

# Opinions

## *Making a difference starts with taking that first step*

This weekend, two Sanders County groups are bringing people together to raise money for the Road to the Buffalo project. The festival in Noxon Park is a collaborative effort between the Women for a Better Sanders County and the Noxon Senior Citizens.

Last week, the Kootenai Forest Stakeholders Coalition was the featured guest at the Thompson Falls Chamber meeting. And a similar group of people with a wide range of ideas and opinions is forming in Plains to advise the Forest Service on projects. They don't always agree, but they come together to make a difference and help make a change.

In our small towns, you'll often hear "there's nothing to do" or "I wish...". These events and groups are perfect examples of stepping up. It doesn't take a lot to make a difference in our communities, it just takes something. Go to a City Council meeting, or try for a seat on a board or council. Volunteer for an organization, or take up your own cause.

Change is inevitable, and as the old saying goes, you're never going to please everyone. It shouldn't matter what your opinion is, but it does matter that you care and that you make an effort.

Often you'll see the same people organizing events year after year. This can lead to burnout of those people and organizations not getting funding critical to operations. If every person got involved, think of what we could accomplish.

Next week, the new trail along the Clark Fork River in Thompson Falls opens. When you visit the trail with its fresh gravel and new signs, think about the work that went into that. It will be there for residents and visitors to enjoy for many years to come. And it started with a group who had an idea and wanted to make the area better.

## Other Viewpoints

### *GEARUP important for success*

Success is defined as the accomplishment of an aim or purpose. But when your aim or purpose is now influenced by the depth of your pockets, success can be so much harder to find. With every new opportunity you find, you have to take a financial hit in order to take advantage of that opportunity. People who are scared of that financial hit tend to settle for less, even though they deserve so much more.

Montana GEARUP purpose is to fund these opportunities for

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## *Guest opinion -*

*by District Judge Ru*

## *Montana legisla*

In one of my earlier articles I discussed the unsatisfactory state of affairs in our criminal justice system, pointing out the incarceration rate in the U.S. is the highest in the world. You may recall our country has 737 per 100,000 people incarcerated, which is six times more than the worldwide midpoint of 145 per 100,000 people. Our prison population was relatively flat until the 1980's. Due primarily to the war on drugs, our incarceration population had increased by an astonishing 500% in the last 30 years. 49% of U.S. inmates are serving time for drug offenses.