

THE OPINION PAGE

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SOUND OFF!

- **Write:** Grand Forks Herald, Box 6008, Grand Forks, ND 58206-6008
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OUR OPINION

Plenty of good news in 2019

Herald editorial board

The past year brought historic bad news, in the form of weather events, business closings and agriculture issues. In hopes of putting the unfortunate happenings of 2019 behind us, here are highlights of good news from Grand Forks and the immediate region in the past 12 months.

Mayor Mike Brown announced at his State of the City address in February that Grand Forks was on the cusp of a billion dollars in investment. In the months since, his prediction is coming true, thanks to massive construction projects in the downtown area, in the private business sector and at Altru Hospital.

Grand Forks Air Force Base learned that it has been redesignated to a reconnaissance wing. It means the local base is responsible for all operations dealing with the Global Hawk recon aircraft. It should help ease future concerns about base closure.

In February, the Grand Forks region saw a record amount donated during the annual Giving Hearts Day. According to the Impact Foundation, which administers the events, more than \$765,000 was raised for local charities and nonprofits during the one-day event.

Grand Forks Central High School won its third consecutive state hockey title. The 4-3 win over Bismarck in the state finals was the 71st consecutive win for Central over a North Dakota opponent.

In February, Tom Speldrich collapsed from a heart attack while working at 4,000 Valley Square. Luckily, Nick Dohman was nearby; so was Therese Brierley. They helped alert others, prompting the arrival of 4,000 Valley Square nurses Kady Eck, Carra Hindberg, Wanda Armstrong and Jacinda Nelson. Together, their efforts saved Speldrich's life.

In March, Grafton teacher Brittany Larson was presented with a Milken Educator Award — one of just 33 teachers nationwide to receive the honor. The photo of Larson, snapped as the award was being announced, stands as one of our favorites all year in the Herald.

In April, something that didn't happen was great news. Although concerns rose about widespread flooding within Greater Grand Forks, the rising Red River stayed behind the flood protection systems of both East Grand Forks and Grand Forks.

In May, RiverView Health in Crookston broke ground on a \$51 million hospital.

Local leaders celebrated a \$33 million investment — via state grants — in North Dakota's (and Grand Forks') UAS and drone industry.

In June, Altru Health System in Grand



Forks broke ground on its massive \$305 million hospital.

The Energy and Environmental Research Center presented state Sen. Ray Holmberg with its Energy Champion Award — only the 10th time it has been given since 1986.

In July and August, youngsters throughout the community banded together to raise money to help the family of 3-year-old Emma Basting pay for home renovations to accommodate her paralysis. About 20 lemonade stands sprang up and raised nearly \$11,000.

Art Grabowski received the French Legion Medal of Honor at an event in July at the North Dakota Museum of Art. The honor is bestowed upon those who have done "remarkable deeds for France." In Grabowski's case, he was a U.S. soldier during the liberation of France in World War II.

The UND Alumni Association and Foundation had a record fundraising fiscal year, hitting \$67.7 million — nearly twice the amount brought in the previous year. More than 9,000 donors gave gifts during the fiscal year, including 846 first-timers. Donations came from all 50 states. And all this during what could be considered trying times for university fundraising, including the departure of the UND president and a downturn in the local economy.

Speaking of UND fundraising, Werner and Colleen Nistler, of Oregon, donated \$20 million to UND's new College of Business and Public Administration.

New school buildings went up in East Grand Forks (at Sacred Heart School) and in Hatton. Sacred Heart's addition cost \$3 million; Hatton's cost \$6.3 million and had a 91% approval rating from voters.

In August, Altru Health System was named the best hospital in North Dakota by U.S. News and World Report. Altru also was awarded high performance rankings in various specialty categories, including pulmonology and lung surgery, among others.

The short wait times at the driver's license office in Grand Forks became legendary. The Herald heard of people driving from Fargo to avoid long wait times in that city.

In November, UND qualified for the national football playoffs.

UND Police Officer Michael Pommerer was honored in December for his efforts to save the life of a Grand Forks resident who was seriously contemplating suicide.

Also in December, the UND men's basketball team beat Nebraska 75-74. It was the first time UND beat what is known as a Power 5 member — or, a school in one of the top five conferences in the nation.

Certainly, there were more great things that happened in Greater Grand Forks and the region in the past year. These are only highlights, but worthy of note as 2019 ends.

Now, as we turn the page on the calendar, we look forward to all of the good news that will come in 2020.

Everybody needs a sense of belonging

One Sunday morning the pastor said that "everyone has a need to belong." He was confirming God's earlier statement that it was not good for man to be alone.

That profound observation stuck with me because it is so true. However, we have not thought about seriously addressing this truism. The time has come to acknowledge that we are a nation of communities in which millions of Americans don't belong.

It seems that the most intelligent thing we can do is to build stronger communities in which everyone can belong. By community, I mean an organization of people in which everyone cares for everyone, everyone sacrifices for everyone, everyone wishes good for everyone.

When we look across the country, we see too much anger, selfishness and greed. We don't care for others, or sacrifice for others, or wish others well.

At the national level, more

and more of the things that build a sense of community have been cast aside to accommodate a resurrected spirit of rugged individualism and cave culture. The Pledge of Allegiance isn't going anywhere.

We demonstrate minimal care when people are dying because they cannot afford doctors or the medications they prescribe. According to Gallup, 34 million people knew a friend or family member who died in the last five years due to a lack of personal funds. That's not community.

In cases of natural disaster, this country springs gingerly to help the victims. This fervor to do good lasts two days after which we slip out of the scene, e.g. Puerto Rico deserted in wreckage.

The United States has a crying need for community when the two political parties are doing their best to tear the national community apart. They are joined by the media, where everything goes, including

crude, disrespectful and hateful blustering.

Imagine! The richest country with more advantages than enjoyed by any country in the history of the world and we're unhappy. Two research organizations — General Social Survey and the World Happiness Report — agree that overall satisfaction in America declined by 50% between 2007 and 2018.

If all Americans could feel a sense of belonging in a national community, those figures would improve significantly.

So what about the North Dakota community?

While the size of the state enables us to better feel the pain and need being experienced by others, we still have people who don't have a sense of belonging. Of course, our first thought goes to the Native Americans whose land we took by force — land they needed to survive — and then grumble because they don't have jobs. In exchange, we deny them a sense of belonging.

When the first black airmen came to North Dakota in the early 1960s, they must

have thought they were in Mississippi. They were ostracized, abused and told they didn't belong here. North Dakota has made some progress but the Bismarck area is struggling over whether to permit 25 immigrants to belong.

Local communities, including cities, towns, schools and churches, are on the threshold of losing significant ground in maintaining a sense of belonging. A lot of community diminished when economics drove schools out of smaller communities.

The newspapers have been cutting corners for 50 years just to stay alive. This is not a crisis for the newspapers alone. Letting the voice of the community go silent is a major step in the decline of the whole community.

Too many people in our society have no sense of belonging. As "one nation under God" we need to do better than to think only of ourselves.

Lloyd Omdahl is a former lieutenant governor and professor at UND.



LLOYD OMDAHL
North Dakota Matters

Letters policy

Letters should be limited to 350 words and must include the name of the author. Shorter letters are preferred. A telephone number should be included (the number will not be published). All letters are subject to editing for grammar, length, accuracy and clarity. The Herald will consider longer submissions for its Viewpoint columns. These are limited to writers with specific or pertinent expertise on an issue. Viewpoint columns must include a photo of the author. Letters construed as advertising or "thank you" notes will not be published. Email to: letters@gfherald.com. Or send letters to the Herald at Box 6008, Grand Forks, ND, 58206.

Grand Forks Herald

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