Bending Walla Walla

by Richard Burton, Publisher

Thereâ€™s no tiptoeing around the matter. Former Steptoeville, known now as â€œthe town so nice they named it twiceâ€•, Walla Wallaâ€™s residents are hell-bent on blaming Bend for their recent outbreak of rurbia. A phenomenon occurring throughout the West, rurbia is a blending of urban, rural and suburbia.

The fate of nearly 360 acres of Walla Walla farmland lies in the hands of county commissioners. If approved, the development will include 365 new homes, a 65-unit hotel and restaurant, a nine-hole golf course and 10 miles of trails. The developer, Abito, formerly known as Pennbrook Homes is from Bend.

For Walla Wallans to point fingers and plaster â€œDonâ€™t Bend Walla Wallaâ€• bumper stickers on their vehicles and around their community is simply unfair. Bend is the 6th fastest growing city in the nation. Itâ€™s inevitable that nearby towns and communities will be impacted by such growth. Powerful economic growth from surrounding communities only adds to the expansion as is common now, particularly in the West. Other cities such as Telluride, Durango and Bozeman have experienced this same supernova explosion.

Famous for their superb sought-after Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon, Walla Walla is now home to 64 wineries and 40 vineyards with an estimated economic impact of more than $100 million annually. Walla Walla is no one-horse town. Tourism has grown substantially with wine lovers flocking to Washington wine country. More hotels are needed regardless of the ongoing golf course community debate.

Just as the arrival of the railroad in 1911 put Bend on the map, so has wine for Walla Walla. Californians are migrating there by the droves. Blaming Bend for wine lovers migrating to wine country is absurd. Wine aficionados travel in wide circles. Word gets around, and fast.

The locals in Walla Walla speak of loss of small town feel, loss of friendly folk, high prices, huge hotels, even the fear of not enough water for the wheat farms. And then in a most un-neighborly fashion, take the name of a great town, bending it onto the backs of car bumpers in an effort to stop the inevitable.

Whatâ€™s so bad about Bending Walla Walla? With bigger expansion comes more cultural diversity, more exposure to the arts and music, sports and business. Besides robust wine and flavorful, sweet onions, Walla Walla provides an address for convicted felons. Surely by bending Walla Walla a bit, the state penitentiary could become less of a point of interest. Rurbia may remedy this. The disease in itself may become the cure.

â€œDonâ€™t Bend Walla Walla!â€• Not to worry. Bend doesnâ€™t bend. It curves and sways with winding rivers, picturesque scenery, breathtaking mountains and blending cultures. Bend residents are generally too busy skiing, hiking, fishing, boating, spelunking, rafting, camping, golfing and rock climbing to bother with bumper stickers. Oregon

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