

Editorial

PSH courts some new and positive changes

Did summer ever begin? We must have missed it, because here we are again -- way too early by our estimate.

Indeed, it's time to hit the books again. And, as our eloquent (not to mention lengthy) messages from our staff and student leaders attest, people are looking forward to a good year.

Now we're not quite as joyful as they purport to be. After all, who would really exchange the sun and relaxation of summer to walk these beautifully tiled halls of the Olmsted Building.

But we're not ready to start complaining too loudly. First, it's unnecessary and, around here, it's getting old. Second, as David Bowie suggests, it's time to "turn and face the strange ch-ch-changes."

PSH's continuing attempt to transform our campus modifier from commuter to community is starting to bare some fruit. Yeah, the parking lot is nothing but an overlong swath of black, and you still need \$75 for the privilege. But at least the walk into Olmsted is easier on the eye.

A few picnic tables, a little shade and, just imagine, a few flowering plants. We've already seen students sitting out at the new tables studying and enjoying the last days of a summer on its last legs.

Hmm . . . studying, what a joy. It ranks up there with looking out the CapTimes windows and seeing the construction of the new science and technology addition. Nothing like the sun gleaming off dirt to raise the spirits.

Yet, with a little foresight, a completed center appears as another step forward for the campus. It usually doesn't hurt to have up to date facilities around. It might be nice to look out and see the finished product.

Speaking of up to date, construction on the new library is, obviously, underway. Although the CapTimes will miss the current "bookshed" section, an updated library will push the campus another step ahead -- not to mention take care of the former grass mound now posing as more of that glimmering dirt and affectionately billed as "library hill."

And hopefully as plans progress, the administration's goals for campus beautification will take shape. It might be nice to look out these windows and see a campus with a few buildings that aren't part of a single linear plane -- not to mention a few more trees to sit and study under.

It would also be a pleasure to see the effect of these upgrades rub off on the student body, too. Perhaps we might actually develop the idea of being part of a college community. Imagine, if you will:

Students sticking around campus, even after classes are over; cultural and fun events being attended by more than 50 people; intramurals pitting large sections of the school against itself in friendly competition; and yes, we wouldn't mind a few more of those infamous late-night-feels-like-my-head-is-full-of-cement-the-next-morning keggers -- It all sounds like an actual campus.

The initial interest we've seen so far this year in the CapTimes suggests such an attitude adjustment might already be happening. Something we couldn't be happier about.

Mind you, we would like to see more participation. But changes are already underway, and more seem imminent. Granted, they're not so strange, but Bowie would probably be proud anyway.

If you have an event that you would like to see listed in an upcoming issue of the "campus calendar," please leave the necessary information in the mailbox on the office door of W-341. Also leave a contact number so we may get in touch with you if there are any questions.

Be sure to pick up the upcoming issues of The Capital Times. Many changes are taking place, and the staff is growing. Special features scheduled to appear are a crossword puzzle, cartoons by FRED, a short story series, music reviews, a Meade Heights section and an entertainment section just to name a few. Don't miss it.

Life's short already, so have fun

By Crispin Sartwell

Sartwell's First Law of Social Dynamics: Safety is inversely proportional to fun.

A colleague of mine, who wishes to remain anonymous but whose name is Michael Barton, recently returned from South Carolina with some fireworks. This stuff is very illegal here. Living in town, Barton figured he'd get caught if he lit them. I live in the middle of nowhere, so he gave them to me. Now I'm sitting on a seemingly infinite cache of low-grade munitions: M-70s, Black Bombs, firecrackers and Giant Thor missiles.

My ex-wife thinks I will injure my children. But Sam, Emma and I are willing to take the chance. Giant Thor missiles are fun, and one thing that's fun about them is we are risking injury, arrest and deportation back to glorious Dixie. Few phrases of our beloved mother tongue are as captivating as this one: WARNING SHOOTS FLAMING BALLS.

Now that's a warning label. Contrast it with the pitiful "caution: contents hot" you purchase with a cup of coffee at McDonald's.

Another example: The only social life that exists at our beloved Penn State Harrisburg occurs outside the front door of the main building, where smokers gather and gab. New regulations have arrived, however, to save us from the threat of instant death posed by even a distant whiff of immolated tobacco. It's against the rules to smoke outside.

The FDA wants hegemony over nicotine, and I'm figuring they are aiming for a ban. This of course they are doing for our safety. But as the poet W.S. Merwin, now in his seventies, wrote about tobacco: "as your lungs squeak shut, think also what fun it is."

Speaking of fireworks, tobacco and murder, the New York Times reports the reason the murder rate is so high in this country can be summed up in two words: the South. Murder rates in the South are traditionally much higher than in other regions. The experts who the Times consulted connect that to the "culture" of the South, in which people are quick to resent an insult, and in which they are heavily armed with the means to express their resentment.

This calls up apparitions of guys with huge grey sideburns saying "you have insulted me, sah, and we shall meet on the field of honor," or tattooed good ol' boys brawling homicidally in roadhouses. The Times hinted the culture of the South is a pathology that could be cured if we could just get the whole region into therapy, or perhaps remove its residents to reeducation camps or public schools in Massachusetts.

I lived in the South for many years. It's probably a bit more dangerous than the North. It's definitely more dangerous than Boston, which of late has been setting records for fewest murders. But it would be a shame to cure the South of its culture or even to disarm it. In the immortal words of Hank Williams Jr.,

"a country boy can survive." The South is the repository of the last vestiges of something we might quaintly call "America."

We are losing our freedom and our fun not to jackbooted thugs but to bespectacled geeks from the public health establishment.

You know we could make ourselves much safer than we are by imposing ever more draconian regulations on each other, and the geeks are doing that as quickly as possible. We could straighten out our various kinks by government decree. We could ban all things that might cause pain or death: guns, fireworks, motorcycles, opera, ice cream.

We could live much longer on average than we do. We could also be incredibly bored and incredibly boring.

Death sucks. I have lost one brother by gunshot wound, another by drug overdose. My father's smoking habit killed him. But life can suck too when you live in a padded world in which hardly anything happens.

So allow me to suggest some quick applications of the First Law of Social Dynamics: Let's light a few cherry bombs and cancer sticks, risk the presidency for sex and listen to some gangster rap. Relax. We've all got to go sometime etc., etc. We might as well die interested, and interesting.

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