

# OPINION

## Guest Viewpoint

### The month of May is a good time to talk mental health

By Jim Harrison

South Lane Mental Health Board Chair

For centuries, mental illness — from mild, temporary depression, to severe, persistent schizophrenia — has been stigmatized. In recent years, however, mental health services increasingly are recognized as being just as important as physical health services. These days, many people are comfortable seeking counseling or other help as they navigate the ups and downs of life and seek mental wellbeing.

As a longtime physician who recognizes the value of mental health services, this acceptance is welcome and long overdue. The connection between mental and physical wellbeing is strong and undeniable.

Mental illnesses are common. In any given year, one in four U.S. adults will experience a mental health problem, which can range from mild to moderate to severe. That means the chances are great that you, or someone close to you, is struggling.

Mental wellness is something we all have a stake in — whether we ourselves are facing a behavioral health issue, or whether it is a close family member, friend, or neighbor. Promoting mental wellness strengthens our entire community.

May is National Mental Health Awareness Month, and a good time to talk about men-

tal health and wellness, to encourage people in need to seek help, and to celebrate the strides we all have taken in integrating support and services into our community.

In the Cottage Grove area, the great majority of residents who seek behavioral health services find their way to South Lane Mental Health, the area's principal provider. South Lane Mental Health has worked hard not only to expand the range of counseling and other mental health services it provides, but to be a good partner in the community, linking arms with the South Lane School District, PeaceHealth Cottage Grove Community Hospital and Clinics, and numerous local nonprofits, government agencies and private businesses. One of our biggest goals: To increase empathy and tolerance surrounding mental illness.

South Lane Mental Health plays an extensive and crucial role in fostering the community's mental health. Our staff has helped thousands of Cottage Grove area community members with everything from short-term crisis counseling to long-term therapy, medication management and substance use disorder treatment. We've helped hundreds of parents and children bond more closely. We've provided intensive supportive care to scores of individuals who have persistent mental health issues. And we've provided counseling to hundreds of school-age children who are navigating troubles at home or

on the playground. Often our best results, as with good primary care, are found in what untoward events haven't happened.

We are always adapting our programs and services to meet emerging needs. One example of this is a recent expansion into serving residents of North Douglas County. Another example is celebrating the one-year anniversary of opening an innovative Substance Use Disorder Services program for adolescents, and adults who are struggling with both mental health issues and addictions. We offer different treatment styles for different clients because we recognize that one size does not fit all.

South Lane Mental Health's extensive programs and strong client-centered approach are important assets for the South Lane/North Douglas county region. They have earned the agency kudos around the state, and they demonstrate our community's level of caring and compassion.

The great majority of our clients are community residents — people such as you and me — who have simply come up against a mental health issue and need expert help. Our goal is to make the community stronger, whether by helping to house individuals with a serious mental illness who cannot be cared for by their families, by providing therapy that brings families closer together, or by helping individuals kick their destructive addictions.

### Graduates: Your old bedroom will soon be a hot tub

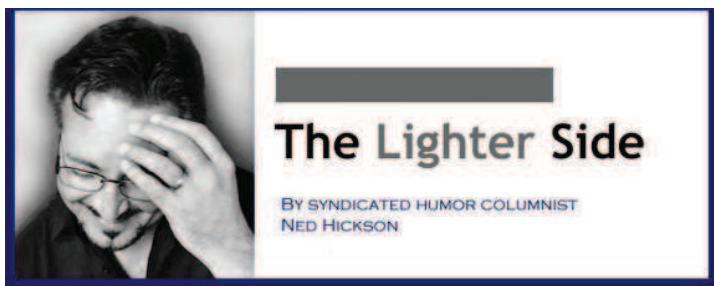
For parents, graduation is a bittersweet time filled with angst and second-guesses. Particularly if it appears their graduate won't be out of the house before the contractor is scheduled to begin turning that extra bedroom into a new hot tub by July 4th.

Don't get me wrong. Parents will always have a place for their children at home. It's just that, after the remodel, that place may have to be in one of the utility closets.

To help with this important transition, a lot of parents put together a "survival" package containing things like pots and pans, utensils, toiletries, dishes, tools—things from home that 1) you, as graduates, will find familiar and comforting in your new life, and 2) they've been waiting to unload on you for years so they can buy all new stuff.

To protect yourself, take careful inventory of this "survival" package before you accept it. Any small appliance — such as a toaster, blender or hot plate — that was made before standard outlets were introduced should be refused. The same goes for any "family heirlooms" that you've never seen before, but that your parents insist you loved as a child. In many cases, these items were never in your home to begin with, and are actually the result of an exchange program estab-

lished by other parents of graduating seniors who are also trying to get rid of stuff they don't want.



The reason for this is simple: All parents know that whatever you leave behind after graduation will likely remain in the attic or garage until the reading of their wills. Because of this, they will stop at nothing to make sure you are accompanied on your journey by that 70-pound ceramic pterodactyl you made in fifth grade, as well as any other belongings that won't readily ignite should the garage be consumed in a "freak" inferno.

But let's assume you manage to escape from home in anything smaller than a 27-foot moving van. Your next step as a graduate will be to settle into your new surroundings. This generally includes adjusting to having a roommate your first year in college. It will probably be someone you've never met before, but whom you can rest assured

has been carefully screened and, based on compatibility, specifically chosen as the perfect roommate. You will never actually meet this person of course, and will instead share a room with someone you once saw in a David Lynch movie. But that's all part of the college experience, which is aimed at preparing you for life.

(Or a life sentence, depending on how the whole roommate thing goes.)

Once you're settled, it's time to focus in on what you came to college for: An education.

Ha Ha! Just kidding! Let's just be honest and admit that you chose a college based on which website had the best-looking students playing volleyball in the fall leaves. Every college website has one of these photos, along with pictures of young, chiseled teachers lecturing before 300-seat-capacity halls filled with super models.

Warning: This is not real life! You will not find a lecture hall filled with 300 super models. In fact, your first semester, you'll be lucky if you find the lecture hall at all.

And even when you do find it, chances are you'll be sitting next to your roommate.

That said, I wish all of this year's graduates the best of luck as they embark into the world with stars in their eyes and dreams in their hearts — and, if they weren't quick enough, a 70-pound ceramic pterodactyl.

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Letters that are anonymous, libelous, argumentative, sarcastic or contain accusations that are unsourced or without documentation will not be published.

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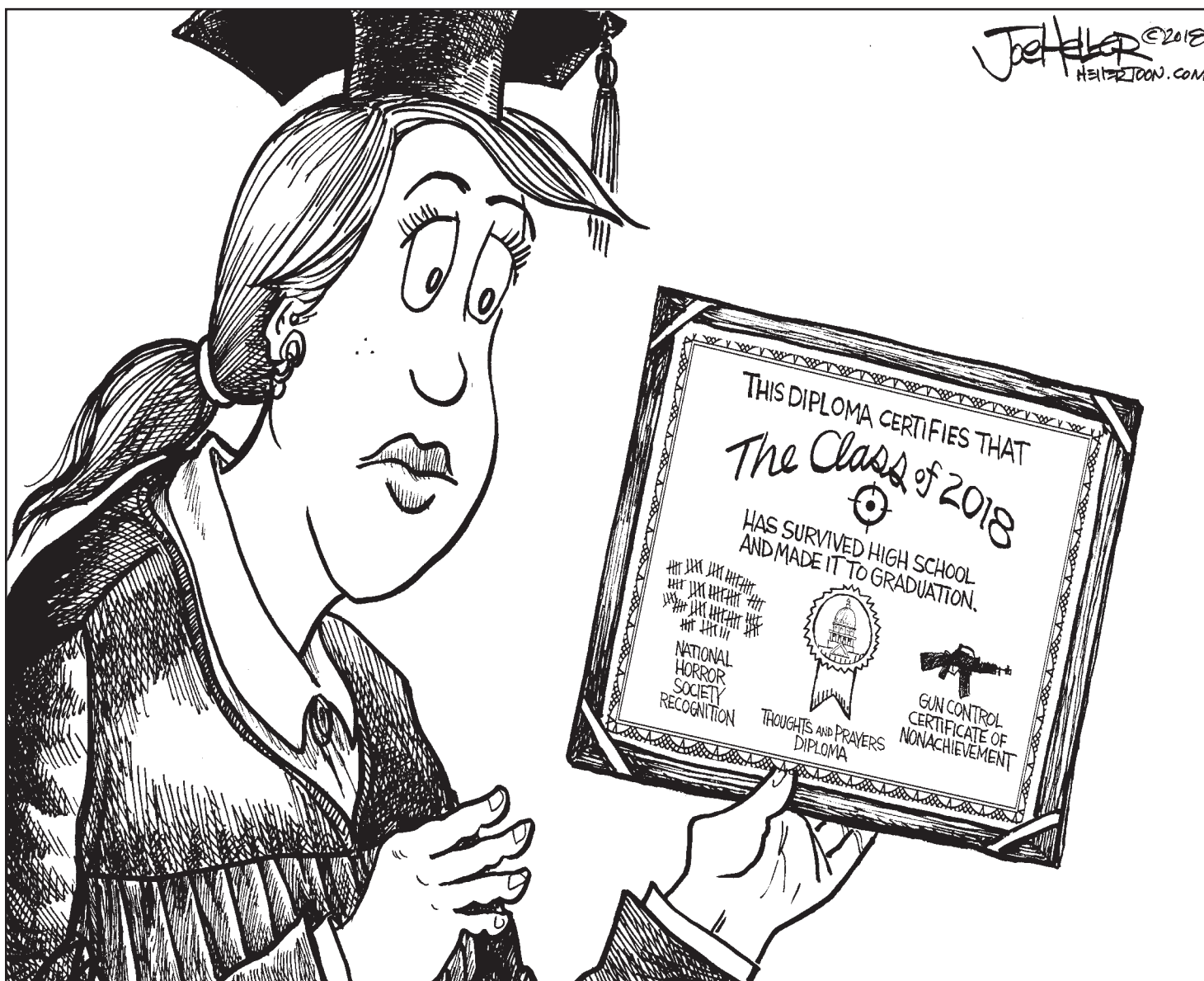
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