

## Our City

Mother Nature can be a real challenge at times and she can usually make you adapt or perish. One such time was the afternoon of October 19<sup>th</sup>. Nearly 30 FFA members had gathered at the Ag Building for our annual fall community cleanup event, what we call the River Walk. At the onset that afternoon things went from bad to worse weather wise. At the time I felt disappointment when I cancelled the event and told the students to go home. In hindsight it was fortuitous as one of the areas to be cleaned was the Willow Bay Recreation Area.

By now you have likely heard of the weather event that took place at Willow Bay midafternoon on the 19<sup>th</sup>. The weather service out of Pocatello confirmed Cris Schultz's, the concessionaire at Willow Bay, estimate of 100 mph winds devastating the area in a micro-burst. Thirty-seven trees were lost; trees that have been a part of the area for generations, trees that were iconic to the area and gave it a special feel and appeal. They are gone! What is not gone though is the ability of this community to pull together and find a silver lining. New trees will be planted of course and planted a bit more strategically; not so close together. In the years to come the youth of today may even remember back to when Willow Bay looked a lot different. Mother Nature changes all things – either we adapt – or we don't.

As a Mayor and City Council we have learned to adapt to budgets that no longer provide for many of the “extras” that make a community a home for so many. Part of that adaptation has been our ability to partner with those who can help us make our dollars go further. One such case is the Idaho Community Development Block Grant that was awarded to the City last week. This grant is administered through the Idaho Department of Commerce and will provide \$150,000 for a new playground at the Lee Street Park. My sincere thanks is extended to Councilwoman Jensen, Michael Patton of SEICOG and Sharon Deal of the Department of Commerce in helping us secure these funds. A Playground Committee has been formed that includes Councilwomen Kristen Jensen and Blanca Mendez, Michael Patton, Whitney Lankford, Frances Beitia, Chris Fehringer and me. The committee is tasked with finalizing the new playground specifications and putting together a formal bid packet for the project. It is our goal to have the new playground in place by next May. The few pieces of playground equipment that are still functional at Lee Street Park will be placed at the Willow Bay Park at the same time.

Much of what we as a City have accomplished over the last 13 years is due largely to the relationships and partnership that have been built with those like Michael Patton and Sharon Deal; folks who can and will help when presented with a project that also fits their mission. Several years ago I took my first steps in the Mayors' Walking Challenge, which introduced me to Courtney Frost of the Idaho Blue Cross Foundation (IBCF). This year that relationship led to our inclusion in Community Health Academy. The Community Health Academy has been a six-month learning collaborative that has provided opportunities for me as mayor, Kristen Jensen and Chris Fehringer to explore in-depth ways as to how we can fight childhood obesity in our community. The Community Health Academy has allowed us to learn best practices, collaborate with other leaders and learn from local and national experts over the course of the academy. As I have written previously we learned about walkability, the economic impact of food systems in our city, as well as leadership and marketing. Upon completion of the

academy this month, a \$10,000 grant will be awarded to the city that will be used to promote youth health, recreation, exercise and connectivity.

Stemming from my involvement with the Community Health Academy the High School has been asked to be a part of the Healthy Minds Partnership which is a collaborative effort between schools and behavioral health providers to help youth receive the behavioral health services they need at school. The premise of the partnership is simple — clinical behavioral healthcare providers are located within schools so students can conveniently access necessary care, thus limiting school absences, making things easier on parents who don't have to scramble to get kids to appointments, and reducing transportation barriers. Our first meeting with Connor Sheldon-Modrow of the IBCF is next month and with the establishment of another positive relationship we hope to bring more inclusive mental health services to our District.

Also as a result of our involvement in the Community Health Academy we have also been asked to partner with The Voice of the Community Project. This project is part of a new statewide rural health initiative launched by the Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation for Health in partnership with the Idaho Rural Partnership and the Idaho Community Foundation last year. The project features a limited number of focus groups in rural communities around the state. The primary purpose is an effort to gather information on one of the most pressing health issues today: health and medical care in rural communities. For the past 11 years, the Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation for Health, Inc. (a 501 (c)(3) non-profit) has invested over \$7 million partnering with communities and organizations across the state to address childhood obesity, youth behavioral health, rural health, and innovation.

I am, and I hope you are too, pleased to have yet another opportunity to continue to adapt to the challenges and changes all around us and make ours the very best place to provide for a better life for kids, grandkids and the generations to follow.

Until next week...