

## OUR VIEW

### Safety is the most important lesson as school is back in session

It's hard to believe but summer's last hurrah is upon us with Labor Day weekend. Beginning next week our focus will turn to fall and sliding back into a routine with school getting back into session.

As students head back to the classroom across the region, it's important for all of us to practice safety skills, especially around on the roadways near buses.

Buses will be taking to the streets and rural roads to haul our precious cargo to and from school.

Children should line up away from the street and avoid roughhousing while they wait for the bus. Kids should never proceed into the street until the bus is completely stopped. If you have to cross the street to reach the bus, make sure you are at least 10 feet ahead until you see visibly see the bus driver.

For motorists, it's imperative to practice driving safety around buses. Obey the school bus stop arms. For a refresher, stop when the bus lights are flashing red and stop arm is fully extended. It's the law. Take extra caution when driving near schools. Watch for increased traffic as there will be more teen drivers on the road.

And for the first school year, remember Minnesota now has a "hands-free" law. Cell phones cannot be in the hands of drivers while in motion.

Last year, Blooming Prairie lost a school teacher and child on their way to school allegedly at the hands of a driver who was using his cell phone to do on-line banking. This kind of behavior is unacceptable behind the wheel. We all need to do our part to avoid using cell phones in the vehicle while driving.

School is back in session for another year. Children are the most precious thing we have. Let's all do our part to help ensure the safety of children heading back to the classrooms next week.



## GUEST COLUMN

### Growing the local foods economy

BY TIM PENNY

This time of year, the farmers' markets are rich with local vegetables, berries, meats, breads and jams. It's a visual testament to the abundance of our region and the ever-growing local foods economy that is sustained by consumers who want to buy directly from area farmers. At Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF), we have been supporting the local foods economy in our 20-county region through a variety of initiatives over the years.

In 2013 the FEAST! Local Foods Network was launched with the purpose of supporting local food producers and food-makers by boosting access to financing, resources and peer-to-peer learning opportunities. The network, which started with a partnership between SMIF and Renewing the Countryside, is comprised of more than 60 organizations, businesses, and individuals committed to growing a sustainable, local and regional food system.

One of the outcomes of this network is the Grow a Farmer Fund. The fund, which was supported by more than 250 generous donors and is managed by SMIF, offers low interest loans of up to \$15,000 to help small scale farmers in SMIF's region purchase the equipment and supplies they need to be successful. EJ Mushrooms in Kasota used the loan to convert a detached garage into a year-round mushroom farm. Hare and Tortoise Farm in Zumbro Falls used the loan to scale up their operations by installing a waterway and purchasing a root washer for their vegetable farm. Other Grow a Farmer loan clients include Antonia Navarro (a chicken farmer in Faribault) and two additional vegetable farms - My Sweet Greens MN in Zumbrota and Pearson Organics in Oronoco. SMIF also participates in support of another fund, the Minnesota Good Food Access Fund, which provides grants, technical assistance and loans to enterprises working to increase access to healthy and affordable food.

The FEAST! Local Foods Network also supports farm and food entrepreneurs through technical assistance. Each month, a Local Foods Peer Group meets to discuss business challenges and successes, learning from each other in order to grow their businesses. A program called FEAST! Smart Start Initiative provides customized coaching for business owners. In 2018, SMIF provided grants to Region Nine Development Commission and the Sustainable Farming Association of MN (SFA), Cannon River Chapter to expand this program. Region Nine worked with entrepreneurs over a seven-month period to support them in building a network of relationships that will help grow their businesses and expand operations. The SFA Chapter used the grant to launch a regional brand, Cannon Valley Grown, which identifies food produced in the Cannon River watershed.

An event that I look forward to every year is the FEAST! Local Foods Marketplace. 1,500 people attend the event, which is a tradeshow experience for food-makers and farmers from southern Minnesota and the surrounding areas to make sales to retail and food service buyers, and the general public. The event will be held Dec. 6-7 at the Rochester Mayo Civic Center, just in time for holiday shopping.

It's amazing to see the partnerships that have been made, the relationships that have been strengthened and the businesses that have grown since the FEAST! Local Foods Network launched six years ago. As we like to say at SMIF, collaboration is the key to vitality in our region. This is especially evident in the local foods economy.

As always, I welcome your comments and questions. You can reach me at [timp@smifoundation.org](mailto:timp@smifoundation.org) or 507-455-3215.

*Tim Penny is the president and CEO of Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation in Owatonna. He represented Minnesota's First Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1982-1994.*

### Music gig provides relief for this prosecutor

For the past several years as the top prosecutor handling what will likely go down as one of the greatest crimes ever in Minnesota's history, Janelle Kendall has needed a stress reliever more than ever. She has found one through a love of music and sharing that passion as the lead singer for a band.

For the record, Kendall is the Stearns County Attorney based in St. Cloud. She handled the Jacob Wetterling case and finally after nearly 30 years brought successful prosecution to Wetterling's killer.

In the past year or so, she has been dealing with the release of the Wetterling files. State law requires investigative documents to be released upon the conclusion of the case. The Wetterling family sued to stop Stearns County from releasing parts of the file. The family lost as a judge ruled that the documents must be released.

Kendall was torn on the case. She wanted to do everything she could to protect the rights of victims, but she also had to comply with state law to release records, despite what the family wanted. "We found there is no way victims could be protected with state and federal laws being followed," she said. She told me last week that the Wetterling case is finally closed and off her desk.

Kendall is familiar in Steele County as she grew up in Blooming Prairie and graduated as an Awesome Blossom in 1983. She was also a 4-H member for many years and has many fond memories of the Steele County Free Fair.

In 2012, Kendall formed a band called Walter's Wheelhouse. They perform gigs all over the state with the majority in northern Minnesota. She came back to perform on Wednesday night during the Steele County Fair.

"It has been my escape," Kendall confesses. "It gives you something different to do and something positive."

As a prosecutor, Kendall sees "so many nasty things" that take place with human nature. Playing in the band also keeps her in check realizing that there are so many more good people out there than what she deals with during her day job.



Hot Pursuit  
RICK BUSSLER

Kendall's group plays music with a groove, including Sheryl Crow, Santana, Pat Benatar, Meghan Trainor, Jack Johnson, Guns N' Roses and some Prince. They specialize in playing for fairs and other outdoor festivals. They also play at bars.

The group recently added a fiddler, which has allowed them to take on some country music. "We appeal to a different demographic," Kendall says. "We're a family band."

She is honored and humbled to have been playing at Minnesota's largest county fair for the past four years. Kendall said when she first started playing at the Steele fair in 2016, she got some cross-eyed looks from her family wondering about the significance of the fair. "You have no idea what a big deal this is," she told her family. "It's one of a kind in a good way."

Kendall remembers back to her childhood when a big highlight was getting interviewed by Todd Hale of KRFO Radio about her flower exhibit. "I remember how nervous I was," she said.

"It's always awesome," Kendall says of the Steele fair. "How can it not be awesome? It's the biggest fair ever."

She said growing up that her family planned their entire summer around the fair. "We picked rocks and weeds so that we could save money to spend on mini-donuts," Kendall said.

Kendall admits it's hard to escape her day job at times. During the Crossroads Mall terroristic attacks in St. Cloud in 2016, Kendall was performing a gig on her guitar when people came up to her asking what was going on at the mall. She went directly from playing to the mall to deal with 37 law enforcement agencies involved in the incident. "We don't get to predict the day when things happen," she said.

While the top prosecutor will continue locking up criminals, she will never forget her roots and the love she developed at a young age for the Steele County Fair.

Kendall will be in hot pursuit of decompressing from the stress of her day job by performing music at night.



STAFF PHOTO BY RICK BUSSLER

Janelle Kendall is the lead singer and guitarist for Walter's Wheelhouse, which performed at the Steele County Free Fair. Kendall grew up in Blooming Prairie and now is the top prosecutor in Stearns County.

## YOUR VIEW

### Fair appreciates support from area

To the Editor:

The Steele County Free Fair Board of Directors, volunteers and staff would like to thank all fairgoers for their outstanding support of the 2019 Steele County Free Fair.

We are proud of the support we receive from Steele County and surrounding areas. The fair is a reflection of our county, and we continually receive praise from visitors and vendors about the courteous and thoughtful people that attend the fair.

The 2019 Steele County Free Fair attracted 322,347 fairgoers compared to

313,347 in 2018. Total Mega Ride tickets were 4,939 versus 4,789 in 2018. There were over 3,300 open class entries and over 2,000 4-H projects.

Again, thank you for participating in the 2019 Steele County Free Fair and look forward to seeing everyone at the 2020 Steele County Free Fair Aug. 18-23. Next year's theme is "Food, Fun and Friends a Plenty in 2020."

Dan Deml, Fair president  
Fair Board and Staff

### Appreciates the fair section

To the Editor:

Congratulations to the Steele County Times on this week's publication (Aug. 21), particularly the section on the Steele County Free Fair.

The picture of Sleeping Beauty should win awards. The article on pen pals was inspiring and uplifting. I appreciate this publication and the fact that the fair articles

are not about the editor as in another publication (Owatonna People's Press).

I will intentionally shop at advertisers of this publication as the quality is best and the written communication is vital to our community.

Neal Jorgensen  
Owatonna