

Our final word on Graduation 'Photo-Gate' To those of you who deposit your warped version of 'patriotic Americanism' on the internet...

We didn't expect 15 minutes of fame--much less 15 days of fame.

Our column about a Facebook comment, which accused the Pelican Rapids Press of "Anti-Americanism" because some of our Somali students were featured prominently in several of our graduation 2019 photos, received national exposure in print and online publications.

The favorable comments about the column--but more importantly--the Pelican area community, were absolutely overwhelming.

The combined exposure through our newspaper, our company website, pelicanrapidspress.com and our Facebook site alone exceeded 100,000 readers nationwide.

I suspect there are those readers out there who are suspicious that the Press is "milk-ing" this publicity for all its worth. Trust me: The little old Pelican Rapids Press country newspaper has no influence on the Associated Press and other media outlets.

We're thrilled, flabbergasted and humbled.

But the truth is, we'll take all the exposure we can get.

Especially when we can illuminate this kind of subject matter.

If I could wave a wand, I'd erase all of the negative, mean-spirited and nasty stuff that goes around on the internet and social media.

I say this not as a Democrat or Republican; a liberal or a conservative;

a left-wing "snowflake;" or a right-wing reactionary.

Good Lord, folks, aren't we all human beings?

Let me remind you the Facebook post that started all this:

"Is the PR press owned by Somalians?...The first and biggest pics are always ragheads!!...Anti-Americanism at it's finest!"

Who feels compelled to publicly make comments like this?

So we have Somali students graduating from Pelican Rapids High School. Big deal. They're American kids, darnit.

I'm actually rather simple-minded about this stuff. I'm not really a "Kumbuya-We Are The World" kind of a guy.

In fact, I'm a bit "Republican" in much of my ideology.

You know...the common conservative view: "The best social-welfare program is a job."

Well, I happen to subscribe to that philosophy.

I don't care if you flip burgers, dig ditches, work the assembly line, plow fields, butcher hogs, collect garbage,

wait on tables, perform brain surgery or put together newspapers. If you're out there working--and in the process, improving your community--you have my admiration.

We have Hispanic, Caucasian, Somali, Bosnian, southeast Asian folks (and others) going to work every day at the Pelican Rapids West Central Turkeys plant. More than 600 employees, by unofficial count.

These folks are, literally, helping feed the world.

The Pelican plant has been among the top producers in the nation of various packaged turkey products. These workers are a huge factor in

driving the local and regional economy.

And they do it every day.

Come on people: How much more "American" can you get?...Heading to work, punching a clock; collecting a paycheck.

I would challenge some of those Facebook-posting "patriots" to come over here to Pelican Rapids. We have jobs. Let's see if you have the right stuff to be a real "American."

If you're not in the workforce, well, take a few hours that you currently spend on your butt behind a computer screen, posting crap on the internet--and invest that time volunteering at your local food shelf, your church, your library, your Chamber of Commerce, the Salvation Army, etc.

Personally, I'm really tired of people unproductively engaging in their twisted version of "citizenship" by circulating garbage on the internet--exercising "free speech" by advocating their interpretation of "Americanism." (You left-wingers aren't entirely off the hook here either, by the way.)

I know Americans.

I see Americans every day in Pelican Rapids.

They walk down to the Mexican grocery and restaurant on main street.

They walk to the African store; and the Mosque located in the back of the shop.

Families stroll to the Catholic church on one end of town; and to the Lutheran churches on the other end.

Americans attend baseball games on Pelican's east side; soccer games on the west side.

And...they go to work.

As for the internet trash deposited by many self-proclaimed "patriotic Americans" (and you know who you are), frankly, I don't give a damn.

From My VIEW POINT

by Louis Hoglund, Managing Editor



An image of the June 12 Pelican Rapids Press column which gained nation-wide exposure after it challenged a Facebook post that attacked Somali citizens.

We're weary of people unproductively engaging in their twisted brand of "citizenship," peddling garbage on the internet...

Letters to THE EDITOR

Pelican was diverse a century ago--including Jewish merchant family

Just read about your "Anti-American" article in the Tribune, then in your paper.

My father, Sam Hartman, was born in Pelican Rapids in 1911, as were most of his seven brothers and sisters, and the family lived there for many years.

Then, as now, it appears that Pelican embraces a melting pot of cultures, which would make my family very pleased to learn. My family is Jewish, and were the only Jews in town back then.

It is evident from your article that the open and welcoming sense of community that existed a century ago remains alive and well in Pelican Rapids.

I have just sent the article to my father's youngest sister, my Aunt Ethel, who was born in Pelican in 1922 and who just celebrated her 97th birthday.

She is sharp as a tack, and I look forward to discussing your article and her days in Pelican Rapids once she has read it.

Regards, Bob Hartman

Pelican sets example of understanding

When I visit schools, kids have no problem with other kids who are different. No matter how one dresses...kids are kids. It's often times attitudes that are handed down or our hateful social media for which people can hide behind unkind comments.

Our America is a melting pot...this time not from Europe, but elsewhere. Kids celebrate differences and educators work to help kids understand differences...celebrate differences as Pelican Rapids did last weekend at the "International Friendship Festival."

Pelican Rapids sets an American example of inclusion and understanding...that's what America is all about! Pelican Rapids is to be congratulated for setting a high example of love for one another.

Respectfully, Jerry Horgen

Inspired by spirit of inclusion, writer will visit Pelican

Thank you for your wonderful philosophy and public action for inclusiveness of all peoples.

Fantastic article in response to an uninformed, scared (?) individual who seems clueless about American history and what truly makes our country "great."

I will make a point of visiting your fine community of Pelican Rapids when I am in Minnesota later this summer.

Lemyra DeBruyn

Two meetings and a dance

Listening sessions with state attorney general, Friendship Fest highlights of a remarkable two days

By Dave Ellison, Guest Columnist

The meetings were back to back, both in Fergus Falls with Keith Ellison, our attorney general, and concerned citizens.

The first was at M State with group of about twenty men and women who all work in various ways to build a diverse civil society; some as teachers, some through philanthropic institutions, some with small volunteer groups like Pelican's multicultural committee.

His comments were articulate and cogent; his anecdotes engaging and relevant. But what impressed me the most was that before we started, when most of the chairs around the table were occupied, someone came into the room and he jumped up and grabbed a chair for them.

The second meeting in City Hall with Mr. Ellison and about 50 concerned citizens was very different in both content and tone.

Folks asked questions, often very pointed, about issues like driver's licenses for undocumented residents, lack of adequate care for the mentally ill, reproductive rights, and the cost to state taxpayers of suits to protect the rights of asylum seekers.

Mr. Ellison answered all respectfully and directly, took copious notes, and in one case promised to talk to Governor Walz about one person's problem. But like the first meeting, at the end it seemed to me that little had changed.

The dance (actually several dances) was at the Friendship Festival the next day here in Pelican. Several groups



A troupe of Somali dancers from the Twin Cities took the stage as a finale of the Pelican Rapids International Friendship Festival. The rains held off most of the day at the outdoor event--but the Somali group performed when the raindrops began to fall heavily--inviting the audience under the shelter at Sherin Park.

(Mexican, Native American and Somali) invited the audience onto the stage at the end of their performances to dance.

The result was a joyous mass of laughing children and adults, men and women with all the skin colors and most of the religions of our human race, stomping to the same driving rhythm. That experience of creating together, a dance, something bigger than any one individual was, I think, much more powerful than any panel discussion or skillful speech.

Minds were changed. Mine certainly was.

I should declare a possible conflict of interest. Mr. Ellison and I are distant cousins. Both of our families came from Africa. Mine left about 30,000 years before his.

Dave Ellison

Friendship Fest dance: A joyous mass of laughing children and adults, men and women with all the skin colors and most of the religions of our human race, stomping to the same driving rhythm

A sampling of comments following widespread publicity on Press graduation photo column

Editor's Note: Published here are just a few of the thousands of comments that were posted, emailed or texted to the Pelican Rapids Press, following the June 12 column regarding a Facebook post critical of the Press graduation photos, because Somali students were prominently pictured in several of the images.

Subsequent media coverage propelled Pelican Rapids into the national spotlight,

with broadcast and newspaper stories circulated from the east to west coasts.

I live in Hendricks, way down in the southwest part of the state, right on the border and clinging onto Minnesota.

THANK YOU for your column which showed so clearly that you are the polar opposite of anti-American. Your words spoke

volumes and the only thing wrong with it is that it wasn't published on July 4.

I learned about your column from the StarTribune via a - gulp! - Facebook posting. I hope you are swamped with 10,000 congratulatory emails of appreciation. Count mine as one of those. Paul Olson

Thank you, Louis Hoglund, for your letter to our communities regarding being American. I appreciate your leadership. Daniel

Glisczinski Cris Egle I just now read of your great response to an intolerant person, on the AP news feed. What a grand person you are. You not only spoke for your community, but for the majority of a nation. Thank you. (I live in Montana)

Carol White Pelican Rapids back in 2001 or so was a city we lifted up as an example

of welcoming tactics for the new refugees coming to the city, no doubt for jobs. They had a winning soccer team, with students from different countries and backgrounds. The games brought the parents together too. There will always be a, hopefully-few, backward simpletons who want to ruin things. Brush them away like cockroaches.

'Looking Back' history column on page 14 this week...

Jeff & Julie Meyer, Publishers Office Hours: Monday-Thursday, 8:30 to 5:00; Friday, 8:30 to 4:00 Phone: 218-863-1421 • Fax 218-863-1423 e-mail: press@pelicanrapidspress.com Advertising Deadline: Noon Friday Online Version: www.pelicanrapidspress.com

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