

OPINIONS



Peggy Scott
Assistant Publisher

Leader launches Teen Advisory Board; you're gonna like it

Dear readers, it's my honor to introduce you to a group of young journalists who have joined the ranks of writers here at the *Leader*.

Together, they make up the *Leader* Teen Advisory Board, and they are a pretty impressive group. They are high school students – athletes, scholars and leaders at their schools. They have strong opinions and lots of questions about the future of our community.

I, for one, hope these young people represent newspaper readers of the future.

For the past quarter century, the *Leader* has served an audience of loyal and engaged readers. Readers who send us letters to the editor, participate in contests, join us for events.

When we meet you on the street, we often hear, "I love the *Leader*," or "I love that little paper." Most importantly, you READ the *Leader*. Thank you.

We notice, though, that some of us have reached a "certain age." Lots of our regular letter writers are past retirement age. We appreciate your insights, experience and opinions.

Here at *Leader* World Headquarters, we want to make sure the *Leader* remains relevant to the next generation, as well. Are young people reading the *Leader*? Where are teens getting their news? Do they care about local news at all? Are they interested in joining the discussion about things happening in our community and our nation?

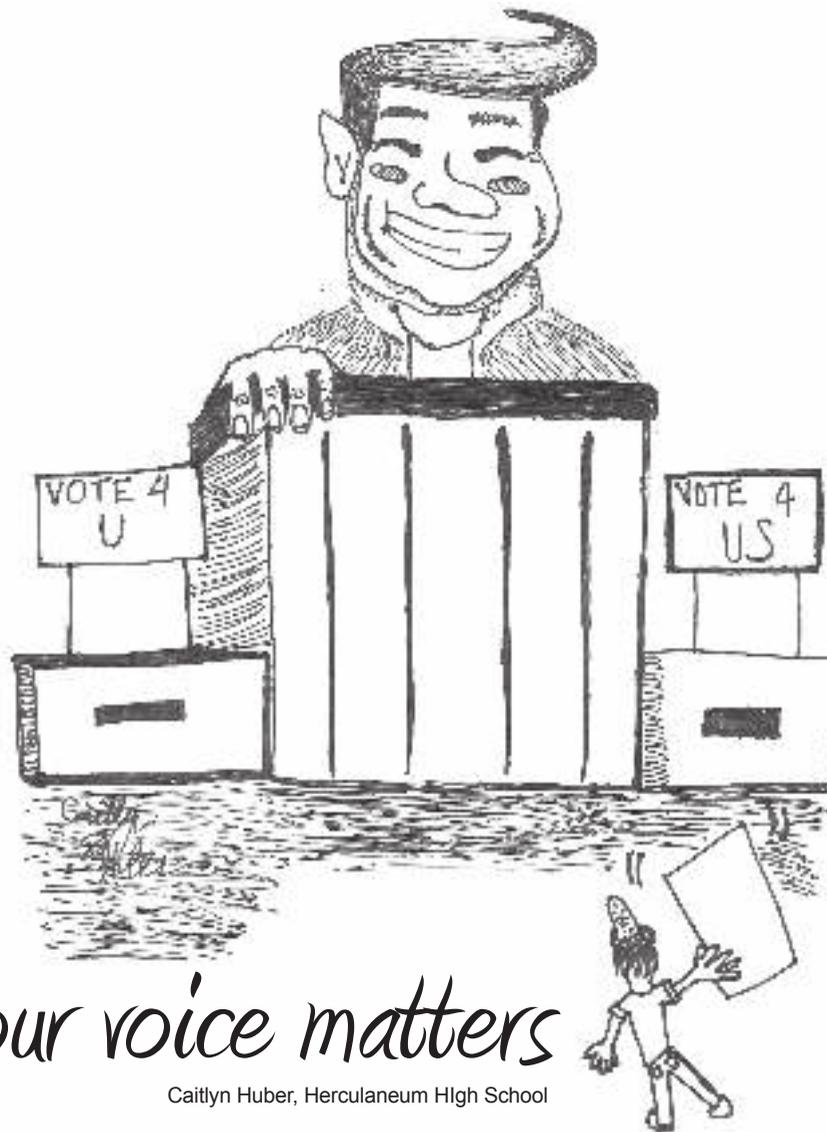
In January 2018, an 18-year-old Arnold resident – Ike Brda – wrote a letter to the editor that we titled "Teen wants elders to smell the coffee." He called out older readers, "those of you who have 15 years or more on me," and said they were the "confused generation."

Leader readers responded with a firestorm of responses, the biggest response we've seen to a single letter in the first 10 months of this year. We heard from our regulars. We also heard from new voices, younger voices. Some agreed with Ike. Some disagreed. The discussion was lively and prompted a second letter from him.

The answer was clear. A young audience is out there if we can reach them and engage them. But how?

While we are asking about the future in Jefferson County, experts across the country are pondering the same questions on a national level. Where are young people getting their news? Will traditional news media, like printed newspapers, be a part of their lives?

A 2017 study by Common Sense Media, a San Francisco-based technology and media nonprofit, surveyed young



Your voice matters

Caitlyn Huber, Herculaneum High School

people ages 10-18 about their opinions on news and how they see, read, or hear about the news. Half of the teens surveyed said news is important to them and following the news helps them feel empowered to make changes in the community. The study also found that teens often get their news from non-traditional sources like websites, podcasts and even Snapchat stories.

The same study says that about 75 percent of teens think the traditional media doesn't talk to people in their age group; instead the media interviews adults talking about teens. And, 69 percent said the news media is out of touch with issues important to young people.

After a discussion with *Leader* editor Peggy Bess and managing editor Kim Robertson, we decided the best way to engage our local students was simply to ask them.

In August, we sent a letter to each high school principal, requesting a student to serve on the *Leader's* newly formed Teen Advisory Board. Principals responded with enthusiasm. They nominated top-notch students who could have easily said their busy school and work schedules didn't leave time for another extracurricular activity.

We held our first meeting on a Saturday, and students turned up (not just for free pizza) to talk about issues that matter to them and to plan editorial projects that will be completed this school year.

The discussion was eye-opening. These teens have serious opinions about serious topics. They think about our communities, issues we face and how they might be able to improve things. And they don't want to wait until they are older or more established. They are ready to start now.

We asked our Teen Advisory Board members to share what's important to them, to talk about what worries them and the issues that adults might not understand. They were open about the impact of things like social media, diversity and mental health on their lives. They think many adults might not recognize how much the world has changed and how fast the changes keep coming.

We brainstormed ideas for possible topics, and filled page after page. After some discussion, we settled on our first project – voting. These young people – some already 18, but most younger – know they want to make good decisions at the polls. They have ideas about the issues and candidates, but, they shared, no one talks about the technical aspects of voting. What happens? How does it work? What should they bring? What will be expected of them when they enter the polling place? How can they get involved?

Students visited with the county's election officials, interviewed young people who have worked the election polls and those who have worked with candidates. The students asked questions, learned a lot and today share some of what they learned. While only a few of them are old enough to cast ballots on Nov. 6, they recognize the importance of making their voices heard.

I hope you enjoy reading their work on **Pages 38-40**. We found it excellent. And, I hope you learn a little something. I hope you share it with others. I hope this is the start of a great relationship with a new generation of *Leader* readers.

The seasoned staff at the *Leader* is already looking forward to the teens' next project, and the one after that. We'll keep you posted.

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