

## Liberals, conservatives help lower teen births

**OUR OPINION:** We should take a lesson in teamwork from town of Tillamook

Jack and Jill went up the hill to play a game of doctor.

They lay on the ground, rolled around, and nine months later Jill gave birth to Jack Jr.

But they didn't learn to do that in Tillamook, Oregon.

While teenage pregnancy continues to be a severe problem across the nation, little Tillamook County has found a way to lower its number of unplanned conceptions.

The northwestern coastal county recently caught the attention of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services after the community cut its teen pregnancy rate by two-thirds.

Their formula for success? Teamwork.

Organizers decided the best game plan was to gang-tackle the problem. The gang turned out to be a strange one, though — one that defines the word "diverse."

Churches, public and private agencies, schools, health workers and families first all got together to acknowledge the issue. Then, they rolled up their sleeves and went to work.

Who would have thought that a group of people from directly opposite political spectrums, beliefs and values, could have ever reached an agreement on anything more important than how to flip a light switch?

Incredibly, those differences actually provided the motivating factor that jump-started the entire community's involvement.

"Everyone did something, and the combination

worked," said a Tillamook County Health official.

Some of those "some-things" included Tillamook County schools working with the Health Department to have teen parents talk to students about the 24-hour responsibility of caring for an infant.

Also, the school district and a special commission for families and children worked with parents on an acceptable sex-education curriculum.

Youth pastors from local churches met with families to discuss improving communication between parents and their teens, particularly on the topic of family values and sexuality.

Teens learned about abstinence and how to resist pressures to become sexually active from church-sponsored speakers; teen-age boys learned about the responsibilities of child-rearing; and the Women's Crisis Center committed itself to helping students recognize and avoid domestic violence and sexual assault.

As a result of these and other proven strategies, Tillamook has a teen-age birth rate of only seven per thousand among females aged 10 to 17. Only four years ago, Tillamook's rate was much closer to the top of Oregon's 36-county list.

In comparison, Lane County's birth rate in the same age group was 16.8 per thousand in 1994.

A local task force has a plan for the Lane County Commission on Children and Families that it hopes will mirror some of Tillamook County's successes.

We can only hope this weird but wonderful solution works for our county as well.



## Angry boys can cause unexpected harm

It's amazing how the rules of life change. Take anger. As a boy, I was able to express my anger in any way I saw fit — screaming, crying, yelling — the usual childish responses.

Kimberly Andrews made me real angry. Little Miss Fourth Grade Perfect. Perfect blue eyes, perfect blond hair, perfect white dress. Perfect, perfect, perfect.

After a math test or an essay was handed back, Kimberly and her ponytail would skip down the hall to her mother's awaiting arms. "Look mom, another A!"

One day Kimberly made me so angry that my 9-year-old blood reached the boiling point. It was creative writing time. The topic was "purple," and Kimberly wrote some schmaltzy story about a little Purple Iris blowing in the wind.

You'll have to understand that at the time Prince and his movie *Purple Rain* were the hippest things a fourth-grader could imagine. It made perfect sense to me that I should write a spin-off entitled "Purple Pain." The star of the story was the lauded rock star Priss who wore purple lace and rubbed it all over himself. I was quite proud of my creation. I mean, hey, this was creative writing and all.

When the papers were handed back, Mrs. Lumley's comments on my story were rather brief: "D-" and "Inappropriate."

Kimberly laughed at me with victory, at which time I grabbed her paper, tore it in two and slugged her right in the stomach.

It felt great. I was able to lash-out in the most immature manner I could conceive.

But at some point in our lives we learn that anger and immaturity are not the most productive means of expression. So what happens when a boy reaches the age of maturity and finds himself ignorant of the destructive potential of his vehemence?

This question is pathetically answered in the January 19th edition of the *Oregon Commentator*.

In addition to the usual boyish bragging about drinking and sex, the *Commentator* included a list entitled, "Top 75 Reasons Why Women (Bitches) Should Not Have Freedom of Speech."

The list was written by four first-year students at Cornell University and has circulated around the Internet for months.

Included in the list are No. 20 "This is my dick. I'm gonna fuck you. No more stupid questions"; No. 39, "Of course, if she can't speak, she can't say no"; and No. 47 "Nothing should come out a woman's mouth, SWALLOW BITCH!"

Those of the *Commentator* claim that they oppose the list but were forced to include it for the purpose of providing context to the Cornell Internet debacle.

However, the manner in which the accompa-

nying article makes light of the list suggests that the *Commentator* writers thoroughly enjoyed the list and simply cited a convenient excuse to revel in a boy's angry fantasy.

Let it be noted that the Cornell story ran in several national publications, including *The New York Times*; none of them printed the list. Tantamount to saying, "To write a story about manure we must include a picture of manure so that you know what it looks like," the claim that the list had to be included with the story is insulting.

The *Commentator* calls the list merely "a bad joke" and argues that only "the easily offended" will be bothered.

No. 38, "If she can't speak, she can't cry rape." Please tell me who is offended by this? Is it those overly sensitive men who, when hearing such "humor," think about their sisters, their mothers or their wives? Is it those paranoid women who are imprisoned at night because they feel unsafe walking outside?

On these boys' playground, fearful women are merely intruders who simply don't know how to have fun. So how does one explain to a child that a joke about invading a woman should not be described as a "form of humor"?

The *Commentator* argues that "there is a clear line between thought and action." This incomplete observation ignores the effects of symbolic discourse.

No, I do not believe that a man might read this list and proceed to rape a woman. However, I do believe that symbols lead to thoughts, and thoughts lead to action.

Not long ago members of Israel's opposition party plastered posters of Yitzhak Rabin dressed in a Nazi uniform throughout the streets of Jerusalem. Party leaders organized rallies where Rabin was labeled the next Hitler. Two weeks later Rabin was assassinated. The study of propaganda is rich with examples that demonstrate the interconnection between words and action.

Statements such as No. 10, "They should just shut up and obey anyway" do more than express humor. They create a fantasy world where women can be objectified, violated and discarded without remorse.

Like prepubescent children circling around a girlie magazine in the bathroom, the writers of the *Commentator* laugh without remorse.

They cannot even fathom the destruction of their banter.

It sure is hard when you're dealing with boys.

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