

Culture of Excellence and Caring

February 2, 2023

Rural Texas and the small towns with long histories which dot Central and West Texas are in danger of being swamped. Many such places have seen an influx of people, and we will see a lot more. While that can be positive or negative, it is taking place at this moment, when unexpected events are occurring more frequently, attitudes are changing rapidly, and the effects are unsettling. The country I grew up in did not have 'supply chain disruptions' which caused basic necessities to be unavailable. Baby formula, amoxicillin (the most commonly prescribed antibiotic in my practice), Tylenol and ibuprofen for children as well as a score of other common items are now or have recently been truly scarce. We used to joke about the Soviet Union having such issues, and we thought it was emblematic of the inefficiencies of socialism/communism. Russians said that when they saw a line forming in a store they would immediately go stand in it, and then they would determine what it was for. The expectation was that the que was for a staple they would need at some time, or it was for a luxury item they would be able to use for barter. Can we be overwhelmed by shortages? It seems like we are or we soon will be, and one clue that we have been overwhelmed, as the Soviets were, is a populace accepting such shortages as normal.

Attitudes toward work and higher education are two things that seem to have changed, especially among young men. Regarding work, this nation has 7 million working age men 18-45 years old, who are not enrolled in school and are not working or looking for work. As to education, I grew up in a college town (Portales, NM), and ENMU always had more enrolled males than females. That has now reversed, and considering that fact brings to my mind the whole question of pronouns. Who had ever thought about pronouns ten years ago?!? He and she have now been replaced – at least in the polite and sensitive crowd – by 'they'. I am sorry, but using the word 'they' to refer to a single individual is, well... confusing. I could go on with the changes, but I will leave it to the reader to judge whether we risk being overwhelmed by the pace of change. One thing that is indisputable is that depression and use of dangerous substances are both problems that have always been with us, but are now truly epidemic. Death due to drug overdose is now the leading killer of people 18-45 in this country. Use of methamphetamine is so common in our community that frequently 10% to 25% of the people who come to our Emergency Department in a day, are regular users.

So, what kind of a place do you want to live in, and what kind of people do you want to attract to the place in which you live? If you want to live in a place that is safe and welcoming, there must be rule of law, good schools, and good healthcare. Also, the people around you must be trustworthy. For the most part, I believe, that describes this area of Texas. However, we can do better, and things will get worse if we don't work to make them better. It also helps if the economic environment is improving. To a certain extent, the fact that things are improving is more important than the absolute level of circumstances such as economic wealth. What are the conditions that foster an increasingly safe, welcoming and prosperous place? I submit that it comes down to a culture of excellence and caring. Protection from death or loss due to fire is essential and excellence in law-enforcement, healthcare, mental health, education for our young people and education for our adults likewise are all essential elements of any vibrant community. Nothing, however, is more important than is the spiritual health of our people. In recognition of these facts, the Health and Wellness Coalition for Runnels County is going to begin recognizing individuals who have done the most to promote the health and wellbeing of the people of our area recently and also over a life-time or a career. We are soliciting nominations for individuals who exemplify excellence and caring. We intend to recognize two people each year. We'd like to recognize one person for having improved the health and wellbeing of Runnels county residents over some period

of time, be it during a disaster, a year, a career or a lifetime of service. This can be any person who made a difference in our county or a portion of our county, either as a professional, or volunteer or both. We would also like to recognize one person from among those designated as 'First Responders Plus', for their recent service to the public. In the future, the period will be the year preceding the recognition, but nominations for the 2023 award may be the time of COVID or the year 2022. The First Responders Plus designation applies to people who work (volunteer or for pay) in fire departments, EMS, law-enforcement (including incarceration or probation roles), healthcare (including mental health), education (including the County Extension office) and ministerial work. These are people who see our emergencies, or – perhaps even more importantly – they see the situations that precede emergencies. Often it is their work that results in averting calamity and avoiding emergencies. The best news may be the things that don't happen, even if you rarely know about them.

We will be recognizing these individuals (HAWC Heroes) at an event on the weekend of April 29, 2023. We will have more information later, but if you would like to nominate someone, we have a short, one-page form. You can pick these up in Winters at the office for West Texas MHMR, 126 State St. or in Ballinger at Ballinger Home Health office, 818 Hutchins Ave. The completed forms can be turned in at the same locations. We will publish more information in the Runnels County Register, or you can go to our Facebook page or website, www.HAWC4RC.org.