

Steve Sack Knight-Ridder Tribune



We shouldn't be afraid to face our fears to change the world

On Thursday nights I teach computers to adults at Thurston High School in Springfield. On a quiet Thursday night, I looked at my classroom from behind a fence, sealed with police tape.

By now, everyone has heard of the terrible things that happened at Thurston High — and Columbine High, Santana High and New Bedford High — and with each new incident, everyone is gripped by fear.

It is the fear that troubled teens might erupt at any time and in any place — the fear that senseless acts of violence might strike close to our loved ones and ourselves.

I felt those fears as I looked at my classroom, suddenly transformed from a place of learning into a place of terrible silence — and it is fear itself that we need to address.

As a public citizen, I know that many people fear teenagers, marking each one as a potential threat. As a computer teacher, I know that people fear the intrusive machines that affect our daily lives.

Both fears are important, because fear itself is important: Each of us has things that make us afraid — things that seem trivial — to those unafraid of the things we

GUEST COMMENTARY

Jeff Osanka

fear. And this fact does not make us any less fearful.

One response is to give in to those fears and call for more and more government regulation, "for our own protection." While understandable, such a response only breeds more fear.

The other response is quite different and more difficult. People can acknowledge their fears and take appropriate personal action to reduce fear.

For instance, the adults in my computer class acknowledged their fear, and took action by signing up for a class. Together they improve their skills by reducing their fear. Similarly, each of us must take ownership of our fear and take steps to overcome it. Let me give you a concrete example of what you can do.

Do you fear that teens are out of control? Then take action. Pick any one of the teens you know, and answer this question: "What one thing can I do to improve the life of this teen?" Then do that thing.

Maybe it is tutoring them one night a week in algebra. Maybe it is taking them on a drift boat to fish the McKenzie River. Maybe it is simply listening to them gripe about their parents. The specifics do not matter. The fact that you have taken action does matter.

You benefit because you have faced your fear and taken action. The teens benefit because someone has taken a true interest in their well-being, and that makes the world, for them, a far less fearful place.

We can continue to let horrible incidents like those in Springfield and New Bedford push us farther away from each other, as we sink ever deeper into our fear. Or we can take personal action, and address our fear by improving a little corner of our world.

I challenge you to join me in taking personal action. Individually we can make a difference in reducing fear in our world and the world of our teens.

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