

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

ANOTHER SCHOOL SHOOTING REMINDS US: IT TAKES A VILLAGE

Oxford High School, in Oxford, Mich., seems like a lot of other schools across the country. Its vision is to provide a world-class education that prepares students to succeed in a global society. The school website espouses values like trust, integrity and accountability. It celebrates a recent student production of “It’s a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play.”

Now, Oxford High has joined an unenviable group that is small but tragically growing. On Nov. 30, four students — Madisyn Baldwin, Tate Myre, Justin Shilling and Hana St. Juliana — were killed at school, allegedly by a 15-year-old classmate, Ethan Crumbley. It was the 53rd school shooting in 2021.

I remember worrying whether my kids had finished their homework. Parents today have a much bigger worry: whether their kids will be safe in school — or whether an Ethan Crumbley is in their midst. It’s unimaginable.

And so, it’s tempting to write about the scourge of gun violence in our country. The data are stark: So far, 2021 is on pace to be the

worst year for gun violence in decades. From Jan. 1 to Sept. 15, gun violence has claimed a total of 14,516 lives, according to the Gun Violence Archive. That’s a 9 percent increase over 2020, equivalent to 1,300 more deaths.

Mass shootings — defined as an incident with four or more people killed or wounded by gunfire, excluding the shooter — are also on the rise, averaging nearly two per day. That’s 15 percent higher than last year.

There are now more guns in American homes than there are people.

The Oxford High shooting brings to light another troubling matter: the fragile mental health of our country’s teens. The nonprofit organization Mental Health America (MHA) reports that nearly one-quarter of youth ages 12-17 — 5 million in all — suffered from a major depressive episode in the past year or coped with severe major depression, which often co-occurs with disorders like substance abuse.

The pandemic has only made a

bad situation worse, leveling untold mental health pressures. Yet according to MHA, 60 percent of teens who suffer major depression do not receive any mental health treatment at all.

But I’m not thinking about guns or kids right now. I’m thinking about family. And community.

Like me, you may be feeling deeply relieved by the news of the arrests of Ethan Crumbley’s parents, James and Jennifer Crumbley, who prosecutors charged with four counts of involuntary manslaughter. It was a rare effort to hold parents accountable for violence attributed to their child.

Prosecutors say the handgun Ethan Crumbley allegedly used to kill his classmates was kept in an unlocked drawer in the Crumbley home, despite warning signs about Ethan’s potential for violence. In fact, the gun had been purchased just a few days prior — on Black Friday — as a Christmas gift for Ethan.

On the day of the shooting, the Crumbleys were called to Oxford High after a teacher discovered

gruesome drawings at Ethan’s desk, accompanied by a plea. He wrote, “My life is useless. The world is dead. The thoughts won’t stop. Help me.” The parents were asked to take Ethan home. They refused and left the school.

It seems that our society has an inherent conflict: While we have long admired individualism and self-reliance, connections are critical to achieving a common good.

At a time when we seem to need each other the most, relationships have become increasingly fragmented.

That’s true even in families. Parents today are busy, making it difficult to find much time to spend with their kids. And when they do find time, parents can be preoccupied — so they don’t know, really, what’s going on in their kids’ lives. The time-strapped may substitute overindulgence for oversight — acting as their child’s friend or buying them gifts.

Not long ago, many kids had another support system: family members who lived nearby. If your

parents were busy, your aunt or grandparent down the street kept tabs on you. This invaluable system has all but disappeared.

But the job of raising good kids isn’t the sole responsibility of parents and relatives. What matters is a positive connection to a caring adult. That’s where community comes in. We’ve seen the power of community at the National Conflict Resolution Center, where we pair teens who have caused harm with adults having shared interests, or lived experience, or both. It’s a powerful and effective tool for creating accountability.

In Oxford, caring adults have already begun to come together in support of their students. It’s the surest way for the community to heal.

Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center, a San Diego-based group working to create solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. To learn about NCR’s programming, visit nrcrcenter.com.

AIRMAN

FROM B1 intention to take home what’s left of the boy, if he really is down there. But, often, not everything works the way you want it to.”

But even if Mischi was not able to find Lawson’s plane, getting a copy of Mischi’s 44-page report has been a nice chapter-closer for Ben Georgeson, 62, whose late father was Lawson’s cousin.

Growing up in the Fresno-area town of Kernmin, Georgeson said he idolized Lawson, who was known to his family as “Billy,” but among his flying buddies as “Woody.” When Georgeson grew up, he followed in Lawson’s footsteps and became a pilot in the California Air National Guard. After befriending some of Lawson’s fellow flyers years later, Georgeson was inducted as an honorary member of Lawson’s 345th Squadron, known as the Devil Hawks. One of Lawson’s best friends in the squadron was Lloyd Martin, who was shot down over Belgium and taken prisoner. He died in 2011.

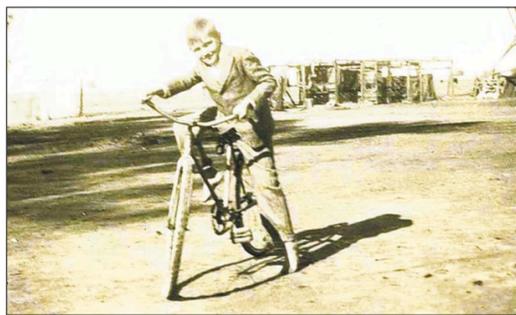
“Lloyd said Woody was a fun guy who was always right in the middle of everything,” said Georgeson, 62, in a recent phone interview. “Lloyd wasn’t flying that day but he said ‘the worst day of the war was the day Woody

went missing. The second worst day was when I got shot down and became a POW.’ It was a tragic thing but that’s part of the deal. You never know when your number is going to be up.”

For the past 20 years, Mischi has been researching World War II aircraft and writing about Allied pilots who died in air battles over Northern Italy during World War II. Mischi spent 43 years as a metalworker before retiring in 2018. Since then, he has dedicated himself full time to research. His writing has been published in a book, historical articles and on WWII-related websites. He has researched and written the stories of more than 100 air crashes. A major area of his interest has been telling the stories of the aviators of about 80 planes shot down in 1944 and 1945 in Northern Italy’s Po Valley, where he lives.

Mischi said he learned about Lawson’s disappearance in May 2020 while reading an unclassified missing air crew report about the 1944 incident. Four P-47s left Pisa that morning at 9:30 a.m. with the goal of dropping incendiary bombs on a German anti-aircraft battery dug into a seaside cliff at Punta Bianca, which is between two small towns in the province of La Spezia, about 50 miles north of Pisa.

According to the Army report and Mischi’s research, the four planes trav-



GLENDALAWSON

Elwood “Billy” Lawson photographed during the 1930s in Escondido.

eling north in a line encountered heavy fire from German guns and broke off their bombing run by turning over the sea to head back. The lead pilot testified that by the time his plane emerged from the clouds, the third and fourth planes in their formation were missing and they never returned to base. In the third plane was Lt. Robert G. Johnson, whose body was later recovered and buried near Florence, Italy. Lawson is believed to have gone down with his plane in the sea.

Lawson was a junior pilot on only his 13th mission that day. Besides his inexperience, he was in the most dangerous position, flying fourth in the formation.

“The guys in No. 1 and 2 were more experienced than Billy and Johnson. The lead pilot led the way in, he might have been there a lot of

times. The further back in the formation you are, the more time they have to train their guns on you. ‘Tail-end Charlie’ is the worst place to be,” Georgeson said.

According to Georgeson and another descendant, Glenda Lawson, Elwood “Billy” Lawson was born in Escondido on Dec. 7, 1922, to parents William Lawson and Bertha Mae Cozell, who separated when he was 5 years old. For a few years, Billy and his younger brother, William, lived with Georgeson’s grandmother, Mae, in Imperial County before returning to Escondido by 1930 to live with their father and new stepmother. He graduated from Escondido High School in 1941 and in June 1942 joined the Army. After more than two years of flight training in the U.S., he shipped overseas to Italy.

He had only been stationed at Pisa about a month when he took off on that fateful mission. About a year after his plane disappeared, the Army finally declared him dead.

Georgeson said that before Billy shipped out in 1944, he assured Mae Georgeson, who he called “Gran,” that he would return. Even if he was declared missing, Lawson told Gran he would use his survival skills to make his way home eventually. Georgeson said it was a promise she clung to until the 1980s when she received Lawson’s Purple Heart and Air Medals in the mail.

When she finally got the bag with the medals she said, ‘Oh, Billy, you’re never coming home, are you?’ ”

During his research last year on the disappearance of the two P-47 planes, Mischi made a breakthrough when he tracked down Turiddo Marciasini, 86, who was an eyewitness to the 1944 incident. On that morning, the 10-year-old Turiddo was in a piazza at Castelnuovo Magra with his aunt, a few miles northeast of the coastline, when he saw four Allied planes fly over the German gun battery and he heard gunfire. He saw the planes quickly turn toward the sea, the last two trailing smoke and flames. Then he saw those planes descend and drop quickly below the edge of the coastline, southwest of the local landmark known

as the Fiat Tower in Marina di Massa.

Mischi interviewed fishermen in the area who keep detailed maps of the seabed to avoid entangling their trawling nets with underwater obstacles such as wrecked planes and boats. Based on accounts from Marciasini and elderly local fishermen, a World War II plane is believed to be located at that location, about 7 kilometers off the coast at a depth of 15 to 16 meters. An initial search by volunteer divers earlier this year yielded nothing, but Mischi said professional divers or U.S. Defense Department recovery teams may have better luck. Anyone who can help in the search for Lawson’s plane can email Mischi at claudiomischi@virgilio.it.

Mischi said there are still thousands of missing U.S. Army Air Force aviators from World War II. Meeting the families of these flyers and telling their stories has been one of the most rewarding experiences of his life.

“It is always a great responsibility to hand over these events of many years ago to history. Stories of life and death, of suffering, unknown or forgotten stories — I think I couldn’t do better than that,” he said. “I am not finished yet. I will never stop finding new planes and new stories to tell.”

pam.kragen@sduuniontribune.com



GILDA ADLER

From left, Adam and Suzi Day (Sycuan Band of Kumeyaay Nation, honorary sponsor); Fred and Roxi (co-chair) Link; Robert and Julie (co-chair) Novak; Meri-dee (co-chair) and Jon Book; and Nanci (president) and Marc Geller.

SCENE

Patrons of the Prado

Event raises money for science, cultural institutions in Balboa Park

BY U-T STAFF

The Patrons of the Prado held its Masterpiece Midnight In Paris event recently at the Spreckels Organ Pavilion in Balboa Park.

The event raised funds to benefit 10 arts, science and cultural institutions on the Prado in Balboa Park. The group’s work includes the Bucks4Buses program,

which provides educational access for San Diego school students to the Balboa Park museums. Since 1997, Patrons of the Prado has granted \$3.9 million to the 10 beneficiaries, including more than \$755,000 for Bucks4Buses, the organization said.

If your organization has held a philanthropic event, you’re welcome to email a

high-resolution photo along with information on the event to society@sduuniontribune.com. Please clearly identify those in the photo, make them aware their image might appear in print and online, include the photographer’s name for credit and be sure to include the who, what, where, when and why information on the event.

Today’s birthdays

Bob Barker is 98. Connie Francis is 84. Dionne Warwick is 81. Singer-musician Dickey Betts is 78. Former race car driver Emerson Fittipaldi is 75. Actor Wings Hauser is 74. Gymnast-turned-actor Cathy Rigby is 69. Musician Sheila E. is 64. Actor Sheree J. Wilson is 63. Former tennis player Tracy Austin is 59. Actor Jennifer Connelly is 51. Actor Madchen Amick is 51. Actor Regina Hall is 51. Actor Mayim Bialik is 46. Actor Lucas Hedges is 25.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

VENDORS

FROM B1 multiple city officials have tried and failed to craft compromise legislation that will appease angry merchants without stifling the emerging vendor community, which is made up mostly of minorities.

The latest effort has been led by Councilmember Dr. Jennifer Campbell, who took over the city’s proposed street vendor ordinance last spring and promised a new law would be unveiled in October.

Campbell, who represents some beach areas significantly affected by vendors, announced this fall that the legislation would be delayed a few months. But she gave merchant groups hope by stipulating that a vote was scheduled for Dec. 14.

While the legislation was never unveiled, people familiar with Campbell’s efforts said the proposal would have banned vendors in some sensitive areas and encouraged vendors to take classes on health, safety and entrepreneurship.

In late November, Campbell’s staff issued a “notice of hearing” for the Dec. 14 vote. In response to a Union-Tribune request at that time to see the proposed law, a Campbell spokesman said “there are still some late adjustments being made to the ordinance that need to clear the City Attorney’s office.”

Those delays continued into December, and Elo-Rivera, who replaced Campbell as council president on Monday, said on Thursday that problems finalizing the proposal and the importance of the legislation made canceling the scheduled vote the right move.

“Our office did not receive a draft of the Street Vending Ordinance as of the deadline for it to be docketed for public review along with the rest of the agenda for December 14,” he said. “As of today, we have still not yet received a draft of the ordinance.”

As a result, Elo-Rivera pulled the item from Tuesday’s council agenda and sent the issue backward to the council’s Economic Devel-

opment and Intergovernmental Relations Committee, which means a delay of at least a few weeks — and possibly a few months.

“Given the importance of the topic and to be consistent with our commitment to transparency, we believe it is important for the council and the public to have sufficient time to analyze the proposed ordinance and its impacts,” he said.

Trimble, the Gaslamp official, said the delay is frustrating because without a law in place the Police Department and the county Health Department are unable and unwilling to conduct enforcement on unruly vendors.

He said merchants don’t want to criminalize vending; they just don’t want vendors to have an unfair advantage over brick-and-mortar businesses — particularly restaurants — because one group has to follow certain rules while the other does not.

“Let’s have vending, but let’s have everyone playing on the same level playing field,” he said.

While advocates of vendors say they welcome new city legislation focused on gray areas in state law, they want any policy proposal to be based on data and analysis instead of knee-jerk reactions. They also say the rules should vary by neighborhood.

Two of the most vocal advocates, the Logan Heights Community Development Corp. and the City Heights Community Development Corp., did not respond last week to requests for comment.

The controversy comes in the wake of SB 946, a state law passed in 2018 that says any vendor regulations created by cities must focus on solving health and safety problems, not limiting economic competition.

Supporters said the goal of the law was to encourage a new class of small entrepreneurs among California’s low-income residents, many of them immigrants with families.

Since 2018, many cities across the state have passed local ordinances that regulate street vendors in the nar-

row ways that SB 946 allows.

In San Diego County, cities that have approved such regulations include Carlsbad, Vista, El Cajon and National City.

Then-Mayor Kevin Faulconer proposed city legislation in 2019 that was hailed by merchant groups but criticized by advocates for vendors.

Faulconer’s proposal would have banned street vendors in high-traffic neighborhoods and parks, but it was never brought forward for a council vote after some critics called it an unfair crackdown with racist overtones.

Mayor Todd Gloria, who replaced Faulconer one year ago, said in February he was committed to crafting legislation that would be supported by advocates and critics of street vending. He promised to unveil a proposed law last spring.

But work on a city ordinance shifted quietly last spring from Gloria to Campbell.

Last week, Gloria said the latest delay makes sense.

“The decision to pull this item is reflective of the need to ensure a robust public process that provides ample opportunity for public review and comment,” the mayor said. “The mayor remains committed to ensuring that the city has an ordinance in place as quickly as possible that provides pathways to micro entrepreneurship while protecting public health and safety.”

Dike Anyiwo, a public policy adviser for the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce, said it’s important to get some legislation on the books to start the inevitable process of tinkering with the new law based on its impact.

“The chamber is very much in support of having rules on the books,” he said. “The chamber is not here to constrict the marketplace. We want to make sure there is clarity.”

No date has been set for the proposal to be presented to the economic development panel.

david.garrick@sduuniontribune.com