

YOUR COMMUNITY FORUM

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COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD

For health, leave no child inside

On a recent sunny afternoon in March, I attempted to write while the late-afternoon sun illuminated my desk. However, I yearned for the sensation of the sharp, chilly wind on my face. I turned off the computer and walked outside.

I often feel most alive when I am outdoors. Routine outdoor walking has made me more conscious of how many people, and especially children, are disconnected from their natural environment. With warmer weather here, I recently reflected on how many children don't spend their summer vacation outside.

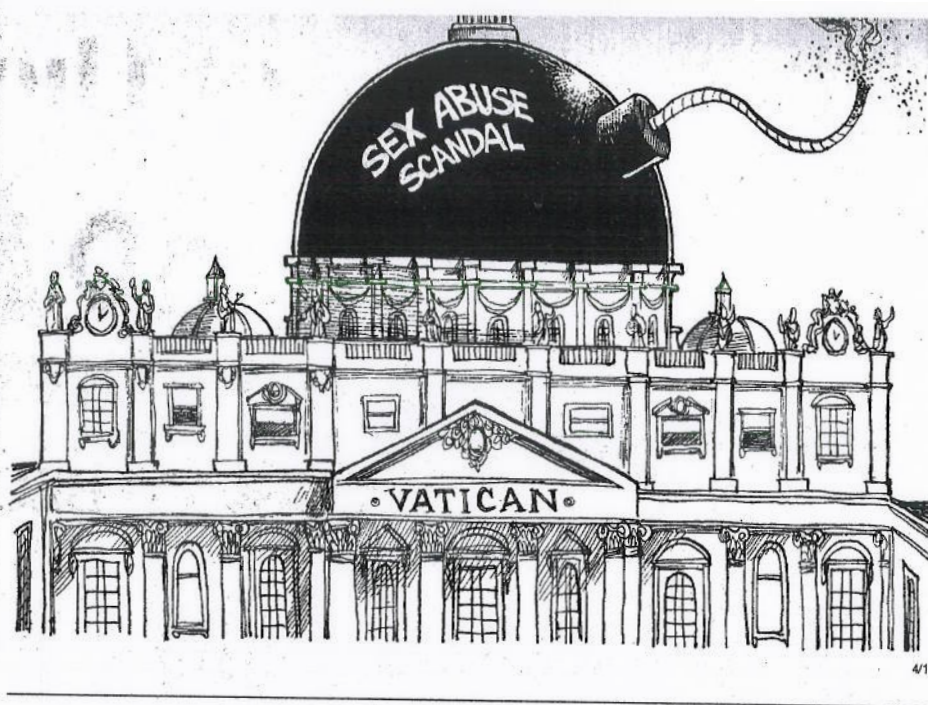
In his 2005 book, "Last Child in the Woods," Richard Louv coined the phrase "nature-deficit disorder" to describe the disconnect many children have with nature. Louv argues that building developers "destroy natural habitat, [and] design communities in ways that discourage any real contact with nature, and include covenants that virtually criminalize outdoor play — outlawing tree-climbing, fort-building, even chalk-drawing



increasing children's access to physical activity and healthy food choices.

Recent school policies to combat obesity, such as removing sugary drinks from vending machines, are positive steps. Unfortunately, because school districts are cutting physical education to correct their deficits, many children who are not active at home also don't exercise at school.

When I consider this information, my childhood seems almost nostalgic in comparison. I was not whisked between indoor activities, like many suburban, middle-class kids today. I instead spent hours doing unstructured outdoor play: bike-riding along country roads, building sandbox cities and splash-



MY TAKE/SAUGATUCK TOWNSHIP

Don't stand in the way of McClendon's investment

BY LARRY SYBESMA

As a Saugatuck Township taxpayer, why should I stand against a fellow American even if it is Aubrey McClendon?

Mr. McClendon is willing to make a substantial investment to improve our community. The investment will render millions in non-homestead taxes — millions each year that will go to our local schools and police, fire and road repair funds. If there ever was a time this area needed help, it is now. Let's remember, government is not getting the job done.

On a recent boat excursion, I noticed there are no visible dunes on the McClendon land. Get a boat and go look. Yours and my most cherished dunes

held a special hearing to inform residents that new boundary lines were being drawn concerning critical dune restrictions. The claim was made that after a full statewide study of the mapping system, a mistake was found to exist. Just so happens that mistake showed up here. The addition includes the area by which Mr. McClendon must come and go to his property. This area is about one mile east of the beach.

The presentation by the DNRE mainly consisted of a young man named Ernie, who by his own admission is no expert. Ernie came with no material proof, no maps, just a good ol' story. He had been sent alone to trespass on three occasions to study the land. He began his presentation by saving the first

The following are excerpts from reader postings on The Sentinel's Web site, hollandsentinel.com. Comments are filed under registered screen names.

On Erik Prince speaking at the Tulip Time luncheon:

yipps: I am in shock over this. Why would Tulip Time want to highlight a paid mercenary in such a way? A dark (blackwatery) shadow will now hang over the beautiful colors for me and many of my friends.

rightisright: Welcome home, Mr. Prince. Thank you for sharing some of your time with your hometown, it is appreciated.

antanka: Good to see Erik back in Holland. Talk your point, Erik, it's how you were raised. Contracting for the government is tough and war is ugly no matter who does the dirty work.

MorninJoe: Let's try not to let this get out to the media outside of West Michigan, OK? This was the poorest of choices for Tulip Time ever. They just do not get it.

TreyQ99: (Erik Prince) is an American hero who served this country. He and his family have done many things for this community. Tulip Time organizers acknowledge the controversy surrounding him, but feel he and his life journey would make for a great speech at the lunch.

ScorpioGG: What makes folks think that someone has to be squeaky clean to be interesting to listen to? Besides, as far as I know, Erik Prince hasn't broken any laws. I would think that he will draw a big crowd.

Cricketclover: Erik Prince's company committed crimes against humanity and

as far as I know, Erik Prince hasn't broken any laws. I would think that he will draw a big crowd.

Cricketerlover: Erik Prince's company committed crimes against humanity and engaged in illegal activity on his watch. Prince bears responsibility for Blackwater's actions as head of the company. Inviting Prince to speak at this luncheon would seem to tacitly support those atrocious actions.

ark52: Seems inappropriate to me. However, in such a politically right community, I'm sure tickets will sell out.

ThinkThrough: If this is the kind of attraction that the Tulip Time board wants to bring to the festival, then I'm done with supporting Tulip Time.

concerned: Because of people like Erik, we are free to make comments. When will Holland wake up to what is going on in the world instead of living in their bubble?

HollandTransplant: Did you all skip over the part about his military service as a Navy Seal? Serving this country in Haiti and Bosnia? He was born into money but chose to serve our country. He could have chosen to take the easy road that was more than available to him but did not. You should remember that.

chux: Tulip Time was careful to distance themselves from perceived politics a year ago. This year they are happy to welcome a speaker successful in business as a result of political connections.

consisted of a young man named Ernie, who by his own admission is no expert. Ernie came with no material proof, no maps, just a good ol' story. He had been sent alone to trespass on three occasions to study the land. He began his presentation by saying the first two trips were in vain due to confusion and equipment failure. Upon his third visit conditions were a lot better and his visual observation of this new area, it was determined to be critical dune. If this isn't bad enough, the DNRE asked for township approval to include an additional 11 acres to extend the restrictions. I asked board members at the meeting to define their physical knowledge of the land. They all reported to have no knowledge. Sorry but I smell grounds for another lawsuit. On that note, remember every land owner in Saugatuck-Township is being asked to approve raising taxes to fight these lawsuits.

I call on the township to follow a new path. The anti-everything folks need to step back. We need jobs. We need good, sound education for our kids. Honor Mr. McClendon's rights as a land owner just as you would any other tax paying land owner.

The DNRE denied any political pressure. You tell me how one mistake in the whole state mapping system happens to be in Mr. McClendon's driveway? I challenge you to consider the long-range benefits of this project to the entire West Michigan community. Become informed, ask questions, demand fairness for all.

— Larry Sylesma is a resident of Laketown Township and a Saugatuck Township property owner.

funds. If there ever was a time this area needed help, it is now. Let's remember, government is not getting the job done.

On a recent boat excursion, I noticed there are no visible dunes on the McClendon land. Get a boat and go look. Yours and my most cherished dunes begin north of the McClendon property. The McClendon property is basically flat. The description of such land given in years gone by is "blow sand." In all fairness, was not this land the site of a boat building company, which just might have been environmentally unfriendly?

Mr. McClendon paid some \$39 million for his property. His claim is that days before he purchased the land the township changed zoning, without notice, causing serious limitations on his intended use. This may prove to be so. I was one in a very small audience present at that meeting.

If this were not enough, local preservation groups went to great lengths to convince all of us that the land was a fragile ecosystem and home to various rare plants and animals. Please correct me if I am wrong, but did not these very groups arrange the purchase of the southern portion of the McClendon property, for a whopping \$19 million? Tell me what came of all the rare animals and plants. The day these groups acquired ownership, everyone was invited to come use the parcel, under virtually no supervision. I believe the only restrictions are no hunting or motorized vehicles allowed. I haven't even found signs saying "Keep Off the Grass."

On March 29, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Energy

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communities in ways that discourage any real contact with nature, and include covenants that virtually criminalize outdoor play — outlawing tree-climbing, fort-building, even chalk-drawing on sidewalks." He asserts that too many children spend their summer indoors using computers, watching television or playing video games. Louv linked children's alienation from nature to attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, stress, depression and anxiety disorders and childhood obesity.

Health research confirms children's inactivity. A 2007-08 study by the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey found that an estimated 17 percent of American youths aged 2-19 are obese. In addition, a 2009 Michigan State University study found that nearly 40 percent of Michigan children are overweight or obese, a rate nearly a third higher than the national average.

Children's eating habits are certainly influenced by their families. However, a 2001 study published in the British Medical Journal suggested that children's activity levels and eating patterns at school influence body weight because children spend so much time at school. In her 2009 State of the State address, Gov. Jennifer Granholm announced the Michigan Surgeon General's "Healthy Kids, Healthy Michigan" initiative, which targets childhood obesity in schools and communities. The program focuses on

to encourage children's outdoor exercise, cities and states such as Chicago, Cleveland and Michigan have "No Child Left Inside" or "Leave No Child Inside" programs. In Michigan, the initiative is comprised of a partnership between organizations advocating outdoor play and environmental education.

Of course, not all children can safely play outside due to neighborhood crime, lack of a yard and other factors. However, Holland and other local cities offer outdoor classes at community nature centers, nature trails and summer playground programs in which kids can safely explore the outdoors. These opportunities are low-cost or free.

I am grateful for the time I spent outdoors as a child. The experience cultivated an appreciation of nature that still nourishes me. As a result, I know it is sometimes best to just leave the work and go outside for a walk. The work will always be there when I get back.

BY GARY TRUDEAU

MALLARD FILLMORE

BY BRUCE TINSLEY

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