

# OPINION

## LETTERS POLICY

Letters to the editor should be 200 words or fewer. All letters are subject to editing for length or clarity. Letters must be original and should be on topics of public interest. Writers are limited to one published letter every 30 days. Letters, guest columns and cartoons must include the writer's name, address and a daytime phone number for confirmation.  
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## Rockford Register Star

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### OUR VIEW

## Celebrate a good week, hope for more

It was a great news week for Rockford. The Rockford City Council approved the Amerock/Ziock development agreement. Construction on South Main Street, an important gateway to the community, has resumed. Gov. Pat Quinn came to town to announce that long-awaited Amtrak train service will begin in 2015. Rock Valley College picked Mike Mastroianni as its president. Mayor Larry Morrissey gave his annual State of the City address highlighting civic accomplishments.

"A Better Rockford Today" could have been the big headline last week rather than the theme of the mayor's speech.

Big pieces — and big investment — are starting to fall into place, especially downtown.

■ Wisconsin-based Gorman & Co. is poised to invest \$52 million to renovate the 101-year-old Amerock/Ziock building, turning it into a 150-room hotel complex with bars and restaurants and as much as 20,000 square feet for conventions, banquets, receptions and trade shows.

■ Urban Equity Properties plans to renovate the Hanley Furniture building into shops and offices, a \$10 million investment. Urban Equity also is spending \$1 million to create loft office and retail stores at 134 N. First St. and is investing \$3.5 million in a residential and commercial project at 327 W. Jefferson St.

■ Next year, you'll be able to board a train to Chicago at the old Chicago Northwestern Depot, 703 Seventh St. Illinois is investing \$223 million in passenger rail from Chicago to Elgin to Huntley to Belvidere and Rockford.

■ The Reclaiming First sports tourism initiative will turn the former Ingersoll building in downtown Rockford into an indoor sports complex that could host basketball, volleyball and other tournaments and events. That's a \$21 million investment.

■ The two-year, \$19 million state project

to rebuild South Main Street will make it easier for people to visit downtown attractions such as the BMO Harris Bank Center, the Coronado Performing Arts Center, and the Burpee and Discovery Center museums.

■ Not quite downtown is the Morgan Street Bridge, which reopened in December after a \$40 million rebuild. The bridge is an important connection to historic Rockford neighborhoods.

Rah! Rah! Rockford! All problems are solved! Prosperity is inevitable!

Not quite. There still are plenty of challenges: crime, unemployment, poverty, crumbling streets and more.

However, the positive news stories we saw last week are the kinds of developments needed to answer those challenges. They create economic opportunity, jobs and a better quality of life for those who live, work and play here.

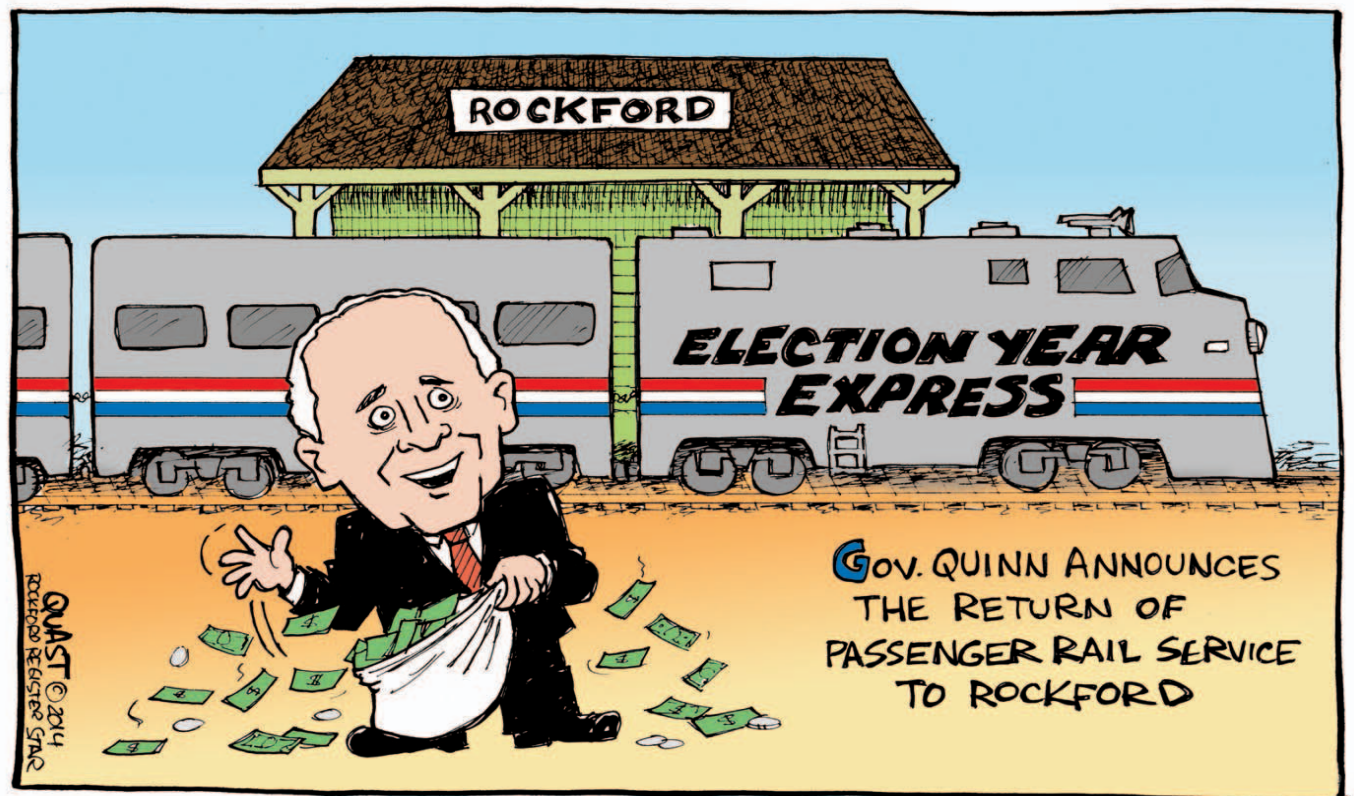
Rock Valley College plays an important role in ensuring a better quality of life. It prepares students for the next step in their lives whether that be moving on to a four-year college or jumping into the workforce after earning an associate's degree.

Mastroianni's promotion to president is as much economic news as bricks-and-mortar projects. He's working to create job opportunities for those RVC students who don't plan on attending a four-year school. The relationships he's building and will continue to build will give employers the workers they need and students the jobs they need.

One of the relationships he's building is with Northern Illinois University and its president, Doug Baker. Baker was in Rockford last week to visit with the Editorial Board. Baker, who started at NIU in July, wants to raise NIU's profile in Rockford. A stronger partnership with RVC would do just that.

Last week was a good week and we don't celebrate those often enough. Let's keep the momentum going.

### ANOTHER VIEW - BRUCE QUAST



### MY VIEW

## Know where your kids are online, too

It's 10 o'clock, do you know where your kids are? Andy Gannon and Rockford Police Chief Chet Epperson ask us that question nightly just before the news begins. I always answer them, "Yep, in their beds ... or at least they better be!"

This week I re-evaluated their question and broadened the meaning, not taking it as literally as it was presented, but moving into the virtual. Do you know where your kids are online? I thought I did, but what I have learned over the past week has prompted me to really know where my kids are, not just physically, and will have both of my teens cringing.

Recently, an alleged serial child sex predator was arrested in our community. He had traveled to northern Illinois from out of state with the express intent of meeting young teens whom he'd friended online, to engage in some type of sexual misconduct. He was arrested with one of the young girls in his car. Again, I ask you, do you know where your kids are?

How often do you spot check your kids text messages to ensure the people they are texting are safe and their messages are appropriate? I have to say I don't do



KRIS KIEPER

it frequently enough, but that is now going to change (begin the cringing by my teens!). Sexting occurs so frequently that the word is now an "official" word in the dictionary.

Teens have committed suicide after compromising pictures that they've texted to their beloved gets shared with half the school by said beloved after a spat. These same compromising pictures taken by young teens have the potential to become child pornography that travels the globe. Do you know what your kid is texting?

Do you know who your kid is online? I frequently look at my kids' Facebook pages and Instagram accounts to see what they are posting, who they are talking with, and what others are posting to them. I talk to them about their privacy settings and only "friending" people they actually know. It turns out it's a good thing I do this, because these social media sites are often where predators find our kids.

The anonymity of the Internet provides the perfect camouflage for a seasoned predator to operate.

"Predators are hiding behind the anonymity of the Internet to target kids, to entice kids online, to try to persuade them to meet them in the physical world," says Ernie Allen, President & CEO, National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

Social networking sites and detailed chat profiles provide easy information to predators. A lack of privacy settings on social networking and gaming sites make it easy for a predator to know what your kids looks like, their phone numbers and addresses, the school they attend, sports they play, pictures, what they enjoy and dislike, their current mood and whether the kids may be displaying behavior that would make them a prime target for an online relationship.

#### How are these for some scary predator statistics:

■ Only 18 percent of youth use chat rooms; however, the majority of Internet-initiated sex crimes against children are initiated in chat rooms. (Journal of Adolescent Health 47, 2010)

■ In 82 percent of online sex crimes against minors, the offender used the victim's social networking site

to gain information about the victim's likes and dislikes. (Journal of Adolescent Health 47, 2010)

■ 65 percent of online sex offenders used the victim's social networking site to gain home and school information about the victim (Journal of Adolescent Health 47, 2010)

■ 26 percent of online sex offenders used the victim's social networking site to gain information about the victim's whereabouts at a specific time. (Journal of Adolescent Health 47, 2010)

**Sexual solicitations of youth occur:**

■ Chat rooms (37 percent)

■ Instant Messaging (40 percent)

■ Other, like gaming devices (21 percent)

Many of us have become lax about really knowing where our kids are, even when they are sitting next to us on the sofa. This arrest in my community turned the lights on for me, and my poor teens are going to have to pay the uncomfortable price of Mom checking their texts periodically.

I encourage you to do the same, and if you find something, don't ignore it, and call the police if your child's safety is compromised. As parents, we have to be as diligent in protecting our children as the predator is in seeking them.

### MY VIEW

## Spring's here! Be careful out there

Spring is finally here, but handle with care. Before you pull out your motorcycles, bicycles, classic cars, golf clubs, soccer balls and spring gear, make sure you exercise caution and safety first.

We have so many blessings for which to thank God: good health, beautiful weather, cool breeze, bright sunshine and no snow. As a transplanted Southerner, I have come to really enjoy all of the seasons that we experience in the Midwest. Yet, the spring is still my favorite season of the year. The tulips are bursting through the mulch and showing off the best of God's splendor. The variegated hostas and perennials are coming up right behind.

Before we get too excited about rushing out to enjoy spring, let us remember to practice safety first and to watch out for each other. Recently, one of my dear



KENNETH BOARD

friends was hit by a car while walking in a quiet neighborhood and left on the side of the road. He was taking advantage of a nice spring evening by taking a leisurely walk. He suffered multiple injuries, but thank God that he is still alive!

Last week, I noticed a toddler kicking a soccer ball in a local southwest Rockford park. He kicked the ball near the street as I was approaching, and I stopped to make sure that he did not run into the street while chasing the ball.

During spring break, my wife and I were almost hit by a car at a police guarded

cross walk while the driver was looking down in his lap while texting.

Bicycle riders must remember to wear helmets, bright clothing and a light if riding at night. Car drivers must be ever-vigilant to beware of motorcycle riders and to share the road courteously with them.

Parents, please do not let your kids play ball in the streets and leave them unattended in parking lots. Drivers, make sure that you slow down and look both ways while driving through parking aisles at local stores, strip malls and major shopping centers.

When backing out of your driveways, make sure that the garage door is open, no cars are behind you, and no children or walking neighbors. We are all busy and sometimes we forget to expect the unexpected.

Yes, spring is here! We

had a long, hard winter and God allowed us to endure it with prayer and patience.

Let us now embrace our gorgeous spring weather with excitement and safety for the welfare of ourselves and others. Let us take time to truly enjoy the spring and do our best to help others to enjoy it, also. After all, we are our brother's keeper.

Now that we are mindful of safety, let us get ready for music and sports in our pristine Rockford parks and on the Rock River. Let us also remember the local farmer markets when seeking fresh produce and honey. Spring is in the air.

*The Rev. Dr. Kenneth Board is the senior pastor of Pilgrim Baptist Church of Rockford and a community member of the Rockford Register Star Editorial Board. If you would like to comment, email opinions@rrstar.com.*

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