

Dear Santa Claus: Excuse Me While I Kiss This Cookie

By Bob Mercer
State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE – Christmas week brings so many joys, especially for folks who love sweet treats, rich meats, aged cheeses, and hot drinks.

The bakers and the cooks, the generations-old family recipes, the real butter.

The unexpected delights, such as a true fruitcake, so packed with nuts and dates and preserved cherries and pineapple you have to lean hard on the butcher knife to cut a slice.

The best fruitcake I've ever had – and no, this is not a joke – arrived at our house a few days ago.

The homemade gift came from our friend Cheryl, after a casual conversation at a Christmas party a few nights before.

That's where we learned her significant other's mother was the fruitcake-fundraiser for his school's music program when he was a boy back in Iowa.

The delivery truck from a regional fruitcake factory would pull up to his dad's appliance store and unload the school's order – his mom's order – for the season.

Those fruitcakes sounded nothing like the loaf Cheryl gave us. But oh they sold.

When I find one in a store – that is, when I remember to look – I buy a boxed fruitcake for my wife, Ellen. Her father bought her mother a fruitcake each Christmas.

This is a benefit that advancing middle age brings. You know what each of you likes. You know what is important to each other.

If you're lucky and spoiled, your wife's baking gets only better and better, year upon year.

Her feet ache a lot this time of year. She is baking many nights of the week, producing cookies for friends and co-workers and family and freezer.

I steal a few samples while they're warm on the counter.

This way, she never needs to bake for me, while I eat like a king.

Trending this December is her cranberry white-chocolate shortbread.

Did I mention the need to keep a tall glass of cold milk at hand, just in case?

And if you're lucky and spoiled, your wife has friends such as Cheryl and Shelly with their Christmas delights.

For many years, we've received a small candy-box of Shelly's homemade toffee.

Irresistibly perfect, it is.

Sometimes, we are graced by a gift of baklava.

The painstakingly thin hand-layered dough and rich filling are always so good. I make it last, piece by piece, for days, until it turns soggy and, well, simply must be finished.

Then there's the Cash family's nut-bar recipe. A story for next Christmas, perhaps.

Such holiday dilemmas we face.

Caramel rolls on Christmas morning: With or without nuts?

Eggnog: Regular or light?

Tom and Jerry: Nutmeg?

Cashew brittle: Yes or yes?

Crescent cookies: Walnuts or not?

Chocolate pie: Whipped cream or nakedly pure?

My mom, Millie, was a Christmas baker. A wide assortment of cookies in round tins accumulated in a mother lode of a pantry off the kitchen.

During the week between Christmas and New Year Day, we demolished them, best to least.

Her mother was a Christmas baker. Irene made a simply great peanut-butter cookie.

Lucky and spoiled?

All of my life.

Merry Christmas!

State Of LGBT Equality In Seven South Dakota Cities Detailed In HRC's New Municipal Equality Index

WASHINGTON - The Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the nation's largest lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) civil rights organization, today released its fourth annual report assessing LGBT equality in 408 cities across the nation, including seven in South Dakota.

The 2015 Municipal Equality Index (MEI), the only nationwide rating system of LGBT inclusion in municipal law and policy, shows that cities across the country, including in South Dakota, continue to take the lead in supporting LGBT people and workers, even when states and the federal government have not.

For LGBT Americans, legal protections and benefits vary widely from state to state, and city to city. Astonishingly, in 31 states LGBT people are still at risk of being fired, denied housing or refused service because of who they are, and who they love. That's why HRC is leading the fight to pass the Equality Act, which would extend nationwide non-discrimination protections to LGBT Americans. The effort to achieve full equality continues, and the MEI remains a crucial tool in evaluating the patchwork of LGBT policies and practices in cities and towns across the nation.

The average score for cities in South Dakota is 23 out of 100 points, which falls below the national average of 56. Aberdeen: 18, Brookings: 52, Pierre: 12, Rapid City: 22, Sioux Falls: 28, Vermillion: 15, Watertown: 18.

"Across our country, cities and towns both big and small aren't waiting for state or national leaders to move LGBT equality forward," said HRC President Chad Griffin. "Instead, these municipalities are taking action now to improve the lives of countless LGBT Americans. In what has been an historic year for equality, a record-breaking number of municipalities this year have earned top scores in our Municipal Equality Index for their inclusive treatment of their LGBT citizens and workers. They are mak-

ing a powerful statement that no one should have to wait for full equality - the time is now."

"This year, an unprecedented wave of discriminatory legislation attempted to roll-back our efforts for LGBT equality," said Rebecca Isaacs of the Equality Federation. "Despite that challenge, over 20 towns and municipalities passed non-discrimination ordinances, some in the most unexpected places. These wins, along with historic LGBT visibility, speak to the tenacity of our advocates all across the country, many of whom donate their time to achieve fairness and equality. The MEI is an important tool for our movement that illustrates our successes and the work ahead of us. We will not stop until all Americans have a fair opportunity to provide for themselves and their families, free from the scourge of discrimination."

"The MEI shows that overall South Dakota is not an inviting place for LGBTQ+ to live except for Brookings which has been proactive in creating a welcoming environment," said Lawrence Novotny, board chair of Equality South Dakota. "Equality South Dakota is attempting to improve the situation in South Dakota."

Key findings contained in the MEI, issued in partnership with the Equality Federation, provide a revealing snapshot of LGBT equality in 408 municipalities of varying sizes, and from every state in the nation. The cities researched for the 2015 MEI include the 50 state capitals, the 200 most populous cities in the country, the five largest cities in every state, the city home to the state's two largest public universities, and an equal mix of 75 of the nation's large, mid-size and small municipalities with the highest proportion of same-sex couples.

Forty-seven cities earned perfect 100-point scores, up from 38 in 2014, 25 in 2013 and 11 in 2012, the first year of the MEI. This year's MEI marks the largest number of 100-point scores in its history.

Other findings contained in the 2015 MEI:

- Cities in all regions of the country earned excellent scores, demonstrating that commitment to LGBT equality is not confined to parts of the country many people assume are most LGBT friendly;

- 47 cities received perfect scores, even with this year's more demanding criteria; that's up from 38 in 2014, 25 in 2013 and 11 in 2012;

- Cities continue to excel even without depending on state law: of cities that scored a perfect 100, 19 are in states that don't have a statewide non-discrimination law; that's up from 15 cities last year, eight cities in 2013, and just two in 2012;

- 32 million people now live in cities that have more comprehensive, transgender inclusive non-discrimination laws than their state or the federal government;

- The average city score was 56 points, with half of the cities researched scoring over 61 points. Eleven percent scored 100 points; 25 percent scored over 77 points; 25 percent scored under 31 points; and five percent scored fewer than 10 points.

- Cities with a higher proportion of same-sex couples tended, not surprisingly, to score better, and the presence of openly-LGBT city officials and LGBT police liaisons also were correlated with higher scores.

The MEI rates cities based on 41 criteria falling under five broad categories:

- Non-discrimination laws
- Municipality's employment policies, including transgender-inclusive insurance coverage, contracting non-discrimination requirements, and other policies relating to equal treatment of LGBT city employees

- Inclusiveness of city services

- Law enforcement
- Municipal leadership on matters of equality

University Art Galleries at USD Presents "Asiniig" by Indian Artist from Minnesota

The University Art Galleries at the University of South Dakota opens the exhibit Assiniig on Monday that features works by Duane "Dewey" Goodwin, of Bemidji, Minnesota, who has Anishanabe and Lakota heritage and White Earth tribal affiliation.

The works will be on display in the John A. Day Gallery in the Warren M. Lee Center for Fine Arts from Dec. 21 through Jan 22, with a closing reception on that

Friday from 6-8 p.m.

Goodwin's work has received numerous grants and awards and has exhibited at the Philbrook Indian Art show in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and the Heard Museum Indian Art show in Phoenix. He has worked in art education for 30 years, believing that restoring traditional arts is vital to retaining cultural traditional practices. He considers himself a contemporary artist living in a semi-traditional environment. Dewey's primary

medium is stone carving, but he's also skilled in bead work and ivory carvings.

Assiniig features many works Goodwin has created throughout his lifetime, such as stone carvings, bronze castings, paintings and traditional bead work. Several of his carving pieces were created while Goodwin participated in the second annual Northern Plains Indian Artist Residency at the University of South Dakota last June. This residency is made possible through the Contemporary Native Arts Program grant. The Northern Plains Indian Artist

Residency supports artists in the upper Midwest in the creation of a new or ongoing visual arts project.



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