

Reconnecting with neighbors

After being cloistered in our house during the winter months, the first day of spring couldn't have arrived soon enough. For most of us guys in Jefferson Township it was an occasion to spend some time with our pickup truck, our tractor and our dogs. It was also time to tend to that all-important manly activity — burning brush in the burn pile while shooting the breeze with neighbors we haven't seen since the cold weather crept into our lives.

Leaning up against a shovel beside the burn pile is usually where my neighbors and I solve all the world's problems. The economy was the main topic of conversation this first day of spring. And the consensus among the group should come as no surprise. We all felt uncertain about what's really going on with the country we love.

"Right now, I've got a lot of proposals out there but everyone is holding back on spending the money and moving forward," says Tim, who owns a small construction company. "I'm doing OK but it would be nice to be doing a little better," he said as he looked up at the honking geese making their return from the south.

"I just got notice in January that my job was being eliminated. I don't much care because I'm at retirement age anyhow," George reluctantly told us. "I'll probably do some little jobs here and there to make a little more money, but it's getting tough out there. Honestly, I don't think anyone in government knows what the hell they're doing," he continued emphatically.

"Wow, George, I'm sorry to



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hear you lost your job," I said. "I'm with you on the government. Our household isn't planning on buying anything major this year. Our business is going OK but like Tim said, I'm seeing our clients being very cautious, as well. It's definitely not a time to be spending money."

"I think we're going down the tubes, probably back to the early '80s," George grumbled as he threw an old wooden board on the burn pile. "I think inflation is going to come back and kill us in a few years with all these ridiculous bailouts."

"I was willing to give Obama a chance but he's been a major disappointment," Tim jumped in. "I know he inherited a mess but I haven't seen anything he's done that gives me any hope that things are going to be better. If anything, I think things are going to get worse," he complained.

"Well, I'm expanding my garden and my wife is going to do some canning. Do you mind if I take some of your horse manure from that pile of yours over there?" George asked.

"Help yourself, George. Take the whole pile if you want," I chuckled. "We have a lot more horse manure coming where that mountain came from."

"Hey, that's not a bad idea. I think I'll be expanding our garden this year, too," Tim said. "You wouldn't mind if I took some of that myself would you?"

"No, not at all," I replied. "Actually you guys are making me rethink my own gardening plans. By the way, Tim, the nice lady that runs C&S Hardware in Saxonburg told me there is an Easter egg hunt behind her place on April 11. I'm bringing my kids. You ought to think about bringing yours."

"Hey, sounds like a plan," said Tim. "You know, I've never shopped there. Is it any good?"

"Yep, and it sure is handy. I'll tell you what. I think we should all start buying local as much as possible. No one is looking out for the little guy and this is one small way of doing something about it," I responded.

"Well, I'm all for that," said George as he adjusted his prized John Deere owner's edition hat. "My wife swears by the tea she gets from some place called the Stillroom there in Saxonburg. She's always on my case about buying local."

"Hey, George, do you think those old ceiling tiles I have leaning up against my shed will burn?" Tim asked.

"Probably not, but then again, if we can get this thing burning hot enough, you never know," George replied as he threw on another board.

Ray Muth of Jefferson Township is a community columnist for the Valley News Dispatch.

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