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Hemphill: 'Peacenicks' looking in wrong place

By Alan Hemphill

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You probably remember that old joke about the drunk searching for his watch under a bright street light at night, when a passerby asks, "Did you lose something here?"

"No," replies the drunk, "I lost my watch across the street, but the light is better here."

I was reminded of that recently when I read about a Vista High School student who was a leader in his local "peace movement." This wasn't the first newspaper article about "peace movement" rallies in several North County communities.

Now, the last I heard there was already "peace" in North County, so advocating "peace" in a North County community was like supporting religion in the Vatican, or looking for a lost watch under a nearby streetlight.

If the "peace movement" wants to accomplish something, they might address their concerns to the combatants in Indonesia, or the Sunni and Shiite in Baghdad, or the warring factions in Darfur, Sudan, Bosnia, or, if they wish to save travel expenses, the Crips and Bloods in L.A., or ...

The "war" in Vista is pretty tame, and the impact of protesting war in Vista is simply emotional masturbation.

Every now and again, someone in the "peace movement" does actually look for a watch where it was lost. There is an annual memorial service in New York for one such activist who lost her life in Gaza, but hopefully she qualified for a Darwin Award. Note that it is not wise to stand in front of an operating D-10 Caterpillar tractor!

The "peace movement" gets a LOT of printers' ink, especially considering that you can get a bigger crowd with a weekday garage sale in Rancho Bernardo, an hour before the listed start time. Notice the size of the "crowd" when the TV stations cover an event such as a "peace movement" rally. Seldom will you see a wide crowd shot; the TV crew cooperates by getting everyone in close for a "tight shot."

A tractor pull in Lakeside would get 100 times the crowd, and a goat rope in Ramona would attract 10 times the crowd on a weekday night ... but neither could get TV coverage.

Back in the early '80s I saw San Diego TV station promos that were puffing an "anti-gun protest" in Los Angeles. Since I was working in Glendale, I heard about the protest on both L.A. and San Diego radio stations while I was commuting.

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I was so intrigued with the advance puffing that I made it a point to watch the coverage. The coverage was of a "burial" of a few guns ... in front of a crowd of fewer than 15!

News coverage is always a choice. Editors are always in a triage situation because there is always more news than either time or reporters to cover the situations. What is news – and what isn't – is a choice, but since Watergate the media has been populated by a large number of people who, as Daniel Pearl's wife said of her beheaded husband, went into journalism "to make the world a better place."

Advocates tend to cover advocates. It is not a media conspiracy. Geese do not conspire to fly in formation.

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