

**EDITORIAL**

# Coming out of hibernation

As I sit here writing this article, I can't help but think of how much life has changed in the past few months, going from everyone running around like ants just living their lives to turning into the bear finding its favorite winter hibernation spot and hunkering down for the long winter ahead. I am hoping we are at a time, like the bear, where it is time to step out into the world and see what is going on around us and maybe have a spring awakening where we can smell the flowers and see the ants starting to scurry about on whatever mission it is they have. This has been an eye-opening experience for most of us, and hopefully it has given each and every one of us the opportunity to delve into what is truly important.



**Stearns County Commissioner**  
by Steve Notch

with state and federal political and ideological issues. As the county has no direct influence one way or the other on these matters, we have not taken up issues such as Second Amendment rights or the governor's executive orders. As commissioners, we might each have our opinion on what we would like to see, but we have tried to stay out of these issues in the county board room. Each county resident is still allowed to come to a board meeting and express their opinion or desire at the public access forum or to contact the commissioners individually.

Part of the reason the county does not get directly involved is we do not have the legislative authority to make or negotiate changes residents may be advocating for. Now, that's not to say we can't reach out to our legislators and tell them what we are hearing from county residents on these matters to help get the word out. The county tries its best to lobby for transportation funding, broadband funding and other funding from the legislature that provides direct benefits to our residents. Like most government bodies, we hear from both sides and can only do our best to make decisions, at least at the local level, that will hopefully be a benefit versus a cost to the county residents.

Please feel free to contact me if you have concerns or issues you see happening in and around Stearns County, and I will try and help get you to the right county department or I will bring your concerns to county administration or to a board meeting. Otherwise, if you would like to speak at the open forum before the county board meeting starts, you can just show up at a meeting and the board chair will ask if anyone would like to speak at the open forum. The public access forum occurs at the beginning of the meeting. I can be reached at 320-836-2199 or [steve.notch@co.stearns.mn.us](mailto:steve.notch@co.stearns.mn.us).

Take care and stay safe.

On the county front, it has been an opportunity to get to know the various online meeting applications such as Zoom or Webex. Those have been the only method of holding our board of commissioners meetings, as well as how I and the other commissioners have attended our other assigned committee and board meetings. Although my vehicle likes these platforms – it gets to stay in my garage instead of driving around Stearns County – I still prefer to meet in person where it is easier to have dialogue and debate with others. Most functions of the county have been performing as they normally would, apart from fewer one-on-one meetings. Many issues remain, such as do we have too many solar farms going up in the county, are we too restrictive with what is required for landscaping and building in shoreline or not allowing rural plats in the various ag zoning districts. Before COVID-19 hit, the county had been in the middle of updating the Comprehensive Plan to address some of these areas of concern, and I'm sure we will pick up the ball again eventually and get this task done, hopefully before the year's end.

Over the past number of months, the county board has been hit up with requests to pass resolutions dealing

# Regulation consternation



**Ultra Sonnek**  
by Ben Sonnek

I've never had the pleasure of meeting Dave Simpkins, one of the Herald's previous publishers and owners, in person. However, I've heard a lot about Dave while on the job, and I've encountered him through his Herald columns as I'm putting together the Way Back When feature; for more details, check the bottom of your birdcage for my column from Aug. 8, 2019, entitled "Wednesdays with Dave."

It's through Dave's columns that I recently met another aspect of the author: specifically, Big Knute, "the old snooze chewer" he made up – at least, I assume he did – and then cited as a source in his May 30, 1995, column, "Big Knute proposes a new regulatory agency."

It's been 25 years since Big Knute laid the groundwork for this agency, so the logical thing to do would be to review the progress it has made in an in-depth front-page article in the Herald. I took this idea to our editor, who turned out to be me. Maybe I was having a bad day, but I rejected my idea and told myself to get back to work or else I'd report myself to my superiors. Well, I'm not about to let my jerk editor have the last word, so I'll use this column for my retrospective piece. There's nothing he – that is, I – can do about it.

Big Knute's agency addressed three main areas, although I'm sure more ground could've been covered had he been allotted more space on the editorial page. The areas were telemarketing laws, video regulations and television rules. Let's look at them individually.

First, Big Knute's top priority was the establishment of the Telemarketing Don't-Bother-Me-When-I'm-Busy Administration; their task would be requiring telemarketers to only call when you wanted to be called and to only call you about things you wanted to be called about. Clearly, Big Knute has made terrific progress in this area. Thanks to information engines and social media, our preferences are automatically collected and sold to shadowy marketing companies who, instead of calling us, target our computers with ads. As invasive as this technique seems, it's easier to ignore a computer than the strident ring of the telephone, so we should probably be grateful our PCs aren't installed directly into our cerebral cortexes yet.

Next, we can safely say the biggest failure of Big Knute's regulatory ambitions came in regard to his desired video-recording limitations. Even in 1995, the old snooze chewer was irritated by how ubiquitous video cameras were in unwanted and potentially awkward situations, especially weddings and their receptions. Big Knute's head would probably explode if he saw a modern matrimonial milieu, cell phones hovering the air like tiny tablets of the Ten Commandments held aloft by sentimental Moses clones.

There has been pushback against this trend, thank heaven. For example, when Maggie and I were married, we had a sign at the door asking people to silence and put away their mobile devices, not even leaving an escape clause in the event of puppy infestation or spontaneous combustion. Fortunately, because we were married with a traditional Latin Mass, most of the attendees were too busy being reverent to reach for their phone pockets. Deo gratias.

Finally, Big Knute, tired of the 10 o'clock news airing stories of killings at the beginning of the newscast, would have had his agency enforce rules upon news outlets so they would only air those grim stories after the weather, local news, world news and sports had finished and the news-watcher was asleep. Well, while up-front coverage of killings was all the rage for the last few weeks, the resulting unrest almost broke the national COVID-19 lockdowns, so it looks like the world will probably be swinging back into coronavirus-centric coverage for a while. I'd go into more detail, but I don't watch the 10 o'clock news; 10 p.m. is set aside for me to convince myself I really, really need to get some sleep. If only I weren't such a staunch advocate for packing as many useless activities into a day as possible.

At the end of Dave's column, Big Knute also proposed that a reality meter be set on every opinion piece done in the media, ranging "from fact to fiction, from innuendo to enlightenment." Well, that's easy enough. Just take a piece of paper, draw a scale from zero to 10, set the needle at zero and leave it there for everything. Even Big Knute said Dave's column would register off the scale for nonsense; heck, my editor said the needle on my column's reality meter is perpetually spinning backward. I'd argue with him, but then he might take me to court, and I wouldn't know whether to sit at the plaintiff or the defendant table.

I conclude with the most important point I can make about Dave's column: What is this "snooze" Big Knute is chewing? It sounds like the punchline of a sick joke.

Q: What does the hangman do when he's tired?  
A: He takes a quick s-nooze.

# What will school look like next year?

Greetings from Sauk Centre Schools. My hope and wish is that you are all healthy and safe and are enjoying summer. The summer months for schools are typically a time of planning for the upcoming school year. As we all know, 2020 has been anything but typical, and this year's summer planning is also turning out to be anything but typical.



**Sauk Centre Public Schools superintendent**  
by Pat Westby

The question that unquestionably seems to be on the minds of many – including myself – is "What is school going to look like next fall?" This is certainly a fair question and, folks, I absolutely wish I had an answer for you. Unfortunately, I do not at this point.

However, what I can tell you and what we do know regarding the guidance and summer timelines we have been given from the Minnesota Department of Education and the Minnesota Department of Health. The guidance we have been given so far is that school districts, while planning for next year, are encouraged to plan for three separate scenarios or three possible learning delivery models. The three scenarios/learning models include the following:

- Return all students to school buildings following the most current CDC and MDH guidelines.
- Return students to school buildings implementing a hybrid model following the most current CDC and MDH guidelines.
- No students return to school buildings and implement a distance learning model.

In addition to these three models, we have also been

given timelines of when we can expect to learn more. The current timelines as given to us from MDE and MDH include the following:

- Week of June 15: MDE and MDH will release public health parameters for each of the three models for schools to consider while contingency planning for the 2020-21 school year.

- Week of July 27: MDE and MDH will share their determination of which educational delivery model will be in the best interest of the health and safety of our students, school staff and school communities for the 2020-21 school year. According to MDE, "This situation is fluid and decisions will continue to be reviewed in the best interest of public health, and specifically the health and safety of our school communities. As the situation evolves, decisions may change. That is why we are all urging all school districts to prepare for each of the three scenarios."

While summarizing all this information from MDE, it basically boils down to the fact that we will not know the answer to the question of what next fall might look like until the week of July 27. At that time, I will surely communicate to you what the educational delivery model will be for next fall. In the meantime, please know we will be working hard to plan for all three scenarios and Sauk Centre Schools will be ready for whatever model is to be used in the fall.

Please continue to take care of yourselves, your families and your friends, and please continue to stay healthy and safe.

# Metaphor for life

I looked carefully at the apples in the food display at work. They looked perfect and, having eaten one the day before, I could attest to them being just that. I selected the most beautiful, most delicious-looking one.

Normally, I can be a seafood eater – in that when I see food, I eat it. I was actually quite hungry that day, and when I got downstairs to my desk I took a big bite. Do you know that feeling when you anticipate the perfect, crunchy, juicy apple, and you bite into it only to discover it is soft and brown inside? What a disappointment!

I commented as much, and my co-worker on the other side of the wall said, "That's kind of a metaphor for life."

Maybe that spoiled apple really is a good comparison for what some of us are feeling these days. Life was rolling along fairly well back in January. Fast forward to today, and most of what we have heard about in the last five months has gone from bad to worse. I am tired and anxious from all the bad news, the virus, the riots and the hatred.

I was dwelling on all of this Tuesday morning, sitting on the front porch and having a cup of coffee. It was well before 6 a.m.; the soft glow of the morning light was soothing, and I was enjoying the 72 degrees. I knew it would get hot later in the day but, to me, that 72 degrees felt divine.

Near the porch, just about five feet from where I sit, there is a statue of St. Francis my siblings gave me many years ago. The statue is about 20 inches tall, appears to be very old, and the concrete has a patina of soft browns and greens. He stands with



**Random Reflections**  
by Diane Leukam

a serene countenance, his face lifted toward the sky. His right hand rests on a wolf's head, and the other hand holds a bird in front of him; those two postures represent stories from his extraordinary life.

St. Francis is known as the saint of peace and of nature. In the quiet of the porch, I wondered what he thought of his beautiful home country, Italy, that has been ravaged by the coronavirus. Was he there in spirit, trying to lift the people up in their sickness, sorrow and fear? Was he sad, or was he seeing a much bigger picture? As a saint of peace, what does he think about what is happening in our country?

We have been in the perfect storm of major events colliding, and we are all weary. We need peace and renewal. We have all bitten into an apple that disappoints and leaves a bad taste in our mouths. Where can we find the peace we need? It is not to be found watching the news on television, staring at our phones or computers, reading emails or scrolling through social media with its texts, tweets and posts.

As I reflected on all this, a catbird flew quietly toward St. Francis and rested briefly on the bird in his left hand. The catbird looked at me for a moment and without a sound, flew away.

Where can I find peace, that good apple that doesn't disappoint but rather refreshes the soul?

For me, peace can be found observing nature in the soft light of a still morning. With each morning, there is new hope, new life, the gift of another day.

# Sauk Centre Herald

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**Letters:** Letters to the editor and other opinion articles are welcomed. Letters must be signed with first and last name and include address and phone number. Letters should be short and to the point. We reserve the right to edit lengthy letters.

**Corrections/Clarifications:** The Herald strives for accuracy. If you would like to report a factual error, please call 352-6577.

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# Letters to the editor accepted

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