

March from 1A

According to store owner Nathan Graham, he was conducting business with two people in his shop when the front door opened and three marchers entered displaying their signs.

Graham, who wasn't aware the march was going on until that point, said he was behind the counter as the three protesters began talking about how they didn't support firearms and how they took lives.

"They weren't yelling, but were just not supporting firearms and trying to get their point across inside of my store," he said.

According to Graham, he and the two customers asked the protesters to leave multiple times before he walked from behind the counter and again asked them to leave.

"Finally, unwillingly, they left," he said.

Photos of the incident were placed on the Florence Oregon Facebook page, drawing condemnation from both sides of the issue.

"I can't defend someone going into a business or on private property. It's indefensible and inappropriate," said Kathleen Wenzel, who took part in Saturday's march. "That shuts down what I think is a valid public statement we were making."

While Graham supported the right of Protesters to make their voice heard, he questioned the tactic of demonstrating in his store.

"It's okay to do it outside the store, just not in the store during business hours, or at any point," he said.

The local demonstration was also missing one component that was part of the national march: Teenagers.

Most of the participants in Florence were of retirement age, with only two elementary aged children joining family members at the demonstration.

Despite the absence of stu-



PHOTOS BY JARED ANDERSON/SIUSLAW NEWS



Protesters walk Highway 101 in Florence Saturday in the rain, carrying signs in support of teachers, schools and sensible gun restrictions.

dents, demonstrator Mona Nicholson, a former school principal, viewed the march as successful and allowing different generations to support the students protesting nationally.

"I'm here to be a cheerleader for children and to show a model because they will be the ones who change the world," she said. "They will be the ones to take over where we baby boomers left off. I'm not saying we need to give up all the guns, but they need to be kept from children and they need to be kept out of schools."

When asked why she thought the debate wasn't settled in previous generations, she stated people got caught up in consumerism and work.

"Everything else became more important," she said. "We got involved in other things. But the power we had back then did begin to change, and the children now have to pick it up. I want to support them as much

as we can.

"Peace not war." As to the debate on whether or not teachers should be allowed to have guns in the classroom for protection, Nicholson said that she could never imagine herself being asked to carry a gun.

"We have to teach," she said. "Our classrooms are overloaded. If teachers had shooting practice and knew how to handle a gun and it was locked up, maybe they could have the option of carrying a gun. But how are they even going to have time to go and unlock a gun?"

"It's ridiculous what they're being asked to do."

Demonstrator Cynthia Orr believed that by participating in marches like this, a message will be sent to legislators to take action.

"I don't think we're going to change the minds of hardliners," she said. "I do think that this march, along with all of the

many marches across the country, sends a message to our congressmen and our senators that we are concerned about gun safety and kids."

While Orr stated she was not anti-gun, she did think restricting gun licensing is important, particularly when it comes to those with mental illness.

"I believe in the Second Amendment, and I believe that the majority of gun owners are responsible and are very conscientious about it. I don't think it makes it wrong to say, even if we have the right to bear arms, that someone who is a danger to the public does not have a right to bear arms," she said. "I don't want to disrespect anybody who is mentally ill, but there are people who are dangerous and should never be able to have a gun."

Orr suggested hospitalization for those with mental health issues or for those affected by bullying in school to receive help.

"I think we need to pull in the American Psychological Association and talk with psychologists about that very issue," she said. "They're already required to report when

someone is dangerous to themselves or the public. I think this is just a step forward with that; if someone is potentially dangerous with a gun, they should be reported. At the same time, we don't want to get to the point where we're restricting everything. It's a complex issue.

"But kids being killed isn't so complex. We have to start somewhere and we need to start now."

The issue's complexity was on full display as demonstrators looked to define their positions on the issues, and where to draw the line on regulations.

Nicholson suggested that a mental health test be implemented before an individual can purchase a gun, such as a driver's license for cars. When asked if such measures should also be imposed on the First Amendment's right to free speech, she stated "absolutely not."

"I think you have to go through background checks," she said. "You have to have some kind of mental health release. I don't really know what all has to be done, because I don't own a gun."

But firearm advocates like

Graham see the issues as similar.

"I would agree with the fact that life is very important, but I would also say that the current enforcement of the laws that are already in place is the best thing that can happen," he said. "I think more gun laws put into place and the watering down of the Second Amendment isn't the right thing to do."

As to the question of whether or not the two sides of the issue can find any common ground, the answer was up in the air.

"We can come together," Karin Radtke, co-organizer of the march, said. "Sportsmen who use guns for hunting seem totally on board with stricter background checks, banning assault weapons, keeping their guns locked up and keeping ammunition separate.

"Those things have nothing to do with affecting the Second Amendment. Do the people who are for the Second Amendment really want deranged people going around with guns? Do they know what they're fighting for?"

When Graham was asked about the possibility of coming together, he believed the solution was in funding, not creating more restrictions.

"I think the most logical way to do it would be to get more funds to the people that conduct the background checks and more enforcement of the laws that are already here and in place," he said. "If you look at all the shootings across the board, it was the deficiency of the governments that enforce those laws — and not quite doing their jobs.

"And that comes down to budgets not being there."

Regardless of their positions on the issues, all of those interviewed believed that the lives of children should not be at risk.

As for the solution?

"I think it's a long process," demonstrator Frank Smith said.

See **MARCH 10A**

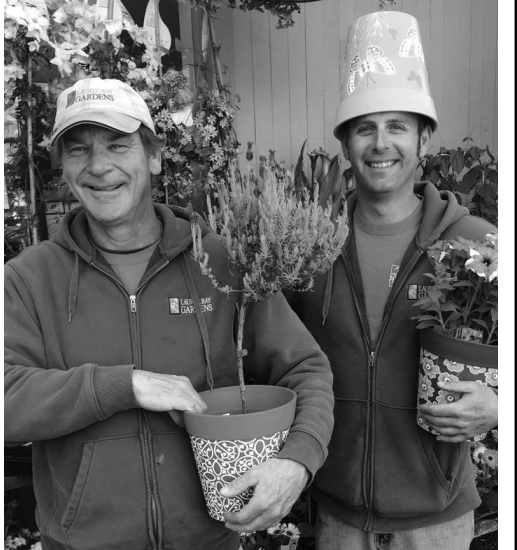
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