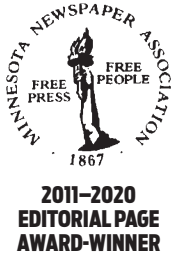


OPINION



PILOT EDITORIAL

Other states profiting big off actions of our governor

Jackson County and the whole of Minnesota are losing out to neighboring states because of the boneheaded decisions of Gov. Tim Walz and the refusal of the Minnesota Legislature to overrule him.

As Jackson County restaurants, movie theaters and fitness centers sat shuttered earlier this year and last at the orders of the governor, scores of local folks — and their dollars — streamed south into Iowa to eat out, catch a show and work up a sweat.

As local retailers and other businesses are forced to require customers to strap masks on their faces upon entry, scores of local folks — and their dollars — head west to South Dakota to do their shopping.

And now, as the state would place throngs of absurd restrictions on local high schoolers looking to enjoy their junior-senior prom, students at Jackson County Central are opting to move their prom — and likely a portion of the local economic windfall that often accompanies it — from Jackson County to Dickinson County, Iowa. And who can blame them?

Neighboring states are profiting big off the actions of Minnesota's governor. And as long as Walz continues to place unreasonable restrictions on Minnesota citizens and businesses — and as long as his supporters in the state Legislature continue to let him — Jackson County and the rest of the state will continue to lose.

Moving prom to Iowa a good decision

I think the Jackson County Central School District, JCC Post-Prom Committee and JCC Student Council should all be commended for the decision to move this year's prom to Arnolds Park.

Local businesses also deserve a lot of praise; even amid a brutal business climate, they continue to support school and community events to the best of their ability. Dudley's Garage, Lakefield's very own bowling alley and grill went the extra mile and reserved a sumptuous ballroom for the event.

With restrictions as they are, hosting prom indoors in Minnesota would have entailed, among other things, barriers between people during dinner, a very

scaled-down grand march and little in the way of opportunities for the interactions that make prom fun, including group dances and, of course, slow dances. Having it outside wouldn't be feasible either; thanks to our state's notoriously mercurial spring weather.

Instead of just committing to a complicated, scaled-down event, the JCC Post-Prom Committee, made up of parents of juniors and seniors, came up with a way to give their kids a real prom, something they can remember fondly in a year marked by very little to remember well.

The school, meanwhile, put the ball in the students' court. By giving the student council final say, it let the classes of 2021 and 2022 decide

what this event was going to look like. The stakeholders got to make the call and I think allowing that to happen is something that deserves credit as well.

Students, especially high schoolers, have gotten robbed over the past year. Sports events have been downsized and lack their usual cheer. Other events have been canceled, postponed or marred by a slew of different protocols. Kids have had to navigate hybrid learning and distance learning as the state flips switches on and off.

They deserve something good to remember this year by and I think hosting prom in an environment where it can be fully enjoyed is a good way to do that. We

can't give our students back everything they've lost, but we can show them the best is yet to come and better days await them.

In the end, students, faculty, parents and businesses came together to make this work and I think that exemplifies the best of community spirit.

Anchors away, JCC!



JUST JOSHIN'
Joshua Schuetz

Water quality concerns surround ag drainage

Public ditch systems and private pattern tile are common tools used throughout the prairie pothole region in order that row crops may exist upon the majority of our rural landscape. Our short-term mindset that tells us these drainage practices are necessary allows us to ignore the environmental effects of this type of land management. The truth is the quality of our public water resources is being degraded without much thought or concern.

Public drainage improvements are petitioned for and passed without true consideration of the short- and long-term effects of these projects.

The goal of tiling and drainage projects is to remove water from the landscape as quickly as possible in order to boost yields. Especially during larger rain events, heavy sediment loads are carried by artificial drainage systems to public water bodies. What compounds the erosional effects of these systems is the increase in peak flows of our rivers and streams. Larger volumes of water creating more swift currents cause an exponential increase in

streambank erosion. As a result, water clarity in southwest Minnesota is mostly measured in inches, which creates reduced aesthetic qualities of our water resources.

According to the University of Minnesota, Minnesota has more than 21,000 miles of drainage ditches making the land of 10,000 lakes seem like the land of much artificial drainage. Jackson County alone has a total of 97 ditch systems. This is a relatively high number, especially when considering not-so-distant Rock County has only one. The surface drainage from open ditches and unprotected open tile intakes introduces high levels of phosphorus to public waterways. Since phosphorus is a limiting nutrient in aquatic systems, its abundance causes robust algal blooms that turn our lakes green in summer. Not only are these intensive blooms sometimes toxic to humans and animals, but they also significantly reduce dissolved oxygen levels, which affects the type of organisms able to survive in an aquatic system. Again, green water reduces the aesthetics and

recreational value of our public waters.

Although not visually noticeable, public and private subsurface tile abounds in southwest Minnesota. In the row crop agriculture that surrounds us, 40 to 60 percent -- and in many cases more than 60 percent -- of that landscape is artificially drained. It is through this subsurface drainage that nitrates are introduced to our lakes and rivers. Research conducted by North Dakota State University in the Red River Valley revealed 18 out of 18 tile outlet sampling sites tested high for nitrogen. The results were above the maximum concentration limits for the "Standards of Water Quality for the State of North Dakota." Excessive nitrogen delivered from subsurface drainage systems to surface waters causes over-productive plant life creating more of the same issues we see with excessive phosphorus. This one-two punch of nutrient overload causes the eutrophication of our lakes. Eutrophication is the process by which a body of water becomes progressively more enriched with nutrients

causing over-productive plant life, namely algae, resulting in low levels of dissolved oxygen.

Whether it's sediment or nutrients, the unnatural drainage of our landscape causes many issues in terms of water quality. The green or dirty water that causes us not to swim or canoe in the lakes and rivers of southwest Minnesota is largely the result of agricultural runoff through public and private drainage systems. Furthermore, our choice of what to put on the landscape and where results in severely degraded water quality. A change in mindset is required to improve our public water resources through conservation agriculture and wetland restoration. It is only then we will be able to fully enjoy more pristine rivers and lakes in southern Minnesota.

(About the author: Lloyd Kalfs has a degree in natural resources from Northland College. He lives in Okabena.)

GUEST COLUMNIST
Lloyd Kalfs

READERS WRITE

Kirchmeier worked tirelessly to preserve the history of Jackson County

To the editor:

This past week, Jackson County experienced a great loss — the removal of Mike Kirchmeier as director of the Jackson County Historical Society by the society's board of directors. In his 13 years as director, he worked tirelessly to preserve the history of our great county.

I worked with Mike for a number of years at the society's museum in Lakefield. During this time, we did have disagreements, but nothing that could be not resolved. He is largely responsible for helping me appreciate the amazing history we have on our doorstep but, for too many years, I had ignored. The history of our county has now become my passion.

Because of his willingness to share this history, I feel he has inspired in many others an increased interest in our history, which has resulted in an increased use of resources available at the museum building, an increase in artifact donations and an increase in financial support.

As a resident at The Pines in Jackson I, as so many others, have been quite isolated during this pandemic. The posts Mike placed on Facebook and articles in our local newspapers for which he furnished information have been a big help adding something to look forward to during these unsettling times. Sadly, that is now gone.

Mike is not a native of Jackson County, but when he came here as director, he immediately began to educate himself about our history. He had continued to research to unearth as much history as he could. This information has been shared not only in the society's quarterly newsletter, which each member receives, but to all who were interested.

I do not see anything positive coming from the decision to remove him as director of the local historical society.

Mary Chonko
Jackson

LAST WEEK'S ONLINE POLL

Q: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Joe Biden is handling his job as president?



Source: Jackson County Pilot Website

THIS WEEK'S ONLINE POLL

Q: Coke or Pepsi?

Vote online at jacksoncountypilot.com.

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The Jackson County Pilot welcomes letters to the editor. Letters must include the writer's name, as well as address and phone number for verification purposes. Letters should be brief, up to 300 words. The editor reserves the right to determine whether material submitted for publication shall be printed and the right to edit as needed. Submit letters in person at the Jackson County Pilot office, mail them to 310 Second St. in Jackson or email them to editor@livewireprinting.com. The deadline for letters is Monday noon. All submissions become the property of the Jackson County Pilot and may be published or otherwise used in any medium.

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