

# Selective optimism

Tuesday, December 23, 2008

By Raheem Hosseini ([editor@ledger-dispatch.com](mailto:editor@ledger-dispatch.com))

"Are you in the holiday spirit yet?"

I heaved a tired sigh at the question. "I'm still recovering from Thanksgiving."

That was a few weeks ago, in which time the ghosts of Christmas' past, present and future have only grown more elusive.

I blame the criminals.

This month has seen an atypically nasty assortment of crimes, starting with the trio of brats that went around Amador shooting out car windows earlier this December. They even broke out the back windows of two vans belonging to the Arc of Amador & Calaveras, which offers services for the developmentally disabled in the two counties. Fortunately, they weren't the two new vans Executive Director Mike Sweeney recently schlepped up Mount Whitney near Death Valley to raise funds for, but still. In the words of one victim, "that's just mean."

Then there was the armed robber who smashed his pistol into the head of an 18-year-old trainee during the robbery of a Jackson sandwich shop that same week. Not satisfied with assaulting someone in the first days of her first job, nor with whatever cash he managed to scrounge from the register, the jerk made off with the terrorized staff's tips, like the Grinch nabbing that last can of "Who-hash."

More recently, a robbery suspect threatened Wells Fargo Bank staff in Plymouth with claims that he was armed, hoofing it out of the building with only a small sum of cash.

I get that not everyone can be like Jordan Bennett, the Jackson Junior High sixth-grader who found \$500 in a bundled wad at his school and turned it in. The money ended up being the campus supervisor's Christmas fund and grocery money, a holiday miracle for one during these distressed economic times. Anecdotal wisdom from local law enforcement suggests that increases in crime are correlative to a protracted recession, but what happened to the etiquette of criminality, the "pleases" and "thank-you's" attending the "stick 'em up's" and "hand it over's"?

I kid. Why would bandits and thieves display courtesies that appear out of reach for average toll booth operators?

Thankfully, the news hasn't all been glum. The three glass-breaking vandals and a man suspected of being part of a string of upcountry burglaries earlier this year were apprehended because of the cooperation of this county's various law enforcement agencies. So was the sandwich shop robber, along with his misguided girlfriend, who worked at the business and allegedly helped facilitate the crime. The couple that robs together definitely doesn't stay together.

Why, there's even been a noticeably benevolent air of cooperation in many halls of local government this month, from the Sutter Creek Planning Commission and Gold Rush Ranch developers meeting halfway on concessions for that large parcel of development to the Amador County Board of Supervisors smoothing out the dispute over what should be paid to build temporary housing units for local farm laborers.

Less wonkish are the warm and fuzzies that can be extracted from the continued donations to the Interfaith Food Bank, which has been inundated with visitors who once believed themselves secure from the punishing need experienced by those less fortunate.

Even better was the story of Rebecca Albin, the ebullient single mother who won a free car from Prospect Motors and a Christmas ham in the space of two days. The deserving Albin can keep the prizes, but don't mind if the rest of us share in the good vibes.

Year-end reports from the Amador Community College Foundation and First 5 Amador have likewise shown hard-won gains. Enrollment in the classes offered at the Amador Learning Center have climbed steadily in each of the past four semesters, Cosumnes River College in Sacramento has pledged its continued satellite presence and Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) is on board with seeking \$250,000 toward the foundation's efforts. Meanwhile, First 5 is leveraging its modest pool of resources to enroll children under 5 in health insurance programs and provide them needed dental care, among other efforts.

Both organizations could see setbacks from severe cuts in state spending, but let's not go there right now.

Perhaps uncharacteristically, I want to end this one on a happy note. And whatever external bummers are occurring this volatile year, I know individuals and families that will spend the next two weeks in stubborn holiday cheer. And on New Year's, we'll welcome the opportunity to take another shot at this whole "peace on earth and good will toward men" thing.

Good luck to us, and happy holidays.

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