

GUEST COLUMN

Student journalists have the same press rights

The attack of the far right against the press isn't just coming from the Trump administration. It is being felt all the way down to regional and local news organizations, and even the high school press.

The First Amendment, which includes the freedom of the press, is often sabotaged by persons who are afraid of points of view that differ from their own, and afraid of news they think might make their political outlook look bad.

It would be wrong to think that the attack on the free student press comes solely from the right, however. Journalism teachers and their students must be aware of bias that can arise from either end of the political spectrum, and to ensure that their pieces are rooted in the truth.

As a journalism teacher of 19 years, I am particularly aware of the tendency to want to quash student expression. Students, particularly high school students, are often perceived as having less right to express themselves than do adults, or it is assumed that student newspapers should be all about sports and dances, but should avoid tough issues. Is this the way we want to teach young people, to avoid issues like suicide, teenage pregnancy, dress-code inequality, the opioid crisis, and the possibility of arming teachers? Both the student writers and the student readers deserve better.

Journalism teachers across the country have an important job of preparing their students to enter the real world. School newspapers and magazines are authentic publications and significant sources of information and opinion. Many of them, like the one at my school, are also public forums because they are delivered to the whole community, and take submissions and letters from both the community and school. Fortunately, our school has an administration that respects



Don Anderson/For The Daily Astorian

Jewell High School students Isaac Wilson, William MacNicol and Amber DeWees relax in the press room of The Jay, Jewell School's literary magazine. The Jay is produced by Falcon Graphics, Jewell's graphic design class.

the First Amendment and protects our publication, The Jay, from forces that would like to dismantle it, or make it into a "fluffy bunny" news source.

Every year, the Student Press Law Center takes on cases where high school newspapers are censored. They provide information to schools and school boards who might not know the laws regarding student censorship, as well as legal advice to students and staff who feel they are being censored or harassed. Many students, parents, teachers and administrators do not realize the extent of press freedom that the Supreme Court has afforded student publications, stating in 1969 that, "It can hardly be argued that either students or teachers shed their constitutional right to freedom of speech at the schoolhouse gate."

It is true that in 1988 the Supreme Court ruled in *Hazelwood SD vs Kuhlmeier* that administrators have the right to occasionally censor student publications, if they view the piece is detrimental to students' education. However, Oregon and several other states have given students stronger protection, requiring administrators to legally justify the reason for

their censorship.

Additionally, while the 1988 *Hazelwood* decision limited the press rights of student publications, it also established that this limitation doesn't apply to publications that have been opened as "public forums for student expression." Some student newspapers have historically been edited and proofread by the administration, while other publications, such as *The Jay*, assign, edit and publish their own stories, based on the decisions of the student publication staff with the guidance of the journalism teacher/adviser.

This distinction is important, as there is a tendency for some school boards and administrations to whittle away at the First Amendment rights of students if they perceive articles or artwork to be controversial or not in keeping with an alleged standard. Most student publications, like the one at Jewell, subscribe to the same journalistic ethics of all major newspapers, and use the Associated Press Stylebook for their writing standards.

The Journalism Education Association, another group that advocates for student journalists and their teachers, fundamentally believes that journalism and student

publications should teach students the value of a free press, encourage lifelong learning, promote high writing standards, and support the freedom of expression. Journalism teachers across the country want to develop students who think for themselves, aren't afraid to take on a difficult topic and write with power and concision.

Smart school boards and administrators realize that allowing students to fully express themselves through a student publication can go a long way to easing pressures within a school. All children, and particularly high school students, deal with a fusillade of issues today that continually threaten the stability of their own lives and the lives of students around them. A student newspaper or magazine is an excellent outlet for students to write and read about topics they identify with. This doesn't mean that good news isn't published along with more difficult issues, but it does mean that students should have the right to read all kinds of writing from the minds of their own classmates.

When I attended the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism a few years ago, the very first thing we did as a group of educators was memorize the First Amendment. One of our professors, Leonard Downey Jr., former executive editor of the *Washington Post*, told us repeatedly, "The First Amendment is the rock on which you stand, and a free press is the foundation of a democracy."

It is fitting that this foundation of a free press be conferred on our youth, just as it is conferred on adults. Students don't give up their constitutional rights just because of their age, and journalism teachers, in fact all educators, must be vigilant in protecting those rights, especially in the current anti-press climate.

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GUEST COLUMN



Louie Opatz

Members of the Seaside eighth-grade girls Pacific Basketball League team present a check for \$1,539.60 to help fund middle school sports to the students of Broadway Middle School in 2014.

Celebrating 25 years of PBL success

If you've spent more than one winter in Seaside, you've likely witnessed the droves of cars that show up in Seaside on weekends between January and early March. Drive your car along Highway 101, past Broadway Middle School and Seaside High, and you'll see both parking lots filled with Chevrolet Suburbans and SUVs from Washington, Oregon and even Idaho.

These cars and their occupants represent the families, coaches, and players from the nearly 500 teams that come to Oregon's North Coast each year for Pacific Basketball League (PBL) tournaments. It's a staggering number when you think about it. Seven weekends, as many as 96 teams (and support crews) per week and a nearly built-in guarantee that local hotels, shops and restaurants will have a great weekend.

Now running tournaments for the 25th year in Seaside, I was interested about the history of this wildly successful venture, so I spoke to PBL Director Kerri Januik by phone recently to learn how it all got started. Surprisingly, it came because of a newfound need in our community. With the expansion of Broadway Middle School in the early 1990s, sixth graders from Cannon Beach, Seaside and Gearhart would move to the expanded school. This move meant fifth- and sixth-grade athletic teams — which once closely mirrored the middle and high school's year-round programs — were planning to be eliminated.

Then Seaside High basketball coach Larry Elliott was particularly concerned about developing future Gulls and keeping sports a part of their lives.

Januik and her husband, Frank, were still fairly new to the area and both were already involved in sports. Frank was a physical education teacher and local coach, while Kerri was coaching eighth-grade girls basketball and teaching classes with her fitness management degree.

A local group that included teachers and business leaders got together to discuss the concept of running a few tournaments, according to Kerri. But they desired a leader.

"They're all teachers, busy and doing their thing," she remembered, "and everyone turned their head and looked at me."

Without a full-time job at the time, and the support of Frank, they decided to give it a try. A nonprofit was established and Kerri was named as the paid director.

"Our goal was to try to get about 16 teams each tournament (that first year)" she said.

They tried some tour-

naments that first fall of 1993, but quickly realized that was simply too early in the season. With Portland schools also slashing sports from program budgets, there was a true need for tournaments like the ones they had developed, and more teams started doing club-type sports.

Recently, 94 teams participated from grades five through eight. Some of the tournaments include fourth grade, but all cap out at the eighth-grade level. Kerri

told me they've had as many as 108 teams.

It's not just Seaside that benefits from the influx of hoops teams.

"In the 1990s, we had a few big tournaments where we started to use Camp Rilea and Warrenton schools," Kerri said. "It's probably been in the last seven years that we've partnered with Astoria."

And it's not just gymnasiums (up to eight gyms with 12 teams per site) and cash registers in the communities that balloon on Saturdays and Sundays. Kerri also partners with the school programs (not just sports) in Seaside, Astoria and Warrenton.

"It's a huge win-win," she said. "They (the kids and coaches) want to do it, and I need somebody to do it. It's a great fundraising opportunity for all these kids when budgets have been cut for different activities."

The groups work the gym, keep score and run the game clock, with coaches and teachers supervising the efforts. Each weekend, these efforts result in money going towards a plethora of school programs.

Teams have arrived all the way from Alaska and California for the tournaments, and inquiries have come from as far as Hawaii. Much of it is the result of a group of community leaders realizing a need for its children.

"It's been a good thing for everybody," Kerri told me as we wrapped up our conversation. "You know, it's a good thing for me and a good thing for my family. I could be a stay-at-home mom (to her three children), they got to be a part of it on the playing side and also on the working side of it later in life, and it's good for the community. It's good for our teams. I just think there's really nothing bad about it and it has been a real blessing."

Have a thought or a question about tourism in Seaside, or maybe an idea for a future column? Drop me an email at jrah1@city-ofseaside.us.

Jon Rahl is the director of tourism for the Seaside Visitors Bureau and assistant general manager of the Seaside Civic and Convention Center.

GUEST COLUMN

Why sell the Birch Street ball field?

On Valentine's Day, Astoria Mayor Arline LaMear, members of the City Council and staff held a special working session to determine if four parks currently under review could be declassified as city parks and converted into surplus property.

There are two reasons the mayor and council would like to see these parks turned into surplus property — first, to reduce the budget burden on the parks department, and second, to make land available for housing.

Once a property is deemed surplus, the city is free to offer the parcel for sale and the land can be sold for development or other uses.

Of the four parks discussed, only the baseball field at 47th and Birch Street was deemed convertible to surplus status. The others were too complicated with historic designations.

The Birch Street field, in Astoria's Alderbrook neighborhood, sits on a little more than an acre of flat ground near the Columbia River. For the past 60 years or so it has functioned as a kind of sandlot ball field with a backstop. During the season the



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

The backstop at Birch Field in the Alderbrook neighborhood of Astoria is the only visible evidence of the baseball diamond.

city would put out bases and do the mowing, in the winter the outfield fills with water and ducks move in. So far this is an All-American story of a low-key neighborhood ball field making good use of a marginal piece of property while the city provided necessary but limited maintenance. When the current city administration came into power this all came to a halt.

Historically the ball field was river bottom, and according to reports local sawmills filled the low-lying area with sawdust to create what we have today. Not suitable for housing but pretty good as a neighborhood ball field.

Due to lack of attention the field has been used less and less. But over the years

when the city did its part, it saw steady use from a wide group of users. T-ball and local pickup softball games were common during the summer.

What the mayor and councilors see now is an underutilized ball field. According to the parks director, her department spends about \$60 a month on maintenance, not a lot. She admits the potential \$60 savings per month doesn't exactly ring her bell, "but anything helps." And inexplicably, rather than being an advocate for the ball field, the parks director appears fine with selling it.

That's exactly what the mayor and council decided to do. In a non-official straw poll, they agreed to declare

the field surplus and offer it to a developer. The official vote will be taken at an upcoming council meeting where public comments will be accepted.

What was missing from the discussion was the extreme level of engineering that will be needed to transform this field into housing. Remember this is in the flood plain, within the tsunami zone and likely falls into the category of wetlands.

The question is, will the city even be able to sell the land for housing? The engineering challenges will be significant and thus the sale price will need to be steeply discounted to motivate a builder.

Something doesn't add up here. The parks department saves \$60 a month, the city ends up with a piece of surplus property that may not be suitable for building at any price, and the neighborhood loses a ball field.

The next day, Oregon Public Broadcasting interviewed the mayor about selling city parks. As I listened, she did a good job explaining her dilemma, "not enough money for parks and not enough land to build houses on."

The question is, does selling the Birch Street field address either of these issues?

Jim Stoffer is a 40-year member of the Alderbrook neighborhood and played catcher in Little League.