

IDEAS & OPINIONS

THE UNION

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In support of Measure I for Higgins Fire District

This March 3, we will be asking to fund Higgins Fire District with Measure I on the ballot. No one likes to vote to increase our taxes. Sometimes we need to fund our community's safety net.

The supporters of Measure I have many solid reasons. This will improve emergency response times along with coverage across the entire fire district, adds paramedics and re-staffs Dog Bar area fire station, and maintains local control over our long-term investments in our district. The fire department hasn't received an increase since the 1980s.

There are also some hidden benefits that come from having a local fire department. We have dozens of formerly trained firefighters that still live in our community. They still have the knowledge and skills to actively help in the event of an emergency or incident. Some of the firefighters and volunteers, young men and women, are from our local high school. This was their first job with real responsibility. Some of them are still serving our community in other ways but still have had the training and others have moved onto other communities.

I would like to tell you about three former volunteers I know very well, my three children. They are now in their 40s and have moved onto other jobs but their training has gone with them. My daughter, Jaimie, trained at Higgins Fire Department and is now a rural route postal carrier. Early in the morning she drives out of Grass Valley to the Greenhorn area to deliver mail. If she were to encounter an emergency, because of her training at Higgins, she knows how to respond. People on her route would not know that she has had the training unless she encountered an incident. She is a hidden benefit that no one realizes.

My son Kris spent nine years as a volunteer and his

OTHER VOICES

Donn R. Coenen

brother Erik was also a volunteer. We live three miles from Higgins Fire Station. When there was a fire or emergency, they would grab their gear and go directly to the scene. Their training gave them the ability to assess the situation at the scene, take control, and render first aid. In an emergency minutes can make the difference. Kris now lives in Smartsville and works at the Nevada County Fairgrounds. Though others are trained in first aid, it is always a benefit to have more and he is also trained as a firefighter.

Erik lives in Citrus Heights and works restoring apartments. He travels a lot. On the road he encounters many obstacles. Having the training he's able to handle most things that can come along and help where needed. He also has two young energetic boys. So the training comes in handy there, too. Here are two more examples of hidden benefits to the community where they live.

This brings me back to the former volunteers that still live in our area. I know several of them. I'm 68 years old. If I ever find myself in a situation where I need emergency assistance, I hope one of those former volunteers is nearby. They learned their skills, responsibilities, and became a great asset to our community because of their training at Higgins Fire Department.

We are so fortunate to have Higgins Fire Department. These good men and women firefighter/paramedic and volunteers live in the area. They are part of our community. We have an opportunity to reopen a firehouse, provide for paramedics, and improve response times. I enthusiastically urge you to support and vote for Measure I by March 3.

Donn R. Coenen lives in Grass Valley.

OUR POLICIES

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR
Letters are limited to 200 words. Kudos must be 100 words or less. Please include your name, address and phone number.

OTHER VOICES
"Other Voices" may be 500 to 750 words in length. Please include your name, address, daytime phone number and a paragraph at the end describing yourself.

EMAIL TO
letters@theunion.com

The Union accepts one submission per author, per 30-day period, although an opportunity for rebuttal will be granted on a case-by-case basis. Due to length, letters to the editor are often able to be published sooner than Other Voices submissions. In the interest of clarity, The Union only accepts electronic submissions. Selection of letters and Other Voices for publication is at the discretion of the editor. The Union reserves the right to edit for length, clarity and content on all submissions. All submissions become the property of The Union.

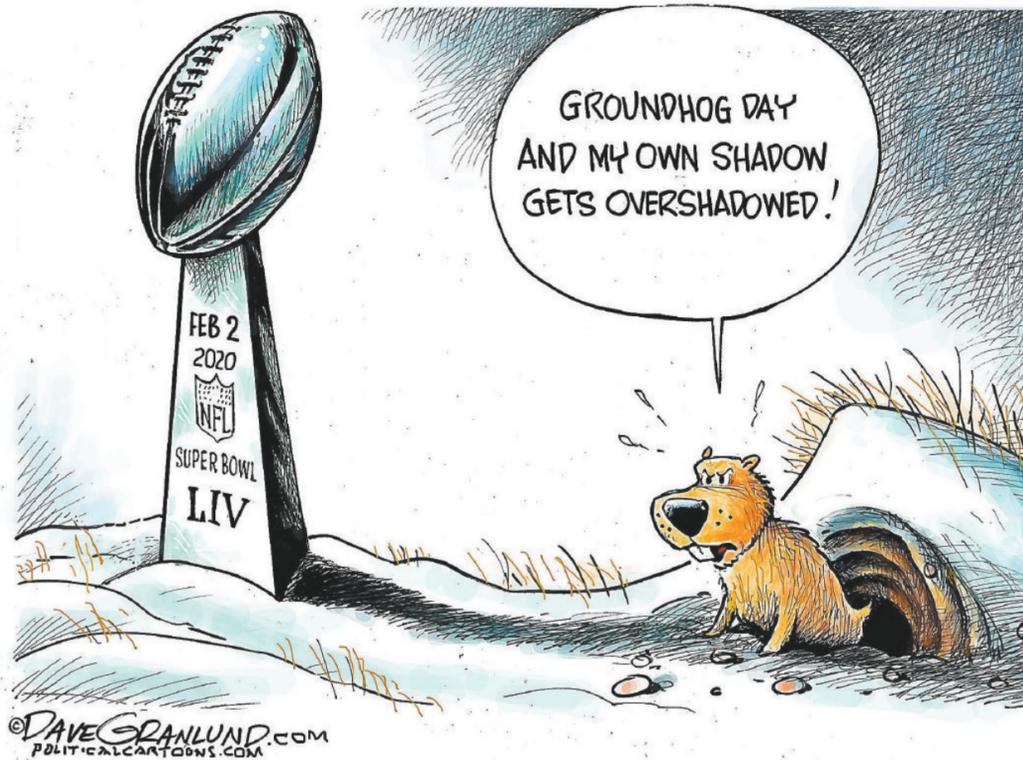
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Last call for Dad

It was the right decision, the only one left. No less awful.

Variations of our drama were playing out in all the rooms. ICU had an everyday quality I found comforting somehow. People in blue scrubs and badges well drilled in their routines. Families a bit hollow eyed under fluorescent lighting, most still able to share smiles. In the beds, bodies rendered into bellows, my dad might joke Darth Vaders if he were there. But he wasn't, not really.

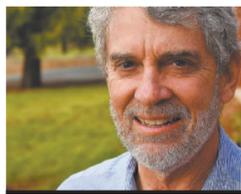
A cheerful neurologist — I forgave him this oddity — showed us the MRI images and explained again the damage: see the light areas, diffuse, profound, the dad I knew gone forever.

The lights never were on in the room, either. A nurse switched on a television I didn't know was there. We turned it off when she left. We held his hands, rubbed his arms and chest, kissed his forehead, told stories and mostly avoided the discussion we knew we would have to have. Four of us, everyone keenly aware of my role.

This was not the telltale heart or anything like that. But the breaths shuddered on schedule, mechanical, loud, ongoing, the one sound I'll remember. Numbers lit up, some big and bright, and a point drew oddly fascinating waves across a screen. A cat would pounce.

I drive my wife nuts imagining worst cases first before working through all the outcomes, the most positive last. I say it's the training from an early career in wildland firefighting. If things blow up, where's the safety zone and can we get everyone there on time? From there the attack takes shape.

So it was with the first phone call back in Grass Valley, the one I had



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dreaded for at least the past decade. The doctor who called, a resident in ICU at Queen's near downtown Honolulu, was kind and thorough through several dropped calls on the cell phone. But her news was a scythe.

The doctors and nurses all were kind, even the one far more fascinated with the MRI images than the people around him in the darkened, telltale room.

Maybe this was so we could take a breath, catch a plane, come to grips, and say goodbye.

I teared up most the first morning after we flew in, having coffee on a Waikiki hotel's deck across the street from the zoo and Diamond Head right there, practically close enough to touch. My wife was sleeping in the room, and I ducked the server's eyes while she poured me a second or third cup.

I was thinking about how sentient life began for me in Waikiki no more than a block or two away, remembering Kuhio Pier and the banyan trees outside the zoo entrance. Then a whole flood of memories, all with my father.

But my otherwise dry-eyed composure surprised me. Why so calm? Stiff upper lip? The product of a more complicated relationship that had settled into amiable and cordial in later years? Probably I'm just built this way, a natural stoic, if infused with a dollop of aloha.

Or maybe it's a weird, unchurched faith in death as part of our bargain with life. We come in, we live our time, and we go back to wherever we came from. Think Mark Twain: "I do not fear death. I had been dead for billions and billions of years before I was born, and had not suffered the slightest inconvenience from it."

I also find comfort in thinking about not just an entire ICU wing accustomed to passings, but 200,000 or whatever years of us as a species and billions as living creatures. This is just what we do. Live, die. Tick, tock.

Near the end, as the waves on his monitor drew down, down, I invited him to haunt me anytime, just

What remarkable, worst timing possible he had, I thought, as I let the phone buzz away while I touched and talked to my dad.

I texted again. Maybe Rhonda and her daughter didn't want to witness this last sadder than sad part either. Try again, my wife urged. He's going fast. That's when I saw I'd been texting my friend by accident.

Dad's oxygen level display plummeted and he had stopped breathing. Then, suddenly, he gasped, as if surfacing from a deep dive, and his numbers jumped back up. I imagined his irritation, like the time he'd hollered, completely exasperated while trying to teach his dunce of a son to sail: "No, the other starboard!"

I got the text right. Rhonda and her daughter returned. Only then did he go, a few hours later, our hands laid on, fading as gently as something like this could go.

Then silence. Finality set in with the stillness, the bellows at rest, after these days of the machines keeping beat heedless of a body's natural rhythm, pending a fate no longer its own to call.

But this wasn't my dad. That much had been clear from the start. His last conscious moment was all about the morning paper at home. Maybe a quick oops and then peace for him. The docs said he felt no pain. He certainly wasn't here for all of what followed.

Maybe this was so we could take a breath, catch a plane, come to grips, and say goodbye. Seems we needed that. I did.

Don Rogers is the publisher of *The Union*, *Lake Wildwood Independent*, and *Sierra Sun*. He can be reached at drogers@theunion.com or 530-477-4299.

Letters to the editor

Stop the hatin' — start the healin'

Norris Burkes was right in his Jan. 20 editorial. Outraged pundits from the left and from the right sides of the political spectrum understand that getting us angry enough to "like" them is the sure road to ratings, income and influence.

As Burkes put it, "If you think these guys are about politics, you don't understand the game."

Most of us from the left and the right sides of the political spectrum have not noticed that outrage is like peeing your pants on a windy street — it feels good for a moment, but then ... there are unintended consequences that make our lives worse instead of better. Every time I succumb to "holier-than-thou-ism" I damage the country I love, and often erode relationships I value.

However, I do take issue with Chaplain Burkes over the solution.

He calls on "people of faith" to shift the tone. Good idea, but not good enough. How about if all of us pause to listen? Including me. Including you. Including the increasing number of folks who are not involved in religious pursuits.

What if we start listening today ... without intending to rebut or persuade? What if we just listen to understand?

I'll try. Will you?

Scottie Hart
Grass Valley

MIM to feature California Youth Symphony

After an exceptional concert last year, Music in the Mountains will again showcase the California Youth Symphony on March 8 in Grass Valley.

This time the Symphony, besides playing their own repertoire, will be

joined by our Music in the Mountains chorus singing Leonard Bernstein's "Chichester Psalms."

This traveling Symphony will be made up of approximately 70 amazing, mostly teenaged, instrumentalists. Even at their tender ages the performers bring a maturity and intensity to their craft that heightens their display of high-level talent. Chichester Psalms is a piece I sang as a 19 year old and its rhythms and beautiful melodic lines still move me as we practice. The cymbals, harps and trumpets magnify this moving piece.

Come join us, you can buy tickets at the Music in the Mountains' box office at 131 S. Auburn St. in downtown Grass Valley, call 530-265-6124 or purchase tickets online at info@musicinthemountains.org.

Madeline D'Andrea
Penn Valley