

opinion

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A VERSE FOR TODAY
And a servant of the Lord must not
quarrel but be gentle to all, able to
teach, patient.
2 Timothy 2:24

Promising new plan for Hemming Park

To make Hemming Park a truly inviting place, it must exude a culture that makes every person inside it realize that Hemming is the “city’s front porch.”

And that they should carry themselves accordingly. But in reality that mindset still hasn’t taken hold in Hemming Park, which is still largely perceived as a magnet for loitering vagrants and questionable behavior. And that’s a shame, given the admirable, often Herculean work that the Friends of Hemming Park — the nonprofit now operating the downtown park — continues to put into changing things there. The nonprofit has absolutely made great strides and enjoyed some success. But greater levels of progress and success still need to be achieved.

REASONABLE PROPOSALS

So it’s encouraging that City Council seems well on the path to approving two proposed bills designed to improve the overall atmosphere in Hemming Park (and, by extension, other city parks). Together, the two proposals would:

- Give the Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office greater authority to enforce the city’s trespassing laws in Hemming and issue citations to those who are blatantly violating park rules.
- Effectively ban repeat offenders from being in Hemming Park for a one-year period.
- Officially extend the boundaries of Hemming Park from beyond the actual park to the curb area that surrounds it. At the moment, people who are poorly behaving inside the park and are asked to leave can actually just take a few steps onto the sidewalks that are beyond the physical site — and continue carrying on in anti-social fashion.
- Allow those who are prohibited from being in Hem-

ming Park to still have access to the adjacent JTA Skyway rail — but in a way that keeps them physically outside the park.

- Sets up a clear and detailed appeal process for those who want to contest their trespassing citations.

COLLABORATION AND DIALOGUE

What’s one good thing about these two proposed bills? They are the end products of months of dialogue and cooperation involving a special council committee specifically created to study Hemming Park, the JSO, JTA, Mayor Lenny Curry’s office, the city’s Parks and Recreation Department and other stakeholders in Hemming’s future. But what’s the best thing about these two proposals? They are reasonable proposals that if consistently enforced with a fair but firm hand — and never with a heavy one — should dramatically improve the daily environment in Hemming Park. City Councilman Greg Anderson, who chaired the special Hemming committee, put it well when he declared that the proposals will provide much “more clarity” to the city’s efforts to make the park a better place for everyone who visits it. Confusion surrounding the city’s role and a nonprofit’s role in operating the park hindered progress. As the front porch of City Hall, Hemming Park must be inviting, attractive, entertaining and informative. It has been all of those things in the past. Other cities have revived their urban parks to becoming havens of fun and informative activities rather than embarrassing centers for undesirables. It’s time for Hemming Park to really become the place of pride that it should be for our city. For a revival to happen, radically changing the culture within the park is a requirement. The City Council proposals represent a good start. Hemming Park is too important, too visible and too historic to allow it to remain an eyesore. It’s time for Hemming Park to star again.



Clothes were given out to people in need during the Rally in the Park event Saturday, Dec. 24, at Hemming Park. The event was put on by three local organizations: The Dream Center, the Jacksonville Love Project and Hot Dogs for Hope. The park is used as a major gathering place for the area. (Will Dickey/Florida Times-Union)

HISTORY OF HEMMING PARK

- First established as a public square by the city’s founder Isaiah D. Hart around 1857, it is Jacksonville’s oldest park.
- Known first as City Park and then St. James Park.
- It was renamed Hemming Park in 1899 to honor Civil War veteran Charles C. Hemming, who donated the park’s Confederate monument (the City’s oldest and tallest).
- At various times the park contained bandstands, fountains, comfort stations and Tourist and Convention Bureau buildings.
- In 1978, the city converted the park into a brick-paved plaza, and completed additional work in 1986 that transformed the area into a single-level, pedestrian-oriented mall.

Source: City of Jacksonville website

European Union

Immigration rules in EU are tough

I have friends who live in the European Union or who have immigrated to the USA from one of the EU countries. Several have weighed in on the executive actions of President Donald Trump concerning immigration to the USA and also for accepting refugees. His order placed a hold on immigration from seven Middle Eastern countries, suspends all refugee admissions for 120 days and bars all Syrian refugees indefinitely. The unflattering comments from many of my EU friends made me wonder what would be the rules if I decided to work in Europe. I was startled. I would need to be a researcher, a student or a highly qualified worker. Imagine if these requirements had been included in Trump’s order! The requirements come from the EU Immigration Portal:

- What conditions must I fulfill to apply for an EU Blue Card?
 - You must prove that you have higher professional qualifications either by showing a higher education qualification (such as a university degree) or by having at least five years of relevant professional experience;
 - You must work as a paid employee — the EU Blue Card does not apply to self-employed work or entrepreneurs;
 - Your annual gross salary must be high, at least 1 ½ times the average national salary;
 - You must present a work contract or binding job offer in an EU country for at least one year;
 - You must have the necessary travel documents. You must have health insurance for yourself and any relatives who come to the EU with you;
 - You must prove that you fulfill the legal requirements to practice your profession where this profession is regulated.
- The next time someone calls into question the rights and regulations involved in immigrating to the USA, as opposed to the more liberal and “compassionate” European countries, feel free to share this comparison.
- Curt Baker**, St. Johns

Another view: Nate Beeler Columbus Dispatch



Letters from Readers

TRUMP’S NEWS

ALTERNATIVE REALITY
Would someone please tell me that I am living a nightmare and will wake up to a sane federal government? These first two weeks of our president’s term have been absolutely unbelievable! He is telling us that there have been terror attacks the press has not reported. That millions of people voted illegally for Hillary Clinton, denying him the popular vote. Does anyone realize that each of the countries on which he placed a ban for refugees does not have any Trump business interests? Saudi Arabia is not included, but where did the 9/11 terrorists come from? And please tell me what exactly are “alternative facts”? On and on it goes! I must commend the various news anchors who must report the ludicrous news from the White House each day with straight faces. God help the USA! May we survive without any major wars until 2020.
Evelyn Peck, Jacksonville

CROSSROADS FOR AMERICA

SHOULD BE REQUIRED READING
Thank you, Morris Publishing Group, for the most informative publication “Crossroads For America.” Unfortunately, the paper contributed only to the felling of more trees because the information you presented will not be read by most of the younger generation.
Lou Meuche, Fruit Cove

CROSSROADS FOR AMERICA

THOUGHTFUL, INTRIGUING
The recent Sunday insert “Crossroads for America: Challenges and Opportunities in Renewing Our Republic” should be required reading for every citizen of these great United States of America.

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Every issue highlighted the extreme importance for reform in America — true reform that restores our country based on the fundamental principles that created the greatest country on earth.

My only surprise was that this insert was placed among the many advertisements. It should have been on Page One of the Sunday paper. It was a fabulous and intriguing read with lessons for all.
Scott Harry, Fleming Island

HRO BILL

BAD FOR JACKSONVILLE
If the City Council votes to give special preferences and privileges to LGBT people, it will indeed create a two-tier unfair treatment of Jacksonville residents. This vote would lead to decaying quality of life for all Jacksonville citizens by classifying a few as elites vs. the rest of us unworthy insignificant. Resentment is a powerful corrosive to true harmony. We all have a constitutional right to and should be treated fairly and equally in our daily life. There is no room for elitism. What needs to change is across-the-board attitudes on all sides, not more facets of existing laws twisted to fit a very small minority of lifestyles forced on us. But if City Council passes an ill-gotten, unnecessary anti-discrimination law just to appease the few, Jacksonville will sink deeper into the muck! So, get with it, City Council! Vote no to the HRO, allow us to respect each other as equals and let gays be themselves (my version of LGBT) as most all of us do without resentment or discrimination. All it takes is just tolerance and understanding.
Art Costa, Jacksonville

HRO BILL

EQUAL RIGHTS FOR ALL
As a longtime Jacksonville resident and a proud parent of three young daughters, I wholeheartedly support updating Jacksonville’s Human Rights Ordinance to end legal discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression in housing, employment and public accommodations. I join this effort to pass the HRO on behalf of human rights, human dignity and equal rights for the LGBT community. Not additional rights, not different rights, just equal rights. My primary responsibilities as a parent are to love, nurture and protect my children. I am concerned what messages are being sent to children in this city. And in addition to being a mother, I am a sister. My brother, a former longtime resident of Jacksonville, identifies as a gay man. I was unaware of the suffering he experienced growing up in Jacksonville but since have learned that his suffering was most caused by the messages that were sent directly and indirectly to him about who he was and is. He was not and is not protected in this city that I call home. The decision whether or not to pass the HRO is up to our elected City Council officials. Fortunately, Councilmen Tommy Hazouri, Aaron Bowman and Jim Love put forth a bill that will offer equal protection for every human being in our city. I urge the council to pass the bipartisan, fully-inclusive Human Rights Ordinance. That’s the city I want to live in! As a mother, wife, sister, daughter, friend and citizen of Jacksonville, I ask the council to have the courage to carry the message of love and unconditional acceptance to our children and to the whole community.
Meredith Chartrand Frisch, Jacksonville

LETTER POLICY
■ Letters of about 200 words are preferred.

■ All letters should include a name, address, occupation and telephone number.

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