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Opinion

Star manufactured controversy

Article attacked programs that help youth, communities

Being a native of Harlingen, a member of its school board since 1992, a professional in private dental practice for the last 13 years serving my community, I find it deplorable that my hometown newspaper diminishes the good work of its children while allowing one of its reporters to manufacture controversy where none exists.

This letter is to clarify the facts which were incorrectly reported in Kate Mewhinney's article which appeared in Monday's edition of the *Valley Morning Star*. Those facts are:

I am a member of the Concerned Businessmen's Association of America, a California-based, non-profit, charitable, educational organization founded in 1981 that sponsors the Set A Good Example program. This program is nationwide in scope. During the past 10 years it has provided copies of *The Way to Happiness* book (written by the best-selling author L. Ron Hubbard) to teachers in 9,000 public, private and parochial schools across the nation who have enrolled nearly seven million children in the program. It, the teachers and the children who used the book have been commended by governors in 44 states. The program has also been commended 15 times in the *United States Congressional*

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Record for its effectiveness in reducing crime, drug abuse and violence on campus.

Each of the past three years the State of Texas has proclaimed a statewide Set a Good Example Month honoring Texas schoolchildren who have contributed toward building safer learning environments through this highly successful moral education program based on Hubbard's book. This information was provided to Mewhinney but she gives the good news no mention at all.

The fact is that nearly 5,000 Rio Grande Valley schoolchildren have contributed through the program. They put their talents to use to help themselves, their school, their families and community be rid of illegal drug abuse, crime, gangs, delinquency and dropouts by setting examples of the common-sense guidelines for living contained in *The Way to Happiness* book — ideas like "taking care of yourself, not using drugs, don't do anything illegal, don't steal, don't murder, honor and help your parents, seek to live with the truth, and fulfill your obligations."

The children of Coakley Junior

High earned a \$5,000 grant for their school as the result of their efforts. It seems a shame that their success story gets no coverage in the Mewhinney article. Is their good work lacking in controversy? Why does Monday's article seek to destroy the validity of their good works by ignoring the facts?

The CBAA's Set a Good Example program is funded solely by private-sector business people like myself and Dr. Vivian Teegardin in some 600-plus cities. Books and materials are provided free of charge to schools. Teachers review *The Way to Happiness* book before ordering copies for use with their students.

Dr. Teegardin and myself also sponsor The Way to Happiness Essay Contest in cooperation with The Way To Happiness Foundation International, which is responsible for coordinating distribution of books around the world. The CBAA and The Way to Happiness Foundation are entirely different organizations.

My community and its children mean a great deal to me. My sole interest, despite what Mewhinney would lead people to believe, is to help the children of Harlingen and its surrounding community learn the difference between right and wrong in conduct so they can lead happy,

healthy lives. *The Way to Happiness* book works very well in that regard. Those are the simple facts.

The Way to Happiness gets its support from a wide range of professionals, businesses, organizations and individuals. It was written specifically as a non-religious work to fill the vacuum of immorality and lack of a common-sense moral code that could be applied by anyone whether religious or not.

An outcome study completed in 1995 by S.H. Beckman and Associates, an independent research firm, found 90 percent of the teachers responding rated *The Way to Happiness* book as "excellent" and 90 percent reported changes in children's attitudes, that students were more positive, proud of their accomplishments, worked together better, were more mannerly, friendly and helpful. More than eighty percent of the students surveyed felt they had learned much from the program, the importance of manners, of treating others with respect, of taking responsibility for their actions and working to be more competent.

Why would anyone want to attack a program like this?

Villarreal is a Harlingen dentist and vice president of the Harlingen school board.

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