

Views by the Echo Press Editorial Board

Thumbs up/ thumbs down

Still not masking up

Thumbs down: We continue to receive complaints from local residents who are seeing people not wearing masks in stores even though it's required in order to enter. It seems to be more common among young people, those in the 18 to 25 range. Maybe they think they're "too cool" to wear a mask or the consequences of spreading the virus aren't a big deal. They may want to ponder this thought from an Alexandria reader who was in a local box store and came across a 55-year-old man that he used to work with. "He was wearing a mask and carrying a bag with a CO2 bottle in it. Yes, he had the virus and may never fully recover," the reader said. "Then I saw many young couples with children, with no masks on. I politely asked why they didn't wear the mask, and they replied, 'I don't like to wear them.' They had no regard for their fellow citizens and their wish to stay healthy. I hope their children do not follow the example of the parents."

Making numbers come alive

Thumbs Up: The city of Alexandria did an excellent job while explaining how the city's budget and tax levy work during the council's "truth in taxation" hearing Monday night. City Administrator Marty Schultz went into precise details of how the budget pie is divided among city departments, what the departments do with the money they receive, the planning that goes into determining the tax levy and the impact it will have on property owners. This wasn't merely a recitation of numbers. It was packed with helpful information and insights that were explained in a way that was crystal clear to the average taxpayer. A few interesting tidbits lived things up: The Alexandria Police Department has a combined total of 271 years of experience among all of its officers; the ice at the Runestone Community Center is just 1 1/8 inches thick; the Alexandria's airport ranks 13th busiest among all 134 public airports in the state; and the Alexandria Fire Department is responsible for calls in an area encompassing 135 square miles. For more details on the budget, including hundreds of documents, summary sheets, spreadsheets and more, go to alexandriamn.city/budget-presentation/.

Deadly challenges

Thumbs Down: Parents, don't regret not bringing up this topic with your children — online "challenges" that have resulted in hospitalizations and even death of teenagers and young adults. Here's just one example: In August, a 15-year-old girl died from an overdose of Benadryl and three other teens were hospitalized after participating in the "Benadryl Challenge" — an online challenge that encouraged participants to film themselves consuming large doses of Benadryl and

posting it in the social media app TikTok. U.S. Sens. Amy Klobuchar, Tina Smith and Sherrod Brown cited the incident in a letter urging the Food and Drug Administration to protect teens and young adults from medically dangerous content online and have the tools to make educated decisions about the content they consume and post online. "The FDA plays a critical role in protecting the public health by regulating the manufacturing, marketing, and distribution of medication. While the FDA continues to examine the phenomenon of social media challenges and has engaged with platforms to monitor and prevent further harm to young Americans, it is clear that much more must be done," the senators wrote. Another way to address the issue is for parents to have a heart-to-heart talk with their children, explaining to them that although some things on the social media may seem fun, silly or harmless, it can lead to very serious consequences.

Risky driving

Thumbs Down: During a pandemic, one would think that there would not be as many people traveling around so fewer drivers should equal fewer fatal crashes, right? Unfortunately, that's not the case. Since the start of the year and through Dec. 1, 367 people have died in fatal crashes in Minnesota, according to preliminary figures from the Minnesota Department of Public Safety. That compares with 338 this time last year and 364 fatalities in all of 2019. DPS Director Mike Hanson said while most Minnesotans are driving smart, there are a number of drivers who have used the lighter traffic as a license to disobey the laws. Law enforcement officers around the state are logging extra patrols to crack down on speeding, drunk driving and seat belt violations but they can't reduce the amount of crashes on their own. Please drivers, prevent a tragedy over the holidays. Slow down, buckle up, pay attention, avoid alcohol or get a designated, sober driver.

Selfish parking

Thumbs Down: How selfish are you when it comes to parking? An Alexandria resident recently went shopping and as he walked by four handicap parking slots at a large store he noticed that three of the vehicles in that row had no handicap stickers or handicap license plates in or on their vehicles. "In fact as I was walking by, a young couple came out and drove away from one of those slots," he said. "Those that are handicapped had to park further away to enter the store. What has happened to our respect for those that need some help? Parents are the example the children will follow."

If you have a suggestion for a Thumbs Up/Thumbs Down, email it to aedenloff@echopress.com or mail it to Echo Press, P.O. Box 549, Alexandria, MN 56308.

Reader Advisory Board helps improve newspaper

In its ongoing effort to improve the newspaper, the Echo Press has a Reader Advisory Board that meets every other month to offer feedback, story ideas and suggestions. Readers can also offer advisory board members their comments. Current members include Louie Seesz, Mary Anderson, Jim Nelson, Jane McCrery, Mark Hintermeyer, Judy Backhaus, Joel Novak and Mike Dempsey.

Five cooking conniptions

Like many of you, I've been spending more time in the kitchen preparing meals lately. Which is OK by me. I love to cook. I like experimenting around with different recipes, exotic foods and whipping up a date night meal to remember.

But there are some things about cooking that bug me — things that should cause all of the wanna-be, at-home chefs out there to rise up and wave our spatulas in discontent. Here's five of mine:

Prep time. I've noticed that practically every recipe has an estimate of how long it should take you to prepare this dish before cooking and serving it. I'm not sure who comes up with these estimates — maybe it's the same people who estimate a before-lunch meeting will take 10 minutes and it stretches into supper time.

One recipe expected me to dice two onions; seed and chop four tomatoes; peel, mince and saute four cloves of garlic; seed and finely chop two jalapenos; wash, dry, de-stem and chop a half-cup of cilantro leaves (which I call the "glitter of cooking" — it gets everywhere); peel and finely grate two tablespoons of fresh ginger; and measure out 12 different types of herbs and seasonings (all with different amounts, of course). The prep time on the recipe: 9 minutes. The reality: Roughly two hours.

Weird reviews. I like



AL EDENLOFF
Al's Turn

reading the reviews for online recipes. It can help avoid a disaster if 313 reviewers say the food was so spicy their tongue fell off or so salty they had to drink a gallon of water after the meal. But then there are the annoying home cooks who take the original recipe and Frankenstein-it into some sort of weird concoction out of a "Chopped" episode. They'll give a recipe just two stars but add: "I didn't have any fresh tomatoes so I added a cup of ketchup and I don't like cilantro so I used mint instead. And my kids don't like anything spicy so I used green beans instead of jalapenos." What the heck?

Weird ingredients. You come across what appears to be an excellent recipe. It looks fantastic until you read that it requires Drupe Fruit (a real ingredient) that can only be found fresh two weeks out of the year (OK, I made that up) and the closest location is a tiny food market at the corner of Aldrich and Zenith Avenue in Minneapolis (again, made up, but you see my point). The recipe looked so promising but I'm not going to try to substitute something to take its place and become like the annoying reviewer above.

Imprecise

measurements/directions. I hate it when a recipe calls for "the juice of two limes." I've bought limes ranging from ping-pong size to as large as a tennis ball. I'm thinking the amount of juice they contain would be vastly different. Why not just say a quarter cup? Another direction I dislike is to saute something — garlic, shallots — "until fragrant." For me, that often means "burned."

Techniques. I think I'm a fairly good cook but there are some cooking basics that don't make sense to me and rarely seem to work. One is to "reduce the sauce by half." I can stir and stir for hours and that sauce never does anything. Another one is to "stir until thickened." Yeah, that doesn't happen either. How can it when I'm constantly stirring it over heat? Once I switch the heat off, it may get a tad thicker, but most times, not. And another one: Remove meat from the grill before it reaches the temperature you want it to reach, let it rest and it will continue to cook. I haven't had much luck with that. If I take something off the grill when it's rare, it's going to stay rare no matter how long I let it rest. It does, however, lock in the juices and make the meat juicier.

And with that, I will let this column rest. Maybe it too will get better. "It's Our Turn" is a weekly column that rotates among members of the Echo Press editorial staff.

LETTERS

Your generosity to Jingle Bells makes a difference

To the editor:

On behalf of the Jingle Bells Foundation, we want to thank everyone who helped make the 72nd annual Jingle Bells Telethon a huge success! A special thank you to Selective TV Alexandria and Gardenville Cooperative.

More than \$80,000 was raised by the end of the telethon on Saturday, Dec. 12. This money will be used to pay for more than 700 grocery cards and the expenses associated with the live broadcast. Over 30 acts performed on the telethon Saturday night.

Many businesses, organizations, individuals and volunteers have made this possible. We are grateful for your support! Your efforts and thoughtfulness bring our community together to help those in need and we are truly blessed with your generosity. Together we are making a difference during the holidays and throughout the year!

If you would like to donate to Jingle Bells, please go to www.jinglebellsalexandria.org or mail a check to Jingle Bells Foundation, P.O. Box 635, Alexandria, MN 56308.

Mike Schreiner
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Issue isn't labels, it's the Twin Cities

Moorhead, Minn. Turns out folks who live in areas of Minnesota not in the metro area are less concerned about labels and more concerned about their dislike for the metro area.

Which is baffling. The Twin Cities area, particularly Minneapolis and St. Paul, is wonderful. A place of people, energy, commerce, diversity, pro sports, a major university, restaurants, night life, culture, arts. You name it, the Twin Cities have it.

But to the readers of this column who responded to my query last week about whether they preferred the place in which they live to be called "Outstate Minnesota" (hooray!) or "Greater Minnesota" (boo!), most took the time to skewer the Twin Cities.

A snippet from an email sent by Mark from Winthrop (20 miles north of New Ulm) was a good representation. He voted for Greater Minnesota.

"... Given the arrogance, and political and economic power of these folks, they pretty much think of themselves as being the entire state but those of us with enough sense to stay away know otherwise. 'Outstate Minnesota' just does not work and must be eliminated," Mark wrote.

Marie from Winona also wants to banish the term "outstate" because of its connotations.

"Forsaken, rejected, ostracized. 'For what? Being different? The other?' 'For not being part of the privileged metropolitan elite?'"

"Mike, not everyone wants to be a City Mouse. Some of us, like me, insist on being a Country Mouse. Amenities: less congestion, shorter commute, cleaner

air, less noise, sense of community. "No one wants to be an 'outtie.' So why inflict this poisonous epithet on us?"

Little did I know my innocent column — it was just a simple question, people — would evoke such emotion.

Many really, really don't like the Twin Cities.

Rural vs. urban. It's a tale as old as time, one supposes, and the schism has only been ripped wider in recent years. You need only look at an electoral map, noting which areas are red and which are blue, to understand how the distrust is entrenched.

There's more to it now than simply City Mouse and Country Mouse.

I've never fully understood the disdain from either perspective, perhaps because I'm a part of both universes. I grew up in a Twin Cities suburb and moved to a rural home north of Alexandria in junior high. My mother and two sisters still live in the metro. I currently live in Moorhead, population 45,000.

I enjoy the space and pace of rural Minnesota. I enjoy the crowds and rush of downtown Minneapolis. It's two different worlds, both with drawbacks and advantages. The idea of being an absolutist — rural Minnesota is perfect and the Twin Cities are worthless — has never occurred to me.

I can't see a Broadway show in Pelican Rapids, nor can I catch a walleye on Hennepin Avenue. I like to do both, so I like both places.

This would put me in the minority of my Minnesota readers, apparently. At least those from outstate. Wink.

Readers can reach Forum News Service columnist Mike McFeely at mmcfeely@forumcomm.com or (701) 451-5655