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OUR GOAL: Lanier County News is created proudly for the citizens of Lanier and the surrounding area by Good Shepherd Media in Lakeland, GA. Our goal is to produce a quality, community oriented newspaper that you, our readers, are proud of. We will reach this goal through hard work, teamwork, loyalty and a strong dedication toward printing the truth.

OUR POLICIES: Letters to the Editor are welcome. Please sign and include address, telephone number and e-mail.

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OPINIONS & VIEWPOINTS



HISTORICALLY
current events through a historical lens
SPEAKING
Dr. James Finck, USAO History Professor

Father, son give insightful review of Temple Grandin

By James Finck, Ph. D.

I rarely get personal with my articles, but this week’s subject resonates with me. One of the hardest days of my life was when a doctor confirmed to my wife and me what we already suspected – that my son, my oldest child had autism.

We knew that not all was lost. Compared to many, we are blessed in that he is high functioning and incredibly smart. Yet it is still a blow to any parent knowing that their child is different and would have challenges many other kids would not have to face.

That has been the case with our child. While he excelled in school, graduating as valedictorian and earning the state regent’s scholarship, he struggled making connections. He has always wanted friends, but does not know how to talk to his fellow students. It’s difficult for people he meets to understand what is going on in that big brain of his. He struggles to look people in the eye, does not know what to say and can’t understand nonverbal cues. It’s easy to judge him as slow, until you talk to him about movies. Suddenly, he comes to life and knows more about movies than anyone I know—how they are made, who starred in and directed every film, and even types of techniques the directors used. I have read some of his movie reviews and he sees movies different than most and understands things that I did not even know I was supposed to understand.

My dream for my son is that the world understands that he is special, and that autism makes him different not lesser. That is the exact message of HBO’s Temple Grandin. Grandin’s condition allows her to see things differently which has allowed her to improve things in her field. The biopic of her life and struggles have brought hope to thousands of parents like me who want what is best for their kids.

I teach at the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma. I could write dozens of articles about why this school is special, but the one program of which I am most proud is The Neill-Wint Center for Neurodiversity. Started by Kathy Perry and sponsored by Phillip and Katie Wint, the center’s mission is to assist students with autism spectrum disorder in their transition to college life and to help ensure postsecondary success. Partly because of the center, on Feb. 23, as part of the Emerson-Weir Liberal Arts Series, Temple Grandin herself will be the keynote speaker.

My son, who is currently part of the Neill-Wint Center and lives on campus, comes home at least once a week and we watch a movie together. With his love of all movies and me being a historian, we tend to watch a classic. However, this past week he asked that we watch Temple Grandin starring Clair Danes in preparation for her upcoming visit. I was so inspired by this movie that I knew I needed to include a review in my column.

Grandin, born in 1947, dealt with autism in a time when the condition was still relatively unknown. The movie starts with her at a boarding school where, because of a strong mother and sainted teachers who recognized her gifts, she was able to excel. It then followed her through college and graduate school. At each level there were many who stood in her way, believing she was not capable of learning. At each level, she proved them wrong. Not only did she learn, but she excelled and became a published author and expert in animal behavior.

At the end of the movie, she is attending an autism conference where parents were shown trying to handle their autistic children in different ways. When Grandin speaks up and announces that she is autistic and has a Ph.D., suddenly every parent in the room wanted to hear everything she had to say. Symbolically, ever parent of an autistic child, including myself, was in that room. Seeing what she overcame shows each of us that our children can also. There are things I can say technically about the movie, but it only seems right that I turn that part over to my son.

“Temple Grandin is a fine film. It does a good job at explaining who Temple Grandin is, specifically when it comes to her work in agriculture that first brought her attention, as well as her life growing up with autism that most people know her for. Claire Danes is great as Grandin, disappearing into the role without her performance coming across as cartoony. Director Mick Jackson succeeds at getting across how Grandin thinks, thanks to the stylistic use of on-screen graphics as well as small cutaways to show how she interprets certain phrases literally. Temple Grandin might feel like a TV movie, and it probably won’t blow everyone’s minds away, but it’s still worth a watch.”

I am excited to see Dr. Grandin in person. Watching the movie has made her a personal hero. She broke down many barriers in higher education and paved a way for students like my son and the others to chase their dreams. It is because of people like Dr. Grandin that USAO has already seen several students in the Neill-Wint Center walk across the stage at graduation.

That day at the doctors may have been one of my hardest days, but I also know that watching my son cross the stage in April when he graduates college will be one of my absolute best.

James Finck, Ph.D. is a professor of history at the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma and writes for the Southwest Ledger. You can follow Historically Speaking on Facebook or at Historicallyspeaking.blog.

Valdosta Monkey’s Thoughts & Opinions

Send your questions for

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Thoughts on legal and illegal Public Meetings

Opine Monkey is still out of country and has asked me to pen this week’s column. Allow me to introduce myself, I am Political Monkey.

Recently I’ve seen some hate on social media aimed at this publication. I’ve also noticed a common denominator in the origin of said hate, which I will keep to myself for the time being.

In reference to “Public Meetings” and “Illegal Public Meetings” let me paste the following...

The public must be given full access to all open meetings and may make video and audio recordings of all open meetings.

In addition to mandating open meetings, the Law requires that agencies provide notice to the public in advance of all meetings, even emergency meetings. That means agencies must make information available to the general public by, in the case of regular meetings, posting at least one week in advance a notice containing the information in a conspicuous location at the agency’s regular meeting place and on its website if the agency has one. The notice must do more than simply meet the technical requirements of the Law. It must be sufficient to reasonably apprise a concerned party of an upcoming meeting and must not be misleading.

Special or emergency meetings that are not held at the regularly posted time and place require more rigorous notice procedures. Such notice includes the posting at least 24 hours in advance at the regular meeting place and oral notification to the newspaper which serves as the legal organ for the county. In counties where the legal organ is published less than four times a week, notice also must be given to any local media outlets that make a written request to be so notified. Such outlets must be notified at least 24 hours in advance of the called meeting. In those rare circumstances where a meeting must be held upon less than 24 hours’ notice, either the county’s legal organ or a newspaper having a circulation at least as high as that of the legal organ must be notified, as well as other media that have requested to be notified by the agency.

Prior to all meetings, including emergency meetings, the agency holding such meetings must make an agenda of all matters expected to be considered available upon request and must post the agenda at the meeting site as far in advance as possible within two weeks prior to the meeting. Items not on the agenda may be considered at a meeting where it becomes “necessary” to do so and such items were not anticipated in advance and deliberately omitted from the agenda.

Minutes of all public meetings must be kept in writing and made available to the public for inspection no later than immediately following the next regular agency meeting. Such minutes must contain, at a minimum, the names of the members present at the meeting, a description of each motion or other proposal made, the identity of the individuals making and seconding the motion or other proposal and a record of all votes. These minutes are subject to the Open Records Law after approval, unless voluntarily released before approval. A summary of the meeting also must be provided by the agency within two business days.

Penalties for Non-Compliance

All actions taken during a meeting closed in violation of the Law are void and can be set aside by a court if challenged within ninety days of discovery. Anyone who “knowingly and willfully” conducts or participates in a meeting without complying with every part of the Law is guilty of a misdemeanor punishable by a fine not in excess of \$1,000.00. Alternatively, a court may impose a civil penalty not to exceed \$1,000.00 against anyone who negligently conducts or participates in a meeting without complying with the Law. The court also may impose a criminal fine or civil penalty not in excess of \$2,500.00 for each additional violation committed within a year of the first violation.

Additionally, public officials who participate in closed meetings in violation of the Law can be subject to recall. Moreover, failure to give adequate notice can result in the invalidation of the proceedings, the issuance of legal injunctions and the requirement to pay the objecting party’s legal costs. In addition, the Attorney General may bring a civil or criminal action to enforce compliance with the Law. As with the Open Records Law, a government agency may be liable for the attorney’s fees of a party who brings a lawsuit to require compliance with the Law if that agency has acted without substantial justification.

Let me be clear, I’m not saying that illegal meetings have or are taking place. I’m just stating the Georgia Sunshine Laws concerning public meetings.

What would be outstanding is if more of the public would take the time to attend such meetings. Especially when those that you have elected are having the meetings and are spending your tax dollars.

I think more people should request to see the operational budgets of all governmental agencies. It might be interesting to see exactly how, where and with whom your tax dollars are being spent.

Is it a bad thing to demand good stewardship and accountability when the politicians are spending our money?

If everything is on the up-and-up then there should be no issue with being as transparent as is required by law.

Some of you may be asking yourself, “Why did Political Monkey paste the Georgia Sunshine Law?” Because “ignorance of the law” is no excuse.

You are invited to “Like” and “Follow” Valdosta Monkey on Facebook and visit his webpage at www.valdostamonkey.com

