

Viewpoint

The Jasper Newsboy

Established in 1865

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Our Viewpoint Editorials

Jasper's giving legacy magnified in holidays

JASPER COULD and should be known as "a giving community." That's a designation the area has long earned and deserved.

People at every economic and social level in this city are involved year round in helping those at least in temporary need or who are simply less fortunate than most.

At no time during the year is that more apparent than the Christmas holidays when the spirit of giving is magnified both in the heart and in practice.

Giving flows from individuals, from churches, from charitable organizations and from governmental entities. Individuals, police officers, church members, business owners and employees are all involved in an outpouring that blesses all that the giving touches, both the recipients and the givers.

With that eternal legacy in mind, *The Jasper Newsboy* commends and congratulates the people of the Jasper area and issues a sincere wish for a happy and blessed holiday season and a very prosperous New Year.

Guest Commentary One person's viewpoint

Other doors close, but the stable door is open

Christmas was close at hand, in all his bluff and hearty honesty. -- Charles Dickens in *The Pickwick Papers*

ONE CANNOT TRAVEL a mile along the road (over the river and through the woods to Grandmother's FEMA trailer?) without seeing at least one sign with some variation on "Keep Christ in Christmas," and, next door, wobbling in the wind a giant, grotesque plastic Santa kept standing by an air-compressor - spiritus indeed!

The irony of the first item is that in the English-speaking world Christmas was forbidden after the Reformation. In England and in the American colonies the Puritan fathers (mothers didn't count) made sure under penalty of law that no one even dared look like he might be observing the day in any way. Even with the Restoration, Christmas in England and the colonies was only minimally observed. After all, Christmas had been a Catholic thing, and to this day many church doors still do not open on Christmas.

As for the giant graven (or, rather, inflated) images, Charles Dickens must perhaps answer for that, for it was he who invented Christmas in the middle of the 19th century. However, when we re-read A Christmas Carol and the far more delightful "good-humored Christmas Chapter" in *The Pickwick Papers*, Christ has nothing to do with it. Dickens' Christmas is all about family, kindness to others, and a little mid-winter merriment, and certainly there is nothing wrong with all of that.

But when Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (aka Queen Victoria's husband) had a tree shipped from Thuringen to England to be set up in Buckingham Palace and decorated, any hope of Christmas as a religious day or at least of continuing to be ignored was over.



Mack Hall

'Keep Christ in Christmas' signs simply ironic...

After that, everyone had to have a Christmas tree, and now they are made in China instead of grown in Thuringen. And then there was an electric train, and a Daisy Red Ryder air rifle, and Captain Kirk ornaments.

By the way, what was Victoria's secret? In the 150 years since Dickens and Prince Albert invented Christmas, it has been overwhelmingly secular in England and America. You will look in vain for Joseph, Mary, and the Infant in the Sears catalogue, It's a Wonderful Life, and A Christmas Story.

No, I'm not complaining about the "Keep Christ in Christmas" signs; I simply find them ironic.

There is a whole industry based on What Is Christmas Really About? Books, sermons, roadside signs, little pamphlets passed out by strange people who show up at your door, all claiming that their Christmas is far better than yours: Your Christmas is Pagan. Your Christmas is male-dominated. Your Christmas is capitalistic. Your Christmas is oppressive to non-Christians. Your Christmas is on the wrong date because of a goat's reproductive cycle. Your Christmas has Wise Men and the Bible doesn't say that. Your Christmas is about Santa Claus and that's not right.

However you keep Christmas, there will be any number of people telling you how you're doing it wrong, so you might as well enjoy it.

Perhaps one final thought, one that doesn't disagree with any of the above, should be considered - a quiet remembrance on Christmas Eve that, as C. S. Lewis said, once upon a time a stable was made a door between worlds. Some church doors might be closed on Christmas day, but the stable door remains open.

Mack Hall is a resident of Kirbyville.

In Jasper County

Many ways to view the celebration of Christmas...



Newsboy photo/Charles Kerr

SPECIAL OBSERVANCE — New and expanded ways to observe the Christmas celebration are demonstrated among Jasper's growing Hispanic population. A recent gathering celebrated Las Posadas, the traditional Hispanic Christmas. The "gift" this child receives at Las Posadas is a slip of paper telling her what she can do to prepare herself for the Christ child.

Your Viewpoint Letters to the Editor

Focus on what's important to all

By CHESTER R. JOURDAN, JR.
Beaumont

As my family and I prepare to move on to the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission in Columbus, Ohio, we will forever cherish the friendships and memories we've made in Southeast Texas. The elected officials, planning commission staff, community leaders and citizens of Southeast Texas will always be in our hearts and prayers. I've greatly enjoyed working for the agency and appreciated the strong support provided by the elected officials, community leaders and staff during my tenure. I've cherished the privilege of coming to work every day irrespective of the barriers or obstacles confronting us regionally in Austin, Texas and/or Washington, D. C. We've had to overcome many challenges these past six plus years in addressing the seemingly overwhelming needs of the region, but by sharing the burden together we've been able to succeed. What I think I will miss the most is the camaraderie and shared vision, particularly since the impact of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita on the region. Obviously, there are still many challenges facing Southeast and Deep East Texas, but I believe the South East Texas Regional Planning Commission and the Deep East Texas Council of Governments are uniquely qualified and staffed to meet those challenges head on. In many ways, the region has a very bright future.

The storm re-taught us a very valuable lesson, "We're much stronger together speaking with a unified voice, when we set aside our differences and focus on what's important we can accomplish great and mighty things."

We'll never forget Southeast Texas, its people and its enduring spirit and we pray that God will continue to bestow his blessings upon this great region of the state.

Letters to editor criteria outlined

Letters to the editor of *The Jasper Newsboy* must meet the following criteria:

- Should be of general or specific interest to the readership of *The Jasper Newsboy*
 - Should be limited to about 300 words
 - Must contain a valid signature, a valid mailing address and valid day and evening telephone numbers where the writer may be reached
 - Names of persons writing letters will not be withheld
 - Unsigned letters will not be published
 - Letters endorsing or opposing political candidates are considered political advertising and should be taken to the advertising department
 - Letters containing personal attacks on individuals, public figures or elected officials will be edited or sent back to the writer. Criticism of how a public figure or elected official votes or on actions taken with regard to performance of his/her job are acceptable as long as the comments are not personally derisive
 - Letters of complaint about private businesses will be forwarded to the business in question and will not be published
 - Thank you letters with long lists of names are considered advertising and should go to the advertising department
 - Deadline for letters is 10 a.m. Monday for inclusion in the following Wednesday's edition
 - Letters may be edited for length, libel, grammar, clarity and newspaper style, without changing the meaning and intent of the letter
 - To ensure diversity and variety of viewpoints, letter writers are limited to one letter each 30 days
 - *The Newsboy* will not publish poetry, anonymous letters, "open" or "third party" letters written to someone else, letters that constitute advertisements, letters concerning private legal disputes or conflicts between individuals, letters that are part of organized writing campaigns and letters that include previously published material
- Mail letters to:
The Jasper Newsboy
 P.O. Box 1419
 Jasper, Texas 75951-1419
 or e-mail to:
 jgalvan@jaspernewsboy.com
- The Your Viewpoint columns are primarily for *Newsboy* readers and subscribers in the four-county Jasper Retail Trade Area of Jasper, Newton, Sabine and Tyler counties. First consideration will be given to letters from those residents.

Capital Highlights A summary of the week's significant events in Austin

Coal plant supporters raise voice as session nears

AUSTIN - The public relations war over a proposal to build 19 new coal-fired plants is getting hotter with the next state legislative session around the corner.

The Texas Association of Business stumped at the Capitol Dec. 15 in favor of the plants and a mix of other power-generation options, such as more nuclear power capacity and less reliance on natural gas.

Energy needs for residential customers, businesses and government are growing faster than power can be generated by the current grid of power plants, said Bill Hammond, executive director of the Texas



Ed Sterling
Texas Press Association

Association of Business. Hammond mentioned Texas could face rolling blackouts in the next few years if power needs aren't addressed.

Other groups, such as Public Citizen Texas, are emphasizing the degrading effects on public health and the environment if the state grants coal plant permits that don't require the cleaner, coal gasification process that results in minimal emissions.

Governor hires former senator

Gov. Rick Perry on Dec. 14 appointed Sen. Ken Armbrister as legislative director for the governor's office.

Armbrister, D-Victoria, was elected to the Texas House of Representatives in 1983 and to the Texas Senate in 1986. During his tenure in the Senate, Armbrister has chaired the Natural Resources, Criminal Justice, State Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations committees. Armbrister chose not to seek re-election and will serve out his term of office, which ends when the new legislature convenes, Jan. 9.

Judge orders speaker to reply

An Austin state district judge ordered House Speaker Tom Craddick to provide the court with information that may show whether one of his office calendars contains what is "public information" under the law.

Plaintiff Cris Feldman of Austin is suing for access to Craddick's 2003 political calendar and the first half of his 2004 political calendar.

The inclusive dates cover the period during which Republicans battled with Democrats over redistricting.

State District Judge Margaret Cooper set

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