

OPINION



PILOT EDITORIAL

New guide shows all we have to offer here

Ready to go somewhere for a little fun?

How about a place with a ton of great restaurants, shopping opportunities and outdoor activities?

How about a place that offers a full calendar of events sure to appeal to any interest and any age group?

How about a place steeped in history, where you can explore sites at which state- and nation-changing events actually happened?

How about a place boasting a wide array of city, county and state parks; tons of campgrounds; a renowned biking and walking trail system; and some of the best hunting and fishing opportunities available?

How about a place where you can golf relaxing links by day and catch edge-of-your-seat racing action by night — where you can bowl, watch the latest movies in stunning 3D and see how America's most powerful tractors are built?

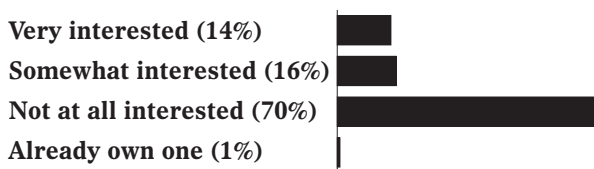
How about not leaving home at all? Because this place is home.

The 2022 Jackson County Visitor and Information Guide hit the streets — and cyberspace — last month. It is absolutely jam-packed with information on the best in local dining, lodging, parks and trails, history and attractions, hunting and fishing and racing and golfing, not to mention a lengthy listing of annual events. Pick up a free copy or find a link to the online edition today and take a peek at all the fun Jackson County has to offer.

Even if you've lived here your whole life, you just might be surprised...

LAST WEEK'S ONLINE POLL

Q: What's your level of interest in electric vehicles?



Source: Jackson County Pilot Website

THIS WEEK'S ONLINE POLL

Q: How will the Minnesota Twins fare this season?

Vote online at jacksoncountypilot.com.

On social capital and its decline

Riddle me this: What do declining participation in religious organizations, lower rates of moving for better jobs, destabilized family structures, decline in marriage, rising rates of suicide and depression and generational poverty all have in common?

The answer, depending on whether you're a conservative or liberal, tends to be either "a lack of personal responsibility" or "structural inequalities." There's a good case to be made for both, but I think the dichotomy is incomplete. The truth is structural problems and poor personal choices have always and will always be with us.

But there's something unique about our country's current malaise, which expresses itself in every kind of social dysfunction imaginable. Despite rising wages, cheaper goods and higher living standards in general, people are psychologically and socially poorer than they were decades ago, at least if survey responses are to be believed.

The main reason why is, in my opinion, the decline of social capital. Social capital refers to the networks of relationships, institutions, individuals and organizations that allow a society to function effectively. Churches, service organizations, professional associations, mutual aid societies, unions and business groups are all examples of institutions that generate — and require — social capital.

These institutions shape society by

instilling civic virtues like volunteerism, doing projects within a given community, connecting people to business and employment opportunities and providing aid when people struggle. Historically, America governed itself primarily through volunteer organizations and committees, a phenomenon Alexis de Tocqueville reported on in his study of the country two centuries ago.

Before the rise of social welfare programs, we had mutual aid societies through which large groups — millions strong — of people chipped in to support one another. Those programs often had local chapters that boosted social capital and helped people find jobs in their communities — and in other communities to which they moved. Social welfare programs can provide cash and impose work requirements, but they can't help a person find a job. Sure, the government can force someone to pick up a part-time job wherever as a condition for getting Medicaid or some other form of help, but they can't say, "Hey, so-and-so is hiring, and I'll put in a good word for you."

A recent study showed Americans move less than they did in the 1880s and 1920s. Despite the interstate highway system and the automobile, we're not much more mobile than we were a hundred years ago.

What does a decline in social capital look like? The first step is for institutions that provide aid like this to become

obsolete, which happened in the 1950s and '60s as government programs took up more space in public life. Second, the demise of mutual aid organizations and their replacement with modern welfare programs made aid less useful to the poor in particular. Because being part of a mutual aid society — which often crossed class boundaries — brought with it networking opportunities, there were opportunities for upward mobility and, since these societies had reciprocal chapters across the country, moving to a community with better opportunities was more feasible. By contrast, someone needing state aid often has to navigate work requirements, bureaucratic scrutiny and potential court hearings just to get assistance. Even if all goes well, the caseworkers are unlikely to be able to help the person find a better job or move to a different community. People, as a result, end up stuck in poor communities with little hope of getting out.

None of this is to say personal responsibility and other structural issues don't matter — of course they do. But they always have. The question we have to answer is why our society's social problems seem so entrenched despite our country's enormous wealth and theoretical ease of mobility.

The decline in American social capital has other effects too. People have fewer friends and are less likely to find someone to marry. When they do marry,

they're less likely to have someone who can watch their kids if needed. All this forces individuals and families into more expensive, formal arrangements. People find themselves with fewer resources when things get hard and, as a result, a general attitude of intense risk avoidance is omnipresent among some people, while others fall into nihilism and recklessness, feeling they need to get the most out of a hopeless situation.

What do we do about this? I honestly don't know. The decline in social capital in Jackson County is obvious — churches are emptying, every civic group is desperate for volunteers, fewer and fewer people participate in public life and social problems like alcoholism and broken homes are becoming more apparent as the years go by. Many young people don't even recognize what having social capital looks like and the institutions that should provide it are withering. Though the federal, state and local governments have contributed to this problem, they can't fix it — but we will be living with it for the foreseeable future, so at some point, we will have to try.



JUST JOSHIN'
Joshua Schuetz

Making the case for clean water: It just makes sense

As residents of a state with more than 10,000 lakes, Minnesotans love to spend time on or near the water. In 2020, 12.3 million people visited our state parks, no doubt spending time on a lake or river. Outdoor recreation that puts us in touch with nature defines our lives and makes us who we are. At the center of our outdoor pursuits is water, which is an essential resource for all life on Earth. It makes our forests and grasslands grow, sustains our wildlife and provides habitat for fish and waterfowl. Yet, the list of Minnesota impaired waters continues to grow.

Like the great majority of southwest Minnesota residents, my family

also vacationed in northern Minnesota. As a young boy captivated by everything fishing, I spent many hours exploring the shoreline of rivers and lakes while in the pursuit of fish, often well before the rest of my family awoke. I was amazed with the clean clear water in which I saw abundant aquatic life. It's hard to explain how my excitement grew the closer I got to the water's edge, just to take it all in.

Now, only that I am older do I understand why those early fishing trips were so special; it was the clean water and the astounding amount of life that called it home. Back at that time, I simply thought our southern waters didn't

hold the same "magic" as those farther north. This "magic" is what I believe drives so many of us to vacation in Minnesota's north country.

It wasn't until the summers of my college years I realized we had the potential for clean water here as well. There I was, water sampling as an intern for the Heron Lake Watershed District on Fulda Lakes, in a canoe, in 7 feet of water, and I could see the bottom! Conservation work completed by the HLWD had improved the water quality so much the lakes were removed from the state's list of impaired waters.

Restoration is possible for all Minnesota waters, those of the north and

south alike. However, conservation comes with a price tag. Just more than 2 percent of the state's general fund spending was utilized for conservation, but that was 20 years ago. Money spent on Minnesota's environmental legacy is now less than 10 percent of the state's overall budget. This is despite the fact nature, with clean water at its core, supports a \$16 billion tourism industry annually while providing 11 percent of all private-sector jobs. In essence, maintaining and improving our natural resources benefits the health and well-being of people across the state, especially when it comes to clean, affordable drinking water.

The 2022 Minnesota list of impaired waters has grown to 6,167 basins, with another 2,972 in need of a total maximum daily load study in 2022, which will add many more to that list in upcoming years. State conservation officials estimate more than 56 percent of our lakes and rivers are now impaired. If that doesn't make you want to act, then you probably care very little about our natural resources or the protection of drinking water.

The 2022 legislative budget sits with a historic \$7.75 billion surplus, meaning there is opportunity to make huge strides toward the restoration of the

water resources that represent our heritage as Minnesotans. As land stewards, it is extremely evident we have fallen short in the preservation of our water resources and have therefore left nature out to dry. It is high time for our state and county governments, as well as our local watershed board — the HLWD — to make the necessary decisions to protect and improve our water quality for future generations.

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

GUEST COLUMNIST
Lloyd Kalfs

READERS WRITE

This month and every month, stand up for children; every single one matters

To the editor:

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners proclaimed April as "Child Abuse Prevention Month" at their April 5 meeting. They encourage all citizens to participate in efforts to help prevent child abuse and neglect, thereby helping to strengthen the communities in which we all live. This is a time to reflect on what we are doing as a community to support children and families. Remember to "Stand Up for Children: Every Child Matters." Children don't come with instructions and too many parents face the challenge of raising their children without the knowledge and support they need and deserve. We all have opportunities to reach out to parents in our own families, neighborhoods, places of worship and places of employment.

If you see a stressed-out parent in public:

· Offer assurance through a smile or a positive

comment.

· Show empathy. Imagine yourself in the other person's shoes.

· Offer encouragement. Say something positive you see about the child or adult.

· Distract and redirect attention away from the stressful situation.

In recognition of April as Child Abuse Prevention Month, Jackson County's Addiction Prevention and Safety Coalition, along with the Jackson County Board of Commissioners, ask for your support for children. Be a positive parent or adult in their lives. Stand up for children. Every child matters.

Thank you for your support.

Bonnie Traetow
On behalf of Jackson County's Addiction Prevention and Safety Coalition, Jackson

Help needed — and quickly

To the editor:

Regarding the state's budget surplus:

Democrats plan to provide funds to ease the sufferings of school dropouts; carjackers; low-income, unemployed, unwed mothers; protesters; and forever college students; and — of course — for grants and aid for education and welfare. And to buy votes.

If funds are still available, Republicans would like to allocate them to road and bridge repair and law enforcement and use some to reduce income and property taxes and provide income assistance for all businesses badly harmed by the Biden/Walz mandates. Welcome back!

Speaking of President Joe Biden, to ease your pain at the gas pump, he is going to release President Donald Trump's saved fuel reserve — 1 million barrels each and every day for six months starting May 30. My question is when we no longer have Trump's emergency fuel reserve, what is Biden's next super move?

Someone — anyone — please save us from this.

Eugene Stene
Alpha

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