

OPINION



PILOT EDITORIAL

For school board, an encouraging revelation and a scary possibility

An encouraging revelation came out of Monday evening's meeting of the Jackson County Central Board of Education.

But so did a scary possibility. By discussing the fact a community task force recommendation regarding future school facilities use could be rejected by a survey of the public, board members acknowledged they are prepared to follow the will of the people — no matter what that might be.

For a board that has closed meetings, been publicly accused of "sneaky" tactics and wrestled with internal discord — one member Monday acknowledged a "perception" problem, another admitted a "communication issue" and a third stated she felt "kind of left in the dark" — the preemptive acknowledgement that the public has final say over the future of school facilities is welcome.

The scary part of all this is to see what the public has to say will cost the district around \$10,000 in taxpayer money for a professional survey.

If the task force puts forth a recommendation that meets with approval of the people, the district can move forward on firm footing. But if the task force recommendation is rejected by the people, it's back to the drawing board for the task force and, presumably, back to the checkbook for another \$10,000 survey.

Here's hoping the task force gets it right the first time.

Don't judge what you don't understand

Mental health fascinates me because it's something I've struggled with personally. Depression and anxiety are far more common than people think, but they are also not what society seems to think they are.

Being depressed doesn't mean I can pull out my gratitude journal, write a few sentences about what's great in my life and suddenly I feel better. I'm not saying that's a bad idea, but depression is much deeper and darker. It will often strike with no warning. Everyone around you asks what's wrong, and you truly don't know, but you can't seem to get out of this deep, dark hole and it's incredibly lonely. People say things like, "Shake it off," "Focus on the positive" and "If there's nothing wrong, why are you so sad?" I'll tell you why — we don't know. That's depression.

Anxiety is something along the same lines. It can be crippling, and feel like it's clawing through your skin. It makes it hard to breathe, and hard to focus. There may be a reason, or something that sets it off; but again, it may be nothing at all. It just appears, like an unwanted guest, taking over your thoughts and making simple things much more difficult.

Many of us — us being those who deal with it — hide it well. You would never know when I get ready to go to an event that has a lot of people at it, I have to calm myself down beforehand. I have to sit down and take deep breaths to calm my racing heart, and my

hands shake when I put on makeup because of the thought of being with all of those people sets off so much anxiety. I attribute part of that to being in more than one verbally abusive relationship, which tends to mess with one's self-esteem, but it's not the same for everyone.

Many people are dealing with it in silence, and fighting their demons daily. There is medication, but drugs often come with other side effects. There are holistic remedies such as meditation, mindfulness and breathing exercises, which truly do help, but require a lot of practice, and it's hard to get to the point where you are calm enough that it works. And for some, it's not enough.

A related topic is suicide. Many years ago, I was very depressed and I was struggling terribly. Thoughts began to creep into my head that maybe I would be better off dead. For those of you who have not dealt with mental health issues, this will make no sense to you, but hear me out.

When you are in that place of complete and utter darkness, you truly feel your life is a burden to those around you. You would never tell them; that would mean being vulnerable, and that surely won't happen. In fact, many people who are truly at that point are not the type to ask for help when it comes to anything in life. They appear to have things together. You might notice a slip here and there, where their happy mask slips off and their sadness shows, but not often. The thought of

suicide is a relief.

Many people talk about how someone they knew committed suicide, yet that person seemed happier in the days leading up to it. Maybe that person made up his or her mind, and the weight had been lifted, because he or she knew soon the burden on others' shoulders, and the heaviness on his or her own soul would soon be gone. It's not a healthy thought pattern, and it's not one that makes sense; but it's no less valid.

Often the thing that is the hardest is the pure loneliness that comes with mental health issues. People don't talk about it because of the stigma attached. Instead, they bottle it up until they can contain it no longer, and then things fall apart.

Don't misunderstand me; suicide is a horrible thing. My dad often refers to it as a permanent solution to a temporary problem, and that's very true; but when your mind is in that low place, it is often a struggle to see the light.

So what does this mean for you? If you've lost someone to suicide, try not to be angry with that person. There's a good chance that person did it because he or she simply couldn't hold on anymore, and did not want to be a burden to you. The other important thing is this: Do not be angry at yourself. There is nothing you could have done. Nothing. Do not sit and obsess over the past and what you could have said or done to change things. Do not wonder if you did something wrong. You didn't. I guarantee it.

What can we do to change things in the future? Mental health has such a stigma around it. It's perceived as weak, or as something people make much worse than it is. While there are people who will use their sadness to get attention, that is not true depression or anxiety.

If you see someone struggling, or even if you don't, talk about mental health. Talk about how it's not a weakness, and it's not something people should deal with alone. Tell your friends you're there for them, and you will listen to them without judgment. Stop telling people to shake it off, or to suck it up.

Sometimes the strongest people we know are fighting an internal battle about which we know nothing. If they don't want to talk about it, fine; but at least they know you are there.

We cannot save everyone, and we cannot make this plight disappear, but by acknowledging the truth and opening the dialogue, we are allowing those who are struggling to know we love them, we support them and we will listen.

This in and of itself could be the support someone needs.



GONE COUNTRY
Laura DeKok

LAST WEEK'S ONLINE POLL

Q: How many more days of plowable snow will Jackson County see this spring?



Source: Jackson County Pilot Website

THIS WEEK'S ONLINE POLL

Q: How will the Minnesota Twins fare this season?

Vote online at jacksoncountypilot.com.

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Signs of Texas — both by word and deed

I have visited Texas many times now and this year got to visit new parts of this gigantic state.

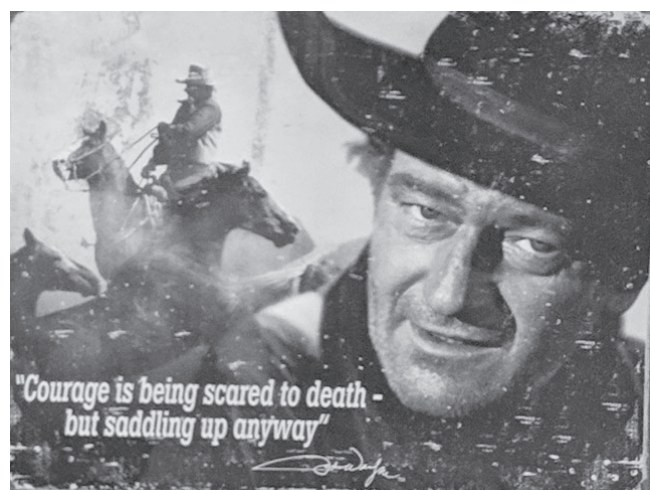
As I travel around Texas, I see signs of Texas everywhere I go. Some of those signs are via word of mouth, but most of them are not.

As an example, when you travel to Texas, you will note how polite people there are. It is "Thank you, ma'am," and "You're welcome, sir," or "Have a blessed day, and y'all come back now." Then there's "Appreciate your business," and "Arrive happy."

Go in or out of a business and you are most likely going to have somebody open the door for you, hold it open and even offer to carry your packages out to the car.

One day, I went into a convenience store and the guy ahead of me made his purchase and exited the store. As I made my purchase and turned to leave, that same fella came back and opened the door for me saying, "Y'all have a blessed day, sir."

It may seem like a little thing to many, but my



Grandpa Jordan told me big things are made up of a lot of good little things. I am seeing he was right on about that when it comes to Texas.

So actions do speak louder than words. But then there are those Texas signs hanging out. Like the ones hanging around this column. Most of them come from restaurants my wife, Pam, and I visited; but some were just stuck on light poles or hung next to a person's house.

Spike's Barbeque probably had some of the best ones, like ones

reading, "Don't talk about yourself ... we'll do that after you leave," and "Happiness depends on what's for dinner." One of my favorites, however, is one that hung by a group of photos of "The Duke," John Wayne — the one that read, "Courage is being scared to death but saddling up anyway." But the sign bearing the Cowboy Code pretty much sums up the way of life in Texas, in my experience: "If it's not yours, don't take it. If it's not true, don't say it. If it's not right, don't do it." Yet another visual sign

of Texas is its beautiful wildflowers, like the bluebonnets that were just coming on the end of February in the Texas Hill country and the Indian paints, bright red flowers with a touch of yellow. Find a field where the two have mixed and you will experience Texas wild at its finest.

So if you ever head to Texas, be sure to get off the interstate and travel the back roads. You won't be disappointed in the scenery — "a different kind of beauty" — the friendly people, the delicious food or that Texas courtesy.

So let me get that door for y'all, and have a blessed day.



OUT AND ABOUT
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