

MEDIATE THIS !

PLEASE, LET THIS DEAD CHRISTMAS TREE REST IN PEACE!

BY STEVEN P. DINKIN

Dear Mediator:

Our condominium complex is kept up very well, but every January, some neighbors ignore the HOA's posted signs about proper disposal of Christmas trees and chuck their trees near the dumpsters. For years, the HOA begrudgingly got rid of the trees. This year, the HOA apparently has had enough. A dead tree that's rotting near my parking space is really distressing my toddler. I know who dumped it, and I think the HOA should fine him. But I don't want to start a feud with a neighbor.

*Stuck in Christmastime
El Cajon*

Dear Stuck:

Any trash that's dumped in a public area constitutes an eyesore. But a discarded Christmas tree that once sparkled with lights in a warm room and now lies outside decaying in the cold is a uniquely forlorn sight.

Nearly everyone who sees this ghost of Christmas past will feel a pang of sadness. But two parties have hardened themselves to this specter so they can keep shirking the responsibility they bear for it.

The first is the neighbor who, assuming he can read, knows he

committed an infraction. The second is the HOA that has peremptorily decided its obligation to enforce bylaws and maintain the property has become too vexing.

In conflicts like these, we borrow a restorative justice strategy based on a universal truth: If you want a transgressor to regret and repent his misconduct, bring him face to face with the person he has harmed, and let him see up close the human cost of his action.

This is particularly effective when community members send a compelling message that everyone should follow the rules.

You can convey this in a half-playful, half-serious manner by creating a flyer with an unforgettable image.

Prop up the tree, and photograph it in all its desolation. The resulting picture can be the centerpiece of a handout titled "Let This Dead Tree Rest in Peace!"

The flyer's whimsical text should explain that an unnamed resident dumped this poor tree illegally and now, for the first time ever, a tree left abandoned in the complex has decomposed into a visual blight and a fire hazard.



GETTY IMAGES

This week's conflict was caused by a discarded Christmas tree and the rules of a homeowners association.

Subtlety is powerful here. If you pointedly call out the guilty neighbor and the recalcitrant HOA management, you will spark the feud you are rightly avoiding. You don't have to go there. They already know they're wrong.

Post the flyer on a bulletin board in a common area. If the tree is still there after a few days,

create a new flyer with the title, "This Dead Tree STILL Needs to Rest in Peace!"

It's possible that both culpable parties will respond with excuses and justifications. If they do, stay on message and repeat as needed.

Admittedly, this will entail quite a bit of work. It would take

far less time and effort to get rid of the tree yourself.

But some conflicts need long-term resolution strategies to prevent them from recurring. An orchestrated campaign of amiable but persistent communication will serve notice to the entire complex (and its management) for years to come that orderliness and fair play are coins of your realm.

And the best part is the lesson this will offer to your child and the other neighbor children.

They probably don't understand all the nuances of HOA bylaws and enforcement. But they know this Christmas tree deserved a better fate. Watching how effective communication delivers justice will be an early and lasting tutorial in the art of problem-solving.

Steven P. Dinkin is a professional mediator who has served as president of the San-Diego based National Conflict Resolution Center since 2003. **Do you have a conflict that needs a resolution?** Share your story with The Mediator via email at mediatethis@ncrconline.com or as an online submission by visiting www.ncrconline.com/MediateThis. All submissions will be kept anonymous. If you have questions, please email me at lora.cicalo@sduiontribune.com

NOTEBOOKS

From Union-Tribune reporting staff

OUTDOORS: ERNIE COWAN

Borrego Badlands not bad at all

There is a maze of curdled landscape on the eastern edge of San Diego County that the maps label as Borrego Badlands.

Yes, it's mostly barren, dusty and seemingly devoid of life, but spend any time here and you will understand the region has simply suffered from bad press.

Since the days of early pioneers and overland settlement of the west, the badlands have been characterized as dangerous, deadly, isolated, lonely, difficult to navigate and a place to avoid.

In his book "California Desert Trails," J. Smeaton Chase describes traveling through the badlands by horseback in the summer of 1916 and meeting an Indian who described the area as "The Devil's House," a place where men go in and never come out.

Places like the badlands, however, have always fascinated and attracted me. I've hiked many miles in the moonscape mazes and spent quiet nights camped in this great void. On a recent hike I found it hard to attach the word "bad" to this alluring natural world. For the nature lover who enjoys solitude, discovery, challenge and adventure, Borrego Badlands should be on your to-do list.

The Redwoods have the Avenue of the Giants, Utah and Colorado have the Avenue of the Ancients and the winding canyons of the badlands could aptly be called Avenues of Time.

Time, measured in the millions of years, has shaped this place, and man has left footprints here for a few thousand years.

The deeply eroded and bare sandstone formations tell a bold story of Earth's creation and also whisper softly about man's early presence, mostly because this was an area of transition rather than permanent human occupation.

Borrego Badlands can be viewed from several spots. The most popular is Font's Point, an iconic location in the state park.

From this lofty perch you can gaze down into the wrinkled landscape created by years of erosion after geologic forces lifted a massive block of earth to form the Ocotillo Rim and Font's Point.

Font's Point can be reached by a well-marked, 4-mile sandy road going south from County Highway S-22 about 7 miles east of Borrego Springs. High clearance vehicles are advised.

Off-roaders can view the badlands below the Ocotillo Rim from San Felipe Wash north of state Route 78. Hills of the Moon



ERNIE COWAN

Blooming lupines at the edge of Borrego Badlands.

and Rainbow washes can even be driven deep into the maze of mudhills.

Maps of the trails into the area are available at the park Visitor Center or State Park Store in the Borrego Mall.

But it's the hiker who will truly discover this place of beauty.

It was a chilly, wind-swept day when I last put down footprints in the badlands. I had spent the night camped with a buddy at Seventeen Palms Oasis and then set out alone the next morning to discover what the wilds had to offer.

In the trackless washes I followed the footprints of a kit fox, and when I climbed to the top of a mudhill I spotted a small sidewinder tightly curled up and half-buried in the sand, no doubt avoiding the morning chill.

A red-tailed hawk perched on a high spot and watched the barren landscape looking for reptile or rodent for its next meal.

Lupine and bright yellow sunflowers dotted the rocky landscape, and mats of purple sand verberna hugged the edges of the wash where precious winter rains had accumulated enough water for growth.

I encountered no one on my loop of several miles from Seventeen Palms to Five Palms and back, but there were "conversations" with spring flowers and skittering lizards, curiosity about patches of alkali that covered the mudhills in some places, amazement at the colorful geological maze, and serenity at being able to amble at my own pace and ponder time and the forces that have created us and the badlands.

Yes, indeed, I can find nothing bad about this place.

Email ernie@packtrain.com

THE READERS' REPRESENTATIVE: ADRIAN VORE

Vulgarity, deception — not funny

The San Diego Union-Tribune decided last week to drop the syndicated comic strip Non Sequitur after its cartoonist, Wiley Miller, inserted in last Sunday's strip a vulgarity directed at President Donald Trump.

The U-T's decision follows that of a host of newspapers nationwide, including the Los Angeles Times, the U-T's sister paper.

The comic strip stopped appearing in the U-T on Friday. A message to readers explaining why the U-T pulled the cartoon ran in its place.

Non Sequitur will appear, today, however. The Sunday full-color comics section is printed about two weeks in advance. When those printings run their course, the strip will no longer be published in the Sunday U-T.

U-T Editor and Publisher Jeff Light and Managing Editor Lora Cicalo will decide on how Non Sequitur will be replaced.

Last Sunday's comic was "The Wiley Bears Sunday Coloring Page" featuring bears as famous Leonardo Da Vinci works. The vulgarity in the three-panel comic was written in the lower right corner of the middle panel. It was hard to see and could have been easily dismissed as scribbling. But a reader of the Butler Eagle in Pennsylvania caught it and told the newspaper. According to news articles, it seems like that was the first reported sighting. The paper yanked the comic Monday.

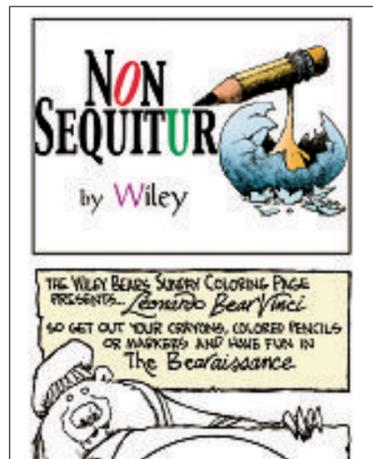
Others papers did the same during the week. Those papers included the Sacramento Bee, Indy Star, Richmond Times Dispatch, Virginian-Pilot and Lexington Herald Leader.

The readers' rep received no emails and only one phone call before the strip was dropped. The reader called after he heard about the cartoon and the fallout.

After the backlash, Miller said he added the vulgarity several weeks ago and had intended to remove it before the comic was distributed. But that statement seemed disingenuous, because last Sunday, the day the comic appeared, he tweeted that the cartoon included an "Easter egg."

"Wiley Miller's actions — both the insertion of a hidden lewd comment and his lack of forthrightness after the fact — represent a serious breach of trust and violate our values of integrity and transparency," Cicalo said.

The distributor, Andrews McMeel Syndication, apologized for not detecting the



A portion of last Sunday's Non Sequitur comic strip.

vulgarity.

Non Sequitur is published in more than 700 newspapers in the United States.

Although readers will complain about comics from time to time because they dislike or disagree with a comic's content, last Sunday's Non Sequitur involved deception and pure vulgarity.

Reference in Hunter story

A story Feb. 1 by U-T military writer Andrew Dyer about Rep. Duncan Hunter advocating for a SEAL on trial on charges of committing war crimes included this sentence of background deep in the story. "Hunter, who faces his own felony charges for alleged campaign finance violations and wire fraud, is a Marine combat veteran who served in Iraq and Afghanistan."

In a letter to the editor three days later, a reader asked why was it important to reference that, and he wondered if it was an example of "subtly biased reporting."

But I feel that information is not biased at all. A public elected official is facing trial in public court. That fact is relevant in a news report involving Hunter. As an editor, I would have asked that the information be included if it had not been.

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FROM THE ARCHIVES

40 YEARS AGO, AN IRISH RUNNER BROKE THE MILE RECORD IN SAN DIEGO

Forty years ago this week, Ireland's Eamonn Coghlan set the world indoor mile record in the Jack-in-the-Box Indoor Invitational track meet at the San Diego Sports Arena. He finished with a time of 3 minutes and 52.6 second.

Two years later, Coghlan would return to San Diego and for another record-setting run. He beat his own indoor mile world record by a full two seconds with a time of 3:50.6 on Feb. 20, 1981.

From the Evening Tribune, Saturday, February 17, 1979:

COGHLAN, THE 'PRIDE OF IRELAND,' STREAKS TO WORLD MARK IN MILE

By Nick Canepa

Eamonn Coghlan was running for Ireland, for the record, for the World and — so it seemed — for his life. And he did it in a madhouse, with flashbulbs lighting up his every step and sweaty palms trembling around stop-watches that just couldn't be accurate.

But they were. It was an impossible 3:52.6 mile — three fifty-two six!

Running with a blend of strength and dignity and confidence, Coghlan produced one of the most electrifying moments in the history of track and field. The pride of Eire ran the mile in an astonishing 3:52.6 in last night's Jack-in-the-Box Invitational before a sellout crowd in the Sports Arena, smashing the one-year-old world record of 3:54.9 set by America's Dick Buerkle.

"The people in Ireland may vote me president after this," boomed the winner.

And if all this wasn't magical enough. Americans Steve Scott and Steve Lacy chased the little Irishman home under the old standard. Scott recorded a 3:54.1 and Lacy a 3:54.7. Scott's time is an American record.

There's more. Coghlan also set a world indoor 1,500-meter record along the way of 3:37.7, and Scott's 3:38.3 is, once again, an American record.

There are people who will argue that Coghlan's effort is the greatest mile ever run anywhere — indoors or out. With short straight-aways and 22 steep bends to negotiate, it's al-



most impossible to run that fast indoors. New Zealand's John Walker, whose 3:49.4 outdoor record came over four laps with long straights, was not on hand last night to offer his opinion. But Coghlan had one.

"Walker says indoor records are Mickey Mouse," grinned Coghlan, "because he hasn't run fast indoors. But 3:52.6? He's going to die of fright when he hears this time. I'd like to see his face. And he's going to doubly die when he hears I've got the 1,500 record."

Someone asked Coghlan if he thought the old mark of 3:54.9 was "pathetic." "Pathetic?" asked Coghlan. "Tonight's time makes it look pathetic, but I'm sure everyone looks on 3:54.9 as an impressive record."

Walker set the 1,500-meter record of 3:37.4 earlier this year, but that record has been disallowed because the track he set it on

didn't have the required raised border on the inside lane. "I'll sign this 1,500 one first," laughed Coghlan when presented with two documents verifying his world records.

It safely can be said that the race was made by American miler Paul Cummings, who set a blazing pace through the first three-quarters of a mile. Cummings is no rabbit. He is a fine miler. But he got together with Coghlan last week in New York and agreed to help out.

"I've been down lately," said Cummings, "so I didn't mind doing it. We talked about it a little last week. I knew he had it tonight."

Let's let the winner take us through the race.

The first quarter-mile was run in a rather slow :59.5. "That was okay," said Coghlan. "I wanted an even pace; that's the way to go after a world record. I didn't want it too fast."

Then Cummings took over, and he ran through the half-mile in a blistering 1:57.8. "I knew Cummings would look after the pace," Coghlan said.

That he did, and when he led the pack through a 2:56.5 three-quarters, the record was eminent. "After that, it was up to me," the Irishman said, "and I wasn't going to let up this time. I let up in New York last week, and it cost me the record (he ran 3:55.0)."

"If it wasn't for Cummings, there wouldn't have been a record. It's the fastest mile I've ever run — indoors or out. And Scott and Lacy gave me inspiration over the final part of the race."

Historical photos and articles from The San Diego Union-Tribune archives are compiled by merrie.monteagudo@sduiontribune.com. Search the U-T historic archives at NewsLibrary.com/sites/sdub.