

OPINIONS

Students' lack of knowledge earns label of 'Dumb American'

Every few months, dozens of North Scott high school students show up at local city council meetings. Unfortunately, they are not there by choice. They are instructed by their government teachers to attend so they can observe how local government works. It is a great idea – in theory.

Students who choose to attend McCausland City Council meetings usually get more than they bargained for. Mayor Buzz Koehn challenges them to first answer a question before he will sign papers they brought to confirm their attendance at the meeting.

After being told to stand, Mayor Koehn likes to ask, “Who is the governor of Iowa?” This is a fair question, and it is reasonable to assume that a high school student, who has most likely grown up in the state, should know the answer. But they do not. Every time a new group of kids come to a meeting, they do not know who is the governor of their state. Just once, I wish the mayor would ask if the students know his name.

During last Tuesday’s meeting, one of the students asked Mayor Koehn for a clue, “What letter does the last name begin with?” When given the letter B, one student finally asked, “Terry Branstad?”

Unsatisfied, Mayor Koehn then asked the name of the lieutenant governor of Iowa. More silence was followed by nervous laughter among the students. He asked another question, “Is the lieutenant governor male or female?” One of the students quickly answered, “Male!” I groaned. Wrong! The lieutenant governor of Iowa is Kim Reynolds, and no, I did not have to look that up.

Feeling sorry for the kids, Mayor Koehn asked what NFL football teams played the previous night. There was no problem answering that question. I was embarrassed. They knew all about football but not the name of their state’s governor?

Still unhappy with the students’ lack of local knowledge, Mayor Koehn asked them to name a current world event. This was followed by an uncomfortable silence. I cringed. C’mon, you can do it, I thought. Russia is invading Ukraine, there was an earthquake in Napa Valley, flooding in India, fighting in Syria, beheadings by ISIS. This is easy. Pick one!

The mayor tried to prompt them by asking, “What type of organization is ISIS?”

“A terrorist organization,” one of the students said. Finally, somebody has been paying attention to what’s going on in the world. Kind of.

I cannot fault the social studies teachers for the students’ apparent lack of knowledge. No, I fault the parents. Conversations are not taking place at home over the dinner table. Kids are plugged in to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, playing video games or watching television. It’s time for the parents to change the channel from Nickelodeon to NBC Nightly News or CNN. Take the headphones away and turn on the news. Discuss what is going on in the world.

Of course, this is easy for me to say. I am a news reporter. It is the perfect job for a news junkie like myself. But you



Sarah's space

by Sarah Hayden

shouldn’t have to be a fan of the news to know what’s going on in the world. It is our civic responsibility. It is our responsibility as parents.

But it’s not just local high school kids who are lacking in overall world and government knowledge. I once hosted a dinner party around the time of the 2012 presidential election, and naturally, the election was a topic of discussion. One of my guests asked who was running for vice president with President Obama. I answered, “The current vice president is running again.” “Who is that?” she asked. I’m serious, she actually asked who was the vice president!

“Joe Biden,” I said. “Oh, I don’t keep up on that kind of stuff,” she replied. That kind of stuff? You mean, important stuff? This was not a North Scott graduate. This person was from Waterloo.

Another time, I was talking with a woman from Davenport about what it was like to grow up in Germany during the ‘80s. She asked me if I lived in East Germany or West Germany. West, of course. Then she asked me if that was the “free part or the Communist part.” She also was unaware Germany reunified in 1990. She asked me what it was called since they merged back into one country. “Germany,” I said.

This was a woman in her fifties. She was alive when all this happened. She should have known better.

I am starting to wonder if this is an American problem – not a young student problem and not an Iowa problem. When I lived in Germany, I was keenly aware of being called a “Dumb American” by Germans. Is this a reputation we have earned?

According to the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), the U.S. is currently ranked 36th in the world in education.

To determine the ranking, more than 510,000 15-year-olds in 64 countries were tested in math, reading and science in 2012. The test is given every three years.

Singapore, South Korea, Japan, China, Switzerland, Canada and Germany were among the highest scores. Even Russia and Latvia scored better than the U.S.

If we are going to continue to compete globally, we have to do better. Education does not just take place in school. It has to carry over at home. The burden of teaching should not rest solely on the shoulders of teachers. Ask your children, do they know who is the governor of Iowa? And I hope you do not have to tell them his name begins with the letter B.

I also hope the next time I see a group of North Scott high school students at a city council meeting, they truly earn the mayor’s signature on their piece of paper.



Farm Belt lawmakers are fearful that the biggest crop on record might be dumped on the ground this season due to huge shipping backlogs on overburdened rail systems in the Midwest.*

(*) A tribute to the late *Des Moines Register* cartoonist Frank Miller who inspired Jim Turley's first cartoon.

1,100 attended Co-op annual meeting

Sept. 18, 1974

The following youth served as officers of the Scott County 4-H Council: Tom Dittmer, Les Kuhl, Sherrie Curtis, Roger Friederichs, Gary Ewoltdt, and Merle Turkle. Walker’s Clothing Store in DeWitt advertised two men’s dress shirts for \$9; western-cut corduroy jeans for \$2.50/pair; and boys’ lightweight jackets for \$2.88. Eldridge Co-op president James Mohr presided over the annual meeting with a record crowd of 1,100 in attendance. Admission for the North Scott Music Boosters chili supper was \$1.50 for junior high and older and \$1.00 for youth in elementary school and younger. Brenda Kaczinski, Cheryl Drumm, JoDee Hamann, Wanda Brisker, Michelle Baughman, Karen DeWulf, Pat Green, Sue Gradin and Sandy Fahrenkrog were on the 1974 cheer squad at North Scott High School. Randy Hamilton and Kevin Jansen were North Scott football players of the week. Jansen, a junior, played a great defensive game against Pleasant Valley, getting eight tackles. He also collected 157 yards on 17 carries. Hamilton, a senior, led an outstanding defensive effort by grabbing nine tackles. The entire defensive unit played a great game. They gave Pleasant Valley only 23 yards of offense and overpowered the Spartans by the score of 21-8. The price for an adult season ticket was \$6.00

Sept. 13, 1989

Brian Granger of Eldridge, a University of Northern Iowa Presidential Scholar, spent seven weeks studying in Leningrad at one of the most prestigious institutions of higher education in the Soviet Union. Granger was majoring in Russian area studies and Spanish at U.N.I. The movie at the DeWitt Operahouse was “Honey, I Shrunk the Kids.” Park View Summer Fest co-chairmen, Becky and Bill Rehn, presented a check of \$160 to the Long Grove Fire Dept. and also donated \$100 to Neil Armstrong Elementary School toward a public address system. The city of Eldridge started a program to help its residents collect grass and leaf trimming by providing 7-cubic-foot paper sacks at no cost to residents. Scouts from Troop 203 travelled to Wisconsin and biked a 100 miles of trail near Cassville. Group members were Eric Varcho, J.J. Gruntorad, Jason Weibel, Matt Weibel and Jerry Reidl. The North Scott volleyball team reached the semifinals of its own Lancer Invitational Tournament before being sidelined by Bettendorf. Brenda Iverson, Jill Brandon, Sarah Siemsen, Tenley Murphy and Jenni Claeys all gave stellar performances



Our Past from the files of *The North Scott Press* compiled by Linda Tubbs

according to coach Deb Menke.

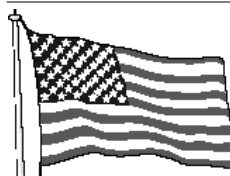
Sept. 15, 1999

Kevin Engelbrecht, son of Arlan and Diana Engelbrecht of Eldridge, was only the third North Scott FFA member to earn the American FFA Degree, the highest honor the National FFA can bestow upon a member. Scott County dairy producers Gene and Shirley Newell were honored were honored with lifetime memberships in the Iowa Ayrshire Breeder’s Association. Scott County residents Carl Zurborg and Norman Frye joined with other members of the Iowa Barn Foundation to spread the word about preserving parts of Iowa’s history through the restoration and preservation of aging barns and agricultural buildings. Among the interesting artifacts that Frye had rescued was a seven-piece mortise joint found in a barn that was being torn down. North Scott football team’s high-powered offense scored the most points in a game since 1974 when they defeated Clinton 49-17. Sean Stender, Kris Kuhlman, Jason Blocker, Shawn Smith, and Jason Thavenet all put points on the board along with Josh Lacey, who was six for six in kicking extra points following touch downs.

Sept. 16, 2009

North Scott School District officials took steps to emphasize good health habits and to stop the spread of the H1N1 virus. They also planned to hold seasonal flue vaccination clinics. Sue McBride was honored for 40 years of service to the North Scott School District. North Scott’s football team took advantage of big plays to defeat Davenport Central 45-24. Travis Anderson scored on a 94-yard interception return, and Alex Rankin repeated the feat with a 31-yard interception return. Rankin also scored by catching a pass from quarterback Cody Manthe and taking it in for a score making it a successful 78-yard play. Jay Whitmore and Sarah Carlin were 5K run winners at McCausland’s Labor Day festivities. Cale Straley and Brooklyn Harvey were winners in the ¼-mile run.

*Letters to the editor are on page 16A and
Shirley Davis' column is on page 17A*



Write to us . . .

Signed letters to the editor are welcome. Send them to: The North Scott Press, P.O. Box 200, Eldridge, IA 52748 or to: btubbs@northscottpress.com

Readers' Poll

Last week's question:
NS FIELD HOUSE

With 66 votes counted, 27 percent said they are in favor of the proposed North Scott Field House; that the entire district will benefit from a much-needed new facility. 18 percent said they have not decided; they can see the benefits but are unsure if it should be a priority now. 55 percent are against it; that the district should not be committing resources to an unnecessary frill.

CY-HAWK SERIES

Should the annual rivalry football game between Iowa and Iowa State continue?

Vote online at

www.northscottpress.com.

Results will be published next week.

Signed letters to the editor on any topic are welcomed. Send to: North Scott Press, P.O. Box 200, Eldridge, IA 52748, or e-mail: btubbs@northscottpress.com.

