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CAREERS, PUBLIC NOTICES, SERVICE DIRECTORY

INSIDE

## 'It's just fun'

## New plates, and 'oodles of possibilities'

If you drive much, and even if you don't, you've probably noticed some new Idaho license plates recently.

New black and white plates and white and teal-colored plates went into effect last year. Appeal to Heaven plates and the USS Idaho commemorative plate became fully effective as of last month. We're seeing more and



TIM WOODWARD

more of the new plates as they catch on and people use them to replace their standard red, white and blue plates.

Seeing the new plates around town made me wonder just how many license plate designs Idaho has and what some of the more interesting and unusual ones are.

Granted, license plates aren't something that occupy a lot of our waking thoughts. The only time we normally think about them is when it's time to renew them. We aren't all Ed Chamberlains.

Who's Ed Chamberlain?

Glad you asked. He was an elderly man who lived across the alley from my parents' house when I was a kid. He must have had 20 or more plates attached to a wall of his garage. I never understood why anyone would be that enamored of license plates, but had to admit that they were more eye catching than the usual garden tools, tennis rackets, etc.

So how many kinds of license plates does the State of Idaho have these days?

Ten?

Twenty?

More than 40, actually. Most are specialty plates promoting wildlife, agriculture and other subjects.

By far the most numerous, however, are the standard red, white and blue plates that have been around since the late 1980s.

Those plates have special meaning for the Woodwards. The state held a contest in the late 1980s asking children to submit designs for them. Thousands of kids entered, and I'll be darned if our daughter Jennifer's design wasn't the one chosen.

Sounds like a tall tale, you're saying? I don't blame you, but it happens to be the truth. She still has a letter from then Gov. Cecil Andrus congratulating her on her design being the one chosen.

More WOODWARD | C4



NATALIE HOLSTEN

Jackie Belville explains the basics of mahjong to Michele Winchester at the Nampa Library's monthly mahjong event on Feb. 2.

## Mahjong growing in popularity

NATALIE HOLSTEN

For The Idaho Press

NAMPA — The sound of clacking tiles filled the air as 32 people sat around card tables, learning and playing the game of mahjong recently at the Nampa Library.

The game, which originated in China in the 19th century and is now played in many variations around the world, is enjoying a resurgence in the U.S., including right here in Idaho.

Many who came to the library's monthly mahjong night Monday, Feb. 2, were newcomers enjoying their first taste of the game, which author and mahjong aficionado Sharona Saltzman likened to "rummy on steroids."

Saltzman said in a phone interview from her home in Los Angeles that she first learned to play mahjong many years ago, but didn't love it at first. It wasn't until later when her daughter was going away to college that she tried it again and fell in love.

"I absolutely was hooked," she said. "It's good for you especially as your kids age, you need your own thing. It's a great way to connect with other women, and to have a safe place to be."

Saltzman said she loves the game so much, she hosted a special mahjong exhibition at the Museum of China in America last year, and this year has authored a book called "Tiles That Unite: Portraits of Mahjong Players Across the U.S."

More FUN | C4



Sharona Saltzman is a mahjong aficionado who has written a book titled "Tiles That Unite: Portraits of Mahjong Players Across the U.S."

## Despite love in the air, Valentine's Day is only the 3rd most popular day to get engaged



DEPOSITPHOTOS

Valentine's Day is not the most popular day for proposals.

ZUZANA PAAR

Food Drink Life

Valentine's Day is closely associated with engagement proposals, but it is not the most common day couples get engaged in the United States. Feb. 14 typically ranks third, behind Christmas Day and Christmas Eve.

Proposal timing tends to follow the structure of the holiday calendar rather than the symbolism of a single date. Travel schedules, shared time off and family gatherings create practical opportunities for major life decisions. When those factors align, proposal activity

increases, with late December consistently emerging as the most active period of the year.

## THE ENGAGEMENT SEASON

In the United States, engagement season generally runs from late November through early February, forming a defined period when proposal activity accelerates. Fewer than half of engagements occur within this window, owing to holiday travel, vacation schedules and extended time together.

Momentum builds through December and peaks across the Christmas holiday period.

Activity remains elevated into January before tapering toward the end of winter, closing out the seasonal cycle that begins around Thanksgiving.

## CHRISTMAS LEADS PROPOSAL TIMING

Christmas Day accounts for the largest share of engagement proposals, driven primarily by logistics. Couples are already gathered, travel has been coordinated months in advance and family proximity creates a ready-made setting for milestone moments.

More VALENTINE'S | C4



IDAHO PRESS FILE PHOTO

This 2020 file photos is a collage of Idaho license plates. The one that says Scenic Idaho is the one Tim Woodward's daughter Jennifer designed.

## Woodward/

The most popular of the new plates, according to Josh Thyer of the Idaho Transportation Department, are those with white letters on a black background. He refers to them as having a retro look.

"I believe the black-and-white design is modeled after license plates from the 1950s," Thyer said.

Most of the plates can be personalized, for a fee. So far I've seen only two personalized black and whites.

To me, the teal plates have a retro look. From my kid days, I seem to recall white plates with

green letters and green plates with white letters. If my memory is accurate, they alternated every year or every other year. But my memory may not be accurate. If anyone can confirm this, I'd love to hear from you.

One of the more unusual new plates is the "Appeal to Heaven" plate, which features black letters, a blue heart and a green pine tree on a white background.

Its inspiration was a Revolutionary War flag flown by George Washington's navy, including an appeal to divine providence during troubled times.

It isn't the only Revolutionary War flag our Legislature has revived. We now also have

a recreation of the Gadsden flag, featuring a coiled rattlesnake and the words "Don't Tread on Me" on a yellow background.

This flag symbolizes opposition to the suppression of personal liberties, with some of the proceeds from its sales going toward firearm safety education. If you see a vehicle with one of these plates, don't do anything to antagonize the driver. A guy with a coiled rattlesnake on his license plate isn't someone you want to rub the wrong way.

I have yet to see an Appeal to Heaven plate on a vehicle, but have seen several Don't Tread on Me plates. Feel free to draw whatever conclusion you want from that.

The assortment of plates to

choose from offers something for just about everyone. A partial list: pilot's paradise, trail riding, snowmobiling, whitewater rafting, amateur radio, old-time cars, street rods, wildlife drawings of elk, trout, bluebirds, combat wounded, Medal of Honor, Purple Heart, disabled veteran, Pearl Harbor Survivor, USS Pueblo, names of colleges and universities . . .

Oodles of possibilities, but for now I'm going to stick with the standard plates. I like the red, white and blue. And it's the least I can do for Jennifer.

**Tim Woodward's** column appears every other Saturday and is posted on [woodwardblog.com](http://woodwardblog.com) the following Mondays. Contact him at [woodwardcolumn@gmail.com](mailto:woodwardcolumn@gmail.com).

## Valentine's/

from C1  
Time off work and established holiday traditions make proposals easier to plan discreetly. The timing also allows couples to celebrate privately before sharing the news more broadly once routines resume in the new year.

### THE RETAIL CALENDAR BEHIND PROPOSAL TIMING

Engagement timing is also closely tied to jewelry purchasing cycles. The period between Black Friday and Christmas represents one of the busiest times of the year for diamond and fine jewelry sales, with retailers offering promotions, financing incentives and end-of-year inventory pushes.

Holiday bonuses and seasonal spending patterns often fund ring purchases, aligning financial readiness with proposal planning. Because many rings are bought in November and December, proposals frequently follow within the same window, reinforcing the late-December surge.

### TRAVEL DRIVES DESTINATION PROPOSALS

Holiday travel plays a significant role in engagement timing. Winter trips create built-in proposal settings, from ski resorts and tropical escapes to European Christmas markets and city break destinations decorated for the season.

Hotels and resorts increasingly offer proposal packages that include photographers, private dining setups and location planning. With couples already traveling and schedules cleared, holiday trips provide both privacy and spectacle without requiring additional logistical coordination.

### WEDDING PLANNING TIMELINES INFLUENCE PROPOSALS

How quickly couples intend to marry also influences when they propose. Engagements that take place in December allow couples to begin planning immediately in the new year, positioning them to secure venues and vendors for spring and summer weddings.

With popular venues booking 12 to 18 months in advance, earlier engagements provide more flexibility in date selection and location availability. December proposals effectively open the planning calendar at the start of the year, giving couples a logistical advantage.

### SAY 'I DO'

Valentine's Day continues to carry outsized expectations as a proposal date, reinforced by decades of marketing, media portrayals and cultural tradition. For many couples, the holiday represents the most emotionally charged moment to ask the question, even if fewer ultimately choose it.

The gap between expectation and action explains why Valentine's Day remains central to the engagement narrative. The symbolism endures, even as real-world proposal timing continues to cluster around the quieter, more private window of late December.

**Zuzana Paar** is the creator of Sustainable Life Ideas, a lifestyle blog dedicated to simple, intentional and eco-friendly living.

## Fun/

from C1  
The book features profiles of 159 players from every state, including three from Idaho. "The game really does unite people across all demographics," Saltzman said. "It doesn't matter who you are, what race, what religion. You're not too young or too old. One of the players in my book played at 8 years old."

Saltzman said she sees many reasons why the game is having a resurgence right now. "It brings people together in real life. It creates a community at a time when many people feel isolated," she said. "Another draw is the brain is active and engaged. Some people say it's a mind sport."

For those who might find that intimidating, Saltzman said to give the game a try. "It's normal to start out with trepidation," she said. "I just say give me two hours and I'll show you what it's like, and many times it will just click. The more you play, the more you learn it. Even people who have been playing for years still find nuances of the game they didn't know about."

For local elementary school teachers Michele Winchester and Tami Dozal, learning mahjong has been on their list of activities to try with their group of friends. "We were looking to find some fun things to do in the valley," Winchester shared.

Their mahjong teacher for the night was Jackie Belville. As the game started, she glanced around the room. "I can't believe there's so many people here!" she said. "We used to have trouble getting enough players for two tables."

After the initial set up of the 144 tiles used in the Nampa Library's version of Chinese mahjong, Belville explained how a roll of the dice determines who deals first. She explained the goal of the game was to make sets of three or four and a double, and explained the different tiles, decorated with different symbols like bamboo, circles, dragons, flowers and Chinese characters.

"I love the tiles," Dozal said, confirming an aspect of the game Saltzman said appeals to many people.

"People say they love the feel of the tiles," Saltzman said. "They love the sound of the tiles clicking together, love the beauty of the tiles. The tiles are like mini pieces of art."



NATALIE HOLSTEN

Interest in the game of mahjong has been growing in the valley.

### Where to play

Interested in trying mahjong? You can play at these locations: the Nampa Library (first Monday of the month), the Star Library (first and third Mondays at 10:15), the Dick Eardley Senior Center in Boise (Tuesdays from 1 to 4 p.m.) and the Meridian Senior Center (Mondays at noon).

Belville helped her newcomers through their first game, which ended with a triumphant "Mahjong!" from the winner.

Laura Abbott, public services

manager at the Nampa Library, said mahjong nights have been hosted by the library for over a year, with interest growing the past few months. "Last month we had 24 people, and I asked them, how did you hear about us? They said online, our pamphlet, social media, word of mouth. One person put it in their neighborhood newsletter, and we got people through that," she said.

Abbott has noticed there's been an overall growth in interest in board games. "It's a little competitive but mostly it's just fun," she said. "They're looking for fun and connection, too. And it doesn't

hurt that we have snacks!"

During the two hours of mahjong, Winchester and Dozal's table got in five games, and a few of the players won prizes like mahjong themed socks and earrings. While the games were competitive and some focus was required, there was also plenty of opportunity for socializing, which Saltzman said is another of mahjong's draws.

"Mahjong is an incredible game that can create real friendships and deep bonds," she said. "The more you play the more you love it. The people you play with become the family you choose."