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# First Friday News & Views

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## Of Ends and Means and Terrorists

by Jonathan Wilson

terrorists. Pure. Simple. If the end justifies the means, then there is no moral compass. There is no difference between us and them. If there is no difference, we are them.

—Jonathan Wilson

Does the end justify the means? That's the question. Given how obvious the right answer and how consistently in American history the answer has been reaffirmed, it's embarrassing that the question is being asked. It's even more embarrassing that the President of the United States is arguing for the WRONG answer.

The President wants to "clarify" the Geneva Conventions on the treatment of prisoners. The President wants greater latitude about how prisoners in United States custody are to be treated. The President wants permission to maintain secret prisons around the world; to hold people indefinitely without filing charges against them; and to export prisoners to countries having a history of torture—for no explained reason other than the obvious, to accomplish torture by surrogate. The President wants to limit access of the accused to an attorney. The President wants to limit access of the accused to confront accusers. The President wants to limit access of the accused to purported evidence against them. The President wants permission to use torture-induced evidence. The President wants permission to exclude impartial judges from deciding guilt of the accused.

When asked to justify these incredible positions, the President repeats, like a mantra, that he is merely doing his job of "protecting" American citizens. That is a classic example of trying to justify the means by restating a supposedly laudable objective. It is an attempt to justify the means by a restatement of the end being pursued.

Lest anyone miss it, that's the argument of the terrorist. If we buy it, we buy into eliminating the difference between us and the

## What God Hath NOT Wrought

I read Chuck McLaughlin's letter to the editor (Des Moines Register, August 18, 2006). After claiming enhanced credibility as a "certified biology teacher," he takes issue with the assertion that same gender intimacy "cannot hurt anybody in a way that heterosexuality can't." He then equates anal intercourse with homosexuality as if that were unique to gay people and completely foreign to heterosexuals.

That fallacy aside, he says that the rectum "is not designed (by God or nature—you pick) to be used as a sex organ." The quote included that parenthetical.

Excluding from sexual intimacy any use of selected body parts based on a limited view of their supposed "design" is so last century. Women have told me that every part of their bodies is vulnerable to erotic stimulation. It's actually true of all human beings. Is that okay with Mr. McLaughlin, but only in anticipation of procreative intercourse? And does the female "design" make heterosexual intimacy off limits when "out of season?" Is the mouth "designed" as a sex organ? If not, so much for oral sex in Mr. McLaughlin's world. Women's nipples are "designed" for breast feeding. But is that it? And in Mr. McLaughlin's paradigm of function-must-follow-design, for what functional purpose are nipples found on men? Are they just a mistake of "God or nature—you pick?"

Mr. McLaughlin's letter discloses three things about him. He's not a very good

(Continued on page 2)



September Speaker Review by Bruce Carr	2
Movie Review <u>The Night Listener</u> by Gary Kaufman	2
October Speaker Profile	3
Briefs & Shorts	3



### CALENDAR

- ▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, October 6 at Hoyt Sherman Place.
- Our guest speaker will be Martha Willits of the Greater Des Moines Partnership.
- ▼ R.S.V.P. by Tuesday, October 3 to Jonathan.Wilson@lawiowa.com or 288-2500 by phone.

(Continued from page 1)

teacher of human biology. He's not very good in bed. And he lacks the good judgment to keep those failings to himself.

—Jonathan Wilson

## Dr. Nancy Sebring

by Bruce Carr

**O**ur guest speaker in August was Nancy Sebring, superintendent of the Des Moines Independent School District, who took up her new post on July 1. Dr. Sebring graduated from Iowa State University and received an M.A., Ed.S and Ed.D from Drake University.

Before returning to Iowa, she was with the Douglas County School District—at 48,000 students the fourth largest district in Colorado—since 2003, serving as the district's deputy superintendent. Before that, she was executive director of curriculum and assessment and an assistant high school principal for the Poudre School District in Fort Collins, as well as a middle school principal in LaSalle, Colorado. Earlier in Iowa, she was a teacher in Madrid and Nevada (and therefore knows how to pronounce the names of both of those towns!), a curriculum director in Webster City, and human resources coordinator in Humboldt. Her first job in a public school district was working with the custodial department while attending NESCO High School in Zeiring—her home town. Sebring, 51, and her husband, Randy, are the parents of two grown children, Greg and Dana.

Dr. Sebring began by describing her own early education in rural Iowa, intending to show how utterly different education is today. We hold ourselves and our students back, she insisted, when we try to hold on nostalgically to that past. The buildings that house those memories are in many cases now a century old, and we can no longer afford hard-wood floors. Nor can we afford to ignore either the diverse backgrounds of today's students or the diverse and immeasurably more difficult expectations that modern society has placed on modern educators. We need lots more technology (there are hundreds of classrooms that do not have even the computer that can be found in every individual office-worker's cubicle), Sebring argued passionately, and we need much more skills-training for teachers.

Schooling has to be about much more than just test scores, she stated, noting that there is a concerted effort to destroy public education—i.e., to privatize schooling nationwide. One consequence—at least Dr. Sebring saw this in Colorado—of the latest federal education policy seems to be an attitude that, if you don't like your school's score, you can just go create your own [charter] school. Fortunately for Des Moines, Nancy Sebring does not subscribe to this notion, and it looks like our kids are once again going to be the primary focus of

the Des Moines Public Schools.

—Bruce Carr

# THE NIGHT LISTENER

Starring Robin Williams, Toni Collette, Sandra Oh, Rory Culkin, Joe Morton, Bobby Cannavale, Maryann Plunkett, Lisa Emery, Becky Ann Baker, John Cullum



Directed by Patrick Stettner

1Hr 31 Min

**I**n the movie, "The Night Listener", Gabriel Noone, Robin Williams character, has just broken up with his much younger lover, Jess (Bobby Cannavale). Gabriel not only lost his lover, but he has also lost his driving source material for his work, for he is Gabriel Noone of the radio show "Noone at Night". Gabriel Noone tells emotionally charged stories, embellished stories based partially on truth, often based on events in Gabriel's real life. Jess had been a very sick AIDS-stricken lover, a wealth of material for his show, but Jess no longer is facing imminent death and has chosen to move out — "to get some space." Gabriel is emotionally crushed and is unable to function at work.

But Gabriel finds a new emotional core when he is asked to review a manuscript written by a 14-year old boy, Pete Logand. Pete is a darling lad, played by Rory Culkin, but has a very dark past. When he was a child his father built a "playroom" down in the basement with lots of insulation to keep the sound from escaping. Pete was blindfolded and led down to the basement where adults would sodomize the child and use him as a sex toy in front of cameras so they could sell the photos on the internet. He now has AIDS and had syphilis when he was only eight. He has been adopted by a blind social worker named Donna, who is progressively protective and secretive about the boy. Gabriel becomes emotionally attached to the boy and tries to make contact, which is where the story begins to make twists and turns to the point where you are not sure what is real and what is not. The story searches the need for some people to attach themselves to a needy helpless person and to milk what they need out of the relationship. A rather dark topic, but well done in this film.

There is very minimal comedy in this Robin Williams feature. But there are several wonderful performances to relish, and a fascinating story to discover. It also explores the emotions of an adult gay couple breaking up, which is rare for the movies.

—Gary Kaufman



# Martha A. Willits President & CEO Greater Des Moines Partnership



**A**s President & CEO of the Greater Des Moines Partnership, Martha Willits has rallied the 21 affiliated communities in our metro area into a true regional coalition, working together with one mission: to maximize local resources to address opportunities for economic and community growth. She leads a staff of 40+ and an annual budget of \$7 million in the strategic development of the Partnership's three programs of work: economic development, community development, and downtown development.

Martha's passion for community is reflected throughout her career, leading the United Way of Central Iowa ('96 - '04), serving on the Polk County Board of Supervisors (elected chair in '87, '88, '91, and '94), and teaching in Des Moines Public Schools. She's been an active volunteer throughout her career, earning recognitions including YWCA's "Woman of Achievement" award, Leadership Iowa Alumni Award, the A. Arthur Davis Leadership Award, and the Drake Medal of Service.

Martha's passion for community is surpassed only by her passion for family. A native of Eagle Grove, she made her home here in Des Moines where she raised two daughters, Anne and Emily. A woman of great influence and accomplishment, the role of which Martha is most proud is being a grandmother for the first and second time! ▼

*From the Editor (Continued from page 4)*

west. Both buildings are modern structures that played a significant role of the revival of downtown Des Moines. Likewise, Oldenburg's **Giant Trowel** in the Meredith Corporation's gardens at the east end of downtown display both that company's publishing heritage and the appropriate placement of art in a public space.

I always admired Edward Lee Hendricks's kinetic sculptures that stood for twenty years on the west side of the old downtown public library. However, their presence never jibed with the classic 1903 building. When they were moved this year to the new downtown library's location, they beauti-

fully complemented David Chipperfield's ultra modern library design. Similarly, the American Republic Insurance Company's sculpture garden adjacent to the company's modern building is a genuine asset to the downtown community.

I suppose it is too much to ask that civic-minded people such as the Bucksbaums, who feel compelled to impose their artistic tastes on the public, might want to get some public input beforehand. One can always hope.

—Steve Person

## BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP to [Jonathan.Wilson@lawiowa.com](mailto:Jonathan.Wilson@lawiowa.com) no later than Tuesday, October 3 for the October 6 meeting. Our speaker will be Martha Willits of the Greater Des Moines Partnership. Jonathan can also be reached by phone at 288-2500.



Thanks to Scott Klinefelter for introducing our September speaker, Des Moines Public Schools superintendent, Dr. Nancy Sebring.



The Holy Relationships Midwest Regional Conference will be in Iowa City October 19-21. For information about registration and/or support, go to the organization's web site, [www.holyrelationshipsmidwest.org](http://www.holyrelationshipsmidwest.org).



The 20<sup>th</sup> Annual All Iowa AIDS Benefit will be held Sunday, October 22 at the Embassy Suites in downtown Des Moines. The Pre-show Party starts at 4:30 p.m. The Silent Auction is from 5:00-7:00 p.m. The Variety Show begins at 6:00 in the ballroom and goes until 10:00 p.m.



### End Game

Presented by the Repertory Theater of Iowa (FFBC member Joseph Leonardi); Sept. 28 - Oct. 25; Thurs. at 7:30, Fri./Sat at 8:00, and Sun. at 3:00; The Capitol Room, 2nd Floor; 315 East 5th Street; For tickets/reservations: call 266-0560 or go on line [www.iowatix.com](http://www.iowatix.com)



And this just in, FFBC member Fred Mount won the "Name the Ugly Doll" contest at The Project with his entry of "Bruenhilda." You go Fred!



# FFBC

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*Des Moines, Iowa*

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## From the Editor

### Public Art, Inappropriate Placement

I have watched from my balcony with fascination as construction of the Principal River Walk progresses through downtown Des Moines. The \$63,000,000, 1.2 mile project will connect the Botanical Center, the Court Avenue District, the Science Center of Iowa, and the Iowa Events Center when it is completed. Among the public art works along the walk is a new sculpture on the west side of City Hall entitled, **Untitled**, by nationally renowned sculptor, Joel Shapiro. The title alone should be enough to raise incredulity for those forced to witness this piece as they stroll past it. The work is inappropriate for its location.

City Hall is an early twentieth century, classically designed building sitting on the east edge of the Des Moines River. Along with other similarly designed government buildings along the river, it brings a sense of coherence to the area. The presence of the Shapiro sculpture shatters that coherence and creates a sense of chaos in its location. According to the Principal Financial Group's web site, the sculpture "is a monumental work in cast bronze that suggests the form and gestures of the human body." That, to be kind, is a real stretch of any person's imagination. The piece more resembles a tree trunk that fell into the Des Moines River, and after tumbling over the Center Street Dam, was dragged on shore and set up in front of City Hall and called a piece of art.

Now don't get me wrong. I like modern art. I appreciate its simplicity and the suggestions that it brings to a person's interpretation. But the placement of art in public spaces should, I believe, be relevant to its surroundings. **Untitled** was a gift to the city from Melva Bucksbaum and Mary Bucksbaum Scanlan. While their motives in presenting the sculpture to Des Moines were good, their choice of subject and location were terribly misguided. If the piece had been located across Grand Avenue near the new public ice rink, it would be perfect. But the Des Moines City Council, in its infinite "wisdom," approved the gift and its placement, so now the rest of us are stuck with this piece that would be more at home in front of a modern office building. The old adage that "Money Talks" is alive and well, as evidenced by this boondoggle.

Controversy over art in public spaces is nothing new to Des Moines. In 1888, the Iowa Legislature appropriated \$5,000 for preparation of a site on the Capitol grounds for a Civil War memorial. The resulting **Soldiers and Sailors Monument** caused such a stir that it wasn't publicly dedicated until 1945. The result of that controversy wasn't, as you might believe, over the topless figure of Mother Iowa on the north side of the monument. No, the controversy arose over the placement of the memorial. It sits on the site of the Old Brick Capitol, the building that housed Iowa government for twenty-nine years when the capital city was moved from Iowa City to Des Moines. Critics of the monument and many Civil War veterans felt the 145 foot memorial would be dwarfed by the gold-domed Capitol across the street. Efforts were made to move the monument, but they came to naught. The history of the **Soldiers and Sailors Monument** makes for fascinating reading.

Many other public sculptures in Des Moines find homes in surroundings that befit their intent. The Claes Oldenburg **Crusoe Umbrella** (1979) in Nollen Plaza rests nicely between the Civic Center on the east and the beautiful Capital Square office building on the