

OPINION

May the Force be with you ... always

Fandoms have a significant presence in pop culture, from Marvel and DC, to Harry Potter, BTS, Doctor Who and Star Trek, but none has had as much of an impact as Star Wars.

With “Star Wars: Episode IX – The Rise of Skywalker” being released this week, fans are heading out in droves to their local movie theaters to check out the latest installment of the franchise. Many of these fans will be decked out in Jedi robes and lightsabers at the ready and afterwards will argue about and critique the film.

Star Wars fans are deeply passionate about the franchise and enjoy everything from the films, television series, books, video games, action figures and more.

Love them or hate them, they truly are some of the most dedicated fans forming a community unlike any other.

I have personally been a

WRITER'S BLOCK



Paige Kieffer
Staff Writer

Star Wars fan since I was 7 years old. It all started back in 1997 when I went to see the special edition version of “Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope” (1977) that was rereleased in theaters for the 20th anniversary. The special edition versions of “Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back” (1980) and “Star Wars: Episode VI – Return of the Jedi” (1983) followed shortly thereafter.

I attended all three the movies with my dad, and they're some of my most favorite memories. He told me about seeing “Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope” in 1977 on a one-screen theater in

Brooklyn Center where he had to wait for weeks to get a seat. He told me he was excited to finally share the Star Wars experience with me.

Immediately after seeing the movies I was hooked. I started to live and breathe Star Wars.

Once the Star Wars special edition trilogy came out on video I watched the films every day for months, absorbing each word. I also rented the original versions of the films and secretly giggled at the sub-par effects, but I enjoyed seeing Star Wars in its original format.

Every day in second grade, my friends and I

would play Star Wars on the jungle gym at recess where we would split into two teams — the Rebel Alliance against the Galactic Empire — and we would battle it out.

Throughout my life my Star Wars fandom never faltered. I watch all the movies and television shows on a regular basis; I'm always in the movie theater on opening weekend to watch the latest film; I have read a number of the Star Wars books, played the computer and video games, dressed up as Princess Leia and Queen Amidala on Halloween, bought a lightsaber, own action figures, harbored a crush for Han Solo, and I regularly tell people “May the force be with you.”

I'm a Star Wars nerd, heart and soul.

As I've grown older, I've been introduced more to the amazing Star Wars community.

In the Twin Cities, Star Wars fans gather every week at USA Karate in

Maple Grove to practice their lightsaber skills.

The Saber Legion club formed three-years ago in Robbinsdale and has since expanded to over 30 chapters and close to 6,000 members worldwide who hone their Jedi skills with heavy-duty stunt lightsabers. Learn more at saber-legion.org.

I've also been introduced to the 501st Legion, a global all-volunteer organization of costumed fans who share their love of Star Wars by doing fundraising, charity work and volunteering in their communities.

The 501st Legion has two regional units with hundreds of members including the Central Garrison that covers Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota; and the Wisconsin Garrison.

The Central Garrison alone has supported the Alzheimer's Association, American Cancer Society, Autism Society of

Nebraska, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Children and Families of Iowa, Make-A-Wish Foundation, March of Dimes, New Directions Down Syndrome Association and more.

For more information on upcoming charity events or to join the Central Garrison, visit centralgarrison.com. To join the Wisconsin Garrison or to learn more about upcoming events, visit wigarison.com.

While Star Wars fans aren't perfect, at our heart we're a very caring fandom, and we've made sure dying fans see the latest films, have built R2 astromech droids that visit children's hospitals and have raised millions for numerous charities.

While I may be biased toward Star Wars, nothing is better than being a part of a fandom. Fandom really isn't about what you love, but how you love it and who you get to share it with.

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LETTERS

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From my perspective, we should be looking at more ways to provide tax relief to more Minnesotans. At the top of my list would be senior citizen tax relief, specifically eliminating the state law that forces income taxation of Social Security benefits. This is a bill I authored last session, and I look forward to fighting for it again this coming year.

As always, I look forward to hearing your thoughts. Please contact me any time by email at rep.nolan.west@house.mn.

Rep. Nolan West
Blaine

West represents District 37B in the Minnesota House of Representatives. District 37B includes most of Blaine.

Ask Anoka County Board to accept refugees

To the editor:

President Trump recently issued an executive order that requires local approval of any refugee resettlement in communities. This decision must be made by the end of January 2020. Gov. Tim Walz submitted a letter consenting to refugees being resettled in Minnesota, but county level consent is also needed. Kandiyohi County led the way for this approval with a 3-2 vote to accept refugees.

As a resident of Anoka County, I would encourage the County Board to also approve resettling refugees into our county. We have an outstanding educational system with English as a Second Language services readily available. Coon Rapids has an organization

in place, Transformative Circle, which is building bridges across the area and could help new refugees feel welcomed. And as a fairly white county (84.5% per U.S. Census estimates in July 2018), continuing to accept refugees would allow all of us to learn more about other cultures.

The Anoka County Board of Commissioners meets twice per month, typically on the second and fourth Tuesday. Please consider contacting your commissioner today to share your views about the importance of refugees and our capacity within Anoka County to assist. Information about the board and list of Commissioners is available at anokacounty.us.

Together, all of us in Anoka County could make a positive difference for future refugees.

Sandra McAnany
Coon Rapids

Look again at commissioner's explanation

To the editor:

Commissioner Matt Look's November letter to the editor claiming Anoka County turnover is low should be very concerning to the taxpayers. Commissioner Look states, “In reviewing the DHS list, we found the list identified 79 individuals who had been certified as assessors. DHS then took the fact that 29 of those individuals were no longer certified to mean there was a 37% turnover.” Commissioner Look also concludes that the DHS information is inaccurate and that, “Unfortunately, this is nothing new for DHS as we have seen time and time again, they seem to have a difficult time with accuracy.” Although Commissioner

Look claims that Anoka County's turnover rate is actually “... lower than any of the counties highlighted,” his analysis is flawed at best and, at worst, deceitful.

Consider the following:

According to the information received following a data request, Commissioner Look's claims are false. For example, Commissioner Look claims that of the 79 individuals who were certified assessors, only 44 conducted assessments. Of these he states, “... one retired, two resigned and 41 are still employed at Anoka County.” From this he calculates the assessor turnover rate as 6.8%. He failed to disclose that only 38 rather than 41 are still doing assessments, yielding a 13.6% assessor turnover rate, double his calculation.

Next, Commissioner Look's mix and match misleading analysis is also

demonstrated by the fact that of the 29 individuals no longer certified, only 14 remain as Anoka County employees. Incorporating this fact yields a 52% turnover rate for this group of County employees.

Finally, another factor Commissioner Look failed to consider is whether any of the other counties had similar issues or other reasons that might have affected their turnover rate. Without this information, Commissioner Look's conclusions are as bad or worse than his claims of DHS's inaccuracies.

I would strongly urge that before Commissioner Look criticizes the DHS or others for faulty information, he ensures his facts and claims are accurate and not misleading.

William Erhart
Ramsey