

OPINION

TRIBUNE EDITORIAL



HELP MAKE 2020 A GREAT YEAR FOR ALBERT LEA

Like many places, Albert Lea saw its share of ups and downs in the economy in 2019.

While the community saw some business closures, it also saw a significant number of business openings and renovations.

After many years stagnant or even on the decline, South Broadway is now seeing renewed interest and life with new businesses popping up throughout the corridor — and more are expected in the future.

The downtown is continuing to experience a rebirth with more expected to come in 2020 with Albert Lea now being part of the Main Street Minnesota program. Other communities that have been a part of the program have seen positive growth, improvement in their Main Street district and increased foot traffic and activities. Adding these things to the success that's already been seen downtown, and it should be an exciting time for the community.

While some of the negative things in the community are unavoidable and happen because of national decisions or other factors, there are many things we can do as a community to move forward with hope — not only for the new year but also a new decade.

The question is, will you jump on board and help that growth?

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MINNESOTA
NEWSPAPER
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2016: 9 state awards

2015: 10 state awards
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You can't help but smile with these memories

It was almost like scenes out of a movie — first, a scary movie, then a drama and finally a comedy.

Our family and I trekked to Rochester Christmas Day to spend time with my mother-in-law, who had been moved from the intensive care unit at St. Marys Hospital to a less-rigorous, more specialized unit in the same hospital. After visiting her multiple times over the past five weeks in the intensive care unit, we were eager to check out a different part of the hospital — and, even more importantly, to see her slowly, but surely, make small steps of improvement.

When we arrived, we set out on our journey to find her new room. Anyone who has been to St. Marys before can attest to how huge the hospital is and how if it weren't for the posted signs, it would be quite easy to get lost. Even with the signs, sometimes it still happens.

We weren't quite sure what we were going to come across, considering we had never been to the part of the hospital we were looking for. After going down a few long hallways, we knew we were getting closer.



Nose for News
By Sarah Stultz

The signs still showed we were going in the right direction, but not a person was in sight. It was a much quieter part of the hospital with low light and tan-colored tile reminiscent of an earlier era.

I don't know if it's because we've watched too many scary movies or because of how dim and quiet it was there compared to the ICU, but it felt as if we were walking through a hallway in a horror film and that at any minute, some scary creature would come out of a doorway. I shudder and laugh at the same time as I think about it. I know it sounds silly, but I wasn't the only one with that thought.

Once we got settled into my mother-in-law's room, it was an action-packed family visit as you can well imagine with four

children and four adults plus my mother-in-law — plus the machines and cords — in her hospital room. Keeping two young children entertained without making a lot of noise and keeping two teenagers focused without being on their electronic devices was quite the challenge.

After we left the hospital, we went looking for a restaurant that was open and came across Denny's near the hospital.

The place was packed, and it felt like we stepped into a comedy — all I could do was laugh to make it through that meal. The kids were getting especially antsy as they waited for their food, and more and more people came pouring in.

At least everyone around us was in a pleasant mood, as the evening finished with a bang as my son bolted toward one of the exit doors — which happened to be the emergency exit — and alarms started blaring.

Ahh, the memories. This won't be a Christmas we'll forget any time soon.

Sarah Stultz is the managing editor of the Tribune. Her column appears every Tuesday.

PEN TO PAPER



What changes will the new decade bring?

We're on the cusp of a new decade, and it feels more portentous than other decennial thresholds in my lifetime.

In my fuzzy memories of 1979, I was wheeling around on my new red tricycle. I started the 1980s on a roll.

Soon, awareness of the larger world, including the Cold War, began to seep in. Old enough to grasp the concept of nuclear strikes, I was skeptical my church could double as a fallout shelter like the distinctive yellow and black signs on the walls promised.

But by late 1989, the Berlin Wall had recently fallen and the Soviet Union was teetering. The struggle to end apartheid was gaining ground and Nelson Mandela was six weeks from walking out of prison. I stopped worrying about nuclear war, and I wrote a research paper (with nary an inkling of the internet) for English class called "The Greenhouse Effect."

In 1999, I was living up to Prince's song of the same name, but the dire context of his lyrics had faded. The potential crisis of "Y2K" was averted through diligent work, and it was already difficult to imagine life before the internet. The information age had begun, and the economy was good.

By 2009, I was mostly just surviving the day-to-day as a tired working mom with a baby. I was frustrated that Democratic leadership dropped the public option from the Affordable Care Act (ACA) legislation to get Sen. Lieberman to join a 60-vote filibuster-proof margin in the Senate.

That still felt like progress, though, in the midst of unequal fallout from the mortgage crisis and resulting recession. Too-big-to-fail banks and automakers were bailed out, while homeowners with underwater mortgages were not. Unemployment was high, with less educated workers taking the brunt of job loss, especially in rural areas like ours. Expensive



My Point of View
By Jennifer Vogt-Erickson

wars in Afghanistan and Iraq dragged on, and the Tea Party built momentum on a wave of resentment.

In retrospect, we were ripping apart, and the Orwellian-sounding "Citizens United" decision in January 2010 gave it rocket fuel. The Supreme Court's majority equated money with free speech, a laughably perverse conclusion. Politicians quickly warped further away from public opinion as "dark money" — undisclosed contributions on behalf of campaigns — was injected into our country's political veins. "Primarizing" entered our lexicon.

The ACA passed, and Republican majorities took over the House and Senate in 2011. The lack of a public option soon left self-employed people who didn't qualify for subsidized health insurance in a desperate lurch as their policies shot up in price. Did Republicans determine that a public option was indeed necessary to fix this gap in the ACA's market-based healthcare reform? No, Republicans instead used the pain of self-employed people as leverage to try to rip away health insurance from millions who had just gained it.

The House voted at least six times for full repeal of the ACA and more than 50 times for partial repeals. Most tellingly, "skinny repeal" failed in 2017 even after Republicans controlled the presidency and Congress.

Nevertheless, the Trump administration is pursuing the ACA's provisions through the courts. The legislation's many advances are still in jeopardy, including: a ban on "pre-existing" conditions, a higher age limit for children on their

parents' insurance, cost-free preventive services and Medicaid expansion.

The decade-long fight over the ACA makes this distinction as clear as ever: Democrats are most interested in using government for the purpose of helping people. Republicans want to place people at the mercy of the market in an economic system that is increasingly winner-take-all.

Looking to the start of 2020, the Cold War is back. A revanchist Russia is aggressively targeting western democracies with cybersecurity attacks and disinformation campaigns. Partly as a result, political arguments have taken on a new and strange dimension, like politicians and citizens aren't arguing over the same reality anymore.

And far from bringing us together as promised, social media has been effectively used to both spread political propaganda and collect personal information on us, with less investigative reporting from collapsing newspapers to counter it. We can still find common ground over local political issues, but it's almost fruitless to debate national politics in Freeborn County.

We must overcome this attack on democracy to confront exigencies like climate change. Our failure so far adds another defining feature as we enter 2020: Children are begging adult leaders to be grown-ups and face our physical reality.

Despite dire straits for democracy and climate, the 1st District has abundant potential power in our sun, our wind, our soil and our resourceful minds.

Frank Baum, who implored us to pay attention to the man behind the curtain 12 decades ago, said it well. "You've always had the power my dear, you just had to learn it for yourself."

Jennifer Vogt-Erickson is a member of the Freeborn County DFL Party.

OPINION

I wish I would have chosen to hug my mother more often

I wish I'd have hugged my mother more. I'm a hugger, but I didn't grow up in a family prone to hugging. Hugging was saved for visitations and funerals. If I saw family members hugging, I'd ask, "Who died?"

I'm not much for saying, "I wish I had." It's human nature to say, "I wish I'd gone to Bemidji State" or "I wish I'd have bought that 40 acres." It's wishing in vain. It's historical worrying.

There's nothing we can do about the past other than learn from it. But I wish I'd have hugged my mother more.

I was proud when someone identified or introduced me as "Lucille's little boy Allen," even when they did so when I was 25 years old. Mom was a wonderful mother. I could put my heart on the table and know that she'd never step on it. Every mother is a story to be set aside from all other stories.

I remember when my father reached the point where pills had become a constant in his life. Dad had a weekly pill organizer that corralled his pills for each day of the week. Mom bought two of those because they were on sale. She didn't take any pills, so she put M&M's in hers.

My mother bragged about me. She'd say things like this about her most recent child: "Allen has always been smart. He was just a toddler when he grabbed an electric fence. No one had to tell him to let go."

Mom said things she apparently learned in Mom School. "Don't sit there like a bump on a log. Make yourself useful." Mom took me to town (population 300) in the hopes of giving me an expanded world view. She'd tell me, "Take a jacket." I'd protest that it was 91°. She assured me weather changes. It had done so before.

"We may not have much money, but we wear clean underwear."

"Try not to get any blood on your good shirt."

"Where is the good scissors?" Nothing on earth had the ability to hide like the good scissors. "If you fall out of that tree and break a leg, don't come running to me."

"If nothing else works, try doing it my way."

I couldn't always tell the difference between friends or relatives. There were many visitors to the farm. Mom said helpful things like, "She's my third cousin twice removed and she's my friend too."

Houdini claimed he was going to return from the dead. My



Tales from Exit 22
By Al Batt

mother said, "If I ever come back, it'll be in the daytime so I won't frighten you."

A mother can tell you all about yourself. I fell into the Le Sueur River frequently. It seemed nice, but it had a dark (and wet) side. My mother blamed my propensity for dropping into the creek on my Baptist genes. I was baptizing myself.

I thought I saw a UFO. I couldn't even spell UFO. Who knows what it was? Maybe it was a prototype for a much-needed flying toaster. I reckoned it had traveled at 10,243 mph. My mother pretended to believe me.

She nearly cried when I gave her a painted rock and dandelions for Mother's Day. I think it was because I gave her a painted rock and dandelions for Mother's Day.

Mother was Uber before there was Uber. She'd pick me up anywhere and drive me anywhere. She did Uber one better. She didn't charge me a cent.

Mom could fold a road map only one way — the wrong way. It would cause my father to sputter. Mother obtained a riding lawn mower. She didn't need a road map as she mowed the lawn as if it were a race track. Trees trembled at the mower's approach.

To Mom, a party was two people laughing at the same time. She called uncontrollable laughter finding a teehee's nest with a haha's egg in it. She never hosted a Tupperware party because Tupperware encouraged leftovers. She maintained there is a trace of everyone on every face. Everyone looked like someone else. "Doesn't he remind you of Ernie Borman?" she'd ask. I had to agree with her. I'd no idea who Ernie Borman was. Mom said, "I'm fine," even when she wasn't.

Teddy Roosevelt said, "Comparison is the thief of joy." Mom agreed with that and thought happiness could be found in what we have. My mother gave the world her smile. It's still there in my memory.

I should have hugged my mother more.

Al Batt's columns appear every Wednesday.

PEN TO PAPER



"HOWEVER DIFFICULT LIFE MAY SEEM, THERE IS ALWAYS SOMETHING YOU CAN DO AND SUCCEED AT." — STEPHEN HAWKING

TRIBUNE EDITORIAL

IF YOU'RE ABLE TO GIVE, CONSIDER GIVING THIS WEEK

GiveMN, the Minneapolis nonprofit behind Give to the Max Day, has launched a special week of fundraising this week titled #GiveAtHomeMN.

The effort aims to raise funds online for nonprofits and schools at a time when many are seeing an increased need for services but fewer opportunities for fundraising.

As of Tuesday afternoon, the giving platform had raised over \$2.3 million through 16,425 donations. The effort continues through Friday.

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz in a Facebook post supporting the initiative said Minnesotans have been known for being generous in their giving.

"During this time of COVID-19 pandemic, it's more important than ever that we support our nonprofits, those that are out there supporting our communities in so many ways," Walz said.

People interested in giving can go to givemn.org and

"During this time of COVID-19 pandemic, it's more important than ever that we support our nonprofits, those that are out there supporting our communities in so many ways."

— Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz

search for local charities they wish to support. There are numerous charities from Freeborn County on the site, including the Freeborn County Historical Museum, LIFE Center of Freeborn County, Freeborn County Humane Society, United Way of Freeborn County, Senior Resources of Freeborn County and the Albert Lea Family Y, among others.

Donors making gifts this week will have the chance to have their donations boosted with \$68,000 in bonus grants

through the Bush Foundation and U.S. Bank.

GiveMN will award 200 \$250 grants to randomly chosen organizations every hour through May 8, and donors are encouraged to give often to increase their chances of winning the random drawing for their organizations.

The numerous nonprofit organizations in the community help fill many gaps, and we hope this week can only be the beginning of continued support for them in the months to come.

That feeling of unity is quickly slipping

It's interesting to see how things have shifted. When the COVID-19 pandemic first started, it seemed for a moment that we were experiencing the country coming together as we moved into uncharted territory. Politics, which were front and center beforehand, shifted into the background and people seemed to get along better.

In my lifetime, the only time I've witnessed something similar was after 9/11 when I was a senior in high school.

People put aside their ideologies and their preferences for political candidates and came together as Americans who had all witnessed something horrific within our own nation's borders. It didn't matter the color of your skin, how much money was in your bank account, who you voted for in the last election or if you grew up in a big city or in rural America.

It was a reminder that in that time of heartache and trouble, we lived in an amazing country with amazing people.

No, it did not mean that everyone everyone had the same opinions or that everyone saw



Nose for News
By Sarah Stultz

eye to eye on issues, but people set aside their differences for the overall good.

I thought some of those feelings of unity were returning in the last few months, but things have changed and I can hardly stomach scrolling through my Facebook page these days. If turmoil of some of the people on my Facebook feed is any indication of how things are all over the country, it's not headed in a good direction.

Why do people have to be rude and hurtful to people who think differently than them when they're stating their opinions?

It has gotten to the point that I have contemplated and followed through with snoozing a few people — essentially hiding their posts for 30 days

— not because I disagree with their opinions, but because they are being extreme and unkind in how they present those opinions. (And then the comments underneath those posts get even worse!)

Just to be clear, there have been a few friends from both sides of the political spectrum I have felt this way about, not just one side.

Let's also be clear, I am grateful for the opportunity we have in this country to have and share differing opinions, but I sure do wish it could be done with a little more respect.

It's good to hear all sorts of opinions, and I have always appreciated being able to hear well-researched discussion from both sides. Just when you think you agree with one viewpoint, then valid ideas from a differing viewpoint are shared and it opens up the possibilities.

But why does there have to be name-calling and personal attacks behind it though?

Sarah Stultz is the managing editor of the Tribune. Her column appears every Wednesday.

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MY POINT OF VIEW

Stand up for rural America by supporting the post office



My Point of View
By Jennifer Vogt-Erickson

"No matter if it rains or snows, the mail must go through." I learned these song lyrics as a young child growing up in the country, where our mailbox (Rural route 3 Box 620) was a portal to the world. It was like a magic box that anything could arrive in. A valentine from Grandma Hazel, a letter from a friend, a postcard from a cousin at camp. All things I've saved.

Today you can buy a 55-cent stamp and mail a letter from anywhere in the U.S. to anywhere else in the U.S. It costs the same amount regardless. The post office, rooted in the Constitution, has been a great democratic leveler in our society for over 200 years.

In 2006, President Bush signed a law passed by the Republican-led Congress, which placed the onerous and unusual burden on the post office of funding its retiree health benefits for decades in advance. The act put the USPS on a path to eventual collapse.

Together with steep losses this year stemming from the pandemic, the USPS is in a dire position and needs a lifeline to keep operating. Republicans are holding it up.

President Trump, for his part, has a personal vendetta against Amazon and Washington Post owner Jeff Bezos, and he has signaled he would let that override the immediate need for USPS relief, which affects every single American. (Amazon uses the USPS for package delivery. The Washington Post has been highly critical of Trump's governing decisions and personal business dealings, which makes Trump publicly bellyache and call the press "the enemy of the people," an abnormal phrase favored by authoritarian despots.)

In February, the House passed the USPS Fairness Act, which repeals the requirement to annually prepay future retirement health benefits, with the support of all three Republican congressmen from Minnesota, including Jim Hagedorn, a pleasant surprise.

The Senate version of the bill, which also has bipartisan support, is stuck in committee. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell would be only too happy to smother it.

Why would Republicans target the post office in the first place, when it is literally a lifeline for rural Americans who receive prescriptions through the mail?

It's not difficult to figure out. Without it, private corporations would be able to scoop up lucrative postal contracts. These are Republicans' favored constituency, not rural voters like us. Would rural people pay the same postage rates as people in cities if all mail delivery were privatized? Not on your life. The last mile is the most expensive.

The USPS also has one of the

strongest public-sector unions and Republicans want to bust it.

Additionally, the USPS used to offer bank services, which Democrats want to allow it to do again. People without a formal bank account could use it as an alternative to payday lending. Does the banking lobby want the post office to offer this additional public good, which would cut into banks' profit margins and hinder them from preying on marginalized workers? No, sir.

Last but not least, the USPS is critical for conducting mail-in voting, which may be more necessary than ever this fall for health considerations due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Republicans have let the secret out numerous times that voter suppression is a key to their election strategy. Why save something that they perceive is antithetical to their success?

Well, here's why the rest of us should rise up to save the USPS: Mail delivery is a public good. The USPS offers some of the best wages and benefits in rural communities. It employs more than 600,000 workers across the country, about 100,000 of whom are veterans. It represents nearly a quarter of the federal workforce, and over 12,000 of those jobs are in Minnesota. And, yes, voting by mail is something many more people, especially senior citizens, are likely to depend on to protect their vote given the anticipated COVID-19 threat this fall.

The bottom line is, people trust the post office. The USPS is bar none the most popular government agency.

The need to act is now. The time to stand up for rural America is now. Postmaster General Megan Brennan testified before Congress last month that the USPS could run out of money by September. Democrats are fighting for rural voters while many Republicans are stonewalling, either for personal reasons (Trump) or political ones. Remember that in November. In the meantime, buy more stamps. Please thank your mail carrier(s) and tell them you support them.

The Albert Lea post office was built as part of the New Deal recovery. It's a massive testimony to the power of government to work for the lasting public good. We must come through for the USPS so it can keep coming through for us.

Jennifer Vogt-Erickson is a member of the Freeborn County DFL Party.

residence ever took the time to listen to our awesome, reassuring, non-blaming, non-name calling leader very calmly and intellectually explain our plan to

keep Minnesota the best state in the nation. I doubt it!

Al Helgerson
Albert Lea

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PLATE TULSA WORLD 4-28-2020
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Give people a choice whether to stay home

Minnesota has done an excellent job of flattening the curve. We've now got to also take care not to flatten the economy. Remember our initial goal was to avoid overwhelming our health care system from having too many cases spike at once. We've succeeded in this, and now we see hospitals furloughing staff. Our actual infection and hospitalization numbers have fallen far below the original projections (which did factor in the shutdown).

Also remember, flattening the curve doesn't reduce the total number of cases, it only spreads them out. We can't live in a bubble until this disappears — it's not possible.

As new data comes in, we're learning COVID-19 is likely much more prevalent and much less dangerous for most than originally feared. This is good news! We need to adjust our course accordingly and re-open as quickly (and still safely) as possible. For multiple reasons, an economic collapse would be far more dangerous than COVID-19 is proving to be so far. Many more people will die if we add a new Great Depression to our list of problems.

If future data reveals a greater threat than we see now, we can always correct again to avoid overwhelming the health care system. But as long as our health care system can meet the capacity needed, we must give people the chance to work and save their livelihoods.

Give people a choice. Folks can still choose to stay home, and those who are high risk probably should. The rest of us need to build up herd immunity and keep the economy moving. Let businesses operate with safety precautions. Saving the economy isn't about rich people and the stock market. It's about us — you and I create the economy. It's how everyone lives, eats and provides for their families. The importance of this cannot be overstated. Please tell Walz we need to reopen Minnesota. This shouldn't be a partisan issue.

Angie Hoffman
Albert Lea

Feehan will work hard for farmers

Minnesota's 1st Congressional District is a large and mostly rural area and, as such, should be represented by someone who understands and works to support agriculture. Dan Feehan is such a candidate.

We have seen how the current administration's trade policy has devastated export markets and reduced prices for farm products. Dan will stand up for farmers and work to end these policies. It's possible to stand up to China and other bad actors without harming farmers and our local economy.

Similarly, the current administration voiced support for the ethanol and biofuel industry but then handed out exemptions to big oil companies,

allowing them to reduce the amount of corn ethanol to be blended into gasoline. It's easy to see where the administration's loyalties lie. As the saying goes, just follow the money. Dan has taken no contributions from big oil and will fight to restore the renewable fuel standard.

Dan also believes that healthy soil and clean water are vital to our communities. He'll listen to farmers to promote land stewardship, crop rotation and other innovative practices that preserve the soil and protect the quality of our water now and for years to come.

But preserving the soil isn't enough if we don't have farmers to work it. Secretary of Agriculture, Sonny Purdue, has expressed the opinion that farmers need to "get big or get out." With many farmers nearing retirement and many with no one to pass the torch to, many farms are being sold to out-of-state investors or rented to the highest bidder, leaving young people who want to farm priced out of the market. Dan is committed to helping the next generation of farmers by supporting the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program.

Finally, farmers need an efficient and reliable transportation system to get their goods to market. Dan will work hard to make sure that our transportation infrastructure is funded for both Minnesota and federal projects.

Our district needs a representative who will listen to and work for all of its citizens. I believe that Dan Feehan is the right person for the job and encourage everyone to vote for him this November.

Jim Wichmann
Conger

Support the A.L. Audubon Society

During the entire month of May, the local Albert Lea Audubon Society will receive a \$1 donation from each purchase of the \$2.50 red "My Heart" Reusable Bag at the Albert Lea Hy-Vee store.

Supporting local nonprofits has never been more important than it is right now! Please consider giving back to our local community by purchasing one or more of these reusable bags. These bags fit right in with one of Audubon's core missions: conservation. All proceeds will be used for improvements at our Nature Preserve at the end of Oregon Street here in Albert Lea. Please come and visit if you are looking for a new place to walk!

We thank Hy-Vee for sponsoring this program, and thank all of you in advance for your support!

Wendy Hagen
Albert Lea Audubon Society

Be a part of the Albert Lea banner project

Albert Lea graduates, families and community are invited to participate in the 2020 A.L. Grad Banner Project! This is an inclusive community grassroots project intended

to honor and support high school graduates while giving inspiration to the community as a whole. Pictorial banners will be placed on Broadway Avenue for 2020 Albert Lea high school graduates, including Albert Lea High School, Area Learning Center and Albert Lea homeschooled. The banners will be displayed from about May 24 through Labor Day. Then, the grad may pick up their side of the banner for a keepsake. If you like, you can take a drive or walk downtown to see the prototype banner located at the corner of Broadway and Main Street. If you would like to be a part of this exciting project, please take the following steps.

Grads and families: We celebrate you! Submit your photo by Friday. Grads are requested to submit a nonprofessional, fun, casual selfie-style (or head/shoulders) photo in portrait format rather than landscape (no professional photos, please). One submission per graduate. Selfie-style nonprofessional photos are requested in order to avoid any copyright issues and to keep things equal and fun for all. If a grad family is not able to pay, please submit a photo anyway! A sponsor will be found for you, and your name will not be shared.

Send one photo via email along with:

- Grad's full name
- Preferred first name and last initial (banner name) (no nicknames)
- Statement "I own the rights to this image and give permission for its use in the 2020 AL Grad Banner Project."
- If desired, add the statement "I request sponsorship."

Send email to al2020gradbanners@gmail.com.

Payments are due Friday. We are happy to make arrangements or find sponsors as needed. Cost per graduate is \$32.50 including tax. Please submit your payment at the drive-thru at Security Bank Minnesota, 437 Bridge Ave., Albert Lea. Security has the form you will need. Payments and donations may be made in the form of cash or check. Please make checks in the name of "Sonjia Hill," with a memo of "Banner."

Community members: If you would like to sponsor a graduate, please make your donation through Security Bank. You may name a graduate or give a general sponsorship. Donors will be acknowledged through the Tribune and social media. Please share this opportunity with all graduates you know. We appreciate your support of our graduates.

For the out-of-town payment address or for more information, please call 507-473-0376. More information is also available on the "George Marin for Albert Lea" Facebook page. Thank you so much for all of your interest and support for this special project!

Jill Marin
Albert Lea

Walz has been a reassuring and calm leader

I wonder if those who protest outside the governor's

OPINION

He's still using rabbit ears

Once upon a time, long before “The Andy Griffith Show” went into reruns, there was an eastern cottontail with a dream.

He had a name, but it's nigh impossible for a mere human to pronounce a rabbit's name, so I'll call him the rabbit.

Yes, the rabbit was a dreamer. But that's like saying Fred Astaire was a good dancer or Babe Ruth could hit a home run. As he nibbled on some salad (he was no rocket scientist and didn't know the name of many plants, but he knew he liked white clover), the rabbit thought about what he wanted to do with his life. He'd taken a few days off to clear the fog from his brain. His job was being pulled out of a top hat by a mediocre magician.

Yes, the rabbit was a dreamer. He not only believed the grass to be greener on the other side of the fence, he knew a pillow was softer and cooler on the other side. He didn't embrace being earthbound. He knew he wanted to go to the moon. He believed in magic, but going to the moon and popping out of a hat are two different things. He didn't want to jump over it. A cow had done that. He was more than a dreamer. He acted upon his dreams. He had gumption. When he did something, he did it up brown. Other rabbits scoffed at his dream and called it a nothing burger. He didn't care. He was going to the moon. That would undoubtedly make him a first ballot inductee into the Rabbit Hall of Fame.

He'd find a way to go during a full moon on a clear night. That would make it easier to find the moon in the dark. He'd fly there when the wind was blowing up. He'd seen the wind blowing up a street before.

He waited and waited. It was like dividing 22 by 7. It took forever. Then the wind blew up in the high trees and the moon was not only full, it was a blue moon, which meant it was the second full moon in the month. That was a good omen. He packed nothing but the four rabbit's feet he carried for good luck.

A commercial flight to the moon was more expensive than a quart jar of banker's tears. That was OK. He knew things that could fly. He'd hop down the bunny trail and ask those with the ability to fly for a ride to the moon.



Tales from Exit 22
By Al Batt

The first one he happened upon was a red-tailed hawk. He asked the hawk if he'd be willing to fly him to the moon. The hawk said, “No, but I'll eat you.”

The rabbit refused the hawk's kind offer, explaining that he was just getting estimates.

The next winged creature he met was a bald eagle. He asked the big bird for help. The eagle replied, “Let's do the math. It has to be 500 miles to the moon. I'll take you, but if I get hungry on the way, I'll be forced to eat you.”

The rabbit said it was the best offer he'd had so far and he'd get back to the eagle on it.

The rabbit hopped farther down the bunny trail and found a turkey vulture eating the most disgusting thing. The rabbit averted both his eyes and nose as he asked the vulture for a lift. He made sure he didn't call him Mr. Buzzard. Vultures hate that. The vulture turned down the gig by saying, “My feet and talons are weak. If they were strong enough to carry you, I'd be ordering my meals from the drive-in window of fast food restaurants.”

The dejected rabbit hopped until the day had turned to night. No flights were booked. He sat forlornly on the dock of Lake Inferior. He saw the moon in the water. It didn't appear to be swimming. It was just there.

The rabbit was a strong swimmer. Everyone in his family was. He dove into the lake and swam to the moon. He climbed onto it. It was a successful lunar landing. It was as if the moon had been made just for him. Sometimes dreams come true.

That's why if you take a good look at a full moon, a really good look, you'll see there is no man on the moon. It's a rabbit. That's why dogs, coyotes and wolves howl at the moon.

I don't know how Neil Armstrong missed that.

Al Batt's column appears every Wednesday.

TRIBUNE EDITORIAL

LET US KNOW ABOUT GOOD HAPPENING IN AREA TOWNS

Some stories we've had in the Albert Lea Tribune in recent weeks remind us of everything that's great about small towns.

There have been stories about a group of Lake Mills friends and parents banding together to host a prom before one of the students left for the National Guard, stories about new or expanding businesses in area towns and a story about all of the effort happening in the 4-H program for students throughout Freeborn County, to name a few.

These stories are a reminder of the positive things that come from our small towns. Though small in population, these towns are always big in heart, accompanied by plenty of pride in what their communities do.

While many of the festivals have been canceled in

“Though many of the festivals have been canceled in the small towns this summer, we know there are still many good things happening.”

the small towns this summer, we know there are still many good things happening.

We want to take another opportunity to invite you, our readers, to help tell the stories that make your community such a good place to live.

This is an especially tough time in our history with plenty of negative to go around, so help us share some of the positive. Small towns are as important to us as Albert Lea is.

If you have a fun or positive

story you would like to share, please send an email to news@albertleatribune.com. And if something has come and gone, then don't worry. We can still print your news. Send us the information regarding the event, along with any pictures you wish to include, to the same email.

Maybe it's something the school or city is doing or maybe it's simply a lemonade stand you took a quick picture of and wish to share. Whatever the case, we want to help share it.

What do your face masks say about you?

With additional businesses requiring face masks in recent weeks, more and more people have been wearing masks when they are out and about.

As someone who is sometimes easily distracted, I've enjoyed getting to see the variety of face masks when I'm out and about and how they seem to have turned into an extension of people's personalities.

Some wear the generic solid-colored surgical masks that you can buy in bulk these days from many stores. Some treat the recommendation or requirement to wear a face mask as an opportunity for a new fashion accessory and try to match them to the rest of their outfit. And others, on a different note, don't care what they look like and just choose a variety of designs. The print options for mask fabric really are endless.

There's everything from floral to polka dots to cartoon characters to everything in between. You can even advertise your favorite political party or candidate on your face mask.



Nose for News
By Sarah Stultz

I've also seen a few people with what I would describe as heavy-duty masks that almost look like some type of body armor that the person is wearing. I wonder if they tout an increased level of protection?

In addition to the style of the mask itself, I also like to note how the mask is fastened around the head — whether through elastic, ties or some other device — and I pay attention to how easy it is for the person to wear the mask, whether it looks semi-comfortable and, for children, whether the mask stays up and is child-friendly.

The other day online, I saw an advertisement for children's masks sold by Crayola. The set included five masks,

each a different color, made to look like crayons. The masks were associated with back-to-school supplies, and the child would essentially wear a different colored mask each day of the week.

It is crazy to think of how the market for face masks has exploded in the last few months.

I, for one, appreciate the variety of masks now available and that there are many options.

As I see masks that work well for others, I try to find out where they got them and how I can get my hands on one of them, too.

While I'm not sure on the effectiveness, I've also seen a fair amount of people wear bandanas that can be pulled up from around the neck and that don't have to be strapped around the ears.

As it looks like masks will be around for a while, what do your masks say about you?

Sarah Stultz is the managing editor of the Tribune. Her column appears every Wednesday.

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Albert Lea Tribune

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Will the information elites rule America?

“Knowledge will forever govern ignorance and a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.” — *James Madison, “Father of the U.S. Constitution”*

America is becoming more stratified. The gulf between the haves and have nots is getting wider.

We're not talking about the growing inequity between the ultrarich in America and the rest of us, though that matters to our country's future. Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos and Warren Buffett, the three richest men in America, have as much wealth as the bottom half of our country's people. Three men with the wealth of the 165 million Americans. The wealthiest 10% of Americans own 75% of household assets.

The inequity that concerns us will empower those who have hoarded wealth onto themselves and rigged politics to ensure they become even more obscenely wealthy. We are talking about the creation of information elites.

We are talking about the information we need to be engaged citizens — news that lets you make decisions that affect your family's health, the safety of your community, the quality of education in your schools and the purity of the water you drink.

News reporting in rural communities as well as the largest cities of America that informs and educates citizens is disappearing — but not completely. In many cases, it will be available to those willing and able to pay for it.

The Wall Street Journal, The Financial Times, The New York Times and The Washington Post all have paywalls. With increasing frequency, paywalls are also going up on the newspaper sites of regional daily newspapers as well as community weeklies. It's a survival move. Since 2004, America has lost 1,800 newspapers with more than 1,700 weeklies and



Guest Column
By Reed W. Anfinson

60 dailies gone, a 2018 University of North Carolina study found. Those that remain are looking for ways to pay their reporters.

You say that the internet will make up for lost newspaper reporting? Not a chance. What we have discovered over the past decade of experiments with internet news sites is that most fail. They are financially tenuous, relying on donations, endowments or fundraisers to stay in business. They are also employing paywalls. Many of these websites are in very large cities, those with populations in the millions and often focus on a higher scale reader socially and economically.

We know internet websites don't make up for the news that is lost. When a 100-reporter newsroom is wiped out, a five-reporter internet site doesn't come close to making up for the watchdog journalism that is lost.

Some publications are introducing high-end news platforms for their readers, charging extra for those whose interests are served through knowledge that others don't have.

“Newspapers are going to become ever more exclusive,” newspaper consultant Jerry Bellune writes. “We must court the upscale market. Upscale buyers will pay for a good product just as they will pay for other luxury items. I'm not preaching elitism. This is reality. Let's quit trying to be all things to all people. It doesn't work.”

If cheap, accessible newspapers with their in-depth and broad coverage disappear, where are people who can't afford the paid content sites going to get their information? “Those who know the power

of information will pay to obtain it, and use that knowledge to influence the agenda,” John Ibbitson of the Toronto Globe and Mail writes. “Those who lack the means or interest will depend on blogs, social networking and whatever information they choose to look for online. How does democracy survive on that?”

It is ironic that with the wealth of knowledge available on the internet that the general public is becoming less informed. In many cases, it knows more about world and national news than it knows about what is going on in its backyard because of the loss of local newspapers.

Too many citizens are now left to news sources that have no interest in fairness, or accuracy. “The prospect that this ‘information age’ could be characterized by unchecked spin and propaganda, where the best-financed voice almost always wins, and cynicism, ignorance and demoralization reach pandemic levels, is real,” Robert W. McChesney and John Nichols write. “So, too, is the threat to the American experiment.”

Ignorance plays into the hands of those who control thoughts and emotions with prejudice and fear. Rather than getting the reporting that allows them to make informed decisions, people will be indoctrinated with the prejudicial news that distorts reality. When people are easily deceived, they can be motivated to act irrationally against others.

In small-town America, the information elites will be those who hold knowledge without any check on their decisions. Elected and appointed officials will be the gatekeepers deciding when, and if, citizens should be informed. This is the future unfolding in America.

Reed Anfinson is publisher/owner of the Swift County Monitor and president of the National Newspaper Association Foundation.



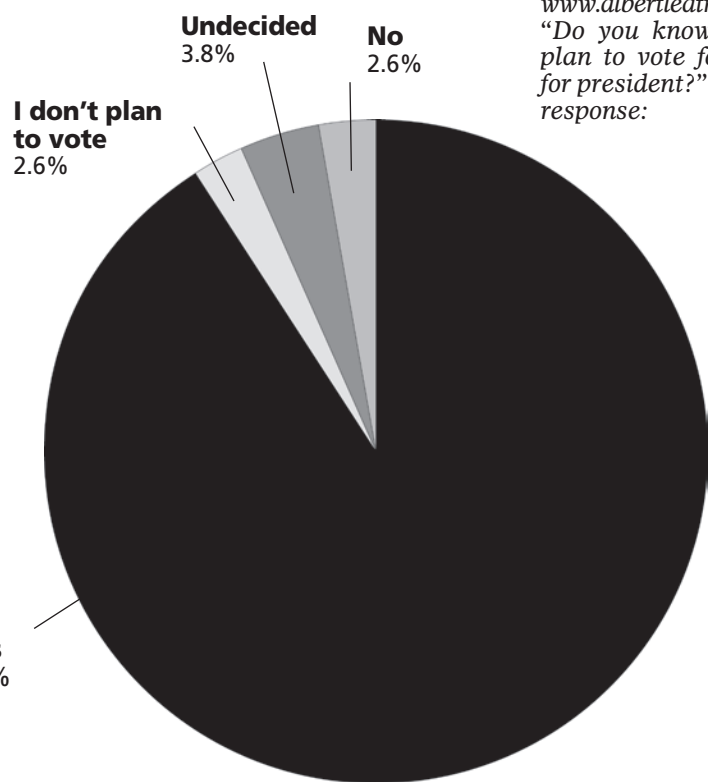
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THE FIRST AMENDMENT: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.



POLL RESULTS



We asked readers at www.albertleatribune.com, "Do you know who you plan to vote for already for president?" Here's the response:

MY POINT OF VIEW

Vote in-person in Nov. if you want your vote counted



My Point of View
By Iolie Rose Harper

As the November election approaches, President Trump and many others have warned against the push for mass mail-in voting. When done with proper certifications, absentee ballots are fine for those who are absent or truly unable to visit their polling place. But implementing mass mail-in voting without enough time to set up a secure system is a recipe for disaster. Even in Washington state, where voting by mail is normal, the Secretary of State, Kim Wyman has cautioned, "you can't just flip a switch and go from real low absentee ballots to 100% vote-by-mail. I mean, ... with a November election deadline, I'm not sure you could do it in states across the country."

On June 22, Marshall Cohen of CNN Politics reported that hundreds of thousands of primary election mail-in ballots were sent back as "undeliverable." Wisconsin alone had 14,000. "State Sen. Jen Jordan, a Democrat who represents Atlanta, said she didn't get the ballot she requested, and that she heard from hundreds of constituents who had the same experience." Can we depend on mail-in voting this fall?

A NewJersey.com article dated June 20 revealed that "Of the 2,400 registered Republicans in Bernardsville, 500 to 700 of them received erroneous mail-in ballots, listing the Democratic candidates instead of the Republicans." The article quoted Karen Gardner, Municipal Republican chairwoman: "The slate of candidates (on the ballot) was all Democrat from Joe Biden down to the dog-catcher, but on the upper right it clearly stated it was a Republican ballot and it had my name and correct information on the return envelope."

It would be nice if all people were honest. However, there are many people who are dishonest and, in addition to error, mail-in voting is vulnerable to many methods of fraud. Ballots can be removed from mailboxes. They can be sent to the wrong address. We can be flooded with counterfeit ballots that would be difficult for our systems to sort through. Ballots received by mistake can easily be filled out and submitted by the wrong person.

"Putting the election in the hands of the USPS would be a catastrophe. In 2018 and 2016, there were 16 million missing and misdirected ballots," J. Christian Adams has stated. "These represent 16 million opportunities for someone to cheat."

Attorney General William Barr has also raised "questions about whether or not (mail-in voting) even denies a secret

ballot, because a lot of the states have you signing the outside of the envelope. So, the ... person who opens the envelope will know how people voted."

For many of us, our political party affiliation can be discovered by a simple check on the internet. I know this because a couple of years ago I checked my name online just to see what would come up and it had me listed as a Republican. It would be very easy for a dishonest person to find out your name by opening your mail (unless it was already on the outside of the envelope), and then if you are not of their party, they could throw it in the trash.

Some of the areas around Albert Lea have mandated that we have mail-in elections, though none of us knew about it until after the decision was made. This matter could be taken to court.

On the state level, the Minnesota GOP and our other leaders are battling MN Secretary of State Steve Simon, who is circumventing the legislative process through the courts and "pushing for extreme changes to our way of voting, in order to manufacture and manage election outcomes," according to GOP Chair Jennifer Carnahan. One example of this is Simon moving forward with plans to remove the witness signature requirement on mail-in ballots for Minnesota's August primary. "There is a reason a witness signature is required when voting by absentee ballot — to prevent fraud," Carnahan has said.

Personally, I would not trust anyone with my voting ballot. We can safely vote in person. If you can go shop at Walmart, you can go vote. People have been allowed to get together and protest in large numbers without COVID-19 restrictions all over the country, including here in Albert Lea. Yet these same people are telling us to do mail-in voting because of COVID-19.

Whoever you choose to vote for, you should be concerned about whether your vote gets counted or not. There is not a more important issue than this. If you want your vote to be counted, make sure that you go and vote in-person.

Iolie Rose Harper is a member of the Freeborn County Republican Party.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sincere thank you

On behalf of the Stalker family I want to thank Randy Schaub, Ole and Post 56, the Minnesota American Legion baseball program and the community for the Hall of Fame induction of my dad, Ed Stalker. We would also thank all the Legion members for their service to our country.

As I said at the gathering, Dad would want to acknowledge players that dedicated themselves to baseball, many assistant coaches at the high school and Legion programs and the community for their support over many years. In addition, wives of coaches have to be a buffer between fathers and their sons they are coaching, part-time wives during the season and part-time concessions and many other duties not usually assigned to a wife. Donna fulfilled that role.

I went out with Tom Dyrdal after the event, and I told him even though Donna, Steve, Denise and myself are no longer in Albert Lea, it was a great place to be raised, education was second to none, sports were excellent and we all still consider it home.

Dad never did it for personal accomplishments, but I am certain he would be unbelievably excited to be in the Legion Hall of Fame, and certainly enjoyed 2018 when he was inducted into the Albert Lea High School Hall of Fame. As a family we thank you all very much.

Respectfully,

Mark Stalker
Kenosha, Wisconsin

Left doesn't know what actually motivates the right

There is little I enjoy more than an ideological discussion, so I appreciate Joshua Hinnenkamp's response to my last column. These are issues society needs to sort through and it's important to do so.

I was amused at Hinnenkamp's dismissal of Black

Lives Matter's self-claimed Marxism as my own "conspiracy." Perhaps he's consumed more Marxist literature than the BLM founders, but the statement that BLM's ideological structure is Marxist came directly from its founders, not from me. Their goal to "disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure" is listed plainly on their website (check under the "About" heading and then "What We Believe"). If Hinnenkamp wants to disagree with BLM over who's a true Marxist, that's a debate I'd be interested to watch.

The left commonly states the right is motivated by racism and/or fear of change. I would argue the left actually has no idea what motivates the right.

The truth is both ends of the U.S.'s political spectrum have changed quite a bit in recent years. If values and policies remained stable since the '90s, or even early 2000s, I might still be voting blue. Instead, both parties have shifted, bringing conservatives into more of a moderate position and pushing parts of the left into the land of extremism.

Many are coming to agree. As the now surging #Walk-Away Campaign attracts former leftists, it has become very common (and fun) to watch newcomers' initial surprise at how welcomed they are by the right. Society has been told that Republicans are the party of hatred, intolerance, authoritarianism and obsession with race — but those who dare question the narrative soon discover the opposite is true.

Hinnenkamp ended his letter using his own definition of "collectivism," a term I had previously criticized. It's important to make sure we're

discussing the same concepts. The proper definition of collectivism is an economic and political structure that prioritizes the rights of the collective over the rights of the individual.

The beauty of a free society with individual rights is that individuals are free to organize in groups as they see fit. They can sing in a choir and shop at a co-op. Heck, they're even free to set up their own commune with consenting friends, if they're so inclined. But in a collectivist society, individual freedoms and rights are sacrificed for the whole. Members are defined by and limited to their assigned group. The means of production, and possibly even property, is controlled by the state.

With this understanding of collectivism, it almost appears Hinnenkamp and I agree in our stances. If he chooses to respond, perhaps he can clarify if free market individualism and capitalism is his true preference for the USA, or if he does, in fact, favor collectivism, Marxist or otherwise.

Angie Hoffman
Albert Lea

Thank you for return of lost item

I lost my money clip at Mayo Clinic and never expected to ever see it again.

I went back where I lost it and some wonderful person found it and returned it to Mayo security.

How wonderful to have it returned. Thank you to the wonderful person who returned it.

Cliff Wood
Albert Lea

How to send a letter

Send letters via mail to Letters to the Editor, Albert Lea Tribune, 808 W. Front St., Albert Lea, MN 56007, or via email to letters@albertleatribune.com. Letters cannot exceed 500 words. They must have one author. Petitions are not printed. Letters must include address and telephone number for verification purposes — only your name and city of residence will be printed. Each author may write one letter per calendar week. Letters are published as soon as space allows. To request a guest column, contact Managing Editor Sarah Stultz at 379-3433. Feel free to call if you don't see your letter.

Drivers must be alert to sounds around them

Question: Is it legal to wear earplugs or headphones driving a vehicle in Minnesota? Does the decibel rating matter?



Ask a Trooper
By Troy Christianson

- The use of a communication headset by an emergency medical services person while operating an ambulance.

It is important for the driver to be aware and alert to everything that is going on around them. Listening to music with headphones or wearing earplugs while driving may block out an emergency vehicle's siren or another vehicle's horn, possibly causing a crash or reducing the response time for an emergency vehicle. The ability to hear a siren and see emergency lights, in a timely manner, will

enable the driver to safely move over and yield to approaching emergency vehicles.

Remember to avoid all distractions while driving as your life and others depend on it.

You can avoid a ticket — and a crash — if you simply buckle up, drive at safe speeds, pay attention and always drive sober. Help us drive Minnesota toward zero deaths.

A portion of state statutes were used with permission from the Office of the Revisor of Statutes. If you have any questions concerning traffic-related laws or issues in Minnesota, send your questions to Sgt. Troy Christianson, Minnesota State Patrol, at 2900 48th St. NW, Rochester, MN 55901-5848; or reach him at Troy.Christianson@state.mn.us.

Troy Christianson is a sergeant with the Minnesota State Patrol.

PAID LETTERS POLICY

Letters asking people to vote for certain candidates or ballot measures fall under the label of paid political advertisements. To submit a letter in this category costs \$15 for local residents — people in Freeborn, Mower, Faribault, Steele, Waseca and Dodge counties in Minnesota and people in Winnebago and Worth counties in Iowa — while letters from people outside of the area will cost \$35 to publish. Letters can be sent to letters@albertleatribune.com or 808 W. Front St. in Albert Lea.

QUOTATIONS IN THE NEWS

"There has been no assessment of Russian interference in the EU referendum and this goes back to nobody wanting to touch the issue with a 10-foot pole," *Intelligence and Security Committee member Stewart Hosie, after a long-awaited report on Russian influence in British politics criticized the British government for neglecting to investigate whether Russia interfered in the 2016 Brexit referendum.*

"The idea that there's a threat to a federal courthouse and the federal authorities are going to swoop in and do whatever they want to do without any cooperation and coordination with state and local authorities is extraordinary outside the context of a civil war. It is a standard move of authoritarians to use the pretext of quelling violence to bring in force, thereby prompting a violent response and then bootstrapping the initial use of force in the first place." — *Michael Dorf, professor of constitutional law at Cornell University, said about federal agents' response to protests in Portland, Oregon. State and local authorities did not ask for federal help for the protests.*

"We've made a lot of progress. Unfortunately, this is something that's very tough." — *President Donald Trump about work on a new federal COVID-19 relief package. Lawmakers returned to the Capitol on Monday as the pandemic seems to be worsening across some states.*

"We're always expected to give, give, give. You're a teacher. You have to be there for the kids. And now it's like, 'Oh, yeah, now you have to put your life on the line for the kids because they need to be in school.'" — *50-year-old high school language instructor Liza McArdle in New Boston, Michigan, about the pressure facing teachers this fall with the coronavirus.*

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