

## **LIVER, ONIONS AND A-1 SAUCE** **Michael S. Williams**

When I was a kid, my mother would feed us a lot of liver and onions. I cannot overstate how much I hate liver. I appreciate that liver is perhaps good for you and there are a good number of people who cannot get enough of it, but I am not one of them. They are welcome to have mine.

To compound matters, we were not allowed to leave the dinner table until we had cleaned our plates. By today's standards this would be considered by some to be child abuse, a tough sell to the parents of yesteryear who grew up during the depression. A dinner table can become a lonely place so I quickly discovered that the only way to gag liver down successfully was to smother it in A-1 sauce.

The recent business breakfast at the Fess Parker Double Tree Hotel featuring the State of the City was a first class morning event. The efforts of many people clearly paid off. However, there was way too much liver and no A-1 sauce. To say there was three minutes of useful and forthright information in the just less than two hour presentation could be construed by some as an exaggeration of several minutes.

The event started with the revelation that there is reportedly over one million square feet of empty office space on the south coast. Wow, that is a lot of empty floor space. The world renowned motivational speaker Tony Robbins would have been impressed how such dynamic news was suddenly spun into a walk through glorious municipal achievements (many of which were fought every step of the way by the city) to become triumphant successes.

For me, the highlight of the presentation was the apparent fire drill at the end where the program potentes vanished before any questions could be asked from the audience of hundreds of guests. One thing is for sure, city management does have a very effective escape plan.

The recent fires that impacted the south coast tested local government to the extreme. While most of us are back to our normal routine and have all but forgotten the near miss of burning the entire town down, others in our community are living a nightmare. False promises, insurance challenges, rules and regulations, municipal bureaucracy, schemes and scams, to name a few for those who were not prepared. That ever nagging question of "Who is going to pay?" seems to keep popping up.

Roads still need repair, some permits are still in process, some homes are not going to be rebuilt, the list goes on and on, but life is returning to normal. In the meantime, we as a community have reset and are skipping along as if nothing ever happen.

Japan is by far better prepared for earthquakes than California. No professional I have talked to disagrees. It has also been suggested by many emergency planners and managers that Japan has

better constructed nuclear power plants than we do in the United States. Japan practices and lives emergency preparedness and look at them today. What do you suppose would happen here under similar circumstances?

We do not need to go to Japan to see the results of recent large scale emergencies. Crescent City and the surrounding communities were impacted by a significant tsunami following the Japan earthquake. It was a non-event for all of the folks in Santa Barbara who drove to the beach during the alert to see what a tsunami looks like.

About two weeks ago, a major land slide took out all lanes of US-101 just above the Humboldt community of Garberville. This cut off most of the west coast of Northern California, leaving the already heavily damaged Highway 299 as the only alternative route. Gas, food, daily supplies, commuters, to name a few was profoundly impacted by the slide.

One big question for emergency workers was where to take the dirt from the slide? Today's environmental regulations do not allow for CALTRANS to just push it out of the way. I just learned that snow has to be properly disposed of if removed. One cannot just dump it in a lake, stream or river. Never mind that the snow free falls into the same lakes, streams and rivers unassisted by man. We do indeed live in amazing times. What efforts are being made to modify local, state and federal environmental regulations for emergencies?

Infrastructure is a huge issue confronting emergency planners. Sewer systems, municipal water systems, electrical, communications and transit systems are all in need of repair. Many of today's water and sewer systems were built during World War II when metal compounds were reduced because of the needs of the war effort. Those World War II pipes are not of the same quality and strength of their predecessors. What efforts are being made to correct this pending emergency?

Good or bad, cut backs, layoffs, brownouts and flat out closing down of local services is in progress. It is going to take longer to have the police respond, if they respond at all. You may find yourself walking to the station to file your report. The fire department is going to take longer to arrive to address your emergency. Road repair is going to take longer. Indeed, the list of impacts is growing. The question is what is being done about it?

It is about priorities. What is the priority of local government today? Do you think emergency planning and preparation is on the priority list for your community? Do you think your community has the ability to address the real needs of the community under normal circumstances? Is our community willing to pay for what it takes to be ready?

If local government cannot function under the best of times, how is it going to function under the extreme stress of an emergency? Unless you like liver, it may be wise to bring a bottle of A-1 sauce before you ask these and other tough questions.