

## Dear Carol

Dear Carol,

A good friend is getting married next month; I helped her choose her wedding gowns. Yes, there are two gowns. Her parents and the groom's parents are divorced. The fathers have remarried and are not on speaking terms with the mothers. The bride's father is throwing a destination wedding in another state. The mothers are not attending the big wedding. I can't go because of my father's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration. My friend is going to have a small wedding here in a park a week before the big wedding for the mothers. I, and a few other friends, want to go to the small wedding. My friend says no, it is just for the mothers. It is in a public park, one friend said he is going to just go and stand nearby so he can see this major event in her life. I want to go too. Are we wrong to go against her wishes?

Laura

Dear Laura,

Please tell your friend your desire to support her on her wedding day. You and the other friends can be the quiet bystanders who make sure nothing goes wrong during the park ceremony. Stray dogs, wayward children, ball games and intrusive bystanders can be kept away by friends who want nothing more than to observe her happiness from the sidelines. If you tell her you are going to be there to support her in that role she will hardly have a way to say no. Please do not try to be a part of the ceremony. This is a trying time for this couple and their families,

your understanding and support will help it be a truly joyous occasion.

Dear Carol,

My grandson's first birthday is in a few weeks. My son and daughter-in-law are planning a big party for about 25 people. I always made my children's birthday cakes; I took classes in cake decorating and made them really special. My son is going to buy a cake from a local store. I'd really like to make the cake and have volunteered. They told me it was too much trouble for me and they would buy one. Do you think it would be all right if I made some decorated cupcakes and brought them as a surprise?

Cooking Nana

Dear Nana,

You asked if you could bring the cake and were told no. Please don't push this issue. A first birthday party for a first child is a very big event for young couples. Often it is their introduction to family and friends in their new role as parents who entertain. It is their party. You were gracious to offer your cake and they want to handle this themselves. It is another opportunity for parents (you) to let go of children and see them as capable adults. Go and be entertained as a guest but I'll bet they will love your help at clean up time!

Send questions to askcarolnow@gmail.com or mail them to Herald Publications.

Carol is a Life Coach available for private consultation in person or on the phone. •

## Political Penguin

By Duane Plank

When I run into one of my readers, usually at the library or the local Starbucks, they often ask how do you come up with three peppy columns a week? And why do people rip the PP occasionally in "Letters to the Editor?" No one seems to rip your sports columns, they say, other than to mention that you don't cover hockey enough, or know how to spell icon Wayne Gretzky's name correctly.

Aside to the newer readers: I misspelled Gretzky's name in column uno, but it was a spell check deal, not my error. And we received a nice LTE that said I had no credibility writing about hockey if I couldn't spell the Grate One's name. I mean the Great One. Damn spell check...

But, seriously folks, if I screw up, I will pen a mea culpa. But how much can you screw up when you are giving your opinion? Someone once said opinions are like \*\*\*\*\*. Everybody has one. I think my father once mentioned that quote out to me as he was attempting to further my education. Think about it, though. You readers are very smart--at least that it is what my field research reveals. Some of you have your set-in-stone, unbending opinions. And I have my slant on the news of the day. Not the only slant; just my slant. Now that we can put that issue behind us, on to some of the news of the week.

Help me out here, folks. What's an acorn? A little nut that squirrels mess around with, right? But I had heard "ACORN" alluded to during the past presidential campaign. Knew that President Obama was somehow involved with the group. ACORN stands for the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now. So they are not nuts.

The folks at ACORN were making the CNN news readers breathless last week, and they do have some hotties at CNN, by the way, because something was amiss with the ACORNers. It seems that there was a buzz in the political world that the group, founded in Arkansas in 1970 to "help the poor," was up to some sort of alleged hanky panky recently--some sort of flimflam chicanery. A prostitute and a pimp were mentioned. Oh, the shame. And these guys are supposed to be helping the downtrodden.

So Pres. Obama went on the tube Sunday, and was asked about his pals. I say that, because according to the venerable Associated Press, which has been around for more than a few years, the ex-community organizer once shilled for ACORN. The AP wrote that Mr. Obama represented the group in a 1995 lawsuit.

The Pres., after viewing the video presentation involving the alleged scandal with the ACORN folks posing as a prostitute and a pimp, weighed in with his view, commenting that what he saw on the screen "was certainly inappropriate and deserves to be investigated." The ACORN folks claimed that they were a tad bit miffed at the alleged chicanery, and had mouthed that they were going to investigate themselves, dadgummit!

Bertha Lewis, the chief executive of ACORN, had promised to move quickly to launch an investigation into the dastardly deeds caught on video. What *isn't* caught on video these days? She was quoted in some of the semi-reputable forums that I follow promising to appoint "an independent auditor" to investigate the incident by last Friday. As of Monday, nada had happened, and shocked guffaws must have echoed throughout the Washington Beltway. Okay, enough about nuts, so help me Sarah Palin.

Saw the not-so-wonderful headline above the fold that informed readers that the Golden Bankrupt State's unemployment numbers have reached a new high--12.2 percent, according to some figures. These numbers were published a little bit after the esteemed Fed Chairman Ben Bernanke again intoned that the recession is darn near over.

Hallelujah! At least we never had to reinstitute those bread lines. The Pres., making one of what seems like his hundreds of appearances on TV each week, told one of the Sunday shows that "all signs are that the economy is going to start growing again." But he did add that unemployment is still a persistent problem and "it could even get a little worse. But what is absolutely clear is that the financial markets are working again."

Good news! Hope that doesn't mean that the big-time financial mucky-mucks will again

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## Cityscape

By Mayor Kelly McDowell

Apologies for the lack of a column last week. I'll blame it on city workload this time, which is the truth. I recently became the Chair of the South Bay Cities Council of Governments, which has cranked up the public sector workload.

The South Bay Cities COG, as it's known, is a formal alliance of fifteen cities in our sub-region of Los Angeles County. Banding us together gives each of us more clout in dealing with issues affecting our cities, especially the kinds of concerns that impact the whole South Bay. Our COG represents close to 30 percent of all the people that live in our nation's most populous county, to put things in perspective.

I'm proud and honored to be the COG chair this year. Many thanks to my colleagues on the COG board who selected me for the post.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch: I hate to be the bearer of anything other than good news, but I feel compelled to share a couple of things.

To be clear, I'm not trying to spread doom, gloom or misery, simply to share some facts about our City of El Segundo which will impact each of our lives to one extent or another. Elsewhere in this monologue are a couple of nuggets of actual good news, so please don't stop reading yet.

On September 15 the city council passed the city's budget for the fiscal year starting October 1 of this year and ending September 30, 2010. Getting there was not a fun trip.

We cut about \$7 million in spending to make the budget balance, more than we've ever cut from a budget since I joined the city council in 1998. Our general fund spending this fiscal year will be about \$62 million. (It's important to note that all California cities and the state itself must pass balanced budgets every year according to the state's constitution. Attention Sacramento: El Segundo does not do this using smoke and mirrors.)

Every city department contributed to the cuts and everyone on the city staff deserves thanks for making some painful decisions. But what made these cuts necessary?

Most of the spending reductions, about \$6 million worth, were caused by significant

drops in revenue in nearly every category, from business license taxes to gasoline taxes. ("Revenue" in government-speak almost always means taxes, of course.)

The revenue decline is due mainly to the general decline in the economy, which has had a significant effect on our city, but not nearly as dramatic as the impact it has had on almost all of the rest of California's nearly 500 cities. The state's pocket-picking to balance its own budget added about \$1 million to our troubles to get to the grand total of about \$7 million.

Is there good news here? Yes there is good news and I am happy and relieved to be able to say that.

We have managed to make these spending cuts without laying off a single employee. That means that our level of service to our community, of which we are so proud, should not change.

We also managed to maintain the same level of support to the El Segundo Unified School District that we did last year. That means that the extra \$150,000 appropriated last year will continue through September of next year at least.

Our city provides about \$1.2 million worth of aid to our schools, including the entire school district library system. To my knowledge, no other city can make that claim about school libraries. And as far as I know, our level of support on a *per capita* basis equals or exceeds every other California city.

This year that amount of aid to ESUSD was not easy to find. And if our economy continues to shrink, our city will need to make more spending cuts. We are at the point now that additional cuts almost certainly would mean cutting city jobs. We don't want to do that.

But I want you to know where we are financially, as a city. And I will keep you posted on this because it is so important.

This is not going to be an easy fiscal year by any measure. But with dedicated colleagues on the city council--and staff members who can seemingly turn their departments' expenditure plans on a dime--we'll get through this, tough though it may be.

And we will still be the proudest city I know. •

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