

OPINION

OUR VIEW

Twice as nice

If you’ve ever considered making a donation to the local food shelves, this is the month to do it.

Donations made during March will do twice as much good as donations made in other months. March is Minnesota FoodShare month, when everything donated to food shelves will be matched by Minnesota FoodShare’s March Campaign.

A 2013 report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture said about one in 10 Minnesota households doesn’t have access to enough food for healthy living.

Locally, donations may be made to the Salvation Army and the Falls Hunger Coalition, each of which assist people in Koochiching County who are hungry.

What? There are people who live in this large community that don’t have enough to eat? Yes, in fact there are, but for many of us, it may be hard to imagine.

But the use of local food shelves tell the story.

Nancy Anderson, director of the Falls Hunger Coalition, said the need for donations to restock food shelves is clear. In February, the coalition served 40 new clients and distributed 10,400 pounds of food through its voucher program and regular food visits. In January, 13,680 pounds were distributed.

In an effort to increase donations, The Salvation Army will offer new ways to

get involved. An auction is set for March 21, and people may drop off gently used items for the auction by calling 218-283-3394. In addition, Envoy Beverly Mayfield said the organization will team with Falls Elementary School students and staff for a donation competition between classes.

This community shows its generosity regularly as we come together to help family, friends and neighbors in need. But in this case, the need is ongoing. It doesn’t end with a successful fundraiser or project. Instead, the need must be filled each month when the food shelves are depleted because of regular use.

March offers the chance to make our donated food items and money do double duty when they’re matched. Each dollar can be stretched further with the match and when food is purchased through discounted programs available to the food shelves.

Donating is easy. Contact The Salvation Army or the Falls Hunger Coalition to find out more about donating. Making a donation can mean writing a check or handing over a greenback of any denomination. It can also mean filling a bag at a local grocery store, or even by just opening your kitchen cabinets and grabbing a can or two, if you can spare.

If we all pitch in, we can help to fill the needs of this community more easily in March.



GUEST COLUMN

A reflection of our community

BY MICHAEL WELLCOME

I remember the keynote Jay Bartkowski gave during the Voyage Forward kickoff event in September. A couple of key sentences come to mind:

Sometimes, our attitude toward ourselves makes us a less attractive destination, both in the eyes of our current residents and visitors possibly looking to relocate. We get to hear about disagreements between local government, their agencies, schools, healthcare providers, and others in our community. This does not give a good impression of our area to locals or outsiders. In my opinion, we need to do better and we can do better. In addition we can’t hold disagreements from the past forever. Here are some of the things I’ve heard as I’ve been throughout our community:

- I will not shop at a store because they made incorrect change 15 years ago;
- I will not join an organization because of a disagreement 20 years ago;
- I will not support Voyageurs National Park because of differences of over 40 years ago.



If we are going to be successful we need to stop focusing on negatives and start to focus on positives. We need to focus on how we can make our community better.

Local residents are not the only ones that read the newspaper or listen to our “local” news. Businesses, individuals, and organizations research cities and towns before they relocate, vacation, or make a decision to move to a different community.

As part of the Voyage Forward Long Term Vision and Strategy Team, I was part of the team that interviewed the consulting firms desiring to develop the Economic Adjustment Strategy. Each team did their homework; they read back issues of The Journal, went online and researched local businesses and organizations, and researched demographic data to get an understanding of the region. They knew our

region before they submitted their proposal.

They did exactly the same thing a company desiring to relocate would do. They did their homework.

Personal attacks and public arguments do nothing to move us forward. They do everything to move us backwards.

The Voyage Forward effort is about engaging our citizens to move our region forward. A huge amount of time and effort has been spent by countless community members over the past year. We’ve had many discussions within our various teams on the need to think differently, act differently, be supportive and operate as one in order to minimize the barriers we can control in attracting people and businesses to our region.

We have had far too many participants on our various teams and in the business community ask why our regional leaders don’t always

appear to work together for the common good. Instead of saying no or throwing up barriers, we should work together and ask how we can move initiatives forward.

Our task is simple. We need everyone working together to make our community a better place. We need our leaders to be examples of who we want to follow, not barriers to overcome.

Leadership doesn’t just mean elected officials. Whether you are a board chair, president, CEO, the person working the cash register, or a student, leadership needs to set the right tone for our region. People see the community by the way you act and react. To the person, we are a reflection of our community.

Now more than ever we need forward thinking leadership. We have a lot of work yet to do on our Journey to Success. It’s time we set our differences aside and work together to make this region a ‘Community of Choice.’

What we need is leadership. From everyone.

Participate and create our own future. Sign up for informational updates and receive more information at www.voyageforward.org.

How to contact your lawmakers

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The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W.
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Share your point of view

Make a difference by writing a letter to the editor or contributing to our online discussions. The Journal’s Opinion page is where meaningful community discussions take place.

The Journal welcomes letters from readers

Letters should be limited to 500 words or less. Longer letters may be edited. Letters must be signed and include the telephone number and address of the letter writer. Only the author’s city address will be published.

Mail letters to The Journal, 1602 Highway 71, International Falls 56649. Letters can also be sent by e-mail to laurel@ifallsjournal.com.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

VSO should be moved to ground floor

To the editor,

Now that our county commissioners have decided to hire an assistant for our county veteran service officer and they have discussed renovating an office on the third floor of the courthouse, this letter must be written asking them reconsider this relocation for the following reasons:

- Not all veterans feel comfortable getting into small confined spaces, such as elevators, due to their circumstances and experiences while in the military.
- Our aging veteran population is hard pressed to

walk up to the third floor to receive assistance.

- For the security of the veterans, veterans service officer, and the county, the current and future third floor office is at risk because on occasion the VSO has to be there after the courthouse is closed. This allows the veterans when finished with their meeting with the VSO to wander the courthouse at will.

By relocating this office to the ground floor it would provide more confidentiality for the veterans. At the present office, any conversation can echo throughout

the building.

I have been informed that a ground floor office was available, but for reason unknown to me it was given to another agency. This office can be accessed from inside or outside of the main courthouse building. After business hours the veterans can exit by an outside door with the inside door to the courthouse closed when appropriate with control of VSO or assistant.

Our present VSO has tripled the caseload of the office and I feel that we as veterans do not need to be stuck on the third floor in a

renovated courtroom.

This office has earned the right to be readily available to all veterans and dependents who require assistance and be easily accessible. The veterans have earned the right to get assistance to them in the most convenient way possible.

I urge all veterans to contact their local, state, and federal representatives with any and all concerns about them receiving their VA benefits. Our VSO is the person who you must see to start any process.

Terry Randolph
International Falls, MN

WHAT OTHERS SAY

Mall security improves with knowledge

We’d all feel better if we knew the 100-plus security guards employed at the Mall of America had AK-47s at their disposal. We’d feel better if we knew they could call in and get 100 more soldiers of a SWAT team in minutes.

Instead, we know the mall has 100 officers “employed” including another 50 part-time. We don’t know how many are there at any one time. If there is a crisis or evacuation plan, we really wouldn’t know it. The mall does conduct lockdown drills once a month. Store employees seem to know of one, but it appears they’re not at liberty to speak about it.

The mall says patrons may be subject to a security interview, but we don’t know when or if or how many of these are conducted or if there is a random program.

Yet, the mall provided an “unprecedented” peek behind its security apparatus touted in newspapers and on television Tuesday.

And that’s part of the problem with keeping the public confident they are safe wherever they go. There’s a fine line to draw between the public knowing what security measures might be in place and the bad guys having the same knowledge.

It seems security managers side too much toward secrecy when educating the

public could do more to enhance security that hurt it.

The mall did reveal some of their strategies. They have teams monitoring the hundreds of cameras set up in the mall. They check delivery vehicles for bomb making material residues with a swab. They monitor social media. They make sure they have connections with people who might have information of threat groups.

The recent threat by the terrorist group al-Shabab that specifically encouraged attacks on the Mall of America caused the mall and Bloomington police to increase their patrols, though they would not say by how much.

The Department of Homeland Security offers training on something as simple as recognizing a suspicious person, but it appears the public at large or mall customers are not bothered with this information, lest their shopping experience be sullied.

Security experts argued that training janitors, security and retail employees to recognize suspicious people increased the number of eyes and ears needed to spot threats. We would argue, the public too, should be trained, thereby increasing the “security” exponentially.

The Free Press of Mankato, Feb. 25