

OPINION



Lowell Anderson / Echo Press
Firefighters from six departments battled a stubborn blaze Tuesday on Alexandria’s Broadway. Some were on the scene for nine hours.

THUMBS UP/ THUMBS DOWN

VIEWS BY THE ECHO PRESS

Working together through the flames

Thumbs Up: As this was being written, a big chunk in the heart of downtown Alexandria was being torn down because of a devastating fire Tuesday morning. Backhoes were ripping into the buildings that housed six businesses, many of them long-time fixtures on Broadway — Raapers Eatery and Ale, RM Tattoo, Charlie’s Bazaar, Little Darlings Children’s Boutique, Hidden Treasures and Achieve Wellness Chiropractic Center. The buildings were also home to about 20 tenants who were renting upstairs units. As of this writing, we don’t know what kind of recovery and rebuilding the businesses will face. The best news: No one was injured, and even through the smoke and flames, there were glimmers of kindness, hope and commaradie. Firefighters from six departments worked together to try to keep the fire from spreading to other businesses. Police officers diverted traffic away from the area. First responders, sheriff’s deputies and posse members also helped on scene. Roers Bakery, Traveler’s Inn, Common Ground and others supplied firefighters with food and coffee. The local Red Cross helped the displaced tenants. Seeing all those individuals – more than 100 of them – work bravely and seamlessly was inspiring. The Alexandria area has a proud history of pulling together through tough times. That resiliency will be tested again.

Harming our lakes

Thumbs Down: Here’s a plea all ice anglers should heed: Don’t leave your litter behind when you leave the lake. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources reported that’s it’s been finding all kinds of junk left on the ice by selfish, careless anglers — cigarette butts, propane canisters, cans, bags and bottles, blocking materials, fish carcasses, even human waste. “Litter is an issue throughout the ice fishing season, but it tends to be particularly problematic as the deadlines for removing fish houses from lakes loom,” the DNR said in a news release last week. “Trash left on the ice is not only an eyesore, but it also has the potential to negatively affect water quality, especially if the litter remains when the ice melts.” In the words of Rodmen Smith, director of the DNR Enforcement Division, the only thing anglers should leave is an imprint in the snow or ice.

Addressing farm safety

Thumbs Up: It’s good to see that more is being done to address farm safety. This week, Gov. Tim Walz

proposed spending \$250,000 to enhance farm safety measures across the state. The money would be used to relaunch the Tractor Rollover Protection Grant Program, which reimburses farmers who retrofit eligible tractors with rollover protective structures. It would also create a cost-share or reimbursement program for farmers who wish to invest in grain bin safety equipment, and pay for a farm safety outreach campaign highlighting tractor and grain bin safety. The governor noted that although only about 2% of Minnesota’s workforce is engaged in agriculture, it accounted for more than 30% of workplace fatalities in 2014. At least 10 people have died in farming-related accidents in Minnesota since June 2019. If even one life is saved through these latest proposals, it would be money well spent.

Fun park/lazy litterbugs

Thumbs Up/Down: A local resident gives a thumbs up to the Douglas County Parks Division’s latest gem, Lake Brophy Park. “It’s a great facility for winter fun!” she said. “There are two sledding hills and also ice skating. Along with that, there are two fire pits and have firewood provided to build a fire while enjoying playing outside.” But there are a few careless people who visited the park on Presidents Day and left three broken plastic sleds on the hillside, along with a full-size, blow-up mattress, she added. They also found a wallet and turned it in to the police. “Let’s make sure to teach our kids how to leave it better than you found it.” she said. “Even if it’s not your trash, don’t be too prideful to help clean it up.”

Ups and downs of icy sidewalks

Thumbs Up/Down: Those who are keeping their sidewalks clear from ice or are making it less slippery with gravel or environmentally friendly ice melt deserve a thumbs up. But property owners who let their sidewalks turn into treacherous skating rinks should get their act together. There have been many bad falls reported in the area in the past couple weeks, some serious enough to merit a hospital stay. In the words of one reader, “It’s a mess out there. Those with sidewalks should at least try to do something.”

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.

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

Cherishing the ties that bind

One of the indelible early memories Mark Anderson cherishes is when he would rush home at noon from Garfield Elementary School in Willmar to have lunch with his mom. For Anderson, the youngest of six children, it was one of the few times he got to spend alone with his mother.



ROSS EVAVOLD
Editor

The two have always been close. Before Anderson — who is best known in these parts by the air name Mark Anthony — settled in Douglas County, he worked at broadcast stations in several markets in the Midwest. During an early stop in Joplin, Missouri, back in the days of long distance charges, his daily calls home led to monthly phone bills that surpassed the \$300 mark.

He soon realized it would be cheaper to move back to Minnesota.

Recent circumstances have Anderson thinking about those moments. For the past five years, the KXRA program director has resumed that pattern of rushing to see his mom over the noon hour, only now it has been from his on-air radio duties to Nelson Gables, where Bonnie Anderson has been in failing health.

“You realize the preciousness of time when you have a loved one on hospice and you know their time is limited,” the son said last week. Throughout these last years, he’s known that any day could be their last. “I cherish each and every lunch hour.”

Those meals together have given them plenty of time to reminisce about their lives, and share memories of World War II when in 1944 Bonnie and Clifford met while he was on leave from the Navy. He signed on after Pearl Harbor and soon was in the South Pacific on a PT boat, while Bonnie was one of so many women who worked in factories and shipyards while the men went off to war, inspecting ammunition at a factory in Minneapolis.

Work has always been a big part of her youngest son’s life — he also anchors KOOL-TV’s newscasts — and those elementary-school lunch hours were a great influence in that regard,



Contributed
A young Mark Anderson shares time with his mother, Bonnie, in this undated photo.

too. Because the other big attraction for him was the popular Twin Cities kids TV show, “Lunch with Casey.” “My dad always thought us kids watched too much TV,” said Anderson, who didn’t miss a chance to remind his dad that all that tube time was only research for his future profession.

The broadcaster who played Casey Jones was Roger Awsumb. “He was one of those guys who made me get into television,” said Anderson, who has led a life full of wonderful coincidences. Consider that Awsumb retired to the Brainerd area, where the tables were turned and he used to watch Mark Anthony doing the weather on KSAX-TV.

Like that one? Here’s another. As a youth they had early release from school on Tuesdays, when Anderson’s mother used to drive him and a girl named Tracey to the United Methodist Church. He would sneak glances in the rear-view mirror at that attractive girl who, he jokes, has now moved up to the front seat. They were married 16 years ago in Las Vegas on Feb. 29, which means on Saturday, Leap Day, they will celebrate their “fourth” anniversary.

When they were back in Willmar for the church’s 125th anniversary celebration, they found a picture of the Wesley Choristers where Mark and Tracey were standing next to each other. “God has connected us all these years,” he said. “It was just our destiny.”

Tracey’s sister is also married to Mark’s brother. Anderson said that looking back to his relatives in Sweden, there were three brothers married to three sisters. “My dad always said we came to it naturally.”

Then there’s this nugget:

At the church’s 100th anniversary, Tracey found a book that listed when people joined the church. There, on the same date in November of 1953, were each set of their parents’ names.

The Andersons also had a connection with Alexandria, as Mark recalls trips here as a kid. If it wasn’t for all of his mom’s connections in Willmar, he said that his parents would have moved here when his dad retired from the highway department.

When Clifford had a stroke in 2015, they finally did make that move, and Anderson was able to resume those special lunches with his dad, who died in 2017, and his mom.

Bonnie Anderson died just after 2 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 25 as her youngest was ending the daily radio show he hosts. When Mark joined sisters Debbie and Cathy at Nelson Gables, music was streaming from the activity room.

“They had the doors open and that beautiful music was resonating down the halls. It was like the heavens were opening for my mom with that gorgeous music,” Anderson said. “They didn’t know my mom was passing just down the hall. It was an amazing experience.”

Suddenly he has a void in his life, not only at noon but at the other times he would visit his mom. It’s something that has occurred to Anderson, too. He has talked it over with Tracey, who works at New Life Christian Church, and is going to start spending the noon hour with her at the church.

“We’ll start a new tradition,” he said.

“It’s Our Turn” is a weekly column that rotates among members of the Echo Press editorial staff.

LETTERS

Ad saying Peterson ‘enabled’ Pelosi is deceptive

To the editor:
An advertisement from the Club for Freedom of Minnesota alleges that Rep. Collin Peterson has “enabled” Nancy Pelosi in a “vendetta” against Donald Trump. When you look at the facts, nothing could be farther from the truth.

Collin Peterson spoke out against the impeachment process from the beginning, and was one of two Democrats to vote against the impeachment articles, not because they were not justified but because they would make no difference.

I presume that Collin Peterson, a senior member of the House of Representatives, also talked with Nancy Pelosi and his congressional colleagues about his viewpoints. Whether you plan to vote to re-elect Collin Peterson or not, please get your facts right before running deceptive advertisements..
**David Geddes
Alexandria, MN**

Why doesn’t US follow up to see where foreign aid is going?

To the editor:
I don’t know what President Trump’s motives were when he went after the Bidens and Ukraine about corruption, but that is

what our president should do every time we give anyone a nickel. Why do we just give these countries all this aid but never follow it up to see if it’s going where it was intended?

How many times do we see aid piled up on a dock or in a warehouse rotting because a lot of these countries have no good means of distribution. We could do a lot more good with a whole lot less if we followed up on the aid and made sure it went where it is suppose to. Any country not willing to allow this follow up should not receive another nickel.

What’s worse than material aid is when we send billions of dollars in cash to someone with absolutely no way of knowing how it’s getting spent. If we did our job and followed up on our aid, we could very likely allow a lot of these immigrants to stay home and live a life in their own country where they would really want to be. So many of these countries are relying on our support, but we have to fix it if we are going to continue.

This is something both Democrats and Republicans should be able to work out in a bipartisan manner. Let’s trying thinking positive for a change.

**Jim Korkowski
Alexandria, MN**