

OPINION

THUMBS UP/ THUMBS DOWN

IEWS BY THE ECHO PRESS

Holiday lights

Thumbs up: Dale and Judy Flemming would like to send a thumbs up to all the people who added a special touch to the Christmas season with holiday lights. “The Alexandria area is beautiful with all the holiday lights aglow and our downtown area is second to none,” said the Flemings in an email. “To all the people that keep the spirit of Christmas shining brightly into the night, thank you!” If you want to see some of the festive displays, check out the winners of the newspaper’s “Light Up the Night” contest published in Wednesday’s newspaper.

The beauty of books

Thumbs up: Nothing can replace the experience of reading a good book – not electronically, but an actual paper-bound book. That’s why it’s so exciting to see the success of this year’s Project Bookshelf, which is sponsored by the Alexandria Area Branch of AAUW (American Association of University of Women). “The generosity of individuals and organizations meant we were able to donate 475 books to Jingle Bells,” said Georgia Wahlberg with the local branch. “Many children and young adults in the Alexandria area will enjoy the gift of a book this holiday season because of you.”

Not heeding the plows

Thumbs down: So far, snowplows have not been out much in our area this winter but crashes with plows have already been reported in Minnesota. Drivers should be prepared for what lies ahead. Last year, there were 84 crashes involving the public and snowplows in Minnesota. Remember to stay well behind the plow, at least 10 car lengths back, away from the snow clouds the plows produce. Other advice from transportation department: Stay alert for snowplows, which turn or exit frequently and often with little warning. They also may travel over centerlines or partially in traffic to further improve road conditions. Don’t drive into a snow cloud. Slow down to a safe speed for current conditions. Turn on your headlights and wear your seat belt. Turn off the cruise control. Be patient and remember snowplows are working to improve road conditions for your trip. Don’t drive distracted.

New Text-to-911 system is working

Thumbs up: The first year of Minnesota’s statewide Text-to-911 system is showing that the service is saving lives and making it easier to contact first responders, according to the Department of Public Safety Emergency Communication Networks (DPS-ECN) division. It reported that dispatchers received more than 4,500 texts since the program’s deployment in December 2017, an average of 375 texts per month. The new system is helping the 20 percent of Minnesotans who have some form of hearing loss. “Text-to-911 is an alternative lifeline for people who would put themselves in harm’s way if they called 911,” said DPS-ECN Director Dana Wahlberg. “But it’s also clear that Text-to-911 is solution to the communication barrier for deaf and hard of hearing Minnesotans experience in an emergency.” Here are some examples Wahlberg cited: A suicidal individual did not feel comfortable talking to someone, so they texted for help instead. An abducted woman texted 911, leading to her captor’s arrest. Children who were fearful of being overheard when calling 911 have texted when their parents were in a verbal or physical conflict. A hunter became lost in the woods on a cold night and didn’t have enough signal strength to call 911, but did have enough to text 911. A person had difficulty breathing from a panic attack and could not speak, so they texted 911. A reminder: Text-to-911 should only be used in emergencies and when speaking is not an option.

Friendly service

Thumbs up: The Alexandria Post Office is providing fast, friendly service this holiday season – so much so it prompted Jody Niesen of Alexandria to give this thumbs up: “I have been to the Alexandria Post Office several times this holiday season to mail packages. I’ve noticed that although there are still numerous customers, the line is moving much faster than other years. The service counter personnel have been extremely helpful and courteous.”

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If you have a suggestion for a Thumbs Up/Thumbs Down, email it to aedenloff@echopress.com or mail it to Echo Press, P.O. Box 549, Alexandria, MN 56308.

IT'S OUR TURN

Residents rally around lost dog

If you’ve never owned a dog, you may not understand just how completely one can fully work its way into your life – or even take it over. Ryan Hopper of Alexandria knows that all too well, and so does his family. “My son is just in love with her. He’s a single guy, and for

him to have someone to come home to at the end of the day, waiting for him, means a lot,” Ryan’s dad, Scott, said of Lola, an 8-month-old, 7-pound Yorkie mix puppy who was a survivor of an Arkansas puppy mill.

“From the minute I met her, I knew she was a part of the family,” Ryan said. As a kid, his parents had owned dogs, but this was different. “From the start she fit so perfectly into my life. If I sit down on the couch, she wants to jump right up and be with me. Really, she is family. I couldn’t imagine her not being there.”

Suddenly, that’s the prospect he faced, when on a December Saturday walk to Fillmore Park, she broke free and ran. Dogs invariably find opportunities to get free and run, but in this case it turned into a harrowing four-plus days of an all-out search by many residents from Alexandria and beyond.

“He was just fraught with despair, that she had gotten away from him,” Ryan’s dad said. “This was his first dog, and they’ve grown extremely close. That’s why it was especially tough.”

The search ended happily, when David Reis was driving home from work and in the darkness spotted a tiny dog crossing Nokomis by The Senator condominiums. Something about its appearance made him pull over and investigate.

Lola was leaning against a garage door, too tired to run anymore, and allowed Reis to pick her up. She had just a scrap of her leash dangling – maybe she got caught up somewhere, since bite marks indicated she chewed through it – and her collar was still on, with Ryan’s name and number.

“I wasn’t quite sure what to expect,” Ryan said when his cell phone rang. For days, he hoped every call



Contributed
Lola, a Yorkie mix puppy, will celebrate her first Christmas with the Hoppers after a four-day search ended in her being found earlier this month near Nokomis Street.

would be the one. “I almost couldn’t believe it.”

He had been out putting up a new set of signs around the neighborhood, as he and his family had been doing for days, and was only three or four minutes away. Those were three or four long minutes.

“It was just a massive relief,” Ryan said. “It was so hard not having her around.”

It was also a huge eye-opener into just how many people here cared about a resident and his lost dog.

“I was absolutely staggered by the response,” he said. “I knew my family and a few of my friends were out there, but people I had never met before were looking for her. A family pretty much spent their entire day. People would show up and say, ‘I’ve got the next hour (to search).’ I never expected that type of response. It really makes me happy to live in this community.”

Scott and his wife, Amy, live in Fergus Falls to be midway between their two sons in Fargo and Alexandria. What they saw here this month made the couple want to make this their home when they retire.

“We were just so floored by the number of people who were out,” Scott said. “Honestly, it was just overwhelming. At 5, 6 in the morning, it was pitch dark, and there were people walking around Fillmore

Park, yelling, ‘Lola, Lola.’ We had no idea who they were. And that’s just the tip of an iceberg. There were so many people that were involved in this.”

The Hoppers, along with a Twin Cities group called The Retrievers, flooded telephone poles with pictures of Lola. They got help from radio stations and this newspaper, and the police department helped with searchlights and heat sensors at the fairgrounds for a potential sighting, Scott said. “Bring Lola Home” was bannered on Randy Fischer Real Estate’s electronic sign on Broadway.

“There’s no way we can thank everybody,” said Scott, who made several friends through the ordeal. “Even if the outcome had been different, we were just so impressed with the people and their willingness to help. The whole experience really renewed our faith in human kindness. It was an unbelievable outpouring of support by the people in town.”

Ryan said he was fully prepared that Christmas wasn’t happening this year, and his father agrees.

“We went from where we don’t even want to celebrate Christmas, to this is going to be the greatest Christmas ever, a celebration of what we almost lost,” Scott said.

“We had given up hope. It really felt like a miracle.”

COMMENTARY

Nothing gained from encounter with DNR

By Kevin Weber, Alexandria, MN

I am an avid sportsman. I have raised both of my boys to be respectful, honest and ethical hunters. Hunters who do their part to give back to the species and hunt in a way that preserves the sport for future generations.

My intention with sharing the story is not to bash the individuals or agency involved. If after reading this, you have somehow taken my position to be anti-law enforcement you have completely missed my point as that could not be further from the truth.

Around 10 a.m. on Nov. 3, my son and one of my nephews each shot and killed a deer on our deer land in Becker County. The deer were field dressed, taken back to camp and hung up. After a quick lunch, we headed back in the woods.

Around 2 p.m., my nephew was approached on our land by a DNR conservation officer who requested to speak with the hunters who shot the deer. Upon my nephew, son and the CO returning to camp, they both were issued citations for failing to validate their deer

at the kill site. Wallets were opened and valid licenses/tags were given to the CO. For the next 90 minutes, a back and forth debate occurred between my son and the CO. For the record, my son never disputed the violation. Two deer were harvested and the tags were not immediately affixed – guilty. Here’s my issue with the DNR’s 90-minute interaction:

- ▶ Valid licensed hunters – check.
- ▶ No previous contacts with law enforcement – check.
- ▶ Not baiting – check.
- ▶ No poaching – check.
- ▶ Abiding by all safety regulations and all other regulations for that matter – check.
- ▶ No illegally harvested animals – check.
- ▶ Not intoxicated or impaired hunters – check.
- ▶ Not felons in possession of deer rifles – check.
- ▶ Check, check, check, check.....check!

I understand why the “failure to validate” law exists but these deer would have been validated with or without a \$190 citation (times two). I’m not naïve to

presume that all encounters with law enforcement are or should be positive. I also understand that at times citations are warranted. With that said, what has the DNR gained with this encounter? Despite 90 minutes being spent on our property addressing these points, the CO’s decision was already made. He stated things like “roughly 25 percent of my encounters get citations,” “well, because I had to get out of my truck is why you’re getting a citation” and “didn’t you read the regulation book cover to cover?”

For a sport that is seeing a decline in hunters and for an agency that outlines education as a primary goal by building rapport with the public, what is gained by citing law abiding hunters on a technicality? We are hours into opener during the most target rich environment of the year for a CO and 90 minutes are being spent with valid, law abiding hunters who are not consciously committing a single crime. Are there not more egregious violators in Becker County to be spending this time on? Unfortunately,

one week later approximately 20 miles west of my property a convicted felon illegally hunting in Becker County shot and killed a law abiding hunter in the woods. I am not suggesting that the 90 minutes spent on our property would have prevented this disaster but the irony is apparent.

I would like to think that the CO my son spoke with is not representative of the entire agency. Unfortunately, however, after a 45-minute conversation with a captain in the DNR, it was apparent they were “cut from the same cloth.” Furthermore, from the dozens of hunters I’ve spoken to since, I’ve heard story after story of people having negative encounters with the DNR enforcing petty issues.

As a father with kids in the woods and as a lifelong law-abiding hunter, I truly hope that the DNR refocuses its perspective on violations that actually affect the natural resources and more importantly violations that affect the safety of the law-abiding hunters in the field. Find something to prevent, so that something is gained.

LETTERS

Amazon is destroying America

To the editor:
I wonder how long it will take for us to realize that every time we purchase from Amazon and not from our local businesses, sooner or later those businesses will close their doors and we will end up paying the taxes that they no longer will pay to support this community.

The old saying goes, “You can pay me now or you can pay me later.” There is no way that we can keep doing this. We have all these nice facilities in this community but now we are eliminating the tax base to help pay for them.

All of these bills have to be paid but now it’s going to be divided by less people and less businesses all the time.

We keep doing this to ourselves. Put yourself in place of these businesses trying to compete with Amazon. How much taxes does Amazon pay to this community? I love to save money like everyone else, but I think that Amazon is the devil in disguise.

Jim Korkowski
Alexandria, MN