

Letters

EDITORIAL

An ugly drug's arrival

The manufacture and use of crystal meth — a scourge of rural America — has a new address: Bridge Street in Northampton, in a wooden house at the edge of the fairgrounds, near a school and just east of the city's downtown. Though the drug-making operation appears to have been small, its discovery creates a big problem for the city and the homeowner.

Remarkably, state regulators do not yet provide guidelines on how a property involved in the creation of the drug known as methamphetamine can be safely handled. That's because it has not had to deal with this problem very often. We hope the matter under investigation in Northampton proves an isolated case.

Though heroin is readily available in the Valley, and in areas close to metropolitan centers, the powder and crystal forms of meth have not made strong inroads here or elsewhere in Massachusetts, unlike less-populated New England states such as Vermont and New Hampshire.

For many reasons, meth isn't just another hard-core drug other people use, usually at grave risk to their health. The drug is known for its particularly debilitating physical effect on users, who take the central nervous system stimulant for the euphoria it produces.

Beyond its savaging of those who use it, meth is a killer that discriminates little when it comes to victims.

As middle America already knows, the manufacture of crystal meth jeopardizes public safety. The backroom chemistry labs set up to produce the substance release noxious fumes that sicken people instantly and can lead to explosions and fires.

In the Northampton case, a landlord who had enlisted a friend's help to clean out a newly vacated second-floor and attic in her 227 Bridge St. property was nearly overcome by fumes. The landlord says her dog remains ill.

The upper floors of the house remain uninhabitable. The cost of ridding the building of dangerous substances, once that process is adequately defined, could be significant.

Authorities who responded to the property



A hazardous materials response team member is washed off after entering a house at 227 Bridge St. in Northampton, the site of a suspected former methamphetamine lab.

owner's call for help Monday treated the site with extreme caution. Teams entered in full hazardous-materials protection gear.

Given the novelty of the case for this area, Northampton called immediately for help from the federal Drug Enforcement Administration, which is expected to remain a leader of the ongoing investigation.

In the days ahead, the city will continue working with a variety of state and federal agencies, as they all see firsthand how serious a risk even a small meth lab poses to a community's safety.

Despite their prevalence elsewhere, meth labs have barely registered in Massachusetts. Last year, the federal drug agency responded to a half-dozen reports of labs across all of New England, including one in Andover in northeast Massachusetts. This year, the number of DEA investigations has risen slightly.

A DEA spokesman told the Gazette that crystal meth used in New England is usually mailed in, not manufactured here. It's hard not to wonder whether the recession has played a role in this, perhaps by driving desperate people to some form of supposed relief.

The discoveries inside 227 Bridge St. do not come as a total surprise. Police calls to the address have resulted in one arrest and involved reports of possible drug use.

People in the area have, including the landlord herself, reported odd behavior outside the house that also suggests drug activity or transactions.

Northampton police continue to interview people associated with the property and may yet identify the person responsible for the remnants of drug making discovered this week by the landlord.

That may resolve this case. It's unlikely to close the books on meth's presence in the Valley.

GUEST COLUMN

On virtues of 'wandering mind'

By POLLY INGRAHAM

SHUTESBURY — Now that we have a "distracted driving" law in Massachusetts, it's a good time to pull over for a minute and think about not only what we ought and ought not to be doing in our cars, but about how our minds work in general.

There's a growing body of research about the dangers of distracted driving, and the fact that almost 20 percent of crashes can be attributed to it provides ample reason for us to change our habits.

The seat behind the wheel of a car is no place for multi-tasking. We may think we're accomplishing a whole lot when we communicate with someone who's not there, plus try to eat a sandwich, but sooner or later we'll have a problem with this strategy — and maybe a really big problem, too.

The website www.distraction.gov (an official federal government one) puts forth a wide array of statistics about the perils of talking and texting on a cell phone.

All of this has skyrocketed in the past decade. Nestled in with all that data, however, is an acknowledgement that cell phones are not the only things to blame: "There are other less obvious forms of distraction including daydreaming or dealing with strong emotions."

Nothing new there — and good luck to the police if they try to nail us for these offenses. Ever since cars were invented, people have been driving around in states of

Wandering has gotten a bad rap in our culture because we have been so goal-oriented. If wandering actually enhances creativity, as studies are showing, then why don't we try it a little more often?

delight or discomfort — with either state potentially veering into the "distracted" realm.

Ironically, new research has also just come out about the benefits of daydreaming. This past summer, the New York Times published an article in the Science section called "Discovering the Virtues of a Wandering Mind."

It turns out that not only is daydreaming not a bad thing most of the time, it can help us get where we want to go. "A wandering mind can protect you from immediate perils and keep you on course toward long-term goals," the article observes.

Sometimes, let's face it, the real circumstances of our lives can be unpleasant, if not downright debilitating. When you're in a traffic jam, who wants to just think about the traffic jam? Much better to imagine yourself, say, on a beautiful hike in the Rocky Mountains. Just make sure you also protect yourself from the immediate peril of bumping into the car ahead of you as well as the danger of being crushingly bored.

Driving laws notwithstanding, this encouragement of mind-wan-

dering must really be catching on. I went to a lecture recently at Amherst College about it, joining about a hundred academics from all over New England. Stephen Prothero, professor of religion at Boston University, gave a talk called "The Art of Doing Nothing: Wandering as Contemplative Practice."

He explained that wandering has gotten a bad rap in our culture because we have been so goal-oriented.

If wandering actually enhances creativity, as studies are showing, then why don't we try it a little more often? By contrast, the megachurch minister Rick Warren wrote a blockbuster book called "The Purpose-Driven Life."

I haven't read the book, and perhaps it's helping a lot of people, but the longer I live the more I see that being "driven" is not always so rewarding.

Indeed, we are more apt to enjoy what's happening around us at any given moment if we're not steeped in purpose, but just open to unfolding experiences.

So yes, by all means, we need to put the cell phones away in the car and not let our thoughts carry us too far away from the machine we're responsible for. I still hope that my teenage daughter will interrupt her texting and talk to me while I'm driving, though; otherwise my mind might go wandering.

Polly Ingraham lives in Shutesbury, where she observes that residents think they know a lot about driving.

Country gets no benefit from party of 'No'

To the editor:

We are at a crucial time. Our technology has exceeded our understanding, our governing institutions do not display wisdom, our social mores lack common sense and thus we teeter on the edge.

We are told love between different races or the same gender is immoral, but that war, bigotry and fear mongering are okay. Caring for others is not Christian, not democratic. Making sure we all have our minimal needs taken care of is bad, while giving to those of great wealth is good. Building sustainable energy systems that are renewable and pose no danger to life are impractical and wrong. Dangerous polluting and centralized systems we know will run out and destroy life are necessary.

War is good, love is bad.

Those of you who think that might be true and support Republican positions — pro-life, anti-immigrant, anti-gay (except when gay), pro-family (sure) and pro whatever wedge issue is popular — I'd like to point out one thing. In all the years they were in power they did nothing about these issues. They just used them to get elected. And still do.

That is why we have arguments about building mosques in New York City, when we could be having discussions about rebuilding our economy. A discussion they don't want to have because they are the party of "No." No new ideas, no facts, no substance and no concern for the welfare of the common people of this country.

Jaffrey Harp
Greenfield

Candidates should 'walk the talk'

To the editor:

Hard times.

Elections are coming soon. We have people running for governor and other offices. Of course, they are promising all kinds of things.

But they don't see the people. We have people in unemployment line, lines of people at survival centers just trying to survive, we have people who are being laid off and shoved to the wall, families trying to get by and lucky if one member has a job.

Candidates talk a big talk and say they spent this much or that much. What is this? How about walking the talk, spend the money to help people survive. Whoever said that just to run for office, you had to spend big money.

When you run for office and you make promises, people expect you to keep them. We are living through a depression (not a recession) and times are hard. Life is hard. Run for office, but walk the talk.

Charles Schmid II
Easthampton

Patrick has served state well in hard times

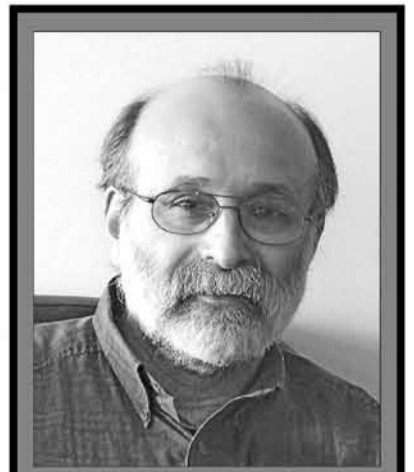
To the editor:

Your teeth have just stopped falling out. You've only lost two, though, while the folks in Pennsylvania or California have lost five. Still it's hard sometimes to look on the bright side. That's how residents of Massachusetts might feel about the fall political landscape.

But we have reason to be optimistic, because our state and our people have been well served in the tumult of the last four years by Deval Patrick, whose dogged work to stay ahead of the fiscal collapse all around has left Massachusetts way ahead of the curve that is closing in so ominously on other states.

Jobs are being created, stimulus funds are providing an essential buffer, gains in education are coming, though slowly, bureaucracy is on the slow dose of Slim-Fast, being reorganized.

While you feel that hole where your tooth used to be, remember, please, how fortunate we are, how much courage and steadiness and creativity this



ROBERT MEEROPOL

Board, volunteers key to Rosenberg Fund's success

To the editor:

Just over 20 years ago, Robert Meeropol, then an unfulfilled corporate lawyer in Springfield, figured out what he wanted to do with his life: he started the Rosenberg Fund for Children (RFC) in honor of his parents, Ethel and Julius Rosenberg. A concert at John M. Greene Hall in Northampton, featuring Pete Seeger, Richie Havens, Country Joe McDonald and Jane Sapp, launched the RFC on Oct. 12, 1990.

Two decades later, the RFC assists hundreds of children across the country every year, and has awarded almost \$4 million since its beginning. But while this project sprang from one man's history and vision, and flourished because of the steadfast support of many people, including hundreds in the Pioneer Valley, one group deserves special recognition.

The RFC is not a project fueled primarily by wealthy people and relying on a "trophy" board of directors to bring home the metaphorical bacon. Instead thousands of people across the country and even abroad support the project with modest contributions. None have made greater contributions than the 36 local individuals who have served on the RFC's all-volunteer board of directors.

Particular kudos should go to four individuals whose service has been Herculean. Board members Elli Meeropol, Bruce Miller, Bill Newman and its chairman, Bob Winston, all have given two decades of their time and energy by serving in these roles from day one. The board is a working one — they make decisions about the organization's grants and policies, but they also provide a wide range of expert services including translation; legal and financial advising; event planning; leading arts workshops and counseling beneficiaries at gatherings attended by grantees; and rolling up their sleeves to work at every, single RFC event around the country for 20 years.

This level of commitment and service to community is rare. On behalf of RFC supporters, beneficiaries and staff, we thank them.

Amber Black
Easthampton

Amber Black is the public relations and technology coordinator for the Rosenberg Fund for Children.

governor has shown. Don't get all cranky and vote for the folks with no record and no management plan. Another term for Deval Patrick is just what, well, the dentist ordered.

Jonathan Wright
Florence

