

'Neighbors' campaign brings people together

■ **OUR OPINION:** New program will teach people about community

"It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood ..."

Most of us can sing or at least hum the words to that funny little theme song from the long-running *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood* TV show.

After years of ridicule for being America's biggest nerd, the soft-spoken, sweater-clad man has recently been praised for his work with children and for his efforts to educate society about basic concepts such as compassion, making friends and treating others with respect.

You can laugh at his cheesy programs and silly songs and maybe even balk over the silly puppets and the red trolley that rings its bell to speak, but the sad reality is that the U.S. desperately needs people like Fred Rogers.

We need to learn how to treat each other better, how to communicate with one another better and how to be better neighbors to each other, literally and figuratively.

Unfortunately, there seem to be a number of barricades (cultural, psychological and social, among others) that prevent many people from making connections with others — whether those "others" are next door or in a nearby cubicle at work. Whether these barriers come from busy and bustling lifestyles or from a subconscious defense against the fear of crime, many people seem to be unable to meet or make friends with others.

Did you grow up knowing your neighbors? Do you know who your neighbors are now? Have you ever said "hello" to those people who just moved into the area?

Thanks to a campaign sponsored by the City Club of Eugene, *The Register-Guard*, the Eugene Neighborhood Leaders Council, the League of Women Voters of Lane County and Lane Community College's FM radio station, city residents are being given the opportunity to share stories of how their neighborhoods have

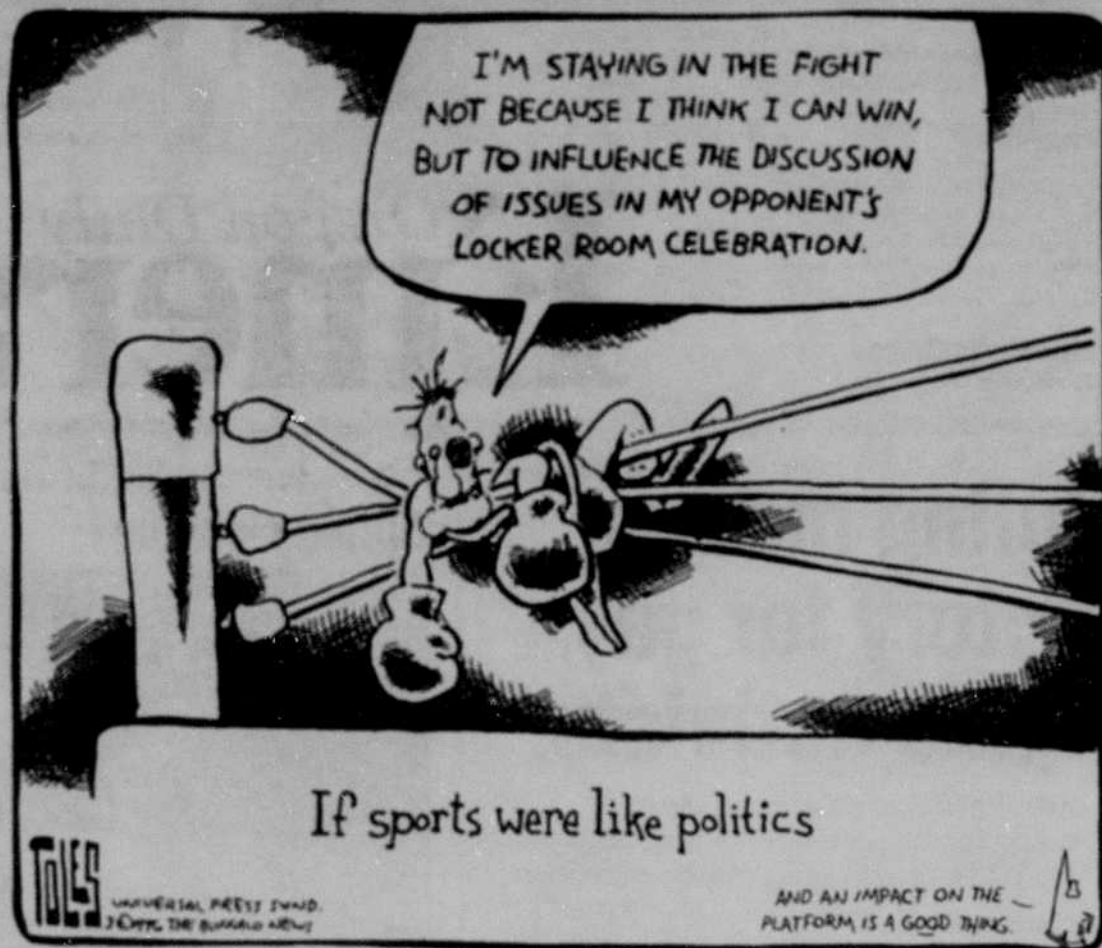
“You can laugh at his cheesy programs and silly songs and maybe even balk over the silly puppets and the red trolley that rings its bell to speak, but the sad reality is that the U.S. desperately needs people like Fred Rogers.**”**

succeeded in bringing people together.

Based on a 1994 City Club forum that identified citizenship and "neighborliness" as two issues Eugene residents considered vitally important, the "Successful Neighborhoods" campaign is an attempt to reveal and advertise examples of community building. Those ideas and formulas will then be applied to other neighborhoods throughout the community.

There are people who actually know who their neighbors are — right here in Eugene. Some neighbors actually talk to each other and do crazy things such as throwing block parties and helping each other out when they need an extra hand.

It will be interesting to hear their stories and learn from their examples. We can all benefit from being better neighbors and having just one more friend.



Bill of Rights doesn't give license to kill

"...that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government..."

— The Declaration of Independence

It would seem that our Founding Fathers created the Bill of Rights in a linear fashion. They wrote the most vital clauses first, the next most important second, and so on. The First Amendment allowed for we noisy Americans to always be heard — regardless of what we have to say. The Second Amendment gives us the means to support this right: should the need arise, whether it be against a foreign power (Great Britain in their case) or against our own government (in our case).

Yes, the NRA does have our best interests in mind. (Don't worry, I hate 'em too). Or perhaps more accurately — they're doing the right things for the wrong reasons. The Second Amendment was not intended to protect the right to bear hunting rifles. Rebellions aren't fought with a .30-06. The Second Amendment was designed to protect the right to bear handguns, AK-47s and other such lethal knickknacks whose sole purpose is to kill human beings. The only thing you can hunt with a bazooka is either a tank or a brontosaurus.

The Second Amendment's intention was to allow the people to fight back against a government that they thought was becoming too tyrannical and out of touch with the populace. Thomas Jefferson once wrote to James Madison that the occasional rebellion was a good thing because it kept the government in line. Remember, this country was founded by a group of rebels. What we called patriots, the British called terrorists. From this rebellion the greatest country in existence was born. Whoops, there I go being patriotic again. Just put a cork in it, quit yer bitchin' about the joys of socialism, communism and every other damn "ism," toss out your Marx (not Groucho) and join us back here in the not-so-nice real world. If you don't like it here, move to China. Your comrades over there have got more freedom and liberty than they can handle.

The problem is that these fruit loop "militias" have gone overboard. The whole idea of protecting one's self from the government is a bad idea. Yes, they are a tad bit crazy. But that's what happens when your family tree doesn't branch.

What defines them as loony toons? Of course we all know they are, so we let the FBI pursue them. But what if they honestly believe that

their civil rights are being violated? And what if they actually are? Conspiracy or not, that threat will always exist with any sort of government. Clinton wants to take away our ability to defend ourselves against the government and each other by restricting handguns and assault rifles under the pretense of fighting crime. What good is a .22 against a M-16 and body armor? If everyone is to have access, then criminals invariably will as well. You can't have it both ways. Too bad the president doesn't realize that. I sincerely doubt he would try or want to become Augustus Caesar, but infringing on our civil rights will not endear him to those who hold the Bill of Rights sacred.

Clinton also signed into law the Telecommunications Decency Act, which bends the First Amendment over the hood of his Mustang and shoves the government's foot up its ass. Am I paranoid or is there a pattern here? Or have I just been watching too many of *The X-Files* again?

The Freemen in Montana deserve the worst possible punishment for being tyrants under the guise of being "patriots." But what of Randy Weaver, a bigot — but as an American he has a right to be — whose wife's head was blown off by an FBI sniper while holding her infant child. Not a weapon, a child. Or the debacle at Waco, Texas, with the Branch Davidians, led by the charismatic demagogue David Koresh. The ATF could have nailed him outside the compound on his daily jog, but instead they opted for a full frontal assault that ultimately led to the immolation of the entire compound. Stupidity on the part of the federal government? Gee, there's something new.

But the government's dispersion of justice in the name of freedom and liberty? Where was justice when a woman's head was vaporized while she suckled her child? Where was liberty when blacks marched peacefully for civil rights in the middle of this century and instead got fire hoses, dogs, nightsticks and bullets in their heads?

Is the government getting out of hand? Will we only realize it once it's too late? Are the quacks not so crazy after all? The greatness of America lies solely in the individual's love of liberty and freedom.

This may be the greatest country on the face of the earth, but there's plenty of room for improvement. Until there's a perfect world, who's going to defend your rights? The government? Don't be naive. Grab your guns and keep your wits about you. Or maybe I'm just paranoid. Probably both, but why take the chance?

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