

Season's Greetings, Citizens of Kingston County!

As you all know, 2020 has been a year of challenge, reflection, disappointment, and reflecting on disappointment-related challenges for our county. But we are a stalwart, hearty people, and if anything we ended the year strong. I don't wanna get ahead of myself, spoiler alerts and all that, but I think I speak for everyone when I say the courthouse's all-animal nativity this year was without a doubt the zenith, the pinnacle, the uppy top of the upside down Nike swoosh of our year... possibly the decade. But for the sake of comparison, we should recap the bad to appreciate the good. For as Jesus or Richard Nixon once said, "Only if you have been in the deepest valley, can you ever know how magnificent it is to be on the tallest upside down Nike swoosh top part." Let's begin with last winter.

As you might remember, we caught a lot of flack two years ago for making the county seat's manger scene a little too...well..."traditional." Personally the only black Jesus I've seen was in that Madonna video, but apparently not doing that on the regular is super duper wrong now. So in the spirit of diversity, we went all out last year in that regard. But it seems you just can't win. People didn't appreciate the addition of one of those Jewish candle thingies, a full-sized Buddha, a feminist (at least, what I think one would look like), two gay penguins, and a DVD copy of The Matrix (Jared from LawnWorks kept going on about how that movie is so full of other philosophies! Such a safe bet!) We got an angry letter from the ACLU of all places, saying it was offensive to quote "nearly everyone who draws breath"!

With April Showers come May Flowers, and what do Mayflowers bring? This year: disaster. It seemed reasonable that since the same people have entered our annual county-wide gardening competition for the last 15 years, why waste time and energy on applications? Just take last year's applicants and automatically put them in the running for this year's. And all told, it worked pretty well. Except for Gary. We all wondered why such a fastidious gardener let his yard get all overgrown and unkempt. That is until we went to do our "County's Worst" photo op (a time-honored tradition!) and found him dead on his couch. Now, mind you, the coroner said it hadn't been *that* long. Was it in bad taste to continue with the photo op with Gary sleeping a peaceful eternal sleep next to his certificate with the big frowny face on it? Gary wouldn't have thought so. Even if his friends and family and that AP article did.

If you're gonna complain about the opener to this year's Air and Water Show, believe me I'm with you. I knew from the start when the idea of "baby skydiving" was pitched, we were on the path to catastrophic, embarrassing failure. And the simultaneous worst and most obvious things that can happen when "baby" and "skydiving" are paired definitely happened during our little event. Were babies thrown out of a plane? Yes. Did they go hurtling to Earth at frightening speeds? Yes. Did they land safely? Of course they did. But did the routine "come together," as the pros would say? You know the answer. It seems like all the work that went into figuring out how to release the baby parachutes from Don's cell phone could have gone toward keeping that in-air choreography much tighter. Some say "you're asking too much of babies," and I say if children are our future, we should set that bar high and early.

If things weren't scary enough already, then came Halloween time and our annual Scares 4 Cares Haunted Barn. Unfortunately the teens who'd be running it the last couple years were off at college and we were left with only Terry Hatfield, our treasurer, to run the thing. Why should Terry run the haunted house, a woman who thinks even a baby pumpkin costume is Satanic and tempts the rule of sin to return to Earth? Easy. She was the last one to call "Not It", and we all know that's legally binding.

But what Terry came up with was truly terrifying, as you and I and everyone who went through the house found out. Turns out she went to gossip mongers all over the county, from nosey church ladies to the social media vague bookers, and created a comprehensive database of every dirty little secret, rumor or vilifying fun fact about everyone in the county. So instead of "rawr" and "get out", little kids in werewolf masks would jump out and say things like "How's the secret family in Akron?" and "Why do you smell shoes at night?" Very upsetting! For both my secret family and my guy at Payless.

But friends, let us put the past in the past. And the recent past of 2 weeks ago, in the present to talk about. Presently. I mean, we're going to talk about this year's triumph: the animal nativity.

When the critics said, "It can't be done, the animals won't sit still!" or "Putting a sheep dressed as a shepherd next to a sheep that's just supposed to be a sheep makes my brain hurt," or "Wrapping a hog in swaddling clothes and worshipping it as your Lord and Savior is sacrilegious." or "Chickens can't carry myrrh", I said, "We don't know the meaning of 'can't'. Or 'myrrh'." And I was vindicated! Because I have received zero formal complaints about the animal nativity. You might say, That's because the only way to make a formal complaint is to present a notarized document in person at the county hall and that's been closed to the public for the past ten months. But I say, "Zero complaints! Suck it, citizens of Kingston County, I'm calling it a win!"

Happy holidays to all! May 2021 be just as successful for us all as the last couple of weeks of 2020 have been for me.

Sincerely,

**Helen Trouser
County President
Kingston County**