

## Be vigilant

It was a beautiful Friday afternoon, the kind that has countless youngsters hanging out in neighborhoods, riding their bikes, heading to the playground, or even looking for frogs.

It's likely that few area residents spent much time thinking about an evil man lurking in the shadows, an abductor searching for a victim, in just the right place. Yet there he was, on Windom's east side, marking his prey.

Many residents likely know by now, that at 2:35 p.m. on Friday, a man pulled alongside an 11-year-old Windom boy in a blue Ford sedan. He didn't ask the boy to come over. He ordered him, "Get in the car."

When the boy hesitated, the man grabbed his wrist trying to pull him in. Fortunately, the boy wiggled free of the grip and ran for help. The man then sped out of town on County Road 17.

In so many ways, Windom is the picture of innocence, full of care-free youngsters and even carefree adults. It's part of the charm of our community.

We cherish the opportunities for leisurely strolls on beautiful summer evenings. So many of us love the fact that kids can feel safe riding bike to the pool or park.

Unfortunately, as Friday's episode so graphically illustrated, this isn't really Mayberry. We aren't insulated from the dark side of life, the scary creatures who make it their mission to snatch our precious youth in broad daylight.

In many ways, Friday's close call was an excellent reminder to parents everywhere in Cottonwood County. We need to take precautions, particularly with children.

At the same time, there's a risk of taking those precautions too far.

Pay close attention to the comments by Windom Assistant Police Chief Cory Hillesheim when asked by a windomnews.com reporter less than 30 minutes after Friday's attempted abduction:

*"We need everyone to be vigilant! Children should not be out there alone. Let them go in pairs, the*

### NEWS & NOTES

■ Friday at 2:25 p.m., a man ordered an 11-year-old boy into his car in Windom. Fortunately, the boy escaped the man's grasp.

■ Assistant Police Chief Cory Hillesheim stressed that children should travel in pairs or groups, but they still need to live their lives.

■ As always, we need to report suspicious activity to police — immediately.

*more the better, but don't stop living your life, either."*

Pay particular attention to that last comment — "... but don't stop living your life, either."

That wasn't an accident. Hillesheim knows there are people out there who will react by keeping their kids indoors, shielded not only from the criminal element, but from life itself.

Sure, there is absolutely no better way to fully protect our kids than to keep them inside the house, or a fenced-in yard. But at what cost?

Windom is a terrific community for kids, with all of its playgrounds, swimming pool, ballparks and more. Part of the reason so many Windom natives go on to be successful and happy can be traced to their childhoods and all of the experiences and social skills they picked up simply by doing the things kids do around town.

As Hillesheim said, our youth can still do those things, just be sure they are doing them with others, not alone.

Incidentally, Hillesheim made one other important comment in the moments that followed the abduction attempt, something we stressed in this space a week ago: "If you see anything suspicious, report it right away."

That is crucial advice. If we want to catch these slime balls, we need to do what the boy's parents did — call police, report suspicious activity immediately.

— Rahn Larson

## OUR READERS RESPOND

*What advice would you give to someone who wants to participate in a fall sport?*

### Crystal Fast

■ WINDOM VOLLEYBALL



"You learn so much from being part of a team. You have to sacrifice some of your time, but it gets you involved before the first day of school."

### Kyle Blomgren

■ MLA CROSS COUNTRY



"Just prepare, mentally and physically, to start the season on day one of practice."

### Tim Kirk

■ MLA FOOTBALL



"Just give it a shot. When you're older, you may regret not giving something a try. Also, sports help with grades and mental health."

### Lyndsey Power

■ SJW GIRLS SOCCER



"Regardless of the sport, just do it. It's worth the risk to try something new. And just enjoy your time doing whatever activity you choose."

## QUICK HIT

Trevor Slette  
Publisher



### Unintended consequences

In 2006, California invested \$3.3 billion to help bring down the cost of solar panels for residents, pushing the "green" ideology.

Now, nearing the end of the panels life cycle, they are having to dispose of these panels, which are full of toxic heavy metals such as lead, selenium and cadmium — which could potentially dirty their ground water.

Some parts of the panels are recyclable, but the cost is extraordinary versus how much they can recycle. This is now a nationwide problem as new panels are put up at an extremely high rate!

Maybe we should have thought this through, before we pushed everyone to be "green."

## The changing table shortage

"And the most underutilized invention of them all award, goes to..."

As a society, we are blessed with many wonderful inventions that we can readily utilize on a daily basis — cell phones, televisions, computers, air fryers, electric vehicles and so on.

Even though we are blessed with technology and new inventions, there is still one basic invention that is not utilized often enough in public spaces — changing tables. And not just changing tables, but changing tables in both the men's and women's restrooms.

I'm not joking, this is a serious issue.

### Awkward changing areas

I never would've noticed if not for my 19-month-old who needs diaper changes at almost every public facility. I also wouldn't have noticed if I didn't have six nephews and three nieces who are all in activities at various schools and event centers.

During the basketball season for my two oldest nephews, we traveled all over southwest Minnesota to attend games. I have changed my son on cold tile floors of schools. I have changed him in maintenance closets at colleges, yes, maintenance closets (which, by the way, gets awkward real fast when a custodian happens to enter during mid-diaper change).

I have even changed my son in a technology classroom atop a table in a beautiful brand new high school. Believe it or not, this was the space I was offered to change his diaper.

In that instance, I remember frantically searching to find a changing table during halftime. I went up to the ticket taker and said, "I noticed neither of your bathrooms have a changing table, is there somewhere else I can change a diaper?"

The ticket taker was more than accommodating and helpful. She led me to a classroom and promptly unlocked it. (Now don't get me wrong, I am thankful that various facilities are so willing to make these accommodations, but should they have to? Shouldn't changing tables be standard in this day and age?)

Once inside the classroom, I was taken to a table toward the front. This place would've been perfect... if it not for the floor to ceiling windows which looked out into

the entryway of the school (where all of the fans were entering the gym.) For the first time in my life, I understood what it must feel like for caged zoo animals with bystanders staring in on their privacy.



RAINA KLISCH  
CITIZEN COLUMNIST

### Men's rooms, too

In my opinion, changing tables should be a standard in every public facility in the women's and men's bathrooms. Yes, men change diapers, too.

When my husband, son, and I watched the state basketball tournament this year at a college, I noticed a dad and his young child were at the game, without the mom. The dad was changing his child on the cold, concrete floor, under a dirty stairwell. I kept thinking to myself, how humiliating for the dad and also the child to have to do something so private in a public space, especially in this day and age where every cellphone has a camera.

This whole situation got me thinking...there are also widowed dads, single dads, uncles and grandpas who must bring young children to events. Where do they change them?

### Restaurant changing stations

Another thing I should mention is that my husband and I often choose where to eat for restaurants based on which bathrooms have the best changing stations. This is rather deplorable, but when you end up having to strip your son down in the bathroom due to a blowout diaper (mid-feast) to a clean diaper with his socks and tennis shoes, it makes perfect sense.

It also brought me back to stories my mom told me regarding my dad's fastpitch softball days, in the early 90s. His team was the very first team in the area where the entire team wore helmets to bat. They were ridiculed, mocked and taunted as they played the game. They were told things like, "Do you have your hardhats ready?"

In today's day and age, it is required for every fastpitch softball hitter and infielder to wear a helmet. I often wonder if sharing these changing table stories with my son will one day be comical.

Right now, the shortage of changing tables is a nuisance that needs to change.

## The PR value of Island Park

On Sunday night, as I worked with volunteers to install the final advertising signs at Island Park, a few board members shared a few plans form the ballpark, which includes new bullpens near each dugout.

As a longtime member of the Windom Baseball Association, I have appreciated the work of volunteers, players and the board. These folks work hard to keep the park looking terrific.

Make no mistake, the beauty of our ballpark — plus all of Island Park, for that matter — reflects positively on the community. Often, when I tell people I am from Windom, they reply, "Oh yes, that town with the pretty ballpark along the highway."

I've always said Windom's "curb appeal," along the Highway 60-71 corridor is underrated by many residents, most notably, city leaders. Think about it, most people who travel through Windom base their entire opinion regarding our community on what they see along Highway 60-71.

That impression can impact countless things, even whether a business chooses to locate here. That's why I still believe that



RAHN LARSON  
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when the city eventually builds a new pool, it should be located somewhere along either highway, not hidden in some back corner of town.

### Remarkably accurate list

This week, Larson's Remarkably Accurate List brings you all-time best medical TV series:

1. ER
2. MASH
3. House
4. Quincy
5. Grey's Anatomy

### QUICK VIEWS

■ Windom's next Night to Unite event is set for Tuesday, Aug. 2, to coincide with the national Night to Unite schedule. I believe this is the first time this event has been held on a Tuesday in Windom.

■ As of last week, Windom had zero applicants for its development director job.

■ The Cottonwood County Fair is set for Aug. 10-13.

## Rules regarding feet on the dashboard

**Question:** We were driving down the interstate the other day and I was passed by a vehicle and I noticed the front passenger had their feet up on the front dash. This was a newer vehicle so I know there are air bags and this got me wondering if this was legal.

**Trooper Troy says:** What you saw is not illegal but it was certainly not safe. People never intend to be involved in a crash, but it can happen at



TROY CHRISTIANSON  
GUEST COLUMNIST

any time. One danger people forget about is deer. They are one of the most common things motorists hit that deploy air bags. I've responded to and investigated crashes that became more serious because a passenger had their legs stretched out and feet placed upon the dashboard. The deployment of the airbag is usually within 25 or 50 milliseconds. That translates to almost 200 miles per hour.

Placing your leg(s) on the dash can result in serious injuries if an air bag deploys. No object (stickers, decals, anything) should be placed over or near the air bag on the instrument panel or steering wheel because they could cause additional harm if the vehicle is involved in a collision.

Air bags are designed to work with seat belts to keep vehicle occupants in a safe position during a crash. Air bags are not effective if the motorist is not belted properly.

Always buckle up and insist passengers are belted, too. In a crash, unbelted motorists can become a projectile, slamming into and injuring or killing others inside a ve-

hicle. Wear lap belts low and snug across the hips; shoulder straps should never be tucked under an arm or behind the back — not only is this unsafe, it is illegal. Children under age 13 should always ride in the back seat. Kids under 4-feet 9-inches should be in a booster seat.

You can avoid a ticket — and a crash — if you simply buckle up, drive at safe speeds, pay attention and always drive sober. Help us drive Minnesota Toward Zero Deaths.

**Sgt. Troy Christianson is an information officer for the Minnesota State Patrol.**

## YOUR VOICE COUNTS

We welcome letters to the editor of up to 300 words on any topic. We strongly encourage letters to be typed/emailed and may be edited for clarity and length and must include your name, address and daytime phone number. The deadline for letters is noon on Mondays.

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