



It has been a very rough year.

Beginning in early 2020 and continuing until today, the coronavirus or COVID-19 has had a massive effect on all of us and all that we do during the past months. Whether we have actually contracted the virus or simply know someone who has suffered from it, we have all been affected.

Perhaps it was through church. You were unable to attend services as you usually do. Your church suffered financially because nobody was in the pews, the suppers and fundraisers were not held this year. There were no lutefisk feeds, no potato sausage sales at Potato Days, no fish suppers, no turkey dinners, no food stands at the Clay County Fair or the Rollag Steam Thresher's Reunion.

If you were a student, especially a high school senior, you were deprived of many of the life-long memories that occur during your school years. There was no junior-senior prom, athletic schedules were curtailed, postponed, altered or eliminated. Even classroom activities were curtailed as we learned to live with "distance learning" through a computer. For the good students it probably worked okay. . . . For those needing special attention from a teacher . . . well, the jury is still out on those students.

If you are or at least were, a struggling small business owner, it has been a horrific 12 months with some suffering more than others. Hardest hit have been bars and restaurants who have seen their businesses simply shut down for months at a time. With no cash flow it's difficult if not impossible to make mortgage, insurance, rent, utility and payroll payments. Government programs have helped but they are not enough to keep the doors open for many.

Individually we have all learned a lot of new terms and practices. "Social distancing", "masking up" and "shelter in place" have become frequently used terms as we go through our daily routines. Many have experienced a complete life style change, choosing to stay at home rather than go out in public and risk exposure to the virus. Family get-togethers for birthdays, anniversaries, Thanksgiving, Christmas, weddings, even funerals have all been put on hold.

We have learned to at least accept the limitations that have been placed on all of us. With the recent start of vaccinations against the virus, hopefully the worst is behind us and we can soon get back to what passes for normal.

In this year's "Streetlight" we're going to take a look at some of the local "heroes" that helped us get through this health scare. They are the people, the "essential workers" who could not "shelter in place". They are the ones who daily put their health and safety on the line to serve us.

We all know someone who fits into this "hero" category. Obviously we have the health care professionals who take care of us when we are sick. They are the doctors, nurses, dentists, chiropractors, office staff and other medical professionals that insure our health. But they are also the ambulance personnel who have no idea what they are dealing with when the next call comes in.

They are the teachers who daily are exposed to a wide variety of germ carrying kids from dozens of different homes, households and circumstances. There are the bus drivers who bring our kids to and from school. They are the police and firemen who protect us. These heroes include the clerks and shelf stockers at our grocery stores, convenience stores, liquor outlets, big box stores and gas stations who daily fulfill our needs.

In this issue of "Streetlight" we're going to take a look at a few of those

individuals. There are way too many to hit all of them, but we have a few random stories to share with you. There are also many other tales that you are familiar with that we are not aware of. Thank those people for their service, they deserve it.

In this issue of "Streetlight" we're also going to take a look forward and back at incredible construction projects that are so big they will have a huge influence on our lives for generations to come.

There is, of course, the huge \$28.5 million dollar school expansion project that will continue through 2021. That project alone will see the high school and elementary schools connected through a "middle block" that will feature a new fine arts auditorium, a new gymnasium, locker facilities and walking track along with a new music department.

Incorporated in the school plans are seven new elementary classrooms, new office facilities for district use, newly remodeled classrooms and a science lab at the high school and upgraded heating and ventilation systems for all facilities. Ground is being broken this spring for a new ag shop to be built on the northwest corner of the high school.

While the improvements at the school was the "big kid on the block", the City of Barnesville was not standing still, investing roughly \$4 million dollars on improvements last year. Most visible of those improvements was nearly a mile long hike and bike path that runs alongside 13th Street, the East City Limits Road. The city also concluded work on a \$2.6 million dollar build of infrastructure in a new 60-home housing development on the east side of the city. A dozen of those new lots have already been sold and will see construction of new homes this year.

A million dollar improvement that you will likely never see but will appreciate every time you flush your toilet was the rebuilding of an eight-acre sewage lagoon cell. That improvement took place last summer and upgrades the sewage system for the foreseeable future and for future growth.

On the city's radar but not on the construction schedule yet are upgrades and expansion of Wagner Park Campground, a new building for the Public Works Department and the potential construction of a new liquor store on land the city has already acquired on the north end of town. Also in the works for the city is a complete rebuild of the north end of Front Street slated for 2023.

Many of these projects will be covered in depth in this issue of "Streetlight" as well as some of the faces of our community. Some of the people and projects you will already know about, others you will be meeting for the first time.

This issue of "Streetlight" will be our 26th annual attempt at keeping you informed of the progress that occurs each and every year in Barnesville. This publication was the brainchild of Record-Review intern Mike Cihak back in 1995. Mike spent a lot of his college spare time with us. As he was getting the first Streetlight publication ready for print he might even have learned a thing or two about deadlines and schedules. He spent more than a few sleepless nights getting that first project ready to hit the presses. Mike now heads up the Communications Department at the University of Minnesota - Morris.

Welcome to the 2021 edition of the Barnesville Streetlight. We hope you find something interesting, entertaining, informational or educational in this year's edition. Settle back, relax and enjoy!

-- Gene Prim, Publisher