



YOUR LETTER BEST

Santa-God connection

According to Andy Rooney, Santa and God are cousins. I think they are even closer than that, they are the same.

Wouldn't this be the greatest irony? With all the arguing about who embodies Christmas more, that they would turn about to be the same entity. Here are some similarities.

They both:

- ▶ Are all-knowing and omnipresent. For Santa, this is once a year, but why only once?
- ▶ Keep track of who's "naughty or nice."
- ▶ Reward virtue and punish evil. (unless you don't think

Book tells rest of Sam Volpentest's story

It would be reasonable to ask why it is worth your time to read a 500-page book about a man probably as well known today as when he died at age 101 in 2005.

But you would be asking the wrong question.



Jack Briggs

In Focus

C. Mark Smith's book *Community Godfather: How Sam Volpentest shaped the history of Hanford*

and the Tri-Cities is much more than the story of Sam.

Smith of Richland is an economic developer and author of *Raising Cain — The Life and Politics of Senator Harry P. Cain*, the colorful and controversial former mayor of Tacoma, war hero and U.S. senator.

In his newest book, Smith

tells the story of how one pint-sized giant of a man with strong determination and powerful political connections almost single-handedly prevented a large portion of Eastern Washington from sliding into economic depression.

It's a story of how, during 50 years, powerful local leaders used Sam — and how Sam used heavy hitters on the local, state and federal levels — to prevent the Tri-Cities from drying up and blowing away when the federal government determined it had enough plutonium to exterminate not just the Russians but the world, and started shutting down all of Hanford's reactors.

Some of that activity by Sam was self-serving. Most was not.

This book tells more than what happened to the Tri-Cities: It tells how it happened, who did it, to whom — and how. Together, these were

the people who were responsible for much of the excitement, vitality, insecurity, fear, politics and dreams that have made the Tri-Cities what it is today.

As a Tri-City Herald reporter, editor and publisher from 1960 to 1997, I thought I knew some of the "how" things happened over the years. I didn't. Reading the book was a trip down the lane of stories missed.

Sam was rarely, if ever, an instigator of projects. He was more of a bloodhound: lead him to a field, show him the scent. And he'd almost always bring home the prize.

Smith shows masterfully how Sam and others did that on project after project. They skillfully navigated the community's love/hate relationship with Hanford as they steered the often-conflicting demands of growing a Tri-City future independent of Hanford while at the same

time preserving the very necessary Hanford jobs.

The book is full of stories that concern not just Hanford. They include how Sam and others thwarted the conspiracy of Yakima and Pendleton interests who wanted the interstate highway no closer than 30 miles to the Tri-Cities.

How many knew that Sam's financial interest in gambling machines had him warned out of Las Vegas by Mafia types?

The book tells how Richland got the federal building, HAMMER, LIGO and how a piece of human bone determined where Battelle was to place one of its major labs.

Sam was not all sugar and spice. The book deals with the family life that Sam sacrificed for the sake of his economic development work.

It also chronicles what his friends and all reporters knew: that Sam, who regarded himself always as

underappreciated and underpaid, yearned for praise and adulation.

He never forgot a slight — even imagined ones.

There are times in the book where a reader can be forgiven for speed reading — such as the details of Washington Public Power Supply System's woes and the family details that would perhaps have been better as an addendum.

But those are nitpicks.

C. Mark Smith has done history a service by masterfully chronicling, through the life of Sam and his contemporaries, how the Tri-Cities was 50 years ago, how it is today — and how it got there.

It's an absorbing book — on sale for \$24.95 at www.cms-author.com. There will be a book-release party at Book-walter Winery from 2-4 p.m. Dec. 15.

▶ Jack Briggs is the retired publisher of the Tri-City Herald.