hope to work with.

A few weeks ago I was contacted as Idaho's Teacher of the Year to be part a focus group sponsored by YouGov. Surprisingly to me, YouGov's efforts will focus on a new American Falls School District initiative began by Superintendent Jensen this year, Read-Talk-Play. I am encouraged by the fact that our school district was already out in front with this national initiative; not that all national initiatives are necessary or beneficial, but this one truly seems to be. I am encouraged in that regard to help make a positive difference.

In other areas of focus as Teacher of the Year my 57-teacher cohorts are focusing continued efforts to bring equity to all students and address the national teacher shortage by promoting and establishing Grow Our Own programs in all school districts across this country and all of its school districts. My thanks locally goes to our own Troy Singleton who leads our local Grow Our Own teacher program. And, while I am speaking about Growing Our Own program's the FFA sponsored Career Day at American Falls High School is scheduled for March 6 from 8:30 to noon, if you haven't been contacted and would like your company to participate please contact me this week.

If you are a veteran or somehow involved with agriculture the FFA Chapter is also inviting you to join us for our annual Agriculture and Veteran Appreciation Breakfast Thursday morning, February 28, from 7:00 to 10:00 am. at the Ag Building. If you are looking for something completely hilarious, entertaining and worthwhile please come join the FFA Alumni and Friends at the Annual Donkey Basketball game Saturday, March 2, beginning at 5:30 pm. in the AFHS Commons and Gym. I hope to see you at both events.

Until next week...