

OUR VIEW

Sparking safety early

A huge community event has made area youth safer this week. More than 200 youngsters from around Steele County took part in the annual countywide safety camp last week in Owatonna.

For 25 years, the Steele County Kid's Safety Camp Board has been teaching kids how to be safe while at home, outdoors, by the lake or anywhere else. Some of the important lessons are fishing, boating, camping, firearms, bicycle, electrical and fire. Just in the past few years internet safety has been introduced as a valuable safety lesson.

Police agencies from Steele County, Owatonna Fire, Owatonna Public Utilities, Owatonna Park & Rec, the county attorney's office and others come together to provide lifesaving tips for 8 and 9 year olds who are at such an impressionable age. Kids need to learn at a young age how to be safe in every aspect of their lives.

We want to salute detective Matt Oeltjenbruns of Owatonna Police, who serves as the organizer of the camp, for his tireless efforts in keeping our young people as safe as possible. Putting on a camp of this magnitude is no easy task, but Oeltjenbruns and many others have teamed up to find a way to make it happen. In the meantime, they are helping to make our communities safer places to live.

The camp also plays an important role in breaking down the barriers between police and children. The kids get the chance to see officers in a non-threatening way that will help shape their image of law enforcement down the road.

Thanks to the safety board for making our children safer.

Joe Mauer was "the real thing"

It was once said by a former teammate of Minnesota Twins great Joe Mauer, "Joe Mauer is the real thing."

What you see when Joe Mauer walks onto a baseball field is truly what this man really is.



Reflections
HOWARD LESTRUD

Joe Mauer is a class act and always has been. He treats everyone with dignity and greatly appreciates his fandom. That was so true on Saturday night, June 15, when Mauer's No. 7 was officially retired before a sellout crowd at Target Field.

My son Troy, who now resides in Arizona, gave his dad one of the best Father's Day gifts ever. Troy was back for his grandfather's funeral a few weeks ago and when he returned to Arizona, he made arrangements to provide me with two tickets to the Joe Mauer Retirement Day.

My wife Judy accompanied me and did we ever have fun.

Rapper T.I. gave a video tribute. His recording, "What You Know" was Mauer's walk-up music for his entire career.

Joe humbly accepted all of the accolades, but not before paying tribute to all those who supported him during his professional baseball career.

"I hope when everyone here tonight sees that No. 7 hanging in the rafters, you all know that you played a role in getting it up there. I know when I see it, I'll think of all of you and be forever grateful..."

I've had the occasion to meet Mauer on the baseball field, a time when Mauer accepted a batting title trophy and a Silver Slugger bat. As I put my hand out to congratulate him, he responded sincerely, "Thank you, I appreciate it."

Mauer earned three Gold Glove awards (as catcher) and six Silver Slugger awards.

Mauer never forgot his roots of playing Major League Baseball in Minnesota.

Following the retirement program, Twins fans were directed to the scoreboard for videos between innings from former Twins teammates and from former adversaries. Two of the adversaries, Justin Verlander of the Houston Astros and Albert Pujols of the California Angels, applauded Mauer's baseball talent.

The entire evening was laced with Mauer family involvement. Nieces and nephews of Joe sang "Take Me Out To the Ballgame" and also introduced Twins players during the middle innings.

To top off the evening, the current edition of the Minnesota Twins gave Joe a special retirement gift by defeating the Kansas City Royals, 5-4, in a come-from-behind effort.

Mauer now joins the group of Twins jersey retirees: Harmon Killebrew (No. 3), Tony Oliva (6), Tom Kelly (10), Kent Hrbek (14), Bert Blyleven (28), Rod Carew (29) and Kirby Puckett (34).

Mauer's jersey retirement event was a festive occasion with his large family in attendance to enjoy the moment with Joe.

The stage was set with Mauer's biological family group on one side and his former Twins teammates on the other side.

Joe was busy accepting congratulations from family, friends and former teammates, but still had time to hold his young son Chip and also found time to accept hugs from his twin daughters Maren and Emily.

Rather than have a large group of former teammates coming to the podium to highlight Joe's banner career, the Twins franchise chose one of Joe's closest former teammates, Justin Morneau, to give a glowing reflection on Joe's career.

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STAFF PHOTO BY HOWARD LESTRUD

Saturday, June 15 was Joe Mauer Day in Minnesota and it was a special day for this former Minnesota Twins baseball star. He had his #7 retired. Here, Joe listens to tributes to his 18-year baseball career. He is holding son Chip.

YOUR VIEW

No surprise to find a cougar in factory farm country

It's no surprise that a cougar was spotted recently near Dodge Center. This isn't the first time that a cougar has been sighted in the area; one was observed a few months ago near our family farm in Westfield Township.

Our farm is surrounded by 11 swine factory farms in a three-mile radius. Dead animals from area factory farms are left to rot in open composting sheds, rather than using a rendering service. Area corporate factory

farms are havens for predators such as cougars that are searching for an easy meal, placing rural communities, children and pets at risk.

When will local citizens understand the dangers associated with corporate factory farms and challenge the foolishness of public officials who approve these facilities?

Brad Trom
Blooming Prairie

Grieving the loss of a man whose life crossed paths on the police beat

Our lives crossed paths in this journey we call life in a way I would never wish on anyone. It still tugs at my heart and haunts me today.



Hot Pursuit
RICK BUSSLER

And I don't believe my son will ever be the same again because of it.

In December 2013, while working as a police officer in Lakeville, I responded to a motor vehicle crash on Dodd Boulevard, which at that time was a dangerous two-lane road, near Lakeville North High School.

Soon after arriving and seeing the lifeless body of a 16-year-old sprawled out across the front seat with seat belt still in place, I discovered it was my son's best friend, Alyssa Ettl.

After realizing there was nothing that could be done to save this girl, I responded with our police chaplain to notify her parents of Alyssa's death. I'll never forget the moment when her mother and father, Jen and Matt Ettl, came to the door carrying on what seemed like not a worry in the world. That's until they saw me standing at the door in a police uniform. They immediately knew something had gone tragically wrong. It was the dreaded visit no parent ever wants to get. It was just weeks before Christmas and boxes were stacked around the living room waiting for the house to be decorated for the holidays. I felt like a mean Grinch coming to steal their Christmas.

crossed. I quickly found that Alyssa's tragedy brought Matt closer to God. I witnessed Matt's faith grow exponentially because of the care, love and exposure he received from the Lakeville community after Alyssa's death. Her classmates made an eternal impact in his life.

But Alyssa's death is only the beginning of this sad story. Within months of Alyssa's death, a close friend of Matt's died of a massive heart attack.

While making the death notification, my cell phone was blowing up. It was my son, Caleb. He was at school wondering what had happened. His friend was nowhere to be found, and students were just learning of a horrible crash outside their school. As soon as I could, I responded to the high school where I confirmed my son's worst fear that his best friend had been killed. I'll never forget the look of anguish and dread on my son's face when he received that terrible news.

Two months later, his mother died and that same week, the family learned his sister-in-law had breast cancer. Less than a year after Alyssa died, Matt was diagnosed with multiple melanoma, a blood cancer.

"God has been a rock for our family," Matt was known to tell people. Despite a life filled with tragedy and loss in such a short period of time, Matt said through it all he has been blessed. He never lost faith. And he proudly shared his faith with others.

In the days after Alyssa's untimely death, I got to know the Ettls during the worst time of their lives. I transported them to the impound yard where their daughter's mangled vehicle had been brought. I took them past the crash scene. I explained as best as I could what had happened. I assured them that Alyssa likely suffered no pain as she had been killed instantly. I escorted them during a roadside service where she died. I attended the funeral and graveside service. I took countless calls from them wondering what to do next. I shared many hugs of desperation with them, and I held their hands through their devastating loss and darkest moments of their life. All of it was beyond the call of duty as a police officer.

Over the past few years, Matt has been hospitalized many times in both the Twin Cities and Rochester, taken chemotherapy treatments and been on the receiving end of failed stem-cell transplants.

Whenever I would see Matt, I felt helpless. Not only did I feel pain over delivering the worst possible news to him in his life, I also felt pain not being able to make him better or make his family better. I hurt badly for him.

On Saturday, June 15, Matt lost his battle to cancer.

The Ettl story and what transpired through the past few years have been a classic reminder to me that life is anything but fair. I still wonder in disbelief how a single family can be given so much heartache and devastation. It definitely has put things in proper perspective for me and made my faith stronger.

I continued our friendship in the weeks, months and years after our untimely paths

I take great comfort in knowing Matt can now rest well and be free of pain alongside his daughter. This should also be a clue to everyone that we were never meant for this place called Earth. It's just a temporary home, and we are made to live eternally in a place of perfection with no sadness. For Matt, I rejoice in that. And for the rest of us still here, we grieve the loss that will forever change many lives, mine included.

GUEST COLUMN

Budget setting process is broken

BY PEGGY BENNETT

The 2019 session and special session has ended. There have been several articles published recently sharing the outcome of the final bills. I was planning on sharing with you some of these end-of-session accomplishments. However, I find I'm unable to put "spin" on what happened and celebrate when I don't feel we accomplished what was truly important for people.

what would and would not be in the committee's final bill.

It took a 21-hour special session, but a compromise was finally achieved to produce another two-year budget for Minnesota. That is good. I am happy with a number of things that were accomplished in the legislature this year, though I do not feel we are focusing enough on our core state priorities.

Because these leaders were so late in agreeing upon budget targets, they felt compelled to abdicate the conference committee process and shoved these bills through behind closed doors all in the name of getting them done "quickly and smoothly." How can abandoning the very process that brings transparency and a voice for Minnesotans be a good thing? It's not!

Though some legitimately good legislation was achieved for Minnesotans within this budget, I feel compelled to raise some concerns.

Some are lauding the ease and speed of getting these bills put together and "agreed" upon, but I cannot - not when I observed the bulldozing of the democratic process that took place; not when I see all the dysfunction.

Process matters because people matter. That three people should have this much power is very concerning to me. That the governor (who is part of a separate branch of government) was so intimately involved in crafting legislation - giving a "yea" or "nay" to bill provisions as part of this secret process - is highly concerning to me as well.

Process matters in a constitutional representative democracy like we have. It matters greatly that citizens have a strong voice in their government through their elected representatives and through the legislative process. It also matters greatly that the process is transparent so that people can carry on their rightful vigilance of government and of those they've elected to represent them.

The governor had already been appropriately involved in the legislative process both before session began and again during session. Why should he be allowed an extra veto pen prior to the one he gets when those bills land on his desk?

During the last two days of our regular legislative session, three people essentially wrote all the final bills that contain our state budget - the leader of the House, the leader of the Senate, and the governor. They did this behind closed doors and without public input, and with little to no input from the people's elected representatives.

Folks, the system is broken, and it has been for quite some time.

The process went like this: the two legislative leaders and the governor (along with some of the governor's commissioners) spent 30 minutes on each omnibus bill the night before session was to be done. They met in a private room with the Senate and House chairs of their respective committees for 15 minutes. Then they asked the two chairs to leave and this select "Power Team" took another 15 minutes to decide

I believe the core problem of this legislative dysfunction centers in the huge 300 to over 1,000 page omnibus bills that are chock full of a myriad of legislative initiatives. Radical legislation, some of which would never even make it to the floor for lack of votes, gets stuffed into these omnibus bills instead of coming for a vote as independent bills. This results in huge bills that are full of hundreds of pages of various provisions and containing many "poison pills" that must be hashed out at the end of session. It simply degrades and ruins the legislative process.

It is time to reform this broken process for the health of our government and for the sake of the people. There are legislators and others on both sides of the aisle who agree that the system has been broken for some time and it needs to be fixed. I am one of those legislators and am committed to finding solutions to reform this dysfunctional system and get it working for the people. That's what Minnesotans deserve.

Peggy Bennett is a state representative for District 27A, which covers all of Freeborn County, the City of Blooming Prairie and southern Dodge County.