



DODGE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Dale J Schmidt Sheriff Scott Mittelstadt Chief Deputy

August Sheriff's Column – Please Respect Each Other and their Opinions

Those who know me know that I am a man with great pride for our country, our state and our community. However, I am extremely disappointed in what I have seen from so many over the last few years. That disappointment does not lie with any one political candidate or political party, but rather with some in our communities who have chosen to be disrespectful of other's property and their opinions. I hope and pray that there is an improvement in the way that we treat one another. It seems that some have forgotten the golden rule that we all learned when we were growing up, "do unto others as you would have them do unto you".

Freedom of speech and respect for others is such an important topic right now. There are many in our country who, whether they know it or not, have created more division than we have ever seen before. Again, I am not referring to politicians or any political party. Yes, they make decisions regarding governing, but we the people have the power to control the narrative. Our voices are louder now than ever before. That is possible through the power of the internet, videos and social media.

Social media has so many positives that allow us to stay connected and share memories. Social media has also turned our country on one another. Perhaps that is because it allows us to sit behind a keyboard not having to speak to someone face to face. As a result, there is very little chance of repercussions. Regardless of the reason, our country has changed and I am fearful of the future we are leaving for our children.

Unfortunately, social media typically has two types of disagreements. In the first type, people disagree. At the end of the conversation, they agree to disagree and they remain friends. I have several friends like this and I enjoy having a debate and considering their perspectives. The second type is unfortunately much more common and unpleasant. This is when two or more people share their opinions, followed by angry outbursts, hateful comments or threatening statements. People become intolerant of each other's opinions and hateful stereotypes are often a result. These stereotypes have only one purpose, to intimidate that person while also shaming others who might share that same opinion into keeping it to themselves.

Recently, I had several residents here in Dodge County tell me that they fear sharing their opinions. They are afraid of the backlash from others who are intolerant. This includes refusing to openly support a candidate, placing a campaign sign in their yard, or even having a discussion with friends or family. This is unfortunate because it is intimidating someone into forfeiting their constitutional right.

I undoubtedly will be the subject of these hateful comments following this column. That too is unfortunate but does not bother me as I stand by my convictions and respectfully refuse to be bullied. At the same time, I will respect the opinions of others and will not shy away from a friendly debate. Remember that no one can bully you in the ballot box and social media bullies are just people typing words on a website, nothing more.

I hope that eventually, our country returns to one of mutual respect for differences of opinion. It will not happen overnight, but if the majority of us begin to recognize the problem and refuse to tolerate hateful speech, we can begin to make a needed change so Dodge County can continue to be a great place to live, work, and visit.

Sheriff Dale J. Schmidt