

Opinion

Editorial

Feliz covidad

It's been a hard nine months. The next few are going to be harder. It's our first pandemic holiday season, political tensions are extreme and will continue that way well into 2021, and then we'll be coming up on the first anniversary of the first round of state-imposed COVID restrictions and recommendations.

Where will we be then? That depends on what we do now.

We are being asked to do a lot, and give up a lot, and trust a lot, because there is so much at stake. Our lives, our livelihoods, our health care system, our sense of community — all are in critical condition, primed for the intensive care unit. Or worse. We wait for vaccines that may or may not work, scanning the news for hopeful headlines. But again and again, it has to be explained that vaccines are not a cure for the coronavirus. Vaccines are preventatives — if they work, and if people accept them.

Absent vaccines, there are preventatives we can take advantage of. If only we would. The horrifying raw numbers demonstrate that many Americans are not even thinking about prevention, or the consequences of ignoring protocols that could save lives. Politics, defiance, ignorance — and, when we are feeling uncharitable toward the selfish stance of the anti-mask freedom fakers, arrogance — have not only made the pandemic harder to contain but also more deadly by the day.

The facts are not in dispute: The pandemic is now beyond a curve or a wave, it's a tsunami engulfing the country. That was predicted, by people who actually know what they are talking about, like Dr. Anthony Fauci — who gets death threats for his trouble.

At this point, the deniers, the hoaxers and every useless idiot the White House trots out to lie on Fox News are irrelevant. They think what they think, believe what they believe, and they are wrong. Too many people in the media treat them as if they have something important to say, or that they represent a legitimate viewpoint. They do not. They are an impediment to the nation's recovery.

But not even deniers, hoaxers, spineless politicians or ignorant people deserve to get sick or die from the coronavirus. Faced with staggering increases in infections and deaths, and an overwhelmed health care system that is losing people daily to exhaustion, frustration or COVID, even some Republican red state governors are imposing restrictions. Too little, too late, but something at least.

Gov. Jay Inslee has taken a lot of flak for his hard-nosed approach to containing the virus, even as he continues to stress voluntarily compliance over enforcement. He's doing the right thing by asking us to cooperate in containing the pandemic. This might be our last best chance to keep COVID from morphing into an even more catastrophic plague.

All we have to do is give up our holidays.

OK, not funny. But the impending holiday season can either be the best opportunity for the virus to explode, or our best opportunity to slow it down. That will mean sacrifice, inconvenience, disrupted seasonal activities, and perhaps fatal consequences for many small businesses.

No question, the restrictions the governor imposed this week portend a bleak holiday season by traditional standards, without the usual human contact and shared experiences that are so important to us at this time of year. It's hard to believe that the restrictions will be significantly eased in a month.

Those restrictions — on almost any gatherings, on restaurants and bars, on gyms and indoor sports, on retail operations, on weddings, funerals and church services — will affect all of us in one way or another. We'll feel it in the valley, where tourism is likely to be impacted despite a fortuitous early season snow covering. People will still want to come, but tourism services will be limited and visitors can't just camp out all over the place like they did last summer. We'll adapt, like we always do, and maintain the best possible attitude.

Of all the things we are being asked to endure, the simplest, most-effective one seems to be the least popular.

So what? It's really easy.

Just wear a mask.

Just wear a mask. They're plentiful to come by, and don't have to be uncomfortable.

Just wear a mask, if nothing else. You'll be helping protect other people, and yourself.

Just wear a mask.

How hard is that? How in the world is that too much to ask?

And why do we have to keep asking?

EXERCISE YOUR FREEDOM. Letters must be fewer than 350 words and may be edited for libel, grammar and taste.

Send to: Methow Valley News, P.O. Box 97, Twisp, WA 98856, fax to (509) 997-3277, email editor@methowvalleynews.com or drop by 502 S. Glover St., Twisp

Methow Valley News

PUBLISHED WEEKLY SINCE 1903

502 S. Glover Street • P.O. Box 97, Twisp, WA 98856
(509) 997-7011 • FAX (509) 997-3277

editor@methowvalleynews.com • www.methowvalleynews.com

Don Nelson, PUBLISHER/EDITOR
Marcy Stamper, REPORTER
Malcolm Griffes, REPORTER
Ashley Ahearn, REPORTER
Ryan Edwards, DESIGN
Dean Hussey, ONLINE MEDIA
Sheila Ward, SALES ASSOCIATE
Tera Evans, OFFICE MANAGER
Paige Wolfe, DISTRIBUTION

CONTRIBUTORS:

Joanna Bastian
Shelley Smith Jones
Ashley Lodato
Sarah Schrock
Ann McCreary
Erik Brooks
Len Baublitz
Rosalie Hutson
Solveig Torvik
Dave Ward

Display advertising deadline for this newspaper is on the Thursday previous to publication at 5 p.m. Classified advertising deadline is Monday at noon. The deadline for news items is Monday at noon.

THE METHOW VALLEY NEWS (USPS Publication No. 343480) is published weekly by MVN Publishing, LLC, 502 S. Glover St., Twisp, WA 98856. Subscription rates: \$39 inside Okanogan County, \$50 outside of Okanogan County and \$65 outside of Washington state per year (in advance). Periodical class postage paid at Twisp, Washington, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to THE METHOW VALLEY NEWS, P.O. Box 97, Twisp, WA 98856.

THE METHOW VALLEY NEWS does not refund subscription payments except to the extent that the newspaper might fail to meet its obligation to publish each week of the individual subscription period, in which case the prorated cost of those issues missed would be refunded.

Member of the Washington Newspaper Publishers Association

Front page banner photo by Don Nelson: Mt. Gardner

Box 97: Letters to the editor

Dig deep

Dear Editor:

Just tell me the truth. Our country's voting system is a mess. I had no idea it was so filled with corruption. As citizens, we deserve to have confidence in our voting process, to know that every legal vote will be counted, and that no amount of money or political party can illegally influence our elections.

And why aren't all the parties jumping on board to make sure our voting system is simple, clear and easy to validate? If there's nothing to hide, no amount of scrutiny should be a problem. This isn't a Republican or Democrat or Libertarian or Independent issue. This is a national security issue.

If we can't trust our voting system, we have no republic. So I am all for digging deep into the voting systems in each state to make sure they are only counting legal votes, and that no political party can disenfranchise any other party from observing the vote count, or manipulate the voting system, or count votes after the voting deadlines.

So go for it — dig deep — expose the truth. I can handle it.

And by the way, no one should be claiming victory at this point in the election. Each state has to officially validate their election results, and then the electors for each state (via the electoral college) vote appropriately. We are a long way from that happening. So cool your jets — let's see how all this plays out.

Chrystal Perrow
Winthrop

Why are you here?

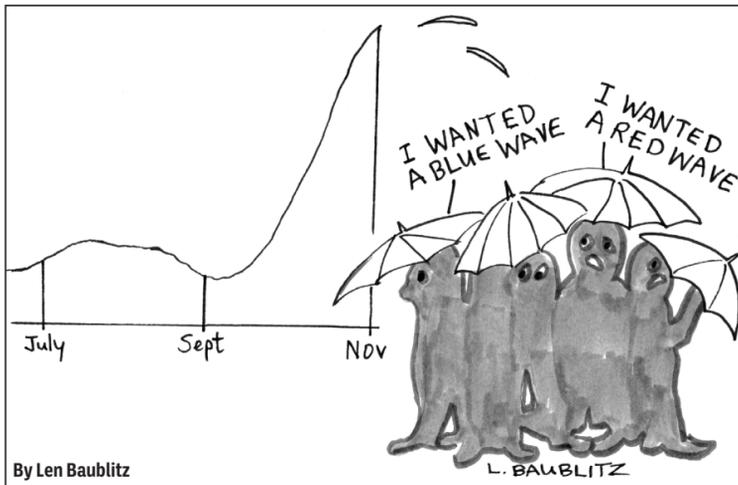
Dear Editor:

As the sun set, snow spilled from heaven's kitchen like flour onto the valley floor. The smell of burning wax from ski sheds began mixing with the rising smoke of woodstoves.

Snow falling in the dark lends focus to what "year-rounder" portends; but then wasn't everyone a visitor first including those born between the climbing walls and the migrating Asians who settled Methow — "low lying valley with blunt hills all around."

Part-timers know little of daily nuances and the seasons rhythms; but given time they will fall in step or beat feet back to whence they came.

For instance, the phrase "open range" never really had any special meaning to the



By Len Baublitz

"newbie;" until now, with the snow coming down around their dream home along with the cattle from the surrounding high country.

All comes together in a gestalt. Every spring ranchers bring cattle up into the U.S. Forest Service hills above. For six months, Elmer and Elsie wander along the ridgetop on a family outing grazing for free without a care in the world. There are few rustlers, cougars or wolves anywhere in sight. Just mountain bikers tearing down "big banked corners and jumps" and hikers in search of the perfect social media post could possibly disturb these peaceful bovines. But, when the temps start to drop and quaking aspen leaves burnt with color fall, the cattle mosey on down in search of food not covered with snow or, ever better, their Uber Rancher offering a lift back to the barn.

The vacation home owner never saw anything like this at Christmas while using their three-day ski pass or on Fourth of July at the rodeo and follow-up Thompson Ridge mountain bike stampede. What they are now witnessing in Zoom Town is novel beyond description. Huge mammals chewing on their cuds are staring back at them through the sliding glass doors into their safe shelters. White-Butt and Black-Face are nonplussed, as well, at not being invited in for a "cuppa" and fireside chat.

In times like these, everyone has something to chew on.

E. Anton Kubena
Mazama

Snow blower warning

Dear Editor:

To my fellow snow country folks: Now that it looks like winter is settling in, I feel moved to pass on some annual advice. Especially given the Zoom Town reality of several

new members to our community, some who undoubtedly will be operating a snow blower for the first time.

Over 26 years ago, I had a moment of brain-deadness and ended up turning off a snow blower with my left hand, being flown to Harbor View Hospital in Seattle where three hand surgeons spent 21 man-hours rebuilding my hand. I write to remind all of you snow blower operators this winter season to not repeat my stupidity!

Even with new designs and safety features on today's machines (mine was 20 years old 26 years ago!) blowers can still jam with wet snow or "yard" objects. Due to the potential kinetic energy stored in the engine compression and belt tension when jammed, the impellers in a blower can rotate slightly when a jammed or clogged machine is freed up. There is very little clearance in the impeller housings ... if your hand is the "freeing" agent you can lose fingers or an entire hand.

Never use your hand or foot to clear a clogged or jammed snow blower. Use a broom handle or long, stout stick. All new blowers come with a plastic paddle used to clear jammed blowers. Some even advise removing the spark plug to release any engine compression before working on a machine.

Snow blowers like many powered devices are in and of themselves not dangerous. They do need to be respected and operated with care and attention. Fatigue, being in a hurry, distractions, objects left out in the snow, etc., are the real dangers. Hopefully you will remember my story every time you operate a snow blower and not create your own story. Have a safe winter season.

Barry Stromberger
Twisp

GUEST COLUMN

Measuring the Methow's Valley's flux: TwispWorks survey seeks your input

BY JULIE TATE LIBBY

Since the opening of the North Cascades Highway in 1972 and the creation of the North Cascades National Park and neighboring wilderness areas, the Methow Valley has been quietly restructuring from a sleepy, resource-dependent community at the end of the road, to a thriving bedroom community for Seattleite second homeowners and outdoor recreationalists. While the ratio of full-time to part-time residents has remained remarkably consistent, (roughly 59% full-time residents and 41% part-time since 2005), new data on population trends, the number of homes built, and COVID-19 in-migration suggests that the Methow is in a state of flux.

In November last year, TwispWorks began compiling data on the Methow Valley as part of a comprehensive economic study that would show how much tourism and second home ownership contributed to the economy. The study sought to understand the economic drivers of our community that made the Methow different than the rest of Okanogan County, upon which most of the employment and industry data was based. Central questions to the study included: How much does tourism contribute to our economy? What about second homeowners and remote workers? How much are the building and real estate industries worth? How do residents make it in a recreational economy based on tourism and second home ownership?

To answer some of the questions, we began with a Small Business Survey, which launched the week before Gov. Inslee's shelter-in-place order. Within weeks, we pivoted the survey to include information on COVID-19 and made it part of the application for the Small Business Emergency Grant. Questions in the survey had to do with specific needs of businesses and employers and covered topics like housing, child care and affordability for tourism workers and employees.

The second set of data we planned on collecting had to do with second homeowners and remote workers, an issue that has come

to the fore during COVID-19. Three weeks ago, the Methow Valley News reported on the "Zoom Town" economy of the Methow Valley, citing comments from real estate agents who described families and new residents who took the plunge and moved to the Methow during the pandemic as their jobs went online.

Like other outdoor recreation areas (Bozeman, Flathead Lake, the Grand Tetons) real estate sales in the Methow have recorded record-high transactions, with homes selling for significantly more than the asking price. Prior to COVID-19, tech-savvy Seattle already had a higher-than-average remote worker population, 6-7% compared to 3% nationally. Today almost half of all Seattle adults work online.

Assessing impacts

For the Methow, this restructuring could mean many things. According to new statistics based on the number of homes in the Methow Valley Watershed, the Methow's full-time population is around 6,120, while our part-time population is around 4,180. With restructuring due to COVID-19, this ratio could be changing. Maybe we'll see a 70/30 split or even 80/20 as more people are able to work remotely. Additionally, the impact of remote wages is yet to be seen. The average Microsoft or Google mid-salaried employee makes \$118,000 to \$164,000 a year — between two to three times that of the average household income in the Methow Valley. Remote wages represent a boon to the economy (more money gets spent here), but also contributes to the rising cost of homes and property taxes.

The survey that TwispWorks is launching this week seeks to understand these timely impacts on our economy. Some of the questions are geared towards second homeowners and retirees; some are geared towards remote workers, and some are geared towards long-time valley residents. We need to know, for example, how many days on average second homeowners spend in the Methow in order to calculate their financial contribution to the economy. Likewise, we need to know how many remote workers we have in the

Methow to understand their impact on the economy. We also want to know how retirees envision their future: whether they feel like they can live out their lives in the Methow Valley or not.

Whether you consider yourself a local, a second homeowner, or a remote worker, this survey is for you. Please visit www.surveymonkey.com/r/5RCGZYP to take part.

The Methow's restructuring is not new to most residents. It's a process we've watched over the last 30 years. What is new, perhaps, is the scale and flavor of change. We all witnessed the crowded trails on Washington Pass this summer. We all noticed the number of second homeowners here in March and April. We were surprised at the number of tourists who flocked to the valley all summer — during an essential-travel-only order from the governor. I suppose we all feel a little uneasy about these changes. We're grateful for our community. We're grateful for our wilderness and open spaces, and we don't know where these changes will take us.

The structural changes occurring today will have a lasting impact on the Methow. Communities don't go backwards. They grow, they change, and they develop. We want to understand these changes so we can plan for the future. The results of this study will be open to the public and any organization making strategic plans, whether it's to do with affordable housing, child care availability, business ventures, or the preservation of agricultural land and open space. For those who've recently moved here and for those who grew up here, please take the survey this week. As we all saw in the recent elections, every voice really does matter.

Julie Tate Libby is the Program Director at TwispWorks.

Rural Restructuring Study: Take the survey

- Participate in the TwispWorks survey at www.surveymonkey.com/r/5RCGZYP.
- For more information, email jtate-libby@twispworks.org.