

## Editorial Opinion

By Daren R. Coon, Secretary-Treasurer  
Nampa & Meridian Irrigation District

Once again the agricultural miracle that water creates in the Treasure Valley is about to unfold.

For the 96th year in a row Nampa & Meridian Irrigation District water managers have turned the water into the hundreds of miles of canals that deliver water to more than 40,000 water users on the 64,000 acres of farmland and residential parcels we serve in Canyon and Ada Counties. From now until October, our canals, such as the Ridenbaugh, will flow night and day carrying as much water as a small river.

A lot has changed in our valley since we started delivering water back in 1904. Back then our canals were far out in the country, completely removed from any people other than the occasional farm. Now, much of that land has been covered with new subdivisions. Increasingly, we find the homes of our new neighbors surrounding more and more of our water distribution system. Today we not only deliver water to the traditional headgates we also bring water to more than 5,000 pressurized irrigation system users in nearly 150 subdivisions around our valley.

But there is one thing that has remained constant throughout the past 96 years: canals are inherently dangerous, especially to children. Tragically every year we read about children drowning in canals and ditches. It can and it has happened right here in the Treasure Valley.

If history holds, in a few months, when it gets really hot, we will begin to get reports of young people floating on tubes on our Ridenbaugh Canal. Our ditchriders will once again encounter people swimming in the canals, playing on structures in or stretching across the canals or on canal banks. Families with their kids and dogs will once again use the canal banks for their evening strolls.

That kind of stuff really can and does give us a lot of sleepless nights. There are a lot of newcomers who really don't understand the danger posed by a canal. To them it is a small creek running past their property. But make no mistake about it the water in canals is deeper than it looks - generally about 7 - 10 feet deep. The water is also flowing fast, a lot faster than it appears. Our Ridenbaugh Canal, for example, typically flows at 520 cubic feet per second, which equates to more than 233,000 gallons a minute. That much water, flowing down a narrow canal translates to a pretty substantial velocity.

A person who falls in a canal has to cope with steep, vertical banks, a fast, deep flow of water and no shallow spots. That combination of factors spells certain tragedy. That's why it is a sad fact that more children drown in canals every year in Idaho than in any other body of water.

Lastly. What many people also may not know is that canals are private property. They are not public thoroughfares even though they may appear that way and if you go on the property without permission it is trespassing. That road down a canal bank is not a public road: it's a private easement we use to patrol and maintain the canal. Whenever possible we work with the Counties or Cities to establish recreational pathway agreements on certain sections of our system. But for safety reasons much of our system is closed to the public.

For the sake of your loved ones: please keep off the canals.