

“I never considered a difference of opinion in politics, in religion, in philosophy, as cause for withdrawing from a friend.” —Thomas Jefferson (1800)



I knew very little about the autism spectrum back in 2006, when I met the young boy who would become my son. My wife and I had been dating for several months when we decided it was time to introduce each other to our children. She explained that he had Asperger’s Syndrome and likely wouldn’t make eye contact — and to not take it personally if he avoided any physical contact like a firm handshake.

“And whatever you do, don’t tousle his hair,” she instructed with a squeeze of my hand. “He really doesn’t like that.”

Autism is a neurological developmental disability with symptoms generally appearing before age 3, impacting the development of the brain in areas of social interaction, communication skills and cog-

Hopefully, understanding autism can help lower some raised eyebrows

nitive function.

It is the fastest-growing developmental disorder, affecting 1 in 68 children, and boys are four times more likely to have autism than girls.

While it is the fastest-growing, autism is also the least funded and,

From the Editor's Desk

Ned Hickson

therefore, least understood disorder. The spectrum of autism is wide ranging, from those who do not speak (40 percent) to others who not only speak but whose talents have impacted the world: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, James Joyce, Albert Einstein, Emily Dickinson, Thomas Jefferson and Dan Akroyd are just a few.

Each summer, our family participates in the four-day KindTree Autism Camp south of Florence. The mission of the Autism Rocks camp is a simple one: For four days,

let those with autism and their families be who they are, free from stares, apology or judgement. That’s because often-times the symptoms of autism aren’t as apparent as other developmental disorders. As a result, children with autism having a difficult

time in social settings — or in extreme cases having a full meltdown — are quickly labeled as being “bratty,” “undisciplined” or simply the result of bad parenting.

While our son, now 19, is well beyond that thanks to the support of teachers, students, family and programs that have given him the tools to understand his Asperger’s, getting there wasn’t easy — particularly in those public moments under the raised-brow stare of strangers.

Through the triumphs and disappointments over

the last 12 years, we have always reinforced the message to our son that being autistic isn’t any different than being short or tall: Each provide challenges as well as advantages in life. Being willing to accept yourself for who you are is the key to recognizing the difference.

Through my 17 years covering the communities of Florence and Mapleton, I’ve had the privilege of meeting many parents of children with autism, as well as adults living with autism.

As I mentioned, I didn’t know much about autism when my son and I met in 2006. Since then, we’ve learned a lot from each other through the journey we’ve shared — including what it means for a father and son to share a firm handshake.

I hope you’ll join me and other families in recognizing National Autism Awareness Month through the end of April 30.

LETTERS

THE WONDERFUL ‘WIZ’

It takes a village — or in this case, the entire Siuslaw school enrollment, most parents, talented directors, artists, costumers, businesses and one small puppy — to present an amazing production of “The Wiz.”

I attended Saturday night’s performance, and as someone who has been involved for most of my younger years with all aspects of theater and what it entails to succeed, I was more than impressed with what this CROW group has accomplished.

Starting with the wonderful printed program, it is impossible to isolate any one performer, musician, stage hand and/or dancer for kudos; but certainly director Melanie Heard and the assistant directors Maree Beers and Genevieve Meltzer deserve special recognition for their commitment to the youth of our community.

The countless hours needed to

work with a group of youngsters this size is an accomplishment on its own. I have witnessed smaller adult groups in situations meet with much less success and discipline — and thus the result are below-par productions.

So to *all* involved: A job well done! Be proud that a community of this size can so successfully achieve to this high level.

The CROW organization has been a Godsend for so many of our youth — and is instilling great goals and self confidence in their young lives. It certainly tops sitting around endlessly with their “cyber” toys.

So, many thanks to all involved with CROW and those who were any part of such an entertaining evening at the FEC. I hope this organization can continue to grow and expand.

The sky is the limit with our donations, however large or small.

I will be awaiting the next

CROW production and encourage all to do the same.

Bravo!

—Sue Hale
Florence

ANGELS ON THE WATER TOWER

I agree with Ian Eales’ Letter to the Editor (“Wouldn’t The Water Tower Be A Better Canvas?” April 10) that the tower would be a good canvas for a mural.

Florence has a lot of angels doing good work helping people in need. I think it would be a good way to say “Thank You” for all their hard work and good deeds.

Also as a way to thank all those that are no longer with us that have done so much for our community.

I would like to see angels painted on the water tower — men, women, children and even a couple of dog angels.

So... angels, please.

—Minn Depweg
Florence

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The Siuslaw News welcomes letters to the editor as part of a community discussion of issues on the local, state and national level.

Emailed letters are preferred. Handwritten or typed letters must be signed. All letters need to include full name, address and phone number; only name and city will be printed. Letters should be limited to about 300 words. Letters are subject to editing for length, grammar and clarity. Publication of any letter is not guaranteed and depends on space available and the volume of letters received.

Letters that are anonymous, libelous, argumentative, sarcastic or contain accusations that are unsourced or documented will not be published.

Letters containing poetry or from outside the Siuslaw News readership area will only be published at the discretion of the editor.

POLITICAL/ELECTION LETTERS:

Election-related letters must address pertinent or timely issues of interest to our readers at-large.

Letters must 1) Not be a part of letter-writing campaigns on behalf of (or by) candidates; 2) Ensure any information about a candidate is accurate, fair and not from second-hand knowledge or hearsay; and 3) Explain the reasons to support candidates based on personal experience and perspective rather than partisanship and campaign-style rhetoric.

Candidates themselves may not use the letters to the editor column to outline their views and platforms or to ask for votes; this constitutes paid political advertising.

As with all letters and advertising content, the newspaper, at the sole discretion of the publisher, general manager and editor, reserves the right to reject any letter that doesn’t follow the above criteria.

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