

# OPINION

VIEWS BY ECHO PRESS EDITORIAL BOARD

## THUMBS UP/ THUMBS DOWN

**H**appy birthday, Larry! **Thumbs up:** Former Echo Press Sports Editor Larry Holverson, a colleague and friend to all of our longtime employees here at the Echo Press, is celebrating a big milestone on January 1 – turning 70. For 33 years, Larry covered every kind of sport in Douglas County and the surrounding region, building a reputation as a sports legend – a title that Larry would humbly say is laying it on too thick. But Larry put his heart and soul into the job right on up to his retirement in 2007. His coworkers knew it. Local coaches and athletes knew it. And readers did too. Back when the newspaper hosted an open house for his retirement, hundreds of people turned out to wish him well. He's just that kind of guy. Larry's wife, Joan, told us that those who want to wish Larry well may send a card to Larry Holverson, 500 Fillmore Street, #305, Alexandria, MN 56308.



Holverson

reader sent us a little story that offers a light-hearted view. It's titled, "Someone Took Jesus." A couple days after Christmas, the pastor of a large church in San Francisco was walking by the nativity scene in the chancel of his church. He was stunned when he noticed the baby Jesus was missing from the manger. He quickly went outdoors to look around and he saw a little boy pulling a new wagon. In the wagon was a doll that looked very much like the missing baby Jesus. The pastor greeted the boy and asked him about the doll. "I got it from the church," the boy replied. "Why did you take it from the church?" the pastor asked. "Well," the boy answered. "I prayed for a new wagon and told the Lord Jesus that if I got one, I would give him a ride. I got the wagon, I took him for a ride and now I'm bringing him back to the church."

### Corporate tax tactics

**Thumbs up:** Corporate owners of multi-billion dollar big-box retailers like Fleet Farm and Menards are trying to use a loophole to avoid paying their full share of local property taxes. It's frustrating for local governments that not only risk losing revenue but are also faced with mounting legal bills. The stores argue that their buildings should be assessed as if they are vacant or "dark" rather than as operating entities, claiming that they've customized their stores so much that the facilities aren't worth as much as their assessed value. At its Dec. 17 meeting, the Alexandria City Council voted to keep \$50,000 in the city's general fund to defend such tactics in tax court, if necessary. Douglas County is also prepared to go to court. It's a shame that businesses in our community that enjoy the many services provided by local governments – from police and fire protection to plowed streets – are dragging their assessed values into the courts. It's not the neighborly thing to do.

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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.*

### The more you give...

**Thumbs up:** Last week, we came across a writing from the Alexandria chapter of United Communities Advocating Non-Violence (UCAN) that we thought was fitting for the holiday season. It's called "The More You Give." *The more you give, the more you get. The more you do unselfishly, the more you live abundantly. The more of everything you share, the more you laugh, the less you fret. The more you'll always have to spare. The more you love, the more you'll find that life is good and friends are kind. For only what we give away, enriches us from day to day.*

### Bringing back baby Jesus

**Thumbs up:** Our Dec. 14 story, "Who stole the baby Jesus," about a manger scene figure that was stolen from the owners of Cedar Rose Inn stirred up some emotions – anger at whoever would stoop to such a criminal act and thankfulness for the forgiving attitude owners Rose and David Gibson expressed. One

## LETTER

### Remembering Dale Serum

**To the editor:**  
Satchel Paige, who in later years once pitched for the Cuban All-Stars at Knute Nelson in a three-game series against the Alexandria Clippers, once said: "Not to be cheered by praise, not to be grieved by blame, but to know thoroughly one's own virtues or powers are the characteristics of an excellent man."  
A long time ago now, when we were all younger and full of hope to get a base hit or better, if you were an opposing player against the Clippers and were fortunate enough to get to third base and took a daring lead and Dale G. Serum was behind the plate, you were doomed to getting picked off by a quick overhand bullet from a great catcher to the third baseman.  
What made Dale unique was more than catching baseballs, of course. This was his kindness toward kids as recreation director. Dale Serum

managed it all for kids, from T-ball to the Clippers and more. And when my wife, Mary, and I were married 51 years ago, Dale sent a nice silver-plated candy dish and wrote a note that the piece was from the Clippers.  
Dale was a decent Christian man along with his loving wife, Carol, and their talented children. When few people came to the games, it didn't matter. We played as if there were hundreds and we even went to the state tournament once.  
One thing I know about heaven is that there are baseball parks there with perfect grass and no bad hops in the perfect infields. And Dale is there now, calling signals behind the plate as he always did, where no one rags on pitchers anymore, and the days are always sunny with no rainouts, and admission is free.  
I salute you, Dale Serum, and I thank you for your life.  
**James Van Amber**  
Mankato, MN

### Submitting letters to the editor:

The Echo Press encourages readers to voice their opinions through letters to the editor. Please, however, keep your letters brief and to the point. Letters of more than 300 words or excessively long letters may be edited to a shorter form by the newspaper staff. Personal attacks against private individuals will not be printed. All letters must be signed and include the writer's address and telephone number. Letters published will include the writer's name and the city of residence only. Writers are limited to publishing one letter every 30 days. Submissions can be emailed to aedenloff@echopress.com or submitted to the Echo Press office at 225 7th Ave. E., Alexandria, MN 56308. For information, call (320) 763-3133.

## IT'S OUR TURN

# A blood pressure surprise

**O**n a whim, I checked my blood pressure about a month ago at one of those machines at Walmart.



AL EDENLOFF  
News Editor

It was 205/116. I had an inkling this was not very good. My wife was horrified. When I gave her the news, her blood pressure, which is always nice and healthy,

likely skyrocketed to all-time personal highs.

I checked the Internet and couldn't find a chart that showed a blood pressure reading for a top number (systolic) higher than 190, and my bottom number (diastolic) should have been under 80.

We scheduled a doctor appointment and the results confirmed it: 204/110. Welcome to the wonderful world of high blood pressure.

I was bummed to get the news and surprised. I watch what I eat – lots of grilled protein, hardly any fatty foods, not much sweets, no sugar-laden pop. I run about 20 miles a week and keep in pretty good shape. My cholesterol levels have always been low. And stress? Yes, there's some that comes with my job, but I think of myself as an even-keeled guy who stays fairly mellow (unless the Vikings mess up or something dumb happens in politics).

But I bombed in two areas: genetics (high blood pressure runs in the family) and salt intake.

I like salty foods, always have. When I go home for lunch, I typically have a can of soup and a low-fat deli meat sandwich,

usually smoked turkey or ham, maybe some crackers or pretzels.

After the doctor appointment, I checked the labels for something I never even glanced at before: sodium. Just four slices of turkey contained 25 percent of my daily value. The soup? A whopping 64 percent. Add in two slices of bread at 14 percent, a slice of cheese, 7 percent, and five crackers, 6 percent, and I'm a walking salt disaster, without factoring in breakfast or supper.

The doctor gave me a prescription for high blood pressure pills and told me to monitor it each day. He also said it would be a good idea to cut back on the salt.

That led to a new adventure: Trying to find food that's low in salt. It's not as easy as it sounds. The levels vary widely but salt is in practically everything – my favorite snacks, every kind of cold and processed meat, cheese, bread, even fresh beef, chicken and pork. And even at high levels in products deemed "low sodium," like soup or broth.

I quickly realized that getting my salt intake down to zero be next to impossible unless I starved to death or ate nothing but fresh fruits or veggies, which I like but can't see myself eating for every single meal for the rest of my life.

Luckily, I slowly started finding things that yes, contain sodium, but at low levels. Tuna is now my go-to sandwich for lunch. A whole pouch of low-sodium water-packed tuna is just 3 percent of my daily allowance. Making that discovery was like finding a life jacket while

drowning in a salty sea. Finally, something I could make for a sandwich for lunch.

Another godsend are no-salt-added foods like canned tomatoes, chicken broth and beans. I've mixed them together and blam! There's my new soup option.

For about a month, I watched my salt intake, kept on running, took those tiny blood pressure pills and tracked my blood pressure with a home monitor. When I checked back with my doctor, I was happy – and my wife was ecstatic – to learn that my levels had "officially" dropped to 132/80.

I also feel better – more energized, not as anxious, not as many headaches.

To all of you reading this: Get your blood pressure checked. Don't do like I did it and put it off just because you don't have any serious symptoms. Also, start checking food labels and think about your own salt intake.

If your own blood pressure is under control, encourage your spouse, friends or loved ones to make it a priority, especially if it runs in your family.

Here's an incentive: Having high blood pressure puts you at risk for heart disease and stroke, the leading causes of death in the U.S. About 75 million American adults have high blood pressure – one in every three adults. But there's hope. Effective medications, small changes in your diet and moderate exercise can work wonders.

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*"It's Our Turn" is a weekly column that rotates among members of the Echo Press editorial staff.*

## COMMENTARY

# Developing a more effective flu vaccine

By U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minnesota

**E**arlier this year, Shane McAllister grew worried when his 9-month-old son, Andrew, developed a 102 degree fever. Shane is a Minnesota doctor, but even with his medical training, he was surprised to see his son quickly lose his cheerful energy and spirit. It scared him, so he rushed Andrew to the emergency room. It didn't take doctors long to diagnose Andrew with a severe case of the flu. Thankfully, treatment returned the little boy to his normal self within a few days.

As a parent, I know that there's no greater feeling of helplessness than having your child sick and hospitalized. No parent should ever have to go through a health scare with their child, and certainly not for the flu.

But too many do. Last year's flu was the worst we've seen in years. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about 80,000 Americans died of the flu last season – including 180 kids. Annually, the flu also costs the nation \$10.4 billion in direct medical costs and \$87 billion in total economic burden.

And in Minnesota, nearly 6,500 patients were hospitalized for influenza, including 699 outbreaks in schools and 211 in long-term care facilities.

People rely on the flu vaccine to keep themselves and their loved ones safe from the flu, yet the flu vaccine isn't always as effective as it should be.

Some years, the flu vaccine is more effective than other years depending upon what strain of the flu is spreading. Overall, the CDC has found that getting

vaccinated for the flu reduces your chance of getting the flu by 40 to 60 percent.

Too much is on the line, so we must redouble our efforts to improve the flu vaccine. And one of the best steps we can take is getting the FLU Vaccine Act signed into law.

Earlier this year, I joined several of my Senate colleagues to introduce this bill to help support critical research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and finally develop a vaccine that would be effective across multiple strains of the flu. The bill's objective is simple – to better protect Minnesotans and Americans everywhere from all variations of the flu.

In September, the Senate secured additional funding for the creation of a universal flu vaccine that I pushed hard for, but it's not nearly enough to get a vaccine over the finish line. We must pass the FLU Vaccine Act to further support this critical research.

But even without a universal vaccine it's still important to get a flu shot. While it might not be 100 percent effective, a simple shot that reduces your risk of serious illness or even death is well worth it.

Simply put, the flu shot saves lives. So let's both take the time to get a flu shot and take action to support the next breakthrough vaccine. Because families, friends, and kids like Andrew are counting on us – in Minnesota and across the country.

For more information on the flu, including where to get a flu shot, visit Flu.gov.

### Reader Advisory Board helps improve newspaper

In its ongoing effort to improve the newspaper, the Echo Press has a Reader Advisory Board that meets every other month to offer feedback, story ideas and suggestions. Readers can also offer advisory board members their comments. Current members include Rick Paulsen, Louie Seesz, Mary Anderson, Jim Nelson, Keith Redfield, Don Schoonhoven and Jane McCrery.