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Column: From the Mayor's Desk

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Last week we had a serious situation where someone used an app called Burnbook to put out anonymous threats about doing harm at Lebanon High School. This happened for two consecutive days.

Thankfully our school officials, Lebanon Police Department and Linn County Sheriffs all worked together to make sure there were no incidents. Of course our detectives are working on finding out who did this.

This Burnbook application or program is something kids can download on a tablet or phone and put out anonymous derogatory comments about others in school or anywhere for that matter. Nothing stops them from bullying other kids, making threats and saying anything they want without the perceived danger of them being caught.

There is a petition going around online to ban or change Burnbook. If not banned, the app needs to have a big change and let kids know their actions will be found out.

The most important thing about this is that parents need to know what apps/programs their kids are using on their phones and computers and keep an eye on what they do online.

Social media, especially Facebook, have a lot of benefits for a small community like ours. The city has a main Facebook page, pages for the police department, library and senior center. Several of the city councilors and myself are also available on Facebook. This is quick access to your local government and this is a really a cool way for citizens to keep informed and be able to contact their elected officials.

There are other helpful social pages out there such as the Lebanon Express and Albany Democrat-Herald. There are pages for local traffic, weather information, turkey sightings, old photos of Lebanon, stuff for sale and other local groups to post whatever is on one's mind.

One big difference between these types of Facebook pages and the Burnbook is that with Facebook you cannot be anonymous. There are ways around it, but if Facebook finds a bogus account, they will delete it.

Something I have seen as the Internet was born and in it's infancy (yes I was there, but I did not create it) is how brazen and rude people can be when they are typing out their thoughts and comments online. There is something that seems to embolden people, young and old, when they are talking to other people online.

The whole online bullying problem is not just kids, there are a lot of adults who act this way and do much the same thing. Saying things on the keyboard or keypad without any filter shows their lack of concern for the results and ramifications of their actions.

I am a staunch supporter of our first amendment rights. I have no problem with people sharing their thoughts, opinions, positions and feelings. But I think sometimes our freedom of speech is misused.

Yelling fire in a crowded movie theater when there is no fire, or a teen making up lies and stories about another, calling them names I cannot even write, those are not what our founders were thinking about.

With our freedom of speech, we as compassionate human beings have a responsibility that comes along with our rights. We need to think before we type and think about how it might affect a person, family, business, or community before shooting off some flaming "mad at the world" message.

Ranting or venting is not a bad thing at all. Sometimes it helps for a loved one or friend to listen as we share what is driving us nuts. Many people have become so reliant on social media, that much of their communications with friends (and loved ones) is online.

Recently there have been numerous "rants" or complaints about things around town. Unfortunately many of the comments are baseless, guessing and just opinions masquerading as facts.

One recent incident was the claim that Safeway was trapping feral cats and killing them. So far there is no evidence of cats being trapped and left to die on the property. An online petition was created that accumulated more than 1,000 signatures.

If this horrible sounding act had happened the way it was presented, wouldn't someone have gotten a photo of the heinous act then helped rescue the cats? As everyone has a camera built into their phone nowadays.

Fox 12 from Portland came down to do a story and could find no evidence of the traps or dead cats. Lebanon Police concluded an investigation and found no evidence of any wrong doing.

In fact Safeway representatives said that they were trapping feral cats and an employee was taking them out to their farm and releasing them there, humane and safely.

Who takes the hit on something like this? Both our community and businesses will suffer. Who repairs that reputation? No one can undo the damage that is caused by speculation

and accusations like this. When the next rumor or comment is posted about something similar, it will add fuel to the fire.

People will remember, oh yeah, they were “accused” of killing cats that time...

Lebanon is in the best shape it has been in years. We have a city council who welcomes email, phone calls or citizens coming to a city council meeting to discuss issues or problems in the community.

Posting accusations and misinformation online only hurts our community. Make sure you have talked to the source to find out what is going on. Just assuming, well we know where that leads us.

Every community has it’s problems and Lebanon is no different. If you have not lived in a big city before, try living there for a few years. I can promise most of you will wish you had never left Lebanon.

We are constantly working to make Lebanon better every day. We have made a huge effort and it will continue. We will put out as much information as possible to keep you abreast of everything that is going on in the city.

We have so many good things going on around town. We have a medical school that will graduate it’s first class soon, a new high-end hotel near completion, the healing garden and event center, new businesses, a vibrant Boys & Girls Club and the list goes on.

I am proud to live in Lebanon and serve as your mayor. I know this is true not only because I believe it, but I read it on the Internet!

Mayor Paul

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