

OPINION

Learn about life behind the wall

Everyone is more than his or her worst moment. I am asking you to keep that thought in mind as I introduce a new column that we will be running once a month in the *Statesman-Examiner* and *Deer Park Tribune*.

Ask a Lifer (see below) is the best way I know to give you a glimpse inside one of the nation's 1,821 state and federal prisons. Who better to answer your questions than someone serving true life? This column will be a place for you to ask questions about anything you would like to know of prison life.

By way of introduction, Kevin Duane Young, almost 56, is one of the incarcerated veterans that I care for. He served in the U.S. Navy and has been locked up at Oregon State Penitentiary for 30 years on a conviction of aggravated murder.

He is among 53,000 prisoners across the U.S. serving Life Without Parole so, unless there is a change of political will or we prevail in an upcoming legal challenge, he will die in prison.

The one thing I have

asked Kevin to keep off-limits to any questions is his legal case. There have been changes in the law in Oregon and the aggravating factors of his sentence no longer exist. We are working to get him back in court with some new evidence and this venue is not the appropriate place to discuss that strategy.

Kevin is a straight-talking gentleman with few filters, so I am sure you are going to find his answers to your questions honest and enlightening.

Because he is very near and dear to my heart, I ask that you treat him as a human being with great value to God, who has said there is mercy and forgiveness for all.

You cannot know the psychological work that Kevin has done to deal with his life and his choices. It is for him to share that with you if and when he feels comfortable to do so.

What I can tell you is that virtually everyone who has been locked away for any length of time has experienced loss, betrayal and soul-searing pain. That is the nature of incarceration.

The longer prisoners are



This is a photo of Kevin and I at Christmas two years ago. The strange look on my face comes with having Skinhead Santa (Swastika on forehead) take our photo, which was definitely a new experience. Nothing much surprises Kevin after 30 years inside.

inside, the fewer people they have who care or even remember them in the free world.

Justice is meting out punishment to those who harm others. However, I believe that very few people cannot be reformed. I also

believe that we are compelled, if we call ourselves a compassionate society, to treat even "the least among us" with dignity and respect. Prisoners are still human beings.

My walk with Kevin has been tested. We come at life

from two entirely different viewpoints and there have been difficulties in communication that we had to work through.

He thinks I am a nerd and a prude but appreciates how my "brilliant" mind works. Almost every story he shares about his past horrifies me and I have had much to learn about what survival on the streets looks like.

I have also learned from Kevin what it means to be born with a skin color that you are taught at an early age makes you inferior in the eyes of some people. I grew up in a largely white community of rural America so I never really had an understanding of what racism looked like until Kevin told me about the bullying involved in being bused across town to a white school during desegregation in Hot Springs, Arkansas, where he grew up. He also had an uncle who was lynched.

Kevin is a man who believes that "men respect men and nothing is given." He has quiet pride and never asks for anything from anyone. When people don't come through for a need on

their own, he shoulders the burden and keeps moving forward.

I have committed to feeding Kevin's mind because lifers don't get to be involved in any personal development programs in prison. I send articles of interest and lots of books, which he passes on to the 35 inmates on death row. I like that we are also giving them an opportunity to "escape" given that they are kept in isolation for all but one hour a day, when they can walk with a "yard buddy."

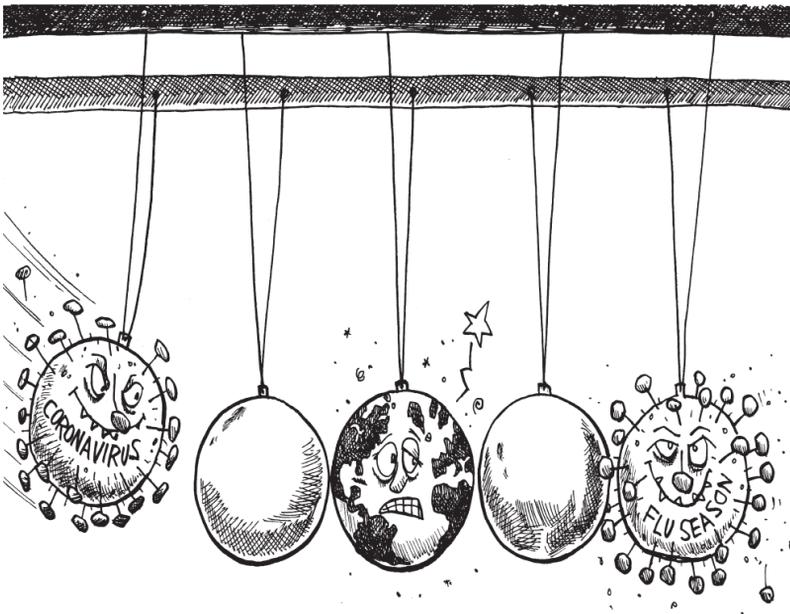
I have been concerned that Kevin would suffer retribution from prison administrators for speaking out in this column, but he said not to worry about that.

"They can't control my mind. My thoughts are my own," he said.

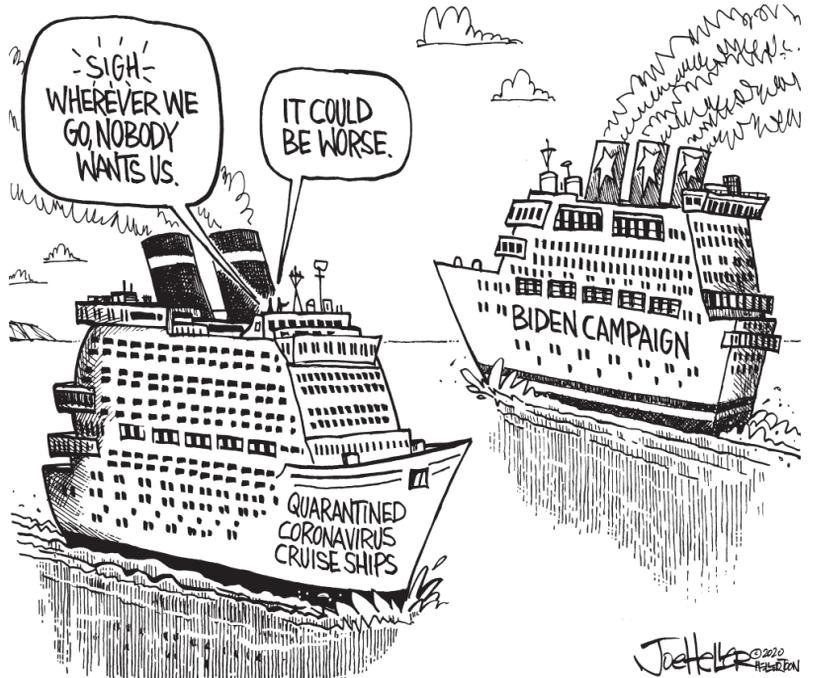
Oregon Department of Corrections might be able to treat Kevin's physical body anyway they wish, but his soul and spirit are free, and I find a strange level of comfort in that.

With that said, I invite you to meet my friend and learn from him as I have ...

— RR



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Ask a Lifer

Prison is no cakewalk and anyone who comes here unprepared for the fact that, on any given day, anything can happen, had better learn fast how to adapt to his surroundings.

My name is Kevin Duane Young and I have been incarcerated on an aggravated murder conviction at Oregon State Penitentiary (OSP) since February of 1992. I was 26 years old when I was sentenced to Life Without the Possibility of Parole; when society decided that I was irredeemable.

I am due to celebrate my 56th birthday soon and I feel that 30 years in this place qualifies me as something of an "expert" about what takes place behind the wall. I have seen it all. There have been times in

here that turned my lips white, and times of intense boredom where every day seems just like the one before it.

Society seems to view a Life Without sentence as a kinder alternative to the death penalty, but it is just a slower walk there. It is a constant fight to preserve my sanity because who wants to live 40, 50 or 60 years caged like an animal? I do everything I can to stay strong.

I think that people judge all prisoners harshly and they don't really care what happens to us in here — until someone they love catches a case and ends up serving time.

What most people don't know is that there are a lot



Kevin Young

of innocent people who come to prison because they pleaded guilty to avoid mandatory minimums that put them at risk of 20 years as opposed to a sentence of two years. Some are in here because of the greed and/or betrayal of another. Many were poor and couldn't afford a good lawyer so they did not have an adequate defense. There are also a lot of people who were addicts or had serious untreated mental health problems that led to criminal behavior.

Don't get me wrong, there are some villains here, too. This is a place for people to be held accountable for the harm they do. However, any attempt at real rehabilitation went by the wayside when the United States opted for mass incarceration and the system became a bureaucratic nightmare that does more harm than good. Human

potential is wasted here.

Here's what my early years at OSP looked like: I had a reputation because of the people I was associated with, and affiliated with, on the streets. That meant that I had to fight every day for the first six months — it didn't matter if I lost, I had to fight to earn my respect.

People rarely mess with me now. You cannot be vulnerable in this place so it is easier to mind my own business and not get drawn into another man's drama.

You run into less problems if you treat everyone with respect and stay to your own space. You never know what another person might be going through that makes him snap if you even bump into him.

Being in prison is like being in a different society, one where you are always surrounded by people and noise no matter where you go.

It is a culture where you can never drop your guard.

I've been to the hole three times and, in fact, just got out of a two-month stay in the bucket. When I was young, I earned money to buy the things I needed by racketeering, which got me six months in the hole. I also spent two months there years ago for fighting. This last time is a long story that begins and ends with the fact that I don't need to wear the jacket of a snitch in here.

I did not join a gang when I got here because I did not want to have to do what another man told me. If you are weak-minded and need attention you are probably going down that path, but there is always a price.

Years ago, the youngsters in gangs used to treat the Old Heads in here with respect, but the ones coming in today often prey on

elderly prisoners because they are defenseless. I've seen them just walk up and sock someone in the face for no apparent reason.

I believe that we need to give people the ability to go to prison and learn how to be productive citizens. I feel the winds of change are blowing in that direction and that is why I have agreed to educate others about the harsh realities of life behind bars. Ask me whatever you like, nothing I say will be sugar coated and I won't put a silver lining on anything.

I look forward to the dialogue.

Questions for Kevin can be sent to editor@statesmanexaminer.com or dropped by the Statesman-Examiner office at 220 South Main Street, or the Deer Park Tribune office, 104 North Main Street. They will be answered in the next monthly column.

From Our Readers

Choose candidate who can excite

A few years ago, I attended a workshop on politics in San Francisco. One of the main ideas taken away from that event was the importance of enthusiasm. Washington State has tried to increase voter participation with mail-in stamped ballots, yet the turnout is usually below 50 percent.

So, if you are wrestling with your choice of nominee in the upcoming primary on March 10 and electability is your prime consideration, choose the candidate who is most

likely to excite the most number of people, who can attract the largest crowds.

Nancy Street Cheney

God has solution to race problem

"If there is a better solution, find it." Thomas Edison. On Jan. 9, 2019, I served as a teacher in Jenkins Jr./Sr., High School in Chewelah. This quote was on a wall in the school.

The better solution to the race problem has been found. The black person, the white person and all others have equal standing before God. We just need to apply this truth.

Romans 2:11 says, "For there is no respect of persons with God."

Arthur Hoak Colville

Can't comprehend liberal mindset

I cannot begin to comprehend the thinking behind the liberal (socialistic) Democrat mind-set, only that there is no actual 'thinking' going on behind it.

Bernie Sanders wants to increase taxes by \$4.35 trillion dollars, and people are actually voting for him? We have a trillion dollar-plus debt already, and I read that "a trillion dollars laid end-to-end would circle the earth 3,892

times and take 3,687 years to walk." Can you even begin to wrap your mind around that one? And all the Democrats running for president want to add a few more trillion to it. Where in the world do they think that money is going to come from?

You can be sure those doing the raising of the debt won't be on the paying end. People who like the idea of everything being free should realize that nothing in life is free, someone else is paying for it.

Those in favor of the Democrats making everything free should take a minute and check out Venezuela, which a few years ago was a thriving economy,

and see if they really want the U.S. to end in the same type of situation.

Use your head people, are

you trying to wipe out your country?

Lottie Swift Kettle Falls

Letters Policy

The Statesman-Examiner publishes letters to the editor of 400 words or less.

Libelous content, personal attacks, discrimination, and more than five thank yous in one letter are not allowed.

We ask readers to stick to broader social issues and not use this forum to register personal complaints against a business, neighbor, etc.

Election related letters will not be printed the week prior to any primary or general election because there is not adequate time to fully explore

the issue. Chain letters with multiple signatures or sent to multiple publications will not be printed.

Letters may not address stories published in other newspapers.

All letters will be edited for grammar, punctuation and brevity.

The Statesman-Examiner reserves the right to reject letters. Letters meeting our standards will be published on a space-available basis. Only one letter per writer per month. Local writers will be given first priority. Email letters to editor@statesmanexaminer.com, or mail them to 220 S. Main St., Colville.

OPINION

Our Voice

Help reduce fire danger by being cautious

Catastrophic wildfires have become a scary reality during the hot dry months of the year in Washington and Oregon, largely due to public lands that are full of bug-infested and diseased trees, which make great fuel when a careless smoker tosses a cigarette out the car window, or lightening strikes.

State and federal agencies are taking a new look at how forests are managed with the costs to battle wildland fires rising from \$37 million between 2008 and 2010 to \$153 million by 2018, according to the Department of Natural Resources.

Fires that burn intensely enough to sear the ground, setting the stage for erosion and widespread devastation have caused state and federal legislators to rethink management practices.

However, changing environmental policy is a slow-moving process because resource protection is a hot button issue, with some activist groups legally challenging any move by man to intervene in the natural order of a forest's growth cycle.

The U.S. Forest Service reports that 2.2 million homes in Washington now lie in the potential wake of a wildfire, which has prompted DNR to initiate a prevention campaign.

Last year, there were 160 wildfires on lands in Stevens County that are under the jurisdiction of the Department of Natural Resources.

Colville is ranked 15th on the state's list of top 25 places where wildfires can be expected each season. A total of 4,720 households are exposed to the threat, says DNR's report.

Also listed is Deer Park, which is ranked 12th with 6,684 homes at risk.

The regional DNR office in Colville oversees public and private properties in Stevens, Ferry, Pend Orielle, Okanogan and Spokane counties.

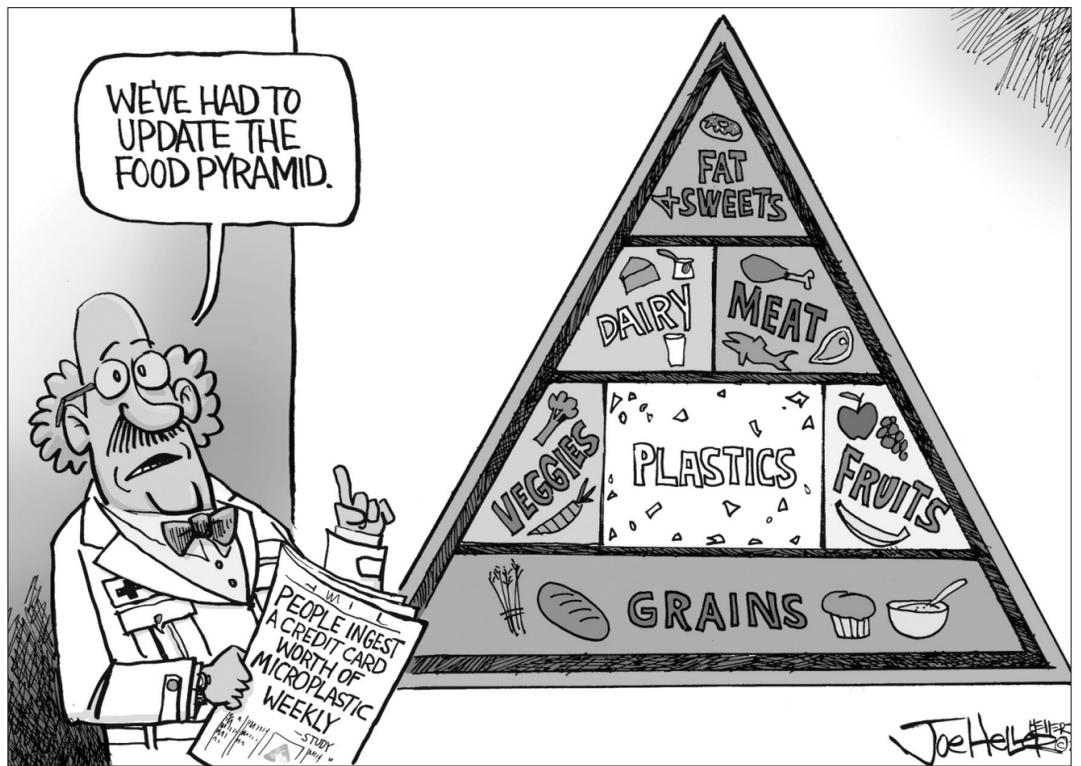
Four staffers are available to assess properties and advise landowners about steps they can take to minimize risks.

We all need to take whatever precautions we can to minimize fire danger as landscapes begin to dry out.

Already this year, DNR has responded to 478 fire calls. Officials are asking state residents to follow these safety tips to reduce the potential for a major wildfire:

- Do not park vehicles in dry, grassy areas as residual heat from exhaust systems can ignite dry grass;
- Campfires are allowed only when a burn restriction on them is not in place, but must be built in approved fire pits on DNR-managed lands;
- Ensure there is a shovel and buckets of water near any campfire;
- Never use flammable or combustible liquids, such as gasoline, propane or lighter fluid to start or increase a campfire;
- State regulations prohibit the open burning of any material that creates dense, toxic smoke or noxious odors. Burning paper and cardboard can easily fly up to start new fires.
- Never walk away from a smoldering campfire, make sure the site is cold before leaving;
- Portable camp stoves are a safer option than campfires at any time of year.
- It is always illegal to light fireworks or use incendiary ammunition or exploding targets on DNR-protected lands.

— Our Voice is the opinion of the editorial board of the Statesman-Examiner and Deer Park Tribune.



Racism: An uncomfortable truth

I set out for my day trip to Fort Spokane last week expecting to learn a lot about military history, which I did, but I left that museum with a feeling of great sadness.

Why? Because the story of the fort is the story of how America's "Manifest Destiny," played out in horrific acts of racism against Native Americans.

Manifest Destiny was an early belief that the U.S. was destined by God to expand its dominion and spread democracy and capitalism across the continent. In those times, Native Americans were viewed as "savages" by much of the white population, so the invasion of their lands didn't matter, much as it hadn't mattered to enslave the black race, also regarded as inferior.

Don't get me wrong, I am not saying this to bash America. I am just highlighting its greatest flaw. We are still the world's

great hope because our constitution embodied a revolutionary idea — a recognition that people's rights were granted directly by the Creator and not government, and that the power lay in the people.

Under the 14th Amendment, all citizens born in America or naturalized were to be given equal protection under the law.

Obviously, progress on that front has been slow and I don't know if we will ever stop injustice, although we must try.

I strongly disagree with the growing movement to strip away our history by only focusing on its racism. We need to learn from the past to avoid repeating it.

We also need to acknowledge that, as many bad things as this nation has done, there have been a staggering amount of good. America is the most generous nation on Earth and impoverished and oppressed people around the world benefit from our charitable spirit.

As many of you know, I am finishing up a book about the need for prison reform that has forced me to see many things about our culture that are troubling. Two of the inmates I care for are black and they

have opened my eyes to the ugliness of learning at an early age that some people hate you because of your skin color.

One of these men grew up in the south and was bused to a white school for added abuse during the era of desegregation. His uncle had been lynched for loving a white woman.

Does that excuse my felons for their crimes? No, but I have come to see that debasing a culture creates a deep-seated shame that destroys a positive sense of identity. This injustice has fueled an inner rage in the hearts of many minorities.

My research for the book brought me to Bobbin Singh, executive director of the Oregon Justice Resource Center.

He expressed the thought that America's punitive mindset toward warehousing prisoners would not change until its citizens were finally ready to see that, from the time this nation was founded, some people have been labeled as disposable.

However, instead of working to make sure all human beings are treated with dignity and respect, there is a growing societal trend to vilify white men and authority figures,

blaming them for all of the nation's problems.

"What do we want? Dead cops! When do we want them? Now!" is a chant from a Black Lives Matter video.

A BLM organizer chants that white people should "get to the back of the bus."

Reverse racism and anarchy is not the answer. It simply creates new classes of victims, so the cycle of paybacks goes on.

America cannot survive as a culture of tribes that war against each other with the weapon of identity politics.

Identity politics create victims with unquestioned worthiness and obliterate the humanity of everyone else.

There is no utopia on this earth, there never will be. We have to realistically approach our problems as a nation and look for solutions, not vengeance.

I am taking the lessons I have learned from our history to change life for our "throwaways" in prison.

Each time I am confronted by America's failings, I am determined to do better, to be better. That is what our history has taught me.

— Raelynn Ricarte can be reached at editor@statesmanexaminer.com.



Looking Glass
Raelynn Ricarte
Managing Editor

From Our Readers

State needs to answer for flag

Our nation is currently celebrating the 75th anniversary of D-Day where at least 10,000 allied forces soldiers gave their lives or were missing in action that day alone.

One of them was my grandmother's younger brother Charlie, who survived the beach assault but was killed by Nazi soldiers shortly thereafter in inland France.

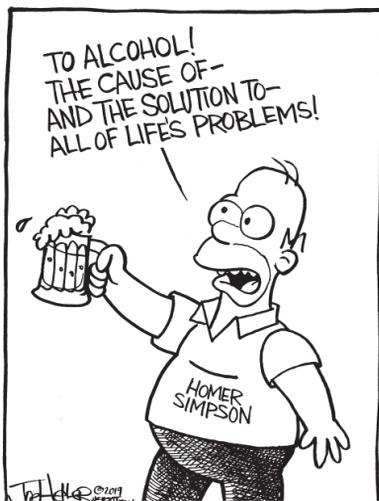
For the month of June, DSHS offices around the state have pulled down the POW/MIA flag to fly the Rainbow flag, the banner of the worldwide LGBTQ movement.

This action was (as I understand it) authorized by the openly homosexual director of DSHS, Cheryl Strange.

Since when do the commemorations of LGBTQ activists trump those of the vast majority of Americans?

It is my understanding that the only flag Washington state has given express permission to fly under the American flag and the Washington State flag on government properties is the POW/MIA flag. (specifically RCW 1.20.017 Passed in 2002).

I have requested clarification of this law from state Sen. Shelly Short, and by what authority DSHS is allowed to take this action.



The law makes sense in that you simply cannot accommodate every will-nilly flavor of the week organization or political cause that wants to fly their flag on state government property.

In the name of fairness, decency and tolerance of community standards, our state government should not be promoting the cause of the Rainbow flag.

The flag should come down with all possible speed and never go up again.

Lawrence Stickney
Addy

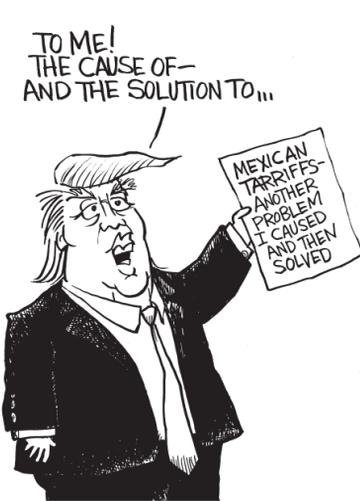
Our Profit-Is-God culture is unsafe
From recent evidence that Boeing sacrificed safety for profit with Federal Aviation Administration complicity (essentially

letting Boeing self-regulate and making the U.S. the last country to ground 737s), we again realize we vitally need strong regulations and independent regulators.

Absence of oversight in our profit-is-god culture encourages cost-cutting that compromises safety.

In his 2003 book, *The Future of Freedom*, noted analyst Fareed Zakaria describes the vanishing social responsibility over time of wealthy interests, such as corporations.

Accompanying this has been a huge increase in wealth inequality, further exacerbated by President Trump's tax cuts for the rich that gave the top 1 percent an average 2018 after-tax income increase 55 times that of the middle fifth of American house-



thing" and "global-warming-is-a-hoax," yet Republicans, including U.S. Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, characteristically won't stand up to the president on such extremely important problems.

Norm Luther
Spokane

Don't mess up our town's good thing

I'm trying to stop trouble before it starts. Times are a-changin'. You can see the handwriting on the wall. This is going to be a hot summer in more ways than one.

Last summer we saw rioting in the streets of the big cities over the political issues of our day.

This summer things are going to get even worse.

Last August, we also saw a series of back and forth letters to the editor in the *Statesman-Examiner*, that

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Email letters to the editor to publisher@statesmanexaminer.com, or mail to *Statesman-Examiner*, P.O. Box 271, Colville, WA 99114.

Please make sure to include contact information for verification purposes, or questions.

Mary Ann Evert
Colville