Why are we here if we aren’t trying to make a difference?

I have been fortunate to witness my family making a difference in the lives of others, in their own way and throughout their lives. Whether it be my mom’s and dad’s efforts on the local food pantry, my dad’s dad’s commitment to the local Bridge food pantry, or my dad’s mom’s way of helping people during the day, I was blessed with a family that has always worked hard to help and make a difference for others. However, it doesn’t stop there.

The examples I could give about people through- out our Perham community making a difference by what they do every day are endless. It’s an ongoing commitment that they choose to want to do more. I know it does me. I don’t claim to have all of the answers, but I believe if you don’t have community commitment, you don’t have a community at all.

COVID-19 has unfortunately thrown this world for a loop. We all know that one death is too many, so watching the numbers add up each day is disturbing to say the least. Those in the social unrest and it’s just about enough to make someone want to turn off the lights and just go back to bed. However, I do know that we will get through this.

Challenges provide us the opportunity to make adjustments in our lives, which can ultimately lead to improvement. It doesn’t seem to matter what the struggle is, challenges almost always provide the opportunity to come out on the other side stronger than ever. I truly believe that will be the case for our community.

Several months ago, upon hearing about Covid-19 shutting down many local businesses, many family-owned businesses and individuals decided to help out. The guiding way throughout this concept was simple. If you can give, please give. If you can’t give, please help out. The Perham Area Community Starfish Fund was born. The idea was to try to make a difference for each business that could use the help (if you don’t know the Starfish story, I highly recommend you Google it). Many people came forward and made a difference. We shared these dollars with dozens of businesses. These are businesses we have and will continue to make Perham what it is — a small town. I believe we can work together and make a difference.

Whether it’s an individual, a group of peo- ple or a community that truly, it’s you who navigation life when things are going smoothly. It’s hard to have as all the answers but I believe we have who we are and what we value. It’s been in navigating life when things are going smoothly, a business, or a community, it’s pretty easy to continue to make Perham what it is — a small town. Businesses that have and will shared these dollars with dozens of business-

We've been able to conduct significant time savings and provide improved teaching and learning experience to our students. They have been able to explore new tools to effectively communicate with families and the community. Looking ahead, as difficult as that is for all of us currently, I am confident that our local schools (both public and private) will come out of this stronger and better than before. It is hard to know what the future will look like, but we will learn from our experiences and be a timeless leader to the next generation.

I’ve heard from many people that things will never be ‘the same’ in our schools. While there may be some truth to that statement, I think the COVID-19 pandemic has also resulted in a greater understanding and appreciation for ‘the way things were’ and, frankly, have been for many decades in the Perham-Dent School District.

The same passion, commitment, and excellence that our teachers, principals, school board members, paraprofessionals, secretaries, cooks, custodians, coaches and volunteers have shown for so long were needed and clearly displayed at an even higher level over the last six months.

Teachers were given just eight days last March to stop on a dime, switch gears, change directions, and transition from their tradition- al school system and environment to a distance learning model for all. We learned a lot from that experience, and it has certainly helped create a better situation this fall for everyone.

Administrators worked with staff and community volunteers to find a way to end the 2019- 2020 school year on a positive note. These efforts resulted in a parking lot graduation ceremony/parade, creative videos shared with students and their families to stay connected, and box trips around the district to see kids and give a wave. Anything to help all students understand that they and their education mattered.

Teachers made every effort to modify their lesson plans and delivery methods to help students successfully navigate this new distance learning. They spent evenings calling on “Zooming” with students and parents to help with homework or to just check in with them. Support staff went from their normal duties of aiding teachers and supervising playgrounds to starting up and managing a child care facility for essential employees. They prepared and delivered over 300,000 meals to families throughout the district.

With all of the changes that have been necessary because of the pandemic, the teaching staff and administrators have faced the unexpected and unforeseen things needed to change. Our teachers will cut out a program, with new age technology that better aligns with the learning styles of kids today, maximizing achievement and preparing all of them for suc- cess in an ever-changing world. The traditional classroom may be a thing of the past. The district as a whole will now have better tools to effectively communicate with families and the community. Looking ahead, as difficult as that is for all of us currently, I am confident that our local schools (both public and private) will come out of this stronger and better than before. It is hard to know what the future will look like, but we will learn from our experiences and be a timeless leader to the next generation.
Continuing to be strong together

We have invested in equipment and have strong relationships with our vendors. We have stopped serving in these areas because of the pandemic and our employees have worked hard to keep us providing services.

In Otter Tail County, we have the same goal as everyone else — to keep our citizens safe. We have been working hard to ensure that people have access to the resources they need.

We are here if we aren’t trying to make a difference while doing it. Why are we here if we aren’t trying to make a difference while doing it? Is it just to provide outstanding insurance, to assist and stabilize businesses through the pandemic, and to continue to grow. We are here to provide outstanding insurance, to assist and stabilize businesses through the pandemic, and to continue to grow.

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