

“Our liberty depends on the freedom of the press, and that cannot be limited without being lost.”

Thomas Jefferson

# OPINION

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR, CONTRIBUTORS  
(OPINIONS EXPRESSED HEREIN ARE SOLELY THOSE OF THE AUTHOR.)

## Tax collector clarifies

I would like to take this opportunity to respond to a letter from last week titled “Positive image.” The letter references \$100,000 in delinquent taxes and then states “...if this was you or I the County would have taken our land.” The letter further states “This large amount of money didn’t accumulate overnight. Someone in the County needs to say how and why it got so high without some sort of action or enforcement.”

The State of California Revenue and Taxation Code only allows action on delinquent secured taxes after five years. The delinquent taxes in this case are only from last year. The soonest action could be taken is after June, 2014. The amount is large and one parcel represents almost 90 percent of the delinquency. Per Revenue and Taxation Code each installment is assessed a 10 percent penalty and each delinquent tax accrues interest at 18 percent per year.

Keith M. Williams  
Mariposa County  
Treasurer – Tax Collector &  
County Clerk

## To our Mariposa neighbors

The mighty oak tree lost its battle with age and the elements. It came crashing down, crushing grandma’s house. The lives of grandma and the man fixing the heater were spared by just a few feet. Grandma’s two cats were missing so I grabbed my chain saw and started to cut my way through the debris to see if they were trapped. Then it happened. Friends old and new and even strangers flowed like a river to the fallen giant. They brought their saws and began cutting the tangled branches. People worked to salvage treasured possessions – family photographs, the flag presented to Grandma at her veteran husband’s funeral, a memorial quilt made by a friend and the silk scarf given by her granddaughter as a memento of her trip to China.

The river of love flowed around the giant, the cats were found alive and well, and grandma is residing in our home. We thank you our neighbors and friends for being part of the river of love that flows through our lives. This community is a testament to the Lord’s command to love your neighbor as yourself. We thank the Lord for the lives spared and the

blessings that have come from all of you. We are grateful for each and every one who has helped.

Gerry and Daryel Lee Caputo and Pat Lang

## Long-awaited book

Recently, Gary and Reva Colliver’s bookstore “Windows on the World” hosted a talk by Grace Schireson, Abbess of Empty Nest Zendo in North Fork. Schireson’s book, “Zen Women, Beyond Tea Ladies, Iron Maidens, and Macho Masters,” has just been published by Wisdom Press. Long-awaited and exhaustively researched, her effort brings to print for the first time the unequal treatment of women in Zen Buddhist history.

Grace is elegant in her presentation, chronicling the struggles of historic and modern women practicing Buddhism. “It’s important,” she says, “when adopting a teaching from another country; that we not assume all the cultural baggage that goes with it.” This applies particularly to Asian attitudes toward women.

Drawing on her 40 years of Buddhist practice, as well as her many years as a clinical psychologist, Schireson maximizes her skills learned as a wife, mother, Zen priest, and Abbot, to provide both a nurturing environment and an opportunity for deep transformation at her North Fork Temple, for beginners as well as seasoned practitioners of Zen Buddhism.

A class in meditation will be given in Oakhurst at the Positive Living Center, by Empty Nest Zendo practitioners and priests, starting Thursday, Feb. 11, once a week through March 18; from 4:30 to 6:35 p.m. Beginners and experienced meditators are welcome. Call (559) 683-0683 for more information.

Pat Stacy

## Take it from me

Take it from a person living in Denver, Colorado. After approving marijuana stores, we now have users using the approval as a challenge against being given demerits for their poor work ethic. After all it’s just another medicine. One even is using it as a defense against being under the influence in a car accident.

Grandpa Bob  
(full name on file)

Lacey Merideth

## Responds to Brockman

Mr. Brockman:

In response to your hostile missile launched at Coyote Springs Ranch and Theresa Castaldi, you are totally and clearly misinformed. In fact you have made four blatant false statements that border on slander. Relative to Ms. Castaldi’s property taxes it wasn’t accumulated overnight. It accumulated over a one year period. I know personally her property taxes have exceeded over \$100,000 dollars a year for some time. Tell me Mr. Brockman what has your tax contribution to Mariposa County tax rolls last year? By the way I don’t think Mr. Keith Williams will be very happy to hear that you think there may be some foul play on the part of the county tax collector.

Mr. Brockman, your lack of knowledge and true information about Coyote Springs Ranch is disappointing to the level that I think you owe Coyote Springs and the Castaldi family a major apology. It is true that millions of dollars have been spent on Coyote Springs Ranch; however the majority of that money was the Castaldi family’s life savings.

Theresa, her brother, and her father have spent the last ten years, and the Castaldi family life savings, building a great facility that is a wonderful place for families, kids and tourists to come visit. However certain officials in the county have made it their priority to interfere, intervene and do everything they could to see that the ranch’s progress was interrupted. This has cost the Castaldi family their life savings and interrupted the Coyote Springs Ranch project, which should be employing a large number of people at this time when jobs are very much needed.

Your statement that Coyote Springs Ranch has been built without permits is totally false, had you been paying attention there are charts available at the public bulletin boards and county offices showing that Coyote Springs Ranch has purchased over 36 permits over a 4 year period, and all of them have been inspected and completed or are in the process with all of the appropriate inspections. Mr. Brockman, as an employee of the ranch I am extremely aggravated that you may possibly be interfering with innocent people’s jobs and future careers at Coyote Springs Ranch.

## There ‘Oughta Be A Law

### The Civil Gideon law

By MICHAEL A. FAGALDE, PARTNER IN THE MARIPOSA LAW FIRM OF ALLEN, FAGALDE, ALBERTONI & FLORES, LLP

On Oct. 11, 2009, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed into law AB590, the Sargent Shriver Civil Counsel Act. The act is named after Shriver, the governor’s father-in-law, because of Shriver’s efforts to help build legal services programs in the 1960s. The act authorizes the creation of pilot programs in selected counties, beginning on July 1, 2011 and running to July 1, of 2017, that will provide free legal services to those who have civil cases involving critical issues affecting basic human needs. California becomes the first state in the nation to create a civil right to counsel program.

The term “Civil Gideon” stems from the landmark 1963 United States Supreme Court case of Gideon v. Wainwright where the court held that, pursuant to the Sixth Amendment to the United States Constitution, indigent criminal defendants were entitled to free legal counsel. The author of that opinion, Justice Hugo Black wrote, “The right to be heard would be, in many cases, of little avail if it did not comprehend the right to be heard by counsel. Even the intelligent and educated layman has small and sometimes no skill in the science of law.” AB590, authored by Assembly Democrat Mike

Feuer of Los Angeles, will require the appointment of legal counsel to represent low-income parties in civil matters involving housing-related matters, domestic violence and civil harassment restraining orders, probate conservatorships, guardianships of the person, elder abuse, or actions by a parent to obtain sole legal or physical custody of a child. Services are to be provided by public interest law groups chosen by the Judicial Council of California, the agency which administers the state court system.

The services will be paid for by a \$10 increase in certain civil court filing fees. The state estimates those fees will generate \$11 million annually. In order to be eligible for service an individual’s annual income must be no more than 200 percent above the federal poverty guidelines. For a family of four, that would mean an annual income of \$44,000 or less.

Assemblyman Feuer in support of the bill was quoted in the Los Angeles Times saying, “How ironic that you can be arrested for stealing a small amount of food -- a box of Twinkies from a convenience store -- and you’re entitled to counsel. But if your house is on the line, or your child is on the line, or you’re being abused in a domestic relationship, you don’t have the same right to counsel.”

Other proponents of the act note that as many as 4.3 million Californians are unrepresented in civil court matters. According to Julia Wilson, executive director of the Legal Aid Association of California,

legal aid groups within the state turn away as many as two-thirds of those seeking help because of lack of resources. Ronald George, Chief Justice of the California Supreme Court has noted that flood of self-represented litigants has greatly increased the cost of running the courts and impairs the ability of the courts to efficiently process heavy caseloads, thus eroding the public’s confidence in the judicial system.

Opponents of the measure argue that the civil courts in the pilot counties will become even more congested as those with free attorneys will be less inclined to reach settlements and more inclined to litigate matters at the courthouse.

From where I sit this is an experiment worth trying. The laws and legal procedures of California are complicated and difficult to comprehend, even for those educated in other fields. I often cringe when I observe unrepresented litigants in custody or restraining order cases shrivel up into frightened and babbling shells of themselves when they have their turn in front of the judge and are opposed competent legal counsel or, worse yet, abusers. On the other hand, it would sure be nice to see a push for improvements in our educational and social service systems so that some of these folks might never have to be in the court system in the first place.

(Direct your questions and comments to Mike@Mercedlaw.com.)