

Press overwhelmed by dozens of comments on 'Anti-American' column

Overwhelming is an understatement, as far as the reaction to our column in the June 12 edition of the Pelican Rapids Press. Also overwhelming was the very direct impact of the dark side of social media and the internet, on topics of ethnic diversity.

Quick background: We covered the 2019 Pelican Rapids High School graduation ceremony, and published an assortment of photos in our print edition. Later, we posted a random grouping of pictures on the Pelican Rapids Press Facebook site.

Several of the photos pictured some of our Somali graduates. A Facebook follower criticized the paper for placing the photos of the Somali graduates "too" prominently. Further, the writer accused the newspaper of "Anti-Americanism at it's finest!"

We responded with a column that challenged his accusation that the paper is "Anti-American." Later, we placed it on our pelicanrapidspress.com website, with a reference on the Pelican Press Facebook page.

The reaction was unbelievable, the number of people reached by our social media post was nearly 34,000 by Monday, June 17. More than 15,000 reacted to our post.

The vast majority of the posts were supportive of the Pelican community's unique spirit of multi-cultural inclusion and ethnic diversity. There were a few negative and polarizing exchanges (mainly from the Facebook follower who wrote the initial post), most of which we deleted or blocked.

Things get nasty in a hurry on social media. Rather than dwell on the negative, we're publishing

a representative, slightly edited, sampling of the Facebook comments received over the past several days.

One of the potentially positive outcomes to all of this would be a great turnout for the Pelican Rapids International Friendship Festival, which is June 22, from about 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Look elsewhere in this edition of the Press for details on the Friendship Festival. We hope to see you there!

Meanwhile, here are some of the comments readers wrote following the publishing of the column.

Darcy Colosky-Pixley My youngest is a graduate of the PRHS Class of 2019! I'm proud of her and ALL her classmates! That simple!

Nicki Stetz A reality of Pelican Rapids is our diversity and we do not find it to be a negative. Our children learn to adapt and accept people that have skin colors and backgrounds that may be different from their own.

There is good and bad in every shape, size and color. To feel you are superior to someone else simply because of how they look and what they wear is shameful.

Åtø Hashi I love the response was given.....Pelican Press's staff do a great job representing Pelican Rapids and making sure Pelican is authentically known for its strong diverse community!

Staci Allmaras I am proud to be a graduate of Pelican Rapids and see our local paper representing our community. Keep it up!

Lorie Stormo Pelican Rapids should be very proud of its diversity!! My children loved growing up there

Roberta Backman To react in fear and misunderstanding is easy, for it is the brain's natural response. To react with kindness and compassion is not, for it takes composure and patience. Gandhi, Oprah, and Dr. King all share a few things in common: kind, compassionate, composed, and patient. Oh, and one more thing- their dark skin.

The color of one's heart has no correlation to their skin tone. But rather, character.

Congratulations to ALL members of the PRHS 2019 graduates. May your character continue to define you, always.

Sincerely, A 2009 PRHS Graduate

From My VIEW POINT

by *Louis Hoglund,*
Managing Editor



Sarah Melby Ehlers Since this is the first time I've heard comments in this community similar...you may be giving him far too much voice when repeating it. If anything this community has been actively looking for ways to show their inclusion and kindness to foreign born residents. Clearly there are some who distrust or feel superior, but please do not amplify their voices.

Alan Grothe Having lived here for over 50 years, I am prouder of Pelican Rapids every year. We represent what is good in America. Congrats all graduates!

Denise Magnusson What? Come on people! These graduates are our future. Power on graduates!

Kerri Leucuta Bravo Pelican Rapids Press! I love that Pelican celebrates all cultures!

Doug N Rhoda Miller Our children don't see color. They see friends.

Kristine Kolar Wow. THIS is the Minnesota I want to live in. Thank you to the community of Pelican Rapids for showing us how to call out anti-American nationalism and hold those who spew it accountable. It is not patriotic, it's hateful and needs to be called out as such.

Ibrahim Hashi Ahmed. Thank you Pelican Rapids Press, for the thoughtful response, you guys are patriots.

Terra Fitzsimmons. Proud of all the 2019 graduates. As a parent of one of them - they comprise goodness, compassion, and acceptance. They are able to learn and grow from the things that make them different, in the end to be a much richer human in having had first hand relationships with all. It is with these qualities they will lead the way in defining our community as a part of the greater whole - our country... Lead the way Class of 2019!

Bev Johnson I'm proud of small town Pelican Rapids Press, and I'm also proud that my grandsons attend the Pelican Rapids school. Glad they will be growing up with diversity.

Lou Ann Henderson This response is awesome! Bravo to the Pelican Rapids Press! Thank you for standing up for what truly makes America great

Stacey Hone My Grandma's Grandma wore a scarf on her head when she came over from Russia, my Grandma's mom spoke nearly no English, my Grandma spoke no English until she went to school, my dad was the first generation to graduate high school and college and speak English as a first language but was bilingual, and I only know a little high German from school but cannot speak it. How soon we forget that most of us are descendants of immigrants. Huge bummer that these kids have to live through this nonsense in 2019.

Deb Sjoström Proud to call Pelican Rapids my home. In a world filled with diversity we need to call out racism and anti-semitism and work towards equity and inclusion. Thanks Pelican Rapids Press for taking a stand.

Nadine W. Brown. Pelican Rapids is where David and I have called home since 1994. We proudly return there every summer now. Our children greatly benefitted from this rich diversity...The 2019 graduating class...is probably over 50% diverse with Somalians, Hispanics, AND Norwegians and Germans too!

Cassie Graff Why is this even a thing? These kids LIVE in AMERICA and GRADUATED from an AMERICAN high school ... they're American

A great way to celebrate ethnic diversity?

Attend the International Friendship Festival June 22 in Pelican Rapids

Details on back page, and in the special "Celebrate Summer" section in this edition

Letters to THE EDITOR

Pelican turned Somali grad Hashi into a 'real' American

Hi Pelican Press! My name is Ato Hashi. I'm 2017 Pelican Rapids high school graduate.

I recently read Anti-American article posted earlier. Pelican Rapids is my hometown no matter what!

It's the town I adore, the town that nurtured me and turned me into real American! I came to Pelican March/05/2012. I was welcomed by the community.

Pelican taught me what bonding together and diversity is all about. Pelican's strength is diversity. We represent and show our ability of unity in diversity.

As my first language I speak Somali, Swahili and I partially speak Spanish. I love how Pelican Press represents my community!

Pelican Press's staff do a great job representing Pelican Rapids and making sure Pelican is authentically known for its strong diverse community!

Åtø Hashi

Proud to call Pelican home, thanks to diversity

Many many thanks to the Press for including the "Anti-American" article in this week's paper.

I've always been incredibly proud to call Pelican my home in large part because of our diversity and I was equally proud reading your article in my hometown paper.

Thank you for calling out the racist comment for what it was.

Andy Johnson

Kentucky guy wants to visit Pelican after column

Dear Un-Americanites:

That op-ed column (Pelican Press June 12) is amazing, and I applaud your comments.

You make me want to visit Pelican Rapids (no, seriously, I'm Googling it).

The good folks of Pelican Rapids - Americans, Somali graduates, lovers of Scandinavian music, etc. - seem to be in quite good hands, media-wise.

Thanks for reminding folks about the true meaning and nature of who we are and who we should be as Americans.

Much love from Lexington, Kentucky (come visit - Horses! Bourbon! More Horses! More Bourbon!)

Brian Powers

Concerned about anti-immigrant rhetoric

I've never met you (and, until today, I had never heard of you or your newspaper) but I am so proud of your essay about the graduation photo.

I grew up in a small Minnesota town myself (Roseau), but I have lived in the Twin Cities since 1980, when I came down here to attend the University of Minnesota.

There is something deeply disturbing about much of the vicious anti-immigrant (and anti-Muslim) rhetoric commonly seen coming out of rural Minnesota. And I am so happy that you took the brave and honest stand that you did.

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Loren Thacker
St. Paul, MN

Minnow races launched in Pelican 25 years ago

100 years ago
June 19, 1919

• Auto upsets-boys hurt

Friday night another serious auto accident occurred between this village and Erhard. **Eddie Stephenson** of this place, **Ben Olson** and **Albert Burton** from north of town and **Eddie Hagrup** who had the Ford, were attending a dance in Erhard and on their way home tipped over.

Eddie Stephenson was taken out from under the car in an unconscious condition and taken to the hospital. He was badly bruised about the head, but was out again in a few days. The other boys received minor bruises, and the car was badly wrecked. It is said the boys or some of them were under the influence of liquor which coupled with the fiendish desire to go at a break-neck speed was responsible for the accident.

• Has bad fall

Erwin Benson, son of **Mr. and Mrs. J.C. Benson** sustained a bad fall Sunday. He was at the Thompson home on **Prairie Lake** visiting and was climbing a tree, as boys so often do, when he fell. He was unconscious for some time and was very badly bruised about the body, but he is now getting along very well.

75 years ago
June 22, 1944

• Coast-to-Coast remodeling store

When the **McKeever Bros.** complete the remodeling of the **Coast-to-Coast store** they expect to have increased its capacity twenty-five percent.

The store will be redecorated, all rearranged and some new fixtures will be added, so the goods can be displayed to better advantage.

The store has had a fine business and with increase in stock and modernized equipment the business will no doubt increase.

• Heavy rain Saturday

A very heavy rain accompanied by a rather stiff wind, struck here Saturday at about 5:30. The rain amounted to 1.10 inches, according to the Frazee office gauge.

At **Bob Creek store** on the west shore of **Pelican Lake**, the heavy wind coming from the east ripped out the dock and tore loose the live bait boxes and forced the waves high on shore.

50 years ago
June 19, 1969

• Meet Byron Hendra

The **Pure Oil Co.** is proud to announce that **Mr. Byron Hendra** has leased the Pelican Rapids station and has reopened it under the name of "**Pelican Pure**".

Many of you probably met Byron when he lived in Pelican Rapids previously. For the past 12 years, he has lived at Coon Rapids, where he gained eight years experience in service station and mechanical work.

He stands ready to serve you with the finest in products and service plus he will also offer tune-up and wheel alignment service.

Stop in, get acquainted.

• Spring cleanup drive successful

The spring cleanup drive sponsored by the **Agassiz Study Club**, was quite successful. The **Boy Scouts** and **Campfire Girls** spent Thursday and Friday afternoons picking up trash in the downtown area and along the ditches on the highway, and a truckload of trash was collected from residents on Saturday.

Let us take pride in our town and keep it clean, so no one has to pick up after us! Beer and pop cans and candy wrappers certainly do not add to the scenery!

Boy Scouts who picked up after you were **Tim Toso, Clayton Nord, Bruce Paulson, Jon Ebersviller, Allan Haugrud, Joel Stokka, Greg Nord, Mark Skugrud, Dennis Brandt,**

Looking BACK

by *Brenda Brand,*
Columnist



Roger, Paul and Jon Sundby, Tim and Tad Rose, and Michael Knutson. Campfire Girls who picked up on the east side and in the park were **Gayla Western, Barbara Lehn, Susan Melkert, Terri and Tammie Rose.**

The Study Club wishes to thank them for all their efforts.

25 years ago
June 22, 1994

• Minnow races set to start

Canterbury Downs has its horse racing, Perham has its turtle races, and now....Pelican Rapids is going to have **minnow races!**

Bill and Char Steinhoff owners of **Oak Lodge Resort on Lake Lida**, say that minnow racing has been popular among their young resort guests. As a result, the event is being moved into town.

The first race is set for 10:30 am, Tuesday, June 21, in the parking lot at Pelican Drug.

Children are invited to enter. No entry fee is charged, the minnows are provided, and registration can be accomplished at the race site. Competition is for ribbons and t-shirts.

The races will continue each Tuesday through August 9, and is sponsored by the **Pelican Rapids Chamber of Commerce.**

• Retiring

Three members of the **Pelican Rapids Good Samaritan Center** advisory board were honored recently for their years of service.

Presented with plaques were **Delores Kapaun, Neols Bredahl, and Carol Toso.**

New members on the board are **Chuck Kregelberg and Kenneth Johnson.**

Jeff & Julie Meyer, Publishers

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