

# OPINION

Contributions welcome to editor@plamerican.com, (952) 345-6378

GUEST COMMENTARY

## Don't leaf the lakes you love

BY MEGHAN LITSEY

If you look carefully, you may soon be able to see the first hints of fall colors spreading through the treetops. Not too long after that, you'll look out the window one day to find your entire yard covered in a medley of yellow, orange and red leaves and you'll wonder, "Where has summer gone?"

As beautiful as the fall leaves are, they create lots of yard work for local homeowners, and it's important to recognize that the same leaves that add color to neighborhoods in fall also add color to our lakes in the summer.

Rainwater runoff from our lawns can carry fertilizers and phosphorus-rich leaves into lakes and streams, where it promotes the growth of harmful and smelly algae in our local lakes, ponds and wetlands. It's estimated that one large oak tree can shed 60 pounds of leaves which equates to about one pound of phosphorus; and if one pound of phosphorus reaches our lakes, it is enough to produce 500 pounds of algae. Do your part for our local lakes and don't leaf the lakes you love this fall.

Before you tend to your yard this fall, consider the following lawn care tips for clean water:

Take a moment to sweep or rake leaves and grass clippings out of the street in front of your house. Left in the street, they can clog storm drains, contributing to localized flooding. When washed into nearby lakes, rivers and streams via storm drains or ditches, the leaves and clippings become a major source of phosphorus, the nutrient that allows algae to bloom in the summer. Dispose of leaves and grass clippings by composting them in your yard or bring them to our local compost facility. Visit the SMSC Organics Recycling Facility website for more information at [www.smscorf.com](http://www.smscorf.com).

Contrary to popular belief, fallen tree leaves will not insulate your lawn during the winter. In fact, they can block vital sunlight and thin your grass. Drop your rake and mulch your leaves into

dime-sized pieces with your lawn mower back into your lawn. Several long-term studies show that mulching leaves into your turf creates healthier lawns than the lawns with no leaves added, and the mulched lawns also had fewer weeds.

Conduct a simple soil compaction test by pushing a screwdriver into your lawn. Is it easy, or do you have to pound the screwdriver into the ground? If you have to pound the screwdriver into your lawn, your soil is most likely compacted, which prevents air, water and nutrients from entering the soil. The solution? Aeration, which reduces thatch, improves drainage and loosens soil. Make sure that your aerator of choice pulls plugs of soil from the turf, rather than simply punching holes in the ground.

If you're planning to water your lawn this autumn, early morning is still the best time of day to irrigate because winds are usually lighter, so you'll waste less water to evaporation. If you can't water in the wee hours of the morning, then try to avoid watering your lawn in the evening, because this can encourage fungal growth.

Fall is a great time to plant trees or shrubs, because there's less shock to the plant and the roots start growing in early spring. If you're still thinking about installing a rain garden or improving your shoreline with native plants, it's not too late. For more information about planting for clean water, visit the Blue Thumb website at [www.bluethumb.org](http://www.bluethumb.org).

By following these fall lawn care tips, you can maintain a healthy lawn and reduce the amount of phosphorus entering our local lakes, rivers and wetlands. For more information on lawn care practices for clean water, contact Meghan Litsey at (952) 378-2163 or [mlitsey@plslwd.org](mailto:mlitsey@plslwd.org).

*Meghan Litsey is the district outreach specialist with the Prior Lake-Spring Lake Watershed District.*

## The only time Congress bothers to lift a finger...



### LETTERS

#### Volunteers make art crawl happen

The Scott County Art Crawl takes place this Saturday, Oct. 5 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. in the communities of Prior Lake, Savage and Shakopee. This fine art tour and art sale is a great way for residents to meet 35 local fine artists and discover one-of-a-kind artwork.

This free event would not happen without the generous support of volunteers, local business sponsors and donors. The Savage Arts Council, producer of the Scott County Art Crawl, extends a sincere thank you and appreciation to our volunteers, and supporters including Southwest Newspapers, Savvy.MN, Shakopee Rotary, Minnesota Valley Electric Company and the city of Savage for helping bring our fourth annual Scott County Art Crawl to the community.

Thank you, Scott County Art Crawl supporters.

**Denise Baerg**  
Art crawl chairperson

#### America's schools have it all wrong

When I was a little girl, I went to schools where teachers taught and students learned, where it was not uncommon to have 40 students in a classroom that was not air-conditioned, where lots of homework was assigned daily, where competition

was healthy, where excellence was recognized and rewarded, where behavioral problems were few and quickly resolved.

So, the recent article about battling bullying in schools got me rattled.

Call me old-fashioned, but I still believe that the primary purpose of our schools is to educate our children and to ensure that they master the basic skills of writing, reading, grammar, math, history, science, logical thinking, etc. so that they will be able to tackle higher learning, and eventually become responsible and productive citizens. Pardon my naiveté, but since when is it the purpose of schools to discipline, feed and medicate our children? And now it is up to the schools to regulate their social behavior as well?

Do we really need teachers in costumes, "complete with mask and cape," to teach our children social skills? Do we really need mental health professionals in our schools? And do we need the schools to monitor Internet activities of our children? Sounds to me like the schools are displacing parents. Is this still America? Where does this stop?

We all know that children learn best from examples. When our children can look up to exemplary authority figures, they learn from the good examples they see. So why are our schools diminishing the importance of traditional family while promoting diverse alternatives? And what examples are we giving our children

when the IRS intimidates conservative groups? Or when Mr. Obama threatens to "bring a gun when they bring a knife," forces Republicans to "sit in the back of the bus," and calls law-abiding Americans "tea-baggers"?

And is it not bullying to threaten withholding federal funds if our schools do not succumb to the common core standards? And we're expecting different from our children?

So here's my suggestion: instead of starting new programs and spending more of our hard-earned tax dollars needlessly, why not use the top-down approach? Starting with Mr. Obama and going down the line, stop the bullying of law-abiding American citizens everywhere. Just think what a wonderful example this would set for everyone, not just the children. I bet this would produce much better results than the multitude of expensive programs and useless laws that only constrict the liberties of all Americans, grow the power of the elites and do nothing to stop the perpetrators.

Lastly, teaching our children the Golden Rule and allowing God back into the public arena will not hurt, either. I'd be willing to wager all I've got that we'd quickly see miraculous results. But I guess expecting common sense to prevail is just asking too much these days. How sad.

**Alexandra Matyja**  
Prior Lake

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All letters to the editor submitted for publication in the Prior Lake American will be verified before they are printed. In addition to the letter writer's name, the letter should contain an address and daytime and evening telephone numbers so the newspaper staff can verify the letter writer's identity. The Prior Lake American will not print any unverified letters, nor any letters without all the above mentioned information.

Letters that are potentially libelous will not be printed or will be edited. However, letters will not be

refused because staff disagrees with their content. Letters may be edited as space requires. Not all thank you letters will be printed. Writers should keep their comments under 500 words.

Letter writers are limited to one letter per month. Letters to the editor may be sent to: Prior Lake American, P.O. Box 538, Prior Lake, MN 55372 or to [editor@plamerican.com](mailto:editor@plamerican.com). Call Lori Carlson, editor, at (952) 345-6378 for further information.

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