

## 12-28-18 Christmas Card Cartoons in Tune

I arrived home Monday afternoon greeted by a Christmas card in my mail box, along with the last-minute pleas for donations. It had no return address. Hmmm...I opened the pleasant glitter dazzled card and read that this person hoped to meet me some day in person. Ooh! I have a secret admirer? It was signed but I could not decipher the name. And it also said, "Enjoy the cartoon."

The single-block cartoon showed a doctor looking at the patient's chart, with the patient sitting on the edge of the examining table. The caption read: "Here's your problem – it looks like you're paying attention to what's going on."

Ha! That was a compliment and the timing was perfect! I had just called a local establishment where I witnessed a table of pies and a man giving out samples of said pies. The man who did not wear gloves, would take off the plastic cover, cut up the gooey apple pie into chunks, and hold out the tin for customers who reached in with their bare hands to take a chunk for tasting.

For reasons I will not now explain, I was not able at the time to go back in and speak to the manager. So, I was determined to call them when I arrived home.

The regular manager was not on site. The one on duty admitted she was fairly new at this site. Poor woman. I guess that is part of learning though. I can just hear the manager saying, as it has happened so many times over the years, at various places, "Of course, on my day off, this happens!"

I explained that ordinarily we, the Board of Health, are given the heads-up by an establishment, that they wish to offer samples on such and such a day. We then have a conversation about the source of the food and the way the samples are offered.

You have all seen that happen in grocery stores. The preparer wears gloves, the brand of the food and nutritional information is posted, and the sample is offered by tooth pick, tiny paper cup, etc.

The new manager explained the food was being offered and sold by "some sort of school, she thinks". She also did not understand why this food was being sold in competition to a store with its own bakery.

Doing this properly is so easy. Let us know ahead of time, prove the food is from an approved source, and provide written protocol on safely serving the

public. The new assistant manager understood, indicating she had no problem “shutting them down”.

So, I was feeling like the Grinch but did not have to be the Grinch. She was going to do it! We both have the same job and responsibility; not that of ruining people’s fun but that of keeping people safe. Well, she had the additional job of boosting sales and this outside pie sale might be good for public relations and charity but not beneficial for boosting corporate sales.

I say we can do both!

I told her they could apply for this and return for New Years and future dates, if all is in order.

Do you use bare hands at home and at family get-togethers? You probably do and that is your choice at private events. “No Bare Hand Contact” has been taken very seriously in Massachusetts ever since the Hepatitis A outbreaks in 2001 when thousands of people received Hep A vaccinations, and some food establishments went out of business.

When I am conducting a restaurant kitchen inspection, I try to put them at ease by striking up a conversation, but I eventually get around to talking about the proper use of gloves. I use that phrase because “appropriate” does not seem to be the best fit. Many areas in life are grey but this is not one of them. It is about correctness, so I use the word proper.

The staff is usually very surprised when I tell them that they do not always need the gloves. They always need clean hands but do not always need gloves.

The classic situation is with pizza making. The cook’s hands are supposed to be clean. Those with clean hands, may roll the pizza dough or sprinkle cheese. He can do this because the food handling is followed by the safety step of baking. If a virus had been shed or bacteria contacted the pizza, it dies in the oven.

Sandwich making and salad prepping, on the other hand, have no such step. Those kinds of foods go right into the customer’s mouths. The pre-cooked pie is now a “ready-to-eat-food”. If the server, or sample-tasting customer, is sick, those germs can enjoy a ride right into your stomach via the food. There wasn’t anything wrong with the food. It simply became the vehicle. Who wants to pick up that hitch hiker?

Microscopic germs are not visible, though. So, I must insist on the proper use of gloves and proper hand washing with soap, warm water and friction and proper separation methods such as paper plates, paper cups or deli papers. It is the proper thing to do.

Food borne illness is not a funny cartoon.

That is why I try to pay attention to what's going on.

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