

WATCHDOG: A CLOSER LOOK

# Got a problem? Not a problem

I have a problem.

And I hope you do, too, because, well ... the more problems you have, the less of a problem I will have.

Make sense?

No?

No problem.

On Jan. 1, I started a new beat we are calling "problem solver." As you might imagine, that title could be a very large umbrella, so I'm trying to refine what it means.

That's one problem, and it's one with which I hope you'll help me. What issues are you facing which, if addressed in the *Democrat and Chronicle* and through our online resources, could help others? What do you most want this beat to focus on?

Consumer issues, like the one Marie Furino had?

In December, Marie caught wind of my new beat and left a message for me about a snowplow driver she'd come to suspect had taken her money and run. Turns out she was right: Two weeks later, her would-be driveway clearer was arrested and accused of scamming dozens of others in Monroe County in the same way.

Social issues?

In June I addressed the ongoing, violent tension between young members of the African-American community who were targeting small groups of South Asian refugees who have settled in northwest Rochester in the past five or six years.

Particularly gratifying was the response to that story: Federal, state and local law enforcement became involved and took steps to address the problem. Neighborhood groups have formed.

Jon  
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PROBLEM SOLVER

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Events have been held to try to bridge the two communities, and it appears to have worked as many say the problems have subsided.

(Most gratifying, though, was a senior refugee who said that he'd never felt safe — either in the Nepalese refugee camp, or in Rochester — until after that story ran.)

School problems?

In 2010, I spotted a crazed, chaotic scene at the Liberty Pole which forced me to slam on my brakes as dozens of people poured into East Main Street in a fight. I visited that area nine times in the next few weeks and discovered the unrest was the result of the Liberty Pole having been made the school district's transfer station for hundreds of city school kids. I documented what I saw and wrote about it, and change came.

That change was not solely because of the story. In fact, pieces of the remedy were already in process when I wrote the story.

Change will never occur because of a news story alone.

It takes people who see the problem and are committed to fixing it.

People such as Mary Jo Colligan, who several years back invited a few friends together to make pillow cases into girl-sized dresses. The dresses, she

explained to me as she cleaned my teeth one morning (Mary Jo is a dental hygienist who would work an earlier shift to accommodate my schedule for cleanings — talk about a problem solver!), protected girls in third-world countries from sex trafficking because the new dresses made it appear as if they had families who cared for them, and therefore less attractive to would-be traffickers.

We wrote a story announcing the sewing session and inviting others to help. Mary Jo expected a few people to respond and she got dozens. They wanted to make 100 dresses and instead made more than 500. Today they are the state representative for the Dress a Girl Around the World program and have donated more than 100,000 dresses. Last year they launched their Stop the Trafficking — End the Cycle campaign, and they have created the Butterfly Boutique, which provides business clothing for women seeking employment.

Needless to say, that was gratifying. A regular feature of this beat will be to highlight groups such as Dress a Girl who are trying solve a unique problem.

A sneak peek of my upcoming story list: What options do families have when their beloved child with autism has uncontrollable physical behaviors and becomes dangerous to property and family members?

I've lived in the Rochester area my entire life. My father was a career journalist who spent 24 years at the *Democrat and Chronicle* and I've enjoyed 22 years of my own in the business. I believe part of our charge is to solve problems, and that most of you

## What's your problem?

Problem solver Jon Hand would like your help crafting the nature of his new beat. Do you have a problem that you think he could help with? Do you know of a group in the community which is trying to tackle a unique problem and is worthy of a feature story? Please send them along. Feel free to contact Hand by phone or email, and find out what problem he's working on by following him on Twitter.com/jonhand1 and Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/jhand55> ?ref=hl

want to be part of the solution.

And I find people who create problems with their vitriolic, divisive speech and actions to be the problem.

So if you have a problem you are struggling with, contact me. Especially if you believe shedding light on the issue will help others.

If you are an expert in your field, or have a unique perspective on an issue — such as a lawyer, contractor, professor, Officer Daryl Pierson's courageous widow, Amy ... the list is endless — and would like to help solve problems, please let me know.

But if you just want to complain about the status quo and tell me problems can't be fixed, call someone else.

That's a problem I don't need.

*The watchdog column appears in print on Fridays and online all the time in the watchdog blog at DemocratandChronicle.com. Jon Hand can be reached at (585) 258-2395.*