

OPINION

OUR VIEW

Driving the lessons home

More safe drivers on the roads benefits us all. There are fewer crashes, deaths and increases to car insurance. That's why it makes sense to increase the number of supervised driving hours for teens and require their parents to attend a safety awareness class. The first year of driving is when many habits — good and bad — are set in place. We ought to make every reasonable effort to teach our youngest drivers the right ways at the start of their driving life. Under a new law that takes effect Jan. 1, teens will be required to log an additional 10 hours of practice before securing their license. And the law requires parents of training drivers to complete a 90-minute public safety awareness class, otherwise their teen will need to put in another 10 hours behind the wheel, totaling 50 hours. Minnesota will become the fourth state to require parents to attend a safety awareness class. Instead of viewing the class as a burden on already very busy parents, we see this as an opportunity to take an active role in their teen's instruction on something they may likely do everyday for the next 50 to 60 years. Parents engaged in their child's driving instruction through the additional supervised driving hours and by taking the class can assist their teen's instructor in driving the important points

home to their teen. And how can it be argued that more driving experience isn't a good idea when last year the Minnesota Department of Public Safety reported there were more than 12,000 crashes caused by Minnesota teen drivers? Those teen drivers were responsible for 38 deaths and more than 8,700 injuries. Those are the deaths and injuries caused to the children, spouses and parents of someone. Leading by example is among the most effective tools in teaching. Parents taking the course may not know about some of the new laws put in place since they began driving and may improve their own driving skills. Parents of teen drivers may also realize by taking the course they have allowed some bad habits to creep into their driving — habits they have passed on to their teen that at some time could contribute to the cause of a crash. Has anyone witnessed a parent talking on their cell phone while driving? Could this be considered distracted driving? Would a teen do it if they saw their parent do it, too? Driving is nearly a requirement when living in places like Borderland. Getting parents involved and adding hours to supervised driving practice in an effort create safer drivers makes sense.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Christmastime: We are truly blessed

To the editor,
‘Tis the beautiful, happy, and holy season of Christmas. A child born over 2,000 years ago came into this world to bring us hope. For the past few years, I have noticed this wonderful Christmas Spirit through all of the months of the year, here in International Falls. Here are a few things that show the wonderful spirit that our small community keeps alive throughout the year, not just at Christmas-time. We have just exited November, the busy month of hunting, voting and Thanksgiving. This community has had coat drives and food drives to help those that are not warm enough or don't have enough to eat. I notice many of our citizens helping and giving in all kinds of ways. In October, though it may not seem important, there are Halloween parties held in Ranier and at Backus for all children. There are many that wouldn't be able to have the fun and games and candy without those community parties. It is so important for all of our children to be included. August and September bring all kinds of people, organizations, and churches collecting school supplies for the many children in our community that would otherwise go to school without. The school supply lists these days are quite extensive. When I was (younger), a couple of No. 2s and a tablet was all that was needed. We have a Clothes Closet here at St. Thomas that gives free, decent clothing to those in need, every month of the year. There is Servants of Shelter, helping those, who by circumstances anyone of us could fall into, have become homeless. The summer months bring a lot of activities, and I have seen many adults and children included in activities, adventures, vacations, and the summer camping trips of others

that many would be unable to enjoy without the giving and sharing hearts of our citizens. All children during the summer, are welcome to a healthy lunch at Backus Community Center. The children of mothers who can only afford two meals a day, the children of working parents, and even the children whose parents can afford a good lunch are welcome. Backus has also served two meals a week for over two years to anyone in need of a meal, conversation or companionship. The season of Christmas lived everyday in our community. Over 20,000 meals served. Every month of the year there are gatherings, feasts, and benefits to raise money and give hope, build and restore faith, that are organized and served by the members of our community. So, so many, unknown, working and serving behind the scenes, without accolades or applause. Christmas. Meals are delivered,

groceries are shopped for and delivered, people helping the sick, shut ins, and disadvantaged. Christmas. There are so many more acts of love and giving that I could mention. There are so many more things that I could tell you about The great gift of Christmas that is shared by you with others, but I am afraid it would become a book and that is not my message. We are now here, Christmastime, 2014. Give and share, love and laugh, enjoy the wonderful food, family and friends, the lights and decorations, and always keep in your hearts the true meaning of Christmas: Hope, given to us by a newborn child, thousands of years ago. I am proud to live in this community, to know you all. You are gracious, loving, sharing, giving and unselfish. Merry Christmas to all and to all a good and peaceful life. Cynthia J. Warren Ranier, MN

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An open letter to the next generation

Dear boys,
Dad here. I want to tell you about something that happened to me yesterday. A friend of mine at the office, a black woman, asked me to join her at a protest about that unarmed 18-year-old who was shot by that police officer in Missouri. I felt a little funny about going, as if a white, 40-something dad had no place at a civil rights rally, but my friend asked, so I agreed to go, as did a bunch of us. On the way over I ended up talking with a couple black men I work with. They're in their twenties, which might seem old to you, but to me they seem close to your age, just kids really. And because we were already thinking about what happened to that boy in Missouri, they started talking about the times that police officers had pulled guns on them. Times. Plural. Like the time one of them was playing basketball with his white friend in a public park. No sooner did his friend go home to get them some Gatorade than a patrol car pulls up. A cop shouted questions about what he was doing in a park in a neighborhood where white people lived, then more cars showed



dictorian. But they looked like criminals to the cops. The worst thing I heard at the rally was something called a "jump out." That's when police jump out of an unmarked van with their guns drawn, shouting at black teenagers passing by to get down on the sidewalk. It makes no sense to me, but it happens enough to black people that it no longer seems strange. If it happened to me or to you, I'd burn down a police station. But they just comply, hoping that the police don't hate them enough to pull a trigger. This isn't something that starts suddenly when black boys become teenagers and wear man-sized clothes. Black students are much more likely to get disciplined than white students in public schools across the country. The black boys you go to school with are three and a half times more likely to be expelled than you are. In Texas, almost every single black male student-83 percent-will be suspended at least once, and those kids who get suspended are three times more likely to get in trouble with the law later. The guys I was talking to knew they had a target on their backs even as kids.

Their parents told them to always be extra polite to the parents of their white friends and to never be in a room in their house alone in case something went missing. They never were allowed to play with squirt guns lest they got shot by a real one. And when they got pulled over for driving through the wrong neighborhood-something that happens to them frequently even today-they rest their hands out the door so the officer doesn't suspect danger, and they record it all with their phones, so the officer can't later claim otherwise. None of this, they said, made them unusual. Everyone they knew-their black friends, that is-had similar stories about being harassed by the police. But being commonplace doesn't make something right, and I'm sad to say that it's up to you to be more aware of this so you can help change it. Love, Dad. Stanford distributed exclusively by Cagle Cartoons newspaper syndicate. Stanford is a regular contributor to the Austin American-Statesman, a Democratic consultant and a Truman National Security Project partner.

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