

## Speaking up Girl encourages diversity

The Empire State Building, one of the most recognizable icons of American culture, is traditionally bathed in colored lights to celebrate various holidays and events. During the Christmas season, the lights are red and green.

A couple of years ago, on a December night, a 7-year-old Jewish girl noticed that the lights on the building were blue. She wondered if the lights were in honor of Hanukkah, the Jewish Festival of Lights. Well, no, she learned upon inquiring, the blue lights were displayed on Dec. 12 of that year to recognize the birthday of Frank Sinatra, "old blue eyes."

That was OK, but the girl, Mallory Blair Greitzer, thought that Hanukkah deserved to be honored on America's most famous (if no longer tallest) edifice. She began a campaign to try to make it so.

It took two years (and a letter to Leona Helmsley, whose management company operates the building), but this year on Dec. 23, the first night of Hanukkah, the lights on the Empire State Building were blue and white, honoring the Jewish Festival of Lights for the first time in history. Tonight, Christmas Eve, they revert to the red and green Christmas colors. A menorah will be displayed in the lobby of the building during Hanukkah and a crescent and star will be on display for USA Muslim Day.

There is no great moral to this story, but this is the time of year that is often referred to in the American Jewish community as "The December Dilemma" — a time when Christmas symbols are omnipresent while other religious beliefs and observances seem to be given short shrift. It is also a time when the message of "Peace on Earth and Goodwill Toward Men" is occasionally interrupted with protests about religious symbols on public property or in the classroom.

None of this is particularly surprising, given the diversity of American culture and the freedom we enjoy to protest that which goes against our personal convictions.

Still, there is a message in Mallory Blair Greitzer's successful campaign to balance the red and green Christmas lights on the Empire State Building with the blue and white lights of Hanukkah. She didn't ask that the Christmas lights be turned OFF, but that the Hanukkah lights also be turned ON. Good for her, and good for Leona Helmsley for listening, even if the symbolic gesture is only for one night.

A country as rich in cultures and traditions as the United States should focus on celebrating and learning from each and every one of them, not pitting one culture against another or trying to stifle those traditions that do not have equal significance for every single individual. What better time of year to recognize this than in December.

This year isn't unique, but it is unusual, in that three celebrations — Hanukkah, Christmas and Kwanzaa — overlap almost exactly. Hanukkah, the eight-day Festival of Lights that begins on the 25th day of the lunar month of Kislev, began this year at sundown on Dec. 23; the traditional "12 days of Christmas" last from Christmas Eve on Dec. 24 through Jan. 6; and the African-American Kwanzaa begins on Dec. 26 and continues through Jan. 1.

The histories are different, the symbols are different, the customs are different. But all these holidays share one common element: They are joyous occasions celebrating various religious and cultural traditions. They are, indeed, "happy holidays." That is their message, and that is our message to all of you. Happy Holidays!

## Editorial's message timeless

(Editor's note: Exactly 100 years ago this year, what may well be the most famous editorial in history first appeared in the *New York Sun*. Written by Francis Pharcellus Church, the editorial was a response to a letter from an 8-year-old girl, Virginia O'Hanlon. It is as meaningful today as it was then.)

Dear Editor:

I am 8 years old. Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus. Papa says "If you see it in the Sun it's so."

Please tell me the truth; is there a Santa Claus?

Virginia, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men's or children's, are little. In this great universe of ours man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect, as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He

exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus! It would be as dreary as if there were no Virginias. There would be no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We should have a no enjoyment, except in sense and sight. The eternal light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.

Not believe in Santa Claus! You might as well not believe in fairies! You might get your papa to hire men to watch all the chimneys on Christmas Eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if they did not see Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see.

No Santa Claus! Thank God, he lives, and he lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, may, ten times ten thousand years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.

Reprinted from the *New York Sun*, Sept. 21, 1897

## Santa writes to youngsters

Dear Kids,

I just finished reading all those thousands of letters you send me every year. I can't respond in person to every one of them, but the nice folks at the Observer said they'd publish my letter to all of you, so here it is.

I can't promise that every single one of you will get every present you asked for, but I'll do the best I can. If you get to bed early and get a good night's sleep, I'll try to be quiet and not wake you up.

Meanwhile, you could do a few things for me, if you would. If you have a fire in the fireplace tonight, please ask your mom or dad to put it out before he or she goes to bed. I come down that chimney pretty fast, and it gets mighty hot in there.

If you have any extra pet food around, the reindeer would appreciate a dish of food and maybe a bowl of water. Any kind of dog food or cat food is fine. They don't like fish food very much.

Speaking of food, I really like those snacks you leave for me. But Mrs. Claus told me to ask if you'd leave skim milk or maybe a carton

of yogurt instead of eggnog and cookies. She thinks I need to lose weight!

Just one more thing. Ask your parents if they can make sure there's enough room in the driveway to park the sleigh. Last year, Vixen and Daaher got tangled up in some Christmas lights on one of those steep roofs, and they're a little bit spooked about landing on the rooftop now. They'll get over it, but this year I'm trying to keep the landing spots flat and low.

Take care now, and I'll see you tonight. You won't see me, but tomorrow morning you'll know I've been there.

Love,  
Santa

*Santa Claus*

### COMMUNITY VOICE

#### QUESTION:

What was your biggest accomplishment in 1997?



"Doing a lot of projects around the house. I retired two years ago."

Jan Mangano  
Farmington



"I got a new job in the Detroit Public Schools on the east side and am really enjoying it."

Philpa Sahner  
Farmington Hills



"Working at Children's Hospital with the kids through the Festival of Trees program."

Lauren Kralowski  
Livonia



"The day my son graduated Farmington High School."

Sherry Fator  
Farmington Hills

We asked this question at Kroger on Eight Mile Road.

### LETTERS

#### Time to learn

Until parent/teacher, Karen Fleish raised the question "Forty-three minutes...how can you teach anything in that? I did not know that I was a victim of 40-minute periods as a student, teacher, and principal in the Detroit secondary schools for 40 years. Before this moment of revelation, I had always thought that the successful use of any time in the classroom depended on the following:

1. The ability of the teacher to make a lesson interesting and important to students.
2. The motivation of students to want to learn.
3. The respect for each in the process of communication and interaction.
4. The encouragement of parents for the children and support of the school in attaining its goals.
5. The leadership of the school and district administration in helping student, teacher, and parent succeed.

Twelve years more of substitute teaching in Birmingham secondary schools have only confirmed my Detroit assessment. The length of scheduled time per class, 60 or 90 minutes of itself, does not create anything but opportunity to learn. Depending upon variables of interest, motivations, and social skills, the time may be used for head down hard work, daydreaming, informal break, or a blend thereof. Certainly there is not even a suggestion that students today have a longer attention span than in years past; indeed they seem to have far less.

Therefore, on second thought, I have to disagree with the parental objection to the North and Harrison faculty vote against longer periods on alternate days. Superintendent Maxfield is right in emphasizing that there is nothing magical in 90-minute classes and a two-thirds approval of the switch is essential. I commend him.

Lawrence Niblett  
Farmington Hills

#### Tale of two businesses

The closing of Cattleman's in the Uptown Plaza was caused by poor management, not lack of customers. After last summer's outbreak of Legionnaires Disease, it would have been appropriate for the management to at least say, "We're sorry people died. We're sorry people got sick. We're going to clean up this place like crazy to make certain something like this can never happen again." Instead, all we heard from management were law suits and denials. Cattleman's is, or was, after all, a food store where customers must have a lot of confidence that the products sold there won't make them sick.

Compare Cattleman's experience with the Stage Deli in Farmington Hills which also had

a recent health scare. Their management stood up and took responsibility for the pain they caused customers. They instituted new cleanliness policies, opened their kitchens for everyone to inspect, and threw a party for every politician and news crew in the area. As a result, business doesn't appear to have been affected.

Cattleman's may or may not have learned anything from this experience. I see it as an excellent example of taking responsibility for your actions, rather than looking to pass blame to someone else.

Charles Paul  
Farmington

#### Council 'well' informed

I was very pleased and satisfied to see the action taken by the Farmington Hills City Council last night with regard to West Bay Exploration's proposal for an oil/gas well at Nine and Haggerty.

Council acted on the information supplied by residents and specialists in pointing out the natural dangers involved in this industrial and hazardous business. Council upheld their oath to be sensitive and protective of Farmington Hills residents health and welfare. Farmington Hills has demonstrated that they have the right to self govern and make policy. Even with the threat of litigation — a common maneuver by the oil/gas industry. Council held firm in their conviction in believing that even a bit of risk and danger is not worth the gamble, let alone the fact that the only one making anything in the process is West Bay.

Hats off to your mayor and council, as well as the residents of Meadowbrook Glen, who took the time and initiative to protect their homes, family and community. A special nod to Rick and Kim Lothinear (spelling?) for never giving up.

Be sure that West Bay will be back. Forty million in black gold lies under the ground. It has been there for thousands of years. Let it stay for another thousand.

Frank Brennan  
Novi

Opinions are to be shared: We welcome your ideas, as do your neighbors. That's why we offer this space on a weekly basis for opinions in your own words. We will help by editing for clarity. To assure authenticity, we ask that you sign your letter and provide a contact telephone number.

Letters should be mailed to: Editor, The Farmington Observer, 33411 Grand River, Farmington Michigan 48335. Or they can be faxed to (810) 477-9722.

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— Philip Power