

SEND US YOUR LETTERS

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OPINION

The Newport Daily News

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"Our view" represents the opinion of the editorial board, above

MONDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2009 ◆ PAGE A9

OUR VIEW

Irish museum deserves new home at fort

Given the role Irish immigrants played in shaping Newport, it makes sense for the Museum of Newport Irish History to have a permanent home in the city to showcase its collections.

Given the role Irish immigrants played in building Fort Adams, it makes sense for the museum to be located there, if possible.

The museum, founded in 1996, currently is in a temporary site at the Eisenhower House at Fort Adams State Park, but its membership would like to be able to move into the fort's former mule barn. The museum, a library and boardroom would be situated in a small section of the barn.

"It was mostly Irish labor that built the fort" in the 1800s, said Vince Arnold, the museum's president and one of its founders. "It's one of the reasons we would like to stay here at Fort Adams."

Upon its formation, the Museum of Newport Irish History's first charge was to restore and preserve St. Joseph's Cemetery, known locally as the Barney Street cemetery. The large lot at the corner of Barney and Mount Vernon streets was the site of a small schoolhouse built in 1809 that was purchased by the Diocese of Boston in 1828 and became the first Catholic church in Newport.

In addition to maintaining the cemetery, the museum hosts an annual lecture series at La Forge Casino restaurant on Irish history and culture and conducts an annual tour of Irish-related sites in the city, using a bus donated by Viking Tours of Newport.

The museum has collected history books about the Irish and has created a computer program with data on the Irish who were born, married and died in the city since the 1840s. Members are recording interviews with residents of the old Fifth Ward, a neighborhood name that has

TO GO

What: A comedy night, including a silent auction, to raise money for the establishment of a permanent site for the Museum of Newport Irish History.

When: Saturday, Feb. 27, at 7 p.m. The comedy show will begin at 8:30.

Where: Ochre Court, Salve Regina University, Newport.

Info: Send Vince Arnold an e-mail at vjarnold@cox.net.

endured long after the city's voting wards were whittled down in number.

"We're compiling an audio history about all phases of Irish immigration here and what the immigrants, their children and grandchildren contributed to the town," Arnold said. "We're also working on a DVD with a virtual tour of Irish Newport. We hope to get that out soon."

The museum has preliminary plans for a permanent site and is raising funds to support its planning and development.

While everyone can celebrate all things Irish on St. Patrick's Day and during the month of March, which has been designated Irish Heritage Month in Newport, the museum works year-round to preserve and promote Irish history in Newport. It deserves a true home from which to do its work.



Rob Rogers ◆ Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

GUEST VIEW

Say 'no' to video game violence

Parents need to be vigilant when shopping for holiday gifts

By Marcia M. Weeden

As adults scramble to buy presents this holiday season, many are seeking suitable video games that will bring fun and enjoyment to the children in their lives. With that in mind, here are a few things that the Parents Television Council would like you to know.

Children's access to violent video games is of particular concern to the PTC given the growing body of evidence on the lasting harmful effects of exposure to video game violence. Games alone do not cause a child to act a certain way — personality, upbringing and environment are strong mitigating factors.

We know from our own time spent in school that repetition reinforces learning to the point where a concept or idea becomes automatic. At ages when children should be interacting with each other and adults to learn peaceful, nonviolent ways to resolve conflicts or deal with frustration, many are spending hours playing video games that teach violence as an acceptable way of life.

In 2004, the Journal of Adolescence reported that adolescent girls and boys played video games on an average of five and 13 hours a week respectively. The more time a child spent playing video games, the stronger the association with hostility, poor grades, more frequent arguments with teachers and physical fighting.

According to Craig A. Anderson, Ph.D., director for the Center of Violence at Iowa State University's psychology department and a recognized national expert on violent video games, repeated consumption of

media violence reduces the normal human aversion to conflict, aggression and violence. Youth not only begin to regard violence as an acceptable option to dealing with frustration, but they are conditioned to believe that violent, aggressive efforts will succeed.

One recent study found that teens who play violent video games showed increased activity in the brain areas linked to emotional arousal and decreased activity in the brain regions that govern self-control. Other studies have shown that playing a disproportionate amount of violent games is likely to increase the frequency and the seriousness of a child's physical aggression, both in the short-term and over time as the youth grows up.

Does this mean that no electronic game is acceptable for children? Absolutely not. There are many fine electronic games available that provide fun, creativity and knowledge that, when played in moderation, can teach children all sorts of positive skills. Some game systems even offer physical activity as part of the games. But what are adults up against when selecting video games for children?

For starters, it is important to remember that the video game industry has a vested interest in selling its wares. Manufacturers self-rate their video games. Content descriptions are vague. To reach a broader market, the ratings lean to "Everyone" and "Teen" regardless of the actual content. There is also an industry belief that a product must have violence to make a profit. Advertising dollars are heavily skewed in promoting violent video games.

The preponderance of violent video game advertising might lead one to conclude that is what consumers want. However, research conducted by the University of Rochester found that it did not matter whether violence was present or not. What players preferred were games that gave them autonomy, via choices, and validation by achieving certain goals or tasks. It was empowerment and competence that players sought, not violence.

Video games permit players to create, name and identify with the games' characters. They are designed to be deeply engrossing, with "the better parts" found hours into the game or at higher skill levels. Some games have keys to hide the action should "unfriendly" eyes pass by.

Ninety percent of teenagers say that their parents never check video game ratings. Most states do not have laws that prevent the sale of M-rated games to minors. Games downloaded from the Internet are not subject to industry ratings.

Before you buy, take the time to investigate what you are purchasing. Keep the personality of the child in mind. Remember, parents have the biggest influence on what is seen in the home. For more information, visit www.parentstv.org, Current Campaigns, Video Game Campaign.

Marcia M. Weeden is the Rhode Island Chapter director of the Parents Television Council, a non-profit organization dedicated to "promoting and restoring responsibility and decency to the entertainment industry."

READERS' LETTERS

RIPTA could better serve tourists and city with few simple changes

Regarding Thursday's editorial on getting more people to use public transportation:

This summer I had the opportunity to volunteer at the Newport County Visitors Center providing tourism information "in the circle."

I was struck by three things:

◆ The literally thousands of tourists who either desired to get to the Cliff Walk or Easton's Beach.

◆ The amazed reaction when I informed out-of-towners that the No. 67 trolley was only \$1.75 one way or \$5 for a 24-hour pass. All expected the costs to be substantially higher, as they are in other tourist destinations.

◆ The frustration voiced by many when informed that there was no more bus service to Easton's Beach (just a few flex buses) and that the closest stop to the Cliff Walk was at Naragansett Avenue/Forty Steps (thus missing the beginning third of the walk — particularly disappointing to the elderly).

All would be better served if, instead of turning right onto Bellevue Avenue, the summer trolleys continued up Memorial

Boulevard and stopped at the entrance to the Cliff Walk and then stopped and turned around at Easton's Beach, before proceeding back Memorial to Bellevue, turning left. This would add a few minutes to the schedule, but would more readily accommodate thousands of tourists.

It would also be more logical to raise the one-way summer trolley fare to \$2 (actually much friendlier since folks are asked to have exact change when they pay on board and using three quarters is inconvenient). An "all day hopper" trolley pass for \$6 would still be viewed as a bargain and generate incremental revenue, with a portion going to the Newport County Convention & Visitors Bureau.

The Rhode Island Public Transit Authority also could install a GPS-triggered audio narration in the trolley that would point out highlights and next stops, further helping to justify a fare premium. The drivers wouldn't have to do a thing.

John Hirschboeck, Newport

SOMETHING TO SAY?

We welcome our readers' views. Our letters policy follows:

◆ Each letter must bear the writer's full name (no initials, please), signature, full address and telephone number (for verification purposes only). We will not publish a letter without a phone number.

◆ We may condense letters and correct errors of spelling

and punctuation.

◆ Letters should be no more than 450 words. Proposed guest view columns should be no more than 750 words.

◆ Because of the volume of letters we receive, we cannot always publish them immediately.

◆ We will run no more than two letters per author per month.

INSIDE THE FIRST AMENDMENT

Still waiting for more open government

We're either on the verge of a new era in transparency in the federal government — or we're not.

On just his first full day in office, Jan.

GENE POLICINSKI

21, President Barack Obama pledged that the

public would have more and easier access to official records and information in his presidency, saying federal agencies should live up to the Freedom of Information Act by presuming records open unless there's good reason to close them.

On Dec. 8, the administration issued a directive that each federal department and Cabinet-level agency must post online within 45 days at least three new sets of high-interest information not previously available, and must create a Web page within 60 days outlining how it intends to live up to open-government regulations. Within 120 days, each must have an open-government plan completed and available to the public for comment.

The plan — if carried out — will go a long way toward improving the thus-far lukewarm rating Obama has gotten from freedom of information advocates.

On the plus side of the FOI ledger, even before the latest directive, the administration developed a Web-based disclosure of the details of the government's massive economic stimulus package (www.recovery.gov). And Obama relaxed rules that had blocked news coverage of the return to the U.S. of the remains of military serv-

ice members killed overseas, rightly leaving it up to family members to decide whether to allow it.

On the negative side, freedom of information advocates note there initially was no disclosure of the details of the so-called Cash for Clunkers program; when records were finally released, they showed the program was much less successful than hoped in taking gas-guzzling old cars off the road. It took the threat of a lawsuit to obtain the names of outside participants in the White House discussions leading up to Obama's massive health-insurance reform package — reminiscent of Bush administration stonewalling on discussions about oil-drilling policy. And the administration has continued the Bush administration's opposition to full disclosure on certain policies regarding the war on terrorism, including the jailing of suspected terrorists overseas.

For watchdog groups on freedom of information issues, there is a wait-and-see attitude about the new Obama initiative. They recall that in 2007, President George W. Bush issued a Freedom of Information order on openness, and that some agencies simply failed to live up to it. Others note that the "new" data to be posted may simply be information already available in one format, but then posted in another.

The real challenge ahead is reversing decades of increasing secrecy across a range of local, state and federal agencies, and bureaucratic roadblocks to obtaining

information under "sunshine" laws. The trend — through Democratic and Republican administrations alike — has been to provide less information to citizens, particularly in areas involving national security.

Change to more-open practices doesn't come easily to bureaucrats. A Dec. 7 federal "open government" meeting in Washington, D.C., for employees working in freedom of information areas, was — of all things — closed to the public. The rationale was the same as so often is given for excluding citizens: Organizers "wanted government employees to be able to speak candidly."

Apart from the fact that these were government employees meeting in a public building to discuss public business, those organizers ought to have considered this candid observation, offered by one high administration official: "Openness will strengthen our democracy and promote efficiency and effectiveness in Government."

A ringing endorsement indeed for transparency and disclosure — and a direct quote from President Obama's Jan. 21 promise of a "new era of openness."

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