

Cottage Grove Sentinel
116 N. Sixth St.
Cottage Grove, Ore. 97424

Opinion

The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

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



Autism awareness can lower a few raised eyebrows

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 touse 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 three, impacting the development of the brain in areas of social interaction, communication skills and cognitive

function.

It is the fastest-growing developmental disorder, affecting one 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, therefore, least under-

stood disorder. their families be who they are, free from stares, apology or judgement.

That's because oftentimes 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 ex-

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 20 years covering the communities of Florence, Mapleton and now Cottage Grove, 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 within our community in recognizing National Autism Awareness Month through the end of April.

From the Managing Editor's Desk

Ned Hickson

stood 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

treme 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

LETTER

REMEMBERING TWO

REMARKABLE LOCAL WOMEN

Last week was a sad one for our community. Cottage Grove lost two of its leading philanthropists with the passing of Joy Woodard and Donna Shepherd. Both women were well known for their generosity in South Lane County.

Over the years, we have all benefited from their thoughtful and supportive approach to the community to which they were deeply committed. South Lane Mental Health is honored to have been among the recipients of support from each of these generous, community-minded women.

Joy Woodard and the Woodard Family Foundation helped found South Lane Mental Health. When members of the Presbyterian Church recognized the need for mental health support in Cottage Grove, the Woodard

family helped make that possible by donating their family home to South Lane Mental Health. The home, on West Main Street, still serves as housing for South Lane Mental Health clients.

Joy's generosity as an artist has also been enduring. Each year, when South Lane Mental Health held its Garden Tours, Joy welcomed us into her studio to choose among her many watercolors to use as poster artwork for the event.

She even opened her beautiful garden to the public for one of the tours. Her distinctive style and beautiful artwork continue to be on display on the walls in South Lane Mental Health's Birch Avenue offices.

Donna Shepherd was a quiet, generous supporter of so much of what makes our community special. Through support from

the Doyle & Donna Shepherd Foundation, South Lane Mental Health was able to move to its new offices on Birch Avenue in 2010 and expand our programming in later years.

We are sad about the passing of both these remarkable women, but their memory is alive through their gracious support of the many important — and enduring — community endeavors they made possible.

Because of their generous approach to philanthropy, our community will continue to be reminded of them, nearly everywhere we turn.

Thank you, Joy Woodard and Donna Shepherd.

With gratitude,

—South Lane Mental Health Board of Directors



Letters to the Editor Policy

The Sentinel 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 without documentation will not be published.

Letters containing poetry or from outside The Sentinel 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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