

CANYON VIEWS

Election season offers civics lessons



NIKKI COLEMAN

Despite what seems like constant news and advertising about the upcoming November election, there is a troubling lack of civic knowledge in our country. Only a quarter of Americans can name all three branches of government and nearly a third can't name any of them, according to a new survey just released by the Annenberg Public Policy Center.

One way to improve those figures is to raise civic-minded citizens by encouraging civics learning in school and at home. So what is civics education?

The nonprofit Partnership for 21st Century Learning defines civic literacy as "our knowledge of government, community and the role that we can play as citizens in our neighborhoods and country."

Many Americans recognize the need to be responsible citizens and be educated about citizenship. Former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor in a *New York Times* interview once said, "Knowledge of our system of government is not passed down through the gene pool."

Test scores show we need to do more to improve our student's understanding of civics. Only 23 percent of eighth-graders nationwide scored at or above proficient in civics, according to the most recent results by the U.S. Department of Education.

Another indication of the need for improvement might be voting behavior. As of 2015, research shows less than 10 percent of Oregonians between 18 and 24 years old registered to vote and fewer than 5 percent actually voted in two of the previous four elections.

Justice O'Connor was the chairperson of a national coalition that put together a comprehensive report called "The Civic Mission of Schools." The report provided numerous recommendations for the best civics education, including students "doing civics," such as community service and student government.

Many schools are now incorporating community service projects into the curriculum, which not only enhance civics education, but builds character later in life. Offering opportunities for students to participate in student government strengthens civic skills and attitudes—and at Oregon Connections Academy (ORCA), I am excited for our new virtual student government program to be underway.

Researchers found that students who receive effective civic learning are more likely to vote and talk about politics at home, more confident in their ability to speak in public and communicate with elected leaders, and four times more likely to volunteer to improve community issues.

Ballots for the Nov. 8 general election will be in mailboxes in mid-October and high school students who might be eligible to vote should keep in mind the deadline to register is Tuesday, Oct. 18. Between now and November, parents will have many opportunities to talk to their children about voting and the election process. To help parents have informative discussions with their children, here are a few suggestions:

Civilized Civics Lessons: Talk to students at about the election, ask them their thoughts. Parents should try to hold back their own opinion and really listen to what their children have to say. Ask which candidates they support and why? If children mention personal attacks or other mudslinging by candidates, use it as an opportunity to reaffirm the values of respect and tolerance.

Your Turn
Have a topic, issue or viewpoint pertinent to Silverton or the east Willamette Valley you would like to share? The Silverton Appeal Tribune welcomes letters to the editor up to 250 words, or submissions to the Your Turn section, from 600 to 750 words, on topics of broader interest.
Contact Justin Much at 503-769-6338 or jmuch@salem.gannett.com.

Investigate Issues: When speaking to children about issues or candidates, it is helpful if parents have done some research first so they can explain why they are for or against certain views. This is also a great time to make sure students understand that it is okay to have differing opinions. Encourage children to do their own research on candidates or ballot measures that extends beyond media stories.

Speech and Debate: Ask students to write a speech to present about one of the ballot topics or another issue important to them. They should make clear pro/con arguments. Hold a lighthearted debate before the family vote on a given issue or something in the upcoming election.

Domestic Democracy: Introduce younger students to the voting system by conducting in-house elections. Create a homemade ballot box and ballots, then hold family votes on what to have for dinner, which movie rent or where to go on a weekend outing.

President for a Day: Designate a day for students to be president and have them research the role of the president. Then encourage students to refine their writing skills by crafting a story that starts with, "If I were President, I would..." Consider having the student send their story as a letter to the president and mail it to the White House: www.WhiteHouse.gov/Contact/Write-or-Call.

Community and Compassion: Compassion is a feeling and an act. Adults can encourage children to be compassionate in many ways whether it's donating clothing or volunteering at the local food bank. Exercising compassion is a part of civic literacy that helps students understand their responsibility in the community.

Families wanting to make a difference in their community are encouraged to participate in the #GoalToBeGreater campaign by visiting www.ParentToolkit.com/Goal. Participants could win a \$10,000 donation to a charity of their choosing thanks to the sponsors, Pearson and NBC News.

Civics education is not just about politics, it's about citizen engagement. This election year offers parents and educators many teachable moments.

Who knows, maybe the student who learns a real life civics lesson this fall will become a leader in the state house or even the White House someday?

Nikki Coleman of Tualatin is a high school social studies teacher and student government adviser with Oregon Connections Academy. She can be reached through the school at 503-897-2272, 800-382-6010 or by visiting www.OregonConnectionsAcademy.com.

Casino night set for Oct. 15

CHRISTENA BROOKS
SPECIAL TO THE APPEAL TRIBUNE

Seven Brides Brewing is the site of Silverton Senior Center's fourth annual Rock the Casino fundraiser on Saturday, Oct. 15.

Tickets are \$25, and the event is open to anyone 21 or older.

It features casino-style gaming with "scrip" winnings that can be spent on silent auction items.

The party runs from 5 to 10 p.m. Funds raised go to the senior center.

Tickets are on sale at the center, the Pillbox, Seven Brides and the Silverton Chamber of Commerce.

MARRIAGE LICENSES

Marriage license applications with Marion County

Tyson Eugene Dettwyler, 28, Silverton, and Emma Laine Morrison, 19, Silverton.

Joseph Alan Obersinner, 26, Silverton, and Ashley Nicole Olsen, 27, Silverton.

Christopher Lee Kinn, 25, Silverton, and Mikensi Ladawn Barstad, 25, Silverton.

POLICE LOGS

SILVERTON POLICE DEPARTMENT

Received calls from Sept. 12 to 18.

Sept. 12

Stolen vehicle, 12:47 p.m., 700 Hicks St.

Sept. 13

Theft, 10 a.m., Wolverine Drive, Salem.

Sept. 14

Theft, 3 p.m., Evergreen School.

Motor vehicle accident, 8 p.m., 800 N Second St.

Sept. 17

Stolen vehicle, 10:16 a.m., 600 W Main St.

Motor vehicle accident, 9:07 p.m., 200 E C St.

Middle school open for tours First Friday

CHRISTENA BROOKS
SPECIAL TO THE APPEAL TRIBUNE

Silverton Middle School will open its doors to the community on Friday, Oct. 7. As local businesses celebrate First Friday with extended hours and special deals, the middle school at 714 Schlador

Street will be open from 5 to 6:30 p.m. This is an opportunity to take a self-guided tour and see how the district turned portions of the old high school into a campus for 450 of Silver Falls' sixth- through eighth-grade students, the Falcons. For more information, call 503-873-5317.

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