

OUR VIEW

Generous giving benefits everyone

One need only glance at the pages of this week's edition to see the breadth of generosity exhibited in the area. And, it isn't just this week. Newspaper after newspaper reports the efforts of individuals or groups intent on making a difference through their fundraising efforts.

The Blooming Prairie Cancer Group hit the \$1-million fundraising milestone this past weekend after raising more than \$50,000 to fight cancer. What began as a family endeavor developed into a community effort.

Everyone involved has done far more than Paint The Town Pink. Some have worked tirelessly to ensure the event's success, while others have reached into their pocketbooks. And many have done both.

In Owatonna, more than 200 people participated in the 10th annual Jacobs Run, a motorcycle ride and auction held to raise funds for and awareness of the Open Arms Suicide Prevention Program in Owatonna.

A few weeks earlier, another motorcycle ride called Rachel's Ride raised more than \$2,000 for Rachel's Light, a non-profit that provides transitional housing for women and children in Steele County.

And this week, we learned that the BOB Ride in July raised more than \$18,000 for the local Toys for Tots campaign.

Each of these fundraising efforts relies on people helping other people. And each provides a much-needed antidote to the negativity we too often experience in this world.

Giving of one's time or one's resources illustrates the best in each of us.

As Mahatma Gandhi said: "In a gentle way, you can shake the world."

If you haven't jumped on the make-a-difference bandwagon, there are plenty of opportunities available.

Seek them out.

This weekend, there are at least two worthy fundraising events occurring: the Steele County Relay for Life and the Owatonna Alzheimer's Walk.

Letters to the Editor

We encourage readers to share their views on issues of community interest. Letters must be signed, no longer than 275 words and type-written or clearly printed. Writers must include their address and a daytime phone number for verification. Phone numbers and street addresses will not be published; your name and city of residence will be published. Letters will be edited for clarity, grammar and length and may be published in print and electronic forms.

Submit a letter by email to scletters@gmail.com; or by mail to the Steele County Times, attn. Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 247, Blooming Prairie, MN 55917.

Stirring up a barnyard ruckus



Hot Pursuit
RICK BUSSLER

Leave it to my trusty writer Howard Lestrud to stir up a barnyard ruckus. He's really done it this time.

Some larger cities have problems with ruckuses involving criminals and their behavior, while other areas like ours have commotions involving animals. I'll certainly take what we have going on any day.

I think Howard has got every dairy cow in Steele County and elsewhere mooing over his call for a milking contest with real cows

next year. And cows aren't the only ones mooing over what Howard thinks could be the "battle of the century."

In case you missed last week's edition, Howard, in his Reflections column, issued a challenge for a real milking contest between himself and yours truly.

"We are in favor of the challenge by Howard and hope that it becomes a reality next June," chimed in a reader from Owatonna. "Our bet is on Rick to win this challenge."

Just this week, I received a notice from the Steele County American Dairy Association, which plans to take on Howard's suggestion as official business. The thought is perhaps the contest could be incorporated into the group's annual Breakfast on the Farm in June.

I'll be honest Howard scares me. He is already

bragging about his BIG SQUEEZE, a cow that only let her milk down for him and no one else. The only practice I have with a squeeze is squeezing off rounds from a .40-caliber Glock during my days as a police officer. Not sure that will help much with this challenge.

I'm also not sure if squeezing the ink onto the newspaper pages really counts at all. Plus, I have lots of experience squeezing one more story or photo into the newspaper each week. But, again, I don't think that will come in handy in this case.

Howard has practice milking cows by hand, though it has been probably close to 60 years ago.

But still, it's more experience than I have.

Granted, I grew up on a farm as well, but my experience was slopping the hogs with feed and water and helping

piglets nurse with their mommas. Nowhere did cows play into my farm experience.

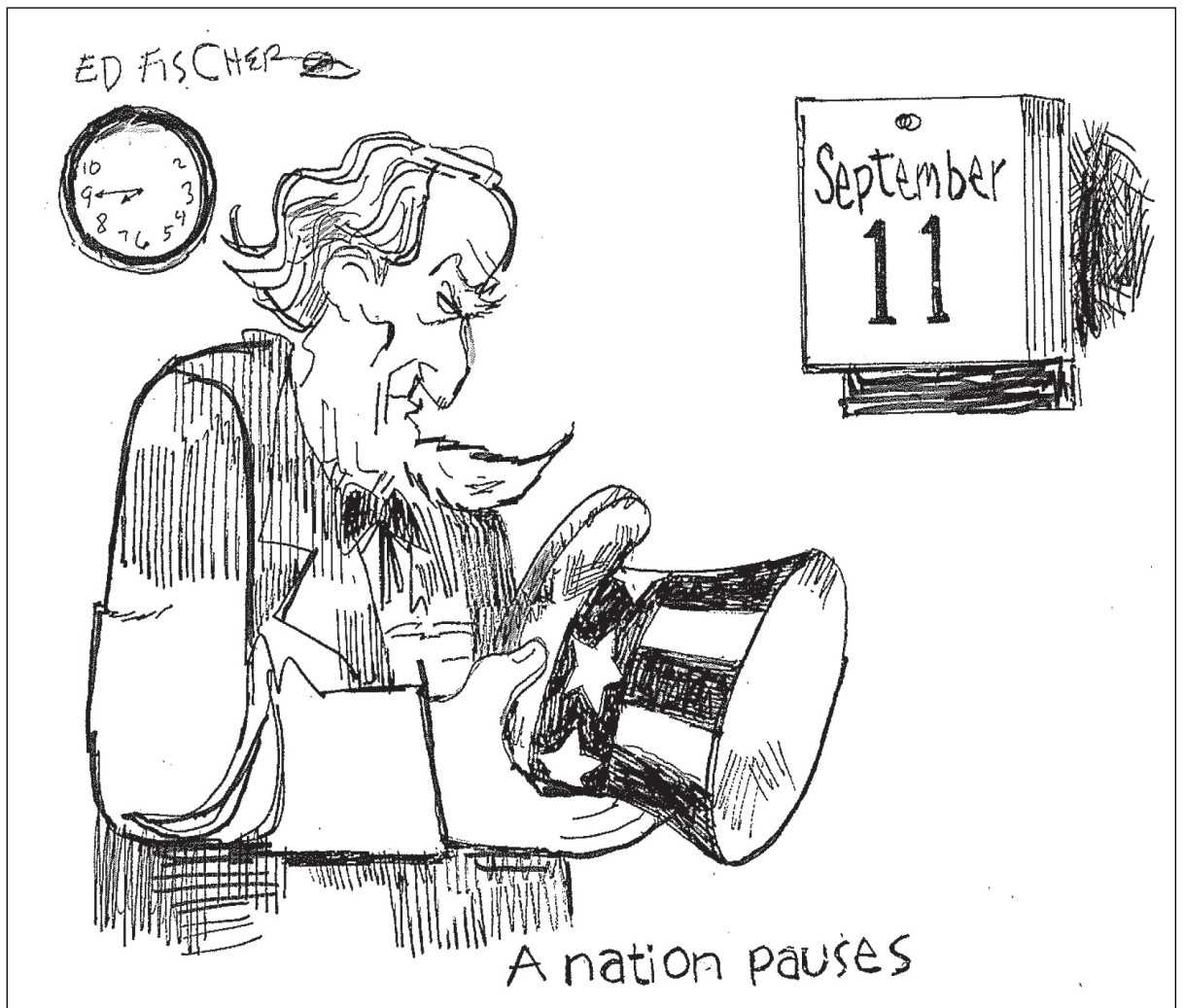
Thankfully, I got a little experience back in August at the Steele County Free Fair, where I milked Bella, the fake cow. I learned a few things from the contest that should prepare me well for taking on Howard.

I'm still trying to figure a way of slipping Steele County dairy farmer Rick Balzer's robotic milkers into the contest, of course, just for my cow.

I don't think I have any choice but to accept Howard's challenge.

Stay tuned as this challenge continues to unfold in the coming months.

I guess it's time I go in hot pursuit of finding a real cow to milk in preparation for next summer's big milking challenge. Watch out, Howard!



New school year, renewed strategic vision



Owatonna Proud
JEFF ELSTAD

We have successfully started our 2021-22 school year as classrooms are bustling and the fall season is upon us. Words truly cannot describe how good it feels to see students and teachers learning, growing and interacting.

At a recent school board meeting, your school board took action to update and endorse the strategic direction of our school district for the next school year. As part of this process, the board approved four

commitments to guide our work: 21st Century Learners, Equity, High Quality Teaching and Learning, and a Safe and Caring Community.

During the past six months, hundreds of school staff, parents and students provided input through surveys on the desired daily experiences they want to see within the Owatonna Public Schools. Based on this feedback, we identified some key desired outcomes, such as this one for parents: "My child is in a safe and caring environment where they will be cared for, accepted, supported and valued." Students said they wanted an environment where, "I feel connected, accepted, valued and have a sense of belonging amongst my peers and adults who are kind and supported; My presence matters."

Staff want to "... have the time, tools and training to do my work effectively and empower students and staff in rigorous learning." These are great examples that outline what we need to focus on to deliver these desired outcomes.

The desired daily experiences also drove our strategic planning team and school board to closely examine our mission, vision, core values and strategic directives. Through thoughtful examination the school board felt strongly that our mission, "Inspiring Excellence, Every Learner, Every Day," still clearly defines who, what and why we exist as a school district. Our vision remains the same: "Owatonna Public Schools inspires a community of learners with equitable access to high quality, innovative

learning opportunities ensuring all students are college, career and life ready." This vision is designed to be a destination that starts at the earliest ages and continues throughout a student's school career. The real work now begins as we use the strategic directives to guide our work.

Our commitment to 21st Century Learning requires us to meet current academic standards while also striving to achieve the 4Cs: communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking, while being community focused. The skills needed for success in college and career are becoming increasingly complex, and we must rise to meet new demands. We must stay abreast of evolving technology as a key driver of the innovation

needed to positively impact student learning outcomes.

We are committed to equity so that all students and staff have access to quality educational opportunities in a culturally competent environment to meet their individual needs. The result will be equitable access to high quality, innovative learning opportunities ensuring all students are college, career and life ready.

Our commitment to providing high quality teaching and learning means that students receive innovative, rigorous, and relevant learning opportunities that meet their varying needs. Staff professional development is focused on collaboration, continuous learning and research-based instructional practices to ensure growth in

student achievement.

We are committed to providing a safe and caring school environment in which students and staff feel safe, positively connected to others, respected, comfortable and accepted. We strive to continue building a supportive culture while we nurture meaningful relationships with students, staff and families.

We are #OwatonnaProud of the work that has been accomplished and eager to move forward with what now needs to be done. Our staff is excited and ready to provide the best educational opportunities for all Owatonna students. Thank you for your continued support that helps make this possible!

Jeff Elstad is the superintendent of Owatonna Public Schools.

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A state and national award winning weekly



MINNESOTA NEWSPAPER ASSOCIATION

2021—16 awards	2015—7 state and 4 national awards
2020—9 state awards	2014—3 state and 3 national awards
2018—6 state and 4 national awards	2013—7 state and 2 national awards
2017—2 state and 3 national awards	2012—2 state awards
2016—8 state and 6 national awards	2011—4 national awards

(Awards presented by the Minnesota Newspaper Association and the National Newspaper Associations)