

Opinion

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ANOTHER VIEW:

Contra Costa Times

New law will finally require training teachers to report child abuse

The era of ignorance will soon end. While state law requires school personnel to immediately notify police or child protective services when they know or suspect a student has been abused, it merely suggests school districts train their workers about the mandate.

Consequently, as this newspaper has documented over the past three years, school employees — from janitors and teachers to principals and district superintendents — were woefully uninformed about the law.

That should change under bills Gov. Jerry Brown signed this year. Starting Jan. 1, school districts must train workers annually about their legal obligations. The significant new law was authored by Assemblyman Mike Gatto, D-Burbank.

A second law, carried by Assemblywoman Susan Bonilla, D-Concord, requires teachers when they initially apply for their credentials, and when they renew every five years, to sign a statement acknowledging their reporting responsibilities.

We hope education of workers will end delays reporting and, in some cases, outright cover-ups of physical and sexual abuse like cases we've documented in Antioch, Brentwood, Lafayette, Moraga, Concord and San Jose schools.

Too often teachers informed supervisors rather than directly alerting police as the law requires. Too often school administrators decided to conduct their own inquiries rather than complying with the mandate to turn cases over to law enforcement officials trained to investigate.

In 2013, then-Assemblywoman Joan Buchanan, D-Alamo, introduced legislation requiring each school district to develop a policy for reporting suspected abuse, and to review it with employees annually. It was a start, but, as we said then, weak: District officials who had previously failed to follow the reporting law would have been responsible for developing the training.

The bill stalled in the Assembly Appropriations Committee, chaired by Gatto, who feared the state cost to reimburse districts. We challenged him to come up with something better. And he did.

Under his new law, which takes effect Jan. 1, the state departments of Social Services and Education must develop a uniform online training program, and every school district must ensure all workers complete it within the first six weeks of each school year.

To be sure, the new law has some problems: First, school districts and workers face no penalties for failure to comply. Second, school districts can opt to provide their own training instead, even though their past attempts have often been inadequate. Third, because of ambiguities in the new law, districts that do provide their own training might be able to evade doing so annually.

Nevertheless, Gatto's bill is a significant improvement. We hope he'll fix the problems in it. We thank him for rising to our challenge.

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■ Voice letters must be 350 words or fewer. "Thank You" letters must be 300 words or fewer.

■ Letters must be signed and include an address and telephone number for verification.

■ Letters by the same writer are limited to two per month.

Send your opinion to ...

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OUR VIEW

THE ISSUE: Museum earns NEH grants.

WE SAY: Awards put our Valley on national stage.

WHAT DO YOU SAY? Send us your thoughts on this topic to www.ivpressonline.com/letterstotheeditor

Desert Museum earns National Endowment grants

Big things have continued to happen for the Imperial Valley Desert Museum in recent years, as the pace of its development and the development of its collection has ramped up rapidly in a very short time.

It's clear many people from the around the area have been cheering on the successes of the local museum long before its present iteration, and these days the Valley has a lot to get behind as work continues on its first permanent installation. And then museum has been a go-to sport for all sorts of cultural events over the last year and more.

But what locals always knew was a special oasis of archaeological and anthropological finds documenting the ancient history of the Valley just got a mighty big boost on the national stage, and a big boost of finances to go along with it.

Recently the museum found out it was the recipient of two National Endowment for the Humanities grants, one for \$4,255 and one for a whopping \$260,000. The NEH is an independent federal agency that has some very stringent standards on what gets funded, and usually if an organization gets funding it really deserves it.

While locals always knew what we had going on out in Ocotillo was important to the history of the desert and the early men and women who called it home, the awards really validate the quality of the museum and the current leadership directing it right now, from board members to director Neal Hitch, who after being brought on several years back really lit a fire under the museum.

The grant funding allows the museum to employ two humanities staff positions. The Desert Museum, incidentally, was the largest single-recipient endowment in California this year.

All of this happens as the Imperial Valley Desert Museum put the finishing touches on "Land of Extremes," the first part of a permanent display telling the story of the desert and its Native American ancestry.

The Desert Museum is a remarkable place, and it gets better with each passing day, as more community support surrounds it, and now national support. If for whatever reason, there are still locals who haven't taken a moment to visit, then what are you waiting for? This is a high-quality museum with a nationally recognized collection.

ANOTHER VIEW



MY VIEW

The most wonderful time of year

I'm sure no child ever loved Christmas more than I did and, thank God, the thrill of it all is still with me. When Gene Austry sings "Rudolph" and Bing Cosby reaches down into the resonance of his deep baritone voice and tells us about the "White Christmas" he sees in his dreams, it generates emotions in me that were spawned by three generations of Christmas memories.

When I envision my perfect Christmas, Scrooge is an irascible uncle who never got a present he didn't already have two of and, if he didn't, this one was certainly the wrong color.

It includes an aging grandmother who always gave each grandchild two one dollar bills, lovingly pressed with each corner carefully smoothed out. It includes a succession of visiting great aunts: Aunt Pearle, Aunt Goldie, Aunt Nora, Aunt Philomena and Aunt Lela. (Don't you just love those names from the 19th century?) Each would arrive at my grandmother's house with their tray of divinity, fudge, brownies and my favorite of favorites, chocolate chip cookies.

Is it any wonder I can close my eyes today and still smell the wonderful kitchen fragrance that filled the house each year at Christmas time? Is it any wonder I still spend several hours a week at the "Y" doing battle with the bulge created by the remnants of all those wonderful memories?

My children are mid-lifers now, but if I close my eyes for just a minute, I can still see them rushing to the Christmas tree on Christmas morning so excited that their feet barely seemed to touch the floor.

Amy would go from present to pres-



MARK L. HOPKINS
VIEWPOINT

ent tearing paper in all directions. Sara, always the little lady, would take each bow off and carefully remove and fold the wrapping paper. Steve usually crawled up on his Mother's lap and woke up slowly to all the excitement before heading for his presents.

To me, the spirit of Christmas culminates each year with Christmas cantatas telling again that wonderful story of a babe lying in a manger with shepherds and wise men kneeling at his feet, of families gathering to renew the bond that was kindled in all of those Christmases past.

Glorious is a Christmas with family, with children sitting in the midst of paper and boxes and this or that toy of the month.

Sad is a Christmas with children as hungry for love as they are for food. Glorious is a Christmas where we reach out to those less fortunate. Satisfying is the feeling of giving not only to your own but, also, to others of God's children. Let it be that kind of Christmas.

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MY VIEW

Santa Claus has come to town



RICHARD RYAN
VIEWPOINT

We were checking out with our perfect Christmas tree, and I felt a sharp poke in my back. Is this a holiday holdup? A stocking cap heist? No. It was a little boy also with a Christmas tree who pushed his shopping basket too close and the tip of the tree stuck me in the back. I did a fake, operatic-like death right there at the checkout stand. His mother was apologetic, and I told her and her son it was OK. A 6-foot Christmas tree just doesn't fit well in the average shopping cart.

During our search for the PERFECT TREE, a serious task, my wife who is normally an easy-going person just dumped a poor, rejected tree out of our shopping cart, sending a little girl fleeing for safety. Timber in the Christmas tree area. "Send that one back to Oregon," she said as we started examining what turned out to be the PERFECT TREE. Some people object to natural, cut trees on environmental grounds, but I consider them in the same way as I do harvested flowers. I knew a guy in the Army whose family owned a Christmas tree farm in Oregon. Trees are planted annually to replace the harvested trees so the farm has trees of all ages growing simultaneously. He also said they employ quite a few elves, which is good for the local elf economy.

I love walking into a garden center chock full of conifers. The aroma of fresh cut Christmas trees brings back a thousand memories and marks the start of the season. I also like fresh wreaths and just stick my nose into the one on our front door as I come into the house. "Honey, you have Christmas wreath needles on your nose. Looks cute but musta hurt," says my wife, who becomes a workshop elf turning out boxes of greeting cards with illustrated envelopes. It's a wonder what she does with Wite-Out. Snowmen appear, magically making the artwork of the Christmas cards secondary. Somebody needs to prop up the post office. Actually, it was difficult finding boxed Christmas cards. Wal-Mart doesn't even carry them anymore. Didn't find any at Target. Cost Plus in La Mesa does. Tweets and email greetings don't do it for us. They are too fleeting, and we like the color and tactile sense of folded paper. I tried hanging my smartphone with the other greeting cards, but it kept falling off the wall.

Santa did come to town a week or so ago. We saw him at the El Centro police station. It's not what you think. He wasn't in trouble for making lists of people who have been naughty and nice. That's the NSA's job. Santa sat patiently and greeted hundreds of families lined up around the police department waiting for a word with him. One guy asked him to fix a ticket. Santa set him up with County Probation and told the guy he'd give him a certificate directing him to perform 30 days of public service. The Central Union High's orchestra and chorus played and sang on the City of El Centro's new portable stage. It's a wonderful addition to the city's Parks and Recreation facilities. Wilson Junior High students also performed.

El Centro and Calexico have had their Christmas parades bringing out thousands of parade-goers, most of whom, in El Centro anyway, parked in front of our house. Brawley had its tree-lighting ceremony, and Heber has lit up Main Street with decorative lights so it's easier to find our way to Kennedy's Market. The Valley is in the holiday spirit. Hanukkah begins at sunset today with the lighting of the first candle of the menorah. The year 2014 will see the 48th annual Kwanzaa, the African American holiday celebrated from December 26 to January 1. The Kwanzaa celebration is not intended to replace Christmas but to emphasize values of ancient African cultures such as unity, self-determination, and collective work and responsibility.

So get out there and put up those lights. Decorate the tree. Give thanks and practice some of that good will toward all women and men. Happy holidays.

Richard Ryan lives in El Centro and can be reached at rryan@mail.sdsu.edu