

GUEST

Mother nature is out to sting me

BY TOM PURCELL

I've learned the hard way that Mother Nature is anything but weak and feeble. I bought a house in the country a little over 30 years ago - a total fixer-upper. An old couple had lived there - hoarders - and the place was a mess.

But that didn't trouble me. I was full of energy. I had big improvement plans. Then I learned how ruthless Mother Nature really is.

I first discovered this when I tore off an old porch enclosure. When I began peeling the siding off, I was attacked by hornets and wasps - I eventually uncovered 80 nests! - which sent me swatting, jumping and cussing throughout my yard.

When the first summer arrived, I decided to build a planter in front of my house. I tore out some old shrubs and jagger bushes and came across a nest of ground bees. Ground bees become very angry when they are disturbed.

The nasty little buggers stung me a half-dozen times. Following advice from a neighbor, I poured gasoline into the nest. I set the canister on the ground, four feet away. I lit a match, but before I could throw it into the nest, I heard Wooooooooooooof!

You see, "woof" is the sound gasoline makes when it ignites. It ignites because gasoline gives off fumes, and fumes - I tend to learn things the hard way - are flammable!

Suddenly, an 8-foot flame shot out of the bee's nest - right up the side of my newly painted house! To my right, I noticed the gas can - filled with 2 1/2 gallons of premium - was on fire.

Thinking quickly, I picked up the canister and ran down my driveway, cussing. I launched the Molotov cocktail into the air. It exploded into a fireball. I raced for the hose and barely managed to douse both fires before I burned down the neighborhood.

I moved to Washington, D.C. in 1998 and rented out my house for many years before moving back to finish off all renovation projects.

Last week I was putting my tractor away in the shed after dark when I got stung a dozen times by hornets I didn't see, who, I now know, live in a large nest.

Thanks to my forever war with stinging insects, I chuckle when I hear environmentalists describe Mother Nature as feeble and weak.

As author Michael Crichton once said, the idea that nature is "fragile" is profoundly wrong. Earth has survived asteroid strikes, supervolcanoes, magnetic pole reversals and mass extinctions. Long after we're gone, Crichton said, the planet will still be here - doing just fine.

Scientist Bjorn Lomborg agrees. He doesn't deny the environmental challenges we face, but says we need perspective. While problems like climate change and pollution are real, he argues they're often exaggerated in ways that lead to panic instead of practical solutions.

He says that nature is remarkably resilient - forests regrow after wildfires, wildlife returned to Chernobyl and coral reefs have shown signs of recovery. Lomborg believes innovation, adaptation and economic growth are better paths forward than fear and alarmism.

We absolutely must be good stewards of Mother Nature's beauty and preserve her resources.

Just know that Mother Nature will flood your basement, infest your walls, sting your backside and burn down your house - then go on about her day like nothing happened.

If that sounds fragile to you, I've got a hornet's nest the size of an Airbnb you can borrow.

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UPSIDE DOWN UNDER

Old grain elevator getting a facelift

BY MARVIN BAKER

In case you hadn't noticed or seen this on the news, there's a sort of art renaissance going on in Minot and this isn't your average, every day painting.

There's an Australian man who is in the process of transforming a downtown Minot grain elevator into a massive work of art. This man is world renowned in his profession and expects to have his work completed before it gets to cold this fall.

Guido Van Helten has visited Minot numerous times in the past two years to get an artist's idea of what the area is like so his art represents Minot and north-central North Dakota.

It's been said that Van Helten does one display of art in each state and for North Dakota, Minot was chosen, just like Fort Dodge, Iowa, Mankato, Minn., and Faulkton, S.D., were picked in the past.

Exactly what Van Helten is painting is unclear and it's doubtful anyone could tell exactly at this point because of the massive size of this artwork. However, if you look at some of the work Van Helten has done in the past, it's amazing, it's unique and none of us can imagine how someone could paint a picture that massive in their mind.

He knows exactly what he is doing. And because he is Australian, it's obvious that most of his work has been done there.

More specifically, a large percentage of his artwork is in rural Australian communities where grain elevators are called silos.

He's painted farmers, wheat fields, livestock, first responders, teachers, nurses and some, cliché as they may seem, sunsets.

There's one small town west of Melbourne called Brim that was just like any other rural town in Victoria until Van Helten painted a "silo" there. Now, people don't just stop passing through. This community has become a destination for people from the city to see this massive display of Van Helten's work.

Since he got started in Minot, there have been several local media reports that have moved over to social media. And, as you might imagine, there are always negative comments on any subject on social media.

Why wasn't someone locally hired? Does anybody care? Is it worth it?

First of all, those messages are meaningless and the only reason they are mentioned is because the people who made them obviously know nothing about Guido Van Helten.

Why wasn't someone locally hired? OK, is there any artist, anywhere in the state of North Dakota, who can create artwork like this? If so, they should come forward and present themselves because there are a lot of dull and blasé concrete grain elevators that could use some color and flair. Even the most popular and professional artists will tell you they can't produce something like this.

Does anybody care? Of course - the Minot business community, people who live in the neighborhood, visitors to Minot and even North Dakota Tourism are taking a serious look at this.

Right now, it's just another elevator in downtown Minot. And for those who think nobody cares, stop by around about late October into early November and see if you care at that point!

Is it worth it? Yes, Van Helten was commissioned, but what he was paid is unknown. Regardless, this man carries an impressive resume and knows exactly what he is doing. So I would submit to you that yes, any amount of money paid to Van Helten will be worth it in the end. Call anyone up in Fort Dodge and ask them.

If you are still skeptical of Van Helten or his work, I suggest you do an internet search about him. First, you're going to see some incredible sights in Australia. Then, you'll see the work he's done in the United States and finally, you'll see that he's done unique works of art in parts of Europe on the sides of tall office towers rather than grain elevators.

Those of us who live in and around Minot know full well how ugly that elevator is downtown just a couple of blocks away from the Ward County courthouse and very near the downtown business district. It's going to transform downtown Minot and you can bet tourism will be picking up.

(Marvin Baker is a news writer for the Kenmare News and formerly Foster County Independent.)



- Weekly Crossword -

CLUES ACROSS

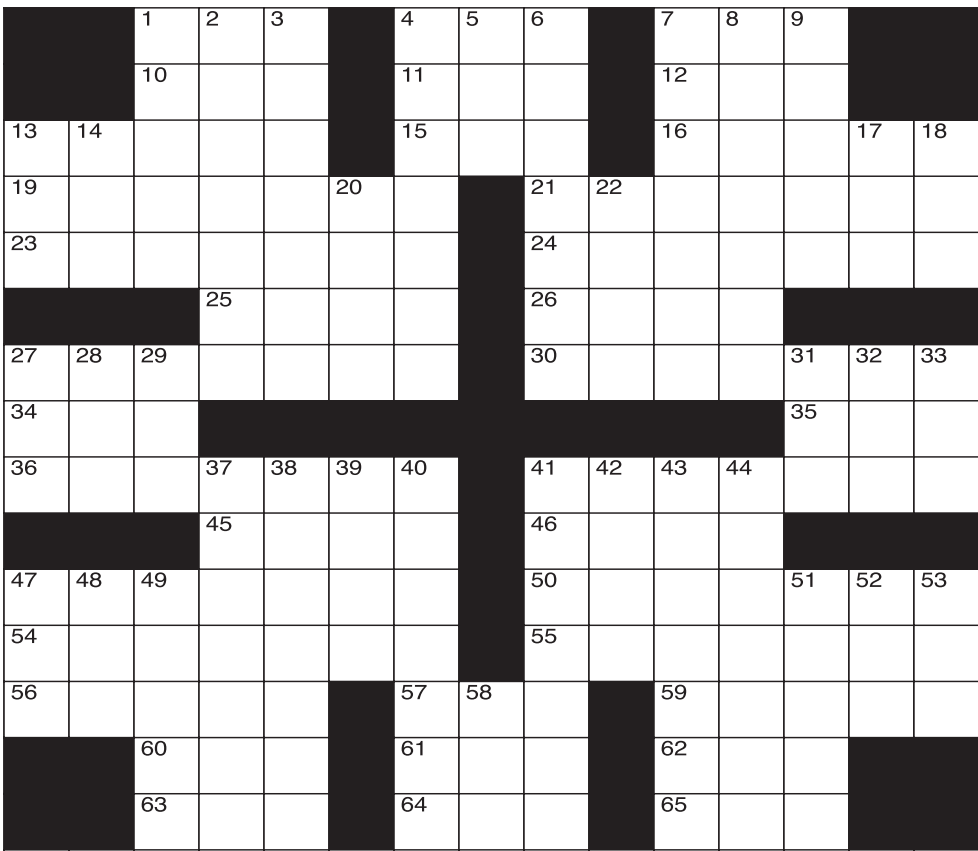
- 1. Auto manufacturer
- 4. The 23rd letter of the Greek alphabet
- 7. Two-year-old sheep
- 10. Member of indigenous people in Asia
- 11. Airborne (abbr.)
- 12. Actress de Armas
- 13. Not moving
- 15. Cool!
- 16. Plants of the arum family
- 19. Perceptible by touch
- 21. Rorschach test
- 23. Monetary units
- 24. Art
- 25. Cardinal number
- 26. Dueling sword
- 27. Hates
- 30. Fixed in one place
- 34. Pie \_\_\_ mode
- 35. Moved on foot
- 36. Passenger's spot on a motorcycle
- 41. A way through
- 45. "Rule, Britannia" composer
- 46. Leader
- 47. Flowing

- 50. Common greetings in Arabic countries
- 54. Solution for all difficulties
- 55. Soft clothing fabric
- 56. Building material
- 57. Sea bream
- 59. A way to cause to be swollen
- 60. One and only
- 61. Skin color
- 62. Wreath
- 63. Nevertheless
- 64. They \_\_\_
- 65. Sea eagle

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Policemen (French)
- 2. Toy dog
- 3. Inflamed colon disease
- 4. Muscular weaknesses
- 5. Helps little firms
- 6. References
- 7. Takes down
- 8. Facilitates
- 9. One-time empress of the Roman Empire
- 13. Engine additive
- 14. Chemistry solution

- 17. Written account
- 18. Consumed
- 20. Coming after all others
- 22. No (slang)
- 27. Government lawyers
- 28. Super Bowl winner Manning
- 29. Small amount
- 31. A way to save for your future
- 32. A way to travel behind
- 33. Midway between north-east and east
- 37. Head pain
- 38. Loud lawn insect
- 39. Actress Hathaway
- 40. Boat race
- 41. About fish
- 42. Nursemaid in India
- 43. Marketable
- 44. Tinier
- 47. Parts per billion (abbr.)
- 48. Paddle
- 49. Oneness
- 51. Bitter compound
- 52. Not around
- 53. Very fast airplane
- 58. Swiss river



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