

# OPINION

## Editorial series ends as age-friendly campaign begins

*This is the eighth and final editorial in a yearlong series on issues facing Minnesota's aging population.*

Like an exclamation point at the end of a sentence, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz signed an executive order establishing the Governor's Council on an Age-Friendly Minnesota just as the last editorial in our 2019 series, The Aging of Minnesota, was being planned.

The order, signed Dec. 11, put into action a two-year campaign to position the state for designation as an "age friendly" state. The governor's order calls for a collective effort "that requires coordination, collaboration, innovation, and focus across state agencies."

As such, the governor's council is charged with coordinating state and private sector partners. Members will be chosen from the Minnesota Board on Aging, Department of Commerce, Department of



Employment and Economic Development, Department of Health, Housing Finance Agency, Human Services, Department of Transportation, Department of Veterans Affairs and the Metropolitan Council.

The council will focus on eight domains of livability set out by creators of the age-friendly designation. We are excited that every age-related issue addressed in the Adams Publishing – ECM Editorial Board 2019 series is represented in the eight domains, which are outdoor spaces and buildings, housing, transportation, civic participation and employment, respect and social inclusion, social

participation, communication and information, and community and health services.

By signing this executive order, the governor is calling the entire state to a higher awareness of the challenges and opportunities in all areas of society and the economy with the rapid growth of residents over the age of 65 years. This is a welcome and important move by a governor who has focused much of his public life addressing the needs of youth.

Calling attention in his executive order to the fact that in 2020, the number of older adults in Minnesota over age 65 will exceed the number of children under

age 18, shows that Gov. Walz is giving balanced attention to the important needs of all segments of the population, with the extreme needs of one group not overshadowing or wiping out the needs of the other.

We agree with this. Even though we have spent recent months highlighting and focusing on the needs, challenges and opportunities of Minnesota's growing over-65 population, this should not become a winners-and-losers situation. The governor's call to focus state government attention on the needs of the state's eldest population should include that, whenever possible, this work will

also positively impact the lives, health, and education of the state's youngest residents.

We started out our 2019 editorial series, The Aging of Minnesota, in February by chronicling the birth of the baby boomer generation after World War II and how this large demographic population is now retiring and will soon stretch and stress public and private programs and services needed by them.

Our second editorial focused on the elder abuse crisis raging in Minnesota. We highlighted the statistics on the growing number of serious abuse cases being reported to authorities by people living in long-term care and assisted living facilities throughout the state. Several of the legislative solutions we supported were successfully passed and signed into law during the 2019 session.

Subsequent editorials centered on the need to rephrase how we think

and talk about aging, the growing number of elderly living in poverty with few options for relief, the distinct shortage of workers to fill service positions in all areas of elderly care (in home and residential), and quality of life disparities between older whites and nonwhites.

So we end our 2019 editorial series here but are confident that the conversation about the need for action to ensure that all older Minnesotans live fulfilling lives will continue at kitchen and conference tables all over the state. And, thanks to the recent action by Gov. Walz, we now look with hope to Minnesota becoming the most age-friendly state in the nation.

— An opinion of the Adams Publishing – ECM Editorial Board. Reactions welcome. Send to: editorial.board@ecm-inc.com.



The Union Pacific Big Boy 4014 chugs along in Duluth.

## The biggest news story of 2019

What do you think was the biggest national news story of 2019?

If you are guessing this monumental story starts with a "T," you are quite right. However, it's not the T-word you are thinking of.

The biggest news story of 2019 was about a train — no ordinary train, but the greatest and strongest steam engine ever built — the Union Pacific Big Boy 4014. This gigantic steam engine was built in the early 1940s to haul long heavy trains of coal over the Wasatch Mountains between Cheyenne, Wyoming, and Ogden, Utah. Twenty-five Big Boys were built; eight survived to go display in parks across the country. Until May of 2019, none of them were running.

Union Pacific Railroad, the original owner of the 4014, worked diligently for the last six years to get this mighty engine up and running. The efforts required a total rebuild of the engine, and in many cases, parts had to be engineered one at a time.

Union Pacific's mission was to get the Big Boy on the tracks, in working order, by mid-May, and take it to Ogden, Utah.

The occasion was the 150th anniversary of "The Golden Spike," the meeting of trains coming from the east and west, the completion of the Transcontinental Railway in 1869. For the first time, Americans could travel from New York to San Francisco by train. It was a miraculous piece of history, uniting the country and making travel feasible.

On May 9, 2019, thousands of



Peggy Bakken  
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train fans gathered in Ogden to watch as the Big Boy arrived from its home in Cheyenne, Wyoming. The UP 844 also arrived, and the engines met nose to nose, just as history recorded two engines meeting a century and a half ago.

My husband, Bruce, was one of the throngs of train buffs — affectionately known as steam nerds — who waited patiently for the engines to arrive, decked out with cameras, phones, video cameras and tripods. He and his buddy Scott from Chicago and many others followed the engine back across Utah and Wyoming. The Big Boy spent the rest of the summer and into the fall traversing much of the western half of the U.S.

To our great good fortune, the Big Boy's travels took him through Minnesota. He started in Albert Lea, then north through Waseca and Faribault, then into the metro area for a three-day stop at Union Depot in St. Paul. Then, north again and on to Duluth. Hundreds of people greeted the train at each stop.

I went to see the engine in St. Paul. Bruce and sons Paul and Matt took a few days vacation time and met the engine in Faribault, then went to Duluth to see the engine one

more time before it took off east to Chicago and on to other destinations.

While the Big Boy's presence in Minnesota was the ultimate experience for train fanatics, its visit also attracted history buffs, families and young toy train lovers. If you did not get the chance to see it traverse our state, let me tell you, this is not Thomas the Tank Engine. It is not cute and cuddly. It is a monster — at 132 feet long, it's about two-thirds the length of a Boeing 747. At 17.5 feet tall, it dwarfs the tallest humans. The driving wheels alone are 5 feet 8 inches tall. UP says it weighs about 1.2 million pounds.

And steam engines have lives of their own. They groan and crackle when they start to move. They huff and puff as they start to breathe, then pick up speed as they steam down the tracks. And when the engine is going full bore, the ground shakes and you have to cover your ears because of the thunderous noise.

Yes, the biggest news event of 2019 was the reincarnation of this monstrous being, sharing with all of us a living and breathing history lesson and showing how tons of iron and steel can be intimidating and beautiful at the same time.

It's one "T" word that we all can agree on.

Peggy Bakken is a former executive editor and a columnist for APG-East Central Minnesota. Reactions welcome: peggy.bakken@ecm-inc.com.

## Letter to the editor

### Response to Dec. 20 opinion page

To the editor:

The opinion page in the Dec. 20 UnionHerald reads like a leftist fantasy novel. Here are some alternate concepts.

Carbon dioxide is plant food. Add warmth and you get more crops, more food, less starvation.

Nuclear power is clean and compact. Windmills kill thousands of migratory birds (they follow wind), solar demand too much land, and big batteries require rare elements mined by child slave labor.

Climate science has been polluted by fraud, politics, and greed.

Coal is cheap and plentiful and when mined wisely, mountains are moved to allow highways in Appalachia.

We used to export our solutions. Now we import their problems. Between child care fraud (huge), jihad attacks, lack of assimilation, high demand on our health care and education resources, and lack of gratitude (eg. Ilhan Omar), it's dishonest to claim "Refugee"="Good for Minnesota."

Forced injections seem more like prison or death camp activities. If we are not free to say "No, Thank You" to vaccinations, then we really aren't free. And vaccination rates in the 91-97% range are remarkably high. What we need more is funding for serious research to explain autism and to explain the numerous instances of permanent neurological damage that parents report have been temporally associated with vaccination.

When non-experts elected by non-experts impose their ideas by force on everyone else, the results are usually an expensive slow motion disaster. Ditto when ideas are implemented by government without freedom in mind.

When government makes a bad choice, it corrects glacially and poorly and we all pay. When individuals make bad choices, correction occurs much more quickly and damage is usually contained, and others can learn vicariously. The huge mistakes that people make will not be contained by government. In those cases, turn to God.

Actually, turn to God first. Then family, friends, and neighbors. Then maybe ask government. Maybe.

Too much government sucks the life, joy, hope, and fun out of people and society. Just like socialism. Lifeless, joyless, hopeless people are unproductive people. Unproductive and unhappy people make poor, unhappy societies that suffer.

Please don't grow government. Please?

Jeff Baumann  
Coon Rapids

### Correction

A photo with the Dec. 27 Anoka County History column included the wrong caption. The caption should have read: "Mrs. T.G.J. Pease and Arch Pease in Pease Printery office."