

OUR VIEW

Signs of spring, yes; return to normalcy, no

If the beautiful spring weather hasn't brightened your mood, a drive around the county might.

You're sure to see children out playing, walkers, runners and bicyclists. Take a closer look and you'll notice the trees and the flowers blooming or someone mowing the lawn. Drive a little farther and you're likely to see farmers in the fields. You might even run into some road construction.

That's what we expect to see this time of year when we're out and about.

This past weekend, unexpected sightings might have included a bustling Farmer's Market in Owatonna's Central Park; or a group of teens dressed in formal attire headed to prom. You might have even seen folks mingling around a campfire or gathering for an outdoor barbecue.

Everything seemed so normal, almost as if the past year and the pandemic were behind us.

Yes, we are beginning to return to normal.

If you are fully vaccinated, you can start doing many things that you had stopped doing because of the pandemic, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines.

While masks are still required in public indoor spaces in Minnesota, the CDC now says that those who are fully vaccinated can now do almost anything outdoors without a mask, with the notable exception of attending a crowded event, like a parade, game, or concert.

Unfortunately, too many of our neighbors aren't fully vaccinated – which probably explains the recent spike in cases here. According to the latest statistics, only 32.3% of Steele County residents are fully vaccinated.

That's a far cry from the 80% needed to reach herd immunity.

Given the numbers, it's easy to understand why public health experts are now saying we may never reach herd immunity. It's also very frustrating.

Yes, the rate of COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths has slowed. But that isn't good enough.

More people need to get fully vaccinated if we ever hope to return to life as we knew it before the pandemic.

Ponder that on your next drive around the county.

GUEST COLUMN

Putting down roots in rural Minnesota

BY TIM PENNY

Anyone who knows me well knows that I regularly champion the benefits of living in rural Minnesota. Not only was I born and raised here, but I have served Greater Minnesota for many years, first during my time in the U.S. Congress and now as the president and CEO of Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF). Now there is growing evidence that many young people are putting down roots in small towns, drawn to a strong sense of community, the lower cost of living, the proximity to natural areas and, increasingly, the awareness of the ability to work remotely.

Married couple Caleb and Blake Lauritsen-Norby were happily settled in the Twin Cities but made the decision to move to Lanesboro after their first visit there reminded them of the small towns where they grew up. They ended up opening a grocery store, Parkway Market and Coffeehouse – a much-needed amenity in Lanesboro. With the help of a Small

Enterprise Loan from SMIF and loan partner CEDA, Caleb and Blake were able to update the building's equipment. Caleb also has a Lego business, Planet Brick, upstairs. For Caleb and Blake, the reasons behind moving to rural were plentiful. The real estate is more affordable, the high-speed internet is faster than what they experienced in the metro, they are surrounded by beautiful landscape and they are able to have a close connection with their customers.

For Shawn Vogt Sween, one of SMIF's Board of Trustees, her move to rural Minnesota was about returning to the place where she grew up, in a small township between Grand Meadow and Spring Valley. Now a Harvard-educated lawyer, Shawn initially left her hometown to pursue her education and kickstart her career. She found herself moving across the country for a span of 14 years with her husband and high school sweetheart, Patrick. From Washington D.C. to California, nothing felt home to See **PULLING** on A7 ▶

A teenager with a jolt of positivity



Hot Pursuit
RICK BUSSLER

While everyone has been focused on getting a COVID-19 shot, and for understandable reasons, there is something else that would help people out and uplift their spirits. It's a jolt of positivity.

I found my blast of positivity during a recent interview with Megan Copeland of

Owatonna. A senior who will graduate from OHS next month, Megan qualified for the state speech contest last month.

I am always taken back when I find a teenager like Megan who is years beyond her age.

Megan sees things a little differently than most of us. She has been blind since birth and

began learning how to get around with a cane as a small child.

"Nothing gets in my way," Megan said matter of fact. "My positivity helps me get through a lot of stuff. I know I am going to be able to conquer (whatever comes along)."

The teenager said she doesn't want to be See **TEENAGER** on A3 ▶



GUEST COLUMN

Don't rewrite history by changing names

BY JAN MITTELSTADT TIPPETT

Is it true that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet?

Does a name change stick just because some government body or citizen group decides it should?

Should historical place names be changed to fit modern values?

No. No. Nope.

I'm of the school that we can't rewrite history by changing the name of the street or a peak or a building. I'm also of the school that taking down statues doesn't change a darn thing. We can't fix history by calling something another name. We can, and should learn from what has gone before us so that we don't repeat mistakes.

Our children and grandchildren – and maybe some parents and grandparents – need to learn about the history of the world and the history of the United States and of Minnesota and of Steele County – both the

good and the bad.

Not all history is rosy. Not all history can be held up as an example of how to live a good and faithful life.

But should we strike the names of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and others who were slave holders at a time when that was perfectly legal but absolutely morally repugnant? Should we remove Franklin Roosevelt's name from schools and streets and memorials because he was the guy who approved interning Americans of Japanese descent during World War II? The interning stripped those Americans of property and rights.

Should we erase John F. Kennedy's name from schools and boulevards because we have learned that his personal behavior before and during his presidency was less than chaste?

No. No. Nope.

Lest I be accused, dear readers three, of speaking out of both sides of my mouth, I

must engage both sides a little. I think there are names of things that should be stricken – words that might be the "n" word or the "s" word or the "r" word and others words that describe unflattering portrayals of people or persons.

However, I do not believe that these words should be edited out of historical novels such as *Tom Sawyer* or *Huckleberry Finn* or countless others. We can use the language in these cases as a way to teach history.

And, I'm lately of the school that removing labels, except on canned goods, would be helpful. I don't think it's helpful to add the hyphenation to describe ethnic backgrounds these days. I think it's divisive as the hyphen use is selective today and usually describes people who aren't white or who don't speak English as a first language. But I digress.

So, Harney Peak near Custer, S.D., the highest peak at 7,242 feet, is now Black Elk peak. And

Lake Calhoun in Minneapolis is Bde Maka Ska, Dakota words meaning Lake White Earth. Swell. Sibley High School is getting a new name. These are but a few examples. The name changes haven't erased the treatment of the Native Americans across the United States by the old white guys and never will.

This whitewashing or trying to adjust our collective memory to adjust our collective understanding is almost sinister in trying to sweep the less than attractive past practices under a really big rug that can never cover up these ills.

Jan did change her name with marriage 29 years ago from Mittelstadt to Tippett, two t's at the end, two p's in the middle, same number of t's but still answers to Janet Mittelstadt as she was known when she lived here. She can be reached at jtippett@midco.net.

Fighting to level playing field for local newspapers

BY AMY KLOBUCHAR

On May 7th of last year, the Hastings Star Gazette printed its last issue. The paper's first issue as The Hastings Independent was published in 1857, a year before Minnesota gained statehood. Generations relied on papers like this for local news – they told you who was born and who died, whose daughter just broke the county record for the 400-meter freestyle, whose Holstein won a surprise ribbon at the

State Fair, and how your local leaders voted.

My dad was a Minnesota newspaper columnist and sports reporter. Even though he worked his way up the ranks to interview everyone from Mike Ditka to Ronald Reagan to Ginger Rogers, he was always, as his managing editor put it, "a champion of those on the outside."

But today, newspapers of all sizes are struggling and closing.

The shuttering of the Star Gazette was helped along by the coronavi-

rus pandemic, but long-term trends in newspaper ad revenue show that the Star Gazette and many local papers like it were already on their last legs when COVID-19 struck.

Ad revenue for U.S. newspapers plummeted from \$37.8 billion in 2008 to \$14.3 billion in 2018. During that time, two other companies, Facebook and Google – worth over \$2.2 trillion combined – became advertising titans.

These two companies don't just control the ma-

majority of online advertising; they've built power over the news, crushing local outlets along the way. It saddens me to think my dad might not have a job in today's tech-dominated world, let alone a chance to interview a U.S. President.

In rural and small-town communities across America, we are seeing the impacts of this consolidation first hand – expanding "news deserts" where local coverage is increasingly difficult to come by.

See **FIGHTING** on A14 ▶