

# RiverOpinion



## Don't Feed the Animals!

**Richard L. Hershatter**  
Contributing Columnist

*If you ever want to gamble, there's a place  
Called Las Vegas, where lost money leaves no  
trace,  
And when there's nothing left to buy your food,  
You'll find the local customs are quite rude.*

**News Headline:** Las Vegas Makes it Illegal to Feed Homeless

We can understand the signs in zoos urging viewers not to feed the monkeys, snakes or kangaroos.

Zookeepers are trained to measure the correct quantities of nourishment suited for a particular species of animal, and well-meaning visitors can easily upset the balance and cause upset stomach or more serious results.

And we have no quarrel with public warnings in the State of Florida that humans are not to feed alligators, lest the reptile get the idea that humans themselves would make a tidy snack.

But the City of Las Vegas has just enacted an ordinance that prohibits the feeding of the highest manifestation of the animal kingdom - human beings.

Not just any human, however - only the homeless ones.

And not any homeless human anywhere - just those homeless who happen to be in a public park.

Somehow, the irony of a city devoted to draining hapless tourists of their dollars and leaving them without assets or a home, then proscribing the feeding of the resulting indigent victim, seems to have escaped the city fathers.

We're not making this up. Violation of the ordinance subjects the good Samaritan to a fine of up to \$1,000 or a jail term of six months, or both.

The city's mayor, who may very well be a distant descendant of Marie Antoinette of "let them eat cake

fame," is quoted as saying "let them drink soup."

His position is that there are soup kitchens available for the benefit of the indigent, and if people feed them in public parks, it will make the parks less attractive to tourists. (There is no similar ordinance against feeding pigeons, whose prolific droppings become sole food to the visiting pedestrian.)

Las Vegas delights in the slogan that "what happens in Las Vegas stays in Las Vegas," which is certainly true of the nest eggs of many hapless visitors.

There are nearly 12,000 homeless people in and around the city. Although there are shelters and soup kitchens set up by charities to serve them, some are located in outlying areas three miles or more from parks where the homeless tend to congregate.

Logic would seem to indicate that if a person is too poor to buy food, it follows that he is too poor to pay the bus or taxi fare to get him to a soup kitchen.

The local branch of the American Civil Liberties Union has called the measure absurd and a constitutional infringement on free assembly.

It plans to challenge the measure in court, pointing out that the new law permits a picnicker to offer a sandwich to a middle-income friend, but not to a poor one. (The law is silent as to the type of sandwich, but presumably peanut butter could be hurtful to homeless individuals with allergies.)

One of the peculiar aspects of the new law is that it is legal to offer the indigent victim money in the park, or food on an adjacent sidewalk, but if the charitable



citizen steps over onto the grass with the food offering, he has become a criminal. The rule adds new meaning to "Keep off the grass" signs.

The city's mayor, who before he became a politician was a mob-connected lawyer, has stated that he never feared mobsters and was certainly "not afraid to go to court against the A.C.L.U."

Furthermore, he claims pride in waging a campaign against the homeless, who, according to him, ruin efforts to landscape and beautify the city. He threatens to turn the tables on any panhandlers carrying signs asking for food, by "suing them for false advertising. They can't be hungry as long as soup kitchens offer free meals."

Other cities are watching the controversy with a great deal of interest. Obviously, Las Vegas is not the only tourist Mecca in a warm climate trying to show a pretty face to tourists.

California's Santa Monica has enacted restrictions on public gatherings in parks, but was forced to moderate them in the face of a federal lawsuit.

Several months ago, in our own state, Orlando promulgated a requirement that a permit be obtained by anyone proposing to feed groups of 25 or more in downtown city parks or other public facilities.

Mickey Mouse has yet to be heard from.

***"What happens in Vegas stays in Las Vegas,"  
A slogan that seems very cool;  
But if we feed the homeless, the cops will then  
take us  
To jail for ignoring the rule.***

*Richard L. Hershatter is a retired lawyer and novelist who writes a syndicated column of interest to Floridians. He can be reached at [Banyan502@aol.com](mailto:Banyan502@aol.com).*

## Technology Helps Stem Campus Danger

### Safety, from Page 1

ed use of the system, which is now in full use at every Manatee County public school. School campuses used to be open, but now you'd better bring your driver's license and hope there aren't any skeletons in the closet.

Visitors to schools are required to present a photo ID that is scanned through the Raptor system. It is connected with similar data banks in 48 states and can almost immediately identify anything from a hardened criminal to a registered sex offender. If the warning signs come up, school personnel at the front desk immediately call for advice from the school's resource officer who then reports to his or her sergeant for help.

Meanwhile, the visitor in question is made to wait in the lobby until facts are checked.

It isn't always a pleasant wait, especially since those with a somewhat common name are often red-flagged, but the photos on their IDs are compared to those in the data bank for verification.

Deputy Carrie Dixon is the School Resource Officer at Haile Middle School. She walks around campus with a smile on her face, recognizes almost every student by name, and her students give her lots of love in return. Like almost everyone in Manatee County, she understands the need for beefed up security in the wake of recent tragedies, but said the school is taking extra precautions nonetheless.

In the event that a person shows up at the front desk without proper identification, or becomes hostile, teachers and administrators are given a lengthy class just prior to the school year to deal with it. First, Dixon said, anyone with suspicions would immediately call or text message Dixon, whose office at Haile is between the front desk and any access to the rest of the campus. Haile, like many Manatee County schools, has plenty of open areas and access to the campus from the outside, but teachers are also trained to check for the ID sticker any visitor must wear before proceeding onto the campus.

In case anything reached the proportions of the recent tragedies in Colorado and Pennsylvania, teachers are also trained to go into lockdown mode, much like the one at Kathleen High School in Lakeland two weeks ago when an officer and police dog were shot to death near

the campus. The students were kept in their classrooms until late in the night, but it is general procedure should such an incident ever happen in Manatee County.

Once the doors are locked from the inside and outside — certain teachers are assigned responsibility for locking the outside doors — and the students go through training drills to crawl under their desks and immediately get away from windows. Shades are drawn, and the vigil begins.

It's a doomsday scenario, but almost everyone agrees, it's better to be safe than sorry.

"I don't think anyone could ever be ready for this, and you hope it never happens, but we are prepared for it if it does," Dixon said. "Resource officers would try to diffuse the situation right way, but we have to be prepared for anything."

Manatee County schools have cameras throughout the schools, especially with so many open areas and hidden corridors at many of the schools. Still, the Raptor has become the most effective way to make sure anyone walking onto campus belongs there. After the ID process, visitors must wear stickers with their drivers license photos, name and destination attached. Sarasota and Pinellas County use the system as well, but not Hillsborough.

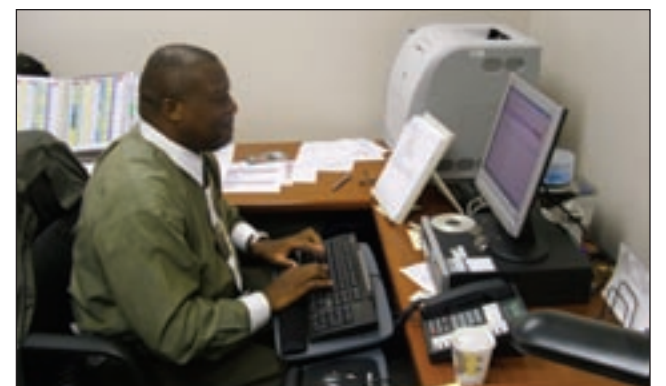
Hayes said such precautions are necessary today.

"Today we are not Small Town America anymore," Hayes said. "We need to be more conscious about everybody on a school campus. Bradenton used to be Small Town, USA, but things changed since Columbine and all these hostage situations. The common thread through all of those incidents were that people weren't vigilant enough about their surroundings."

Hayes pushed for the Raptor System and said it was a shame it came to such high-level security.

"In Manatee County we are used to everybody knowing each other," Hayes said. "It's like Cheers — everybody knows your name. We were comfortable with open campuses when these schools were designed. It's changed."

After several devastating attacks on young girls recently, the Jessica Lunsford Act raised awareness, but Hayes said the county though it needed to go a step further. Now there is much less access to the campuses, especially at the elementary and middle school levels, and



*Safety and Security Specialist Ozell Hayes accesses the Raptor Security system that identifies intruders on school campuses.*

the assumption, Hayes said, is if you are in the wrong place at the wrong time, you are out of there immediately.

On Tuesday, at one point, there were 15 visitors on campuses throughout Manatee County. All were immediately accessed on the Raptor computer Hayes has in his office in Bradenton. Any suspicions by any front desk personnel are immediately sent to Hayes who does a thorough background check while the visitor is detained.

"I can check any visitor at any given school at any given time," Hayes said, referring to a reference book with mug shots of sex offenders from all over the state. "We always know who is on campus. We don't think everyone who visits the campuses is a sex offender, but it's just in case. Better to be safe."

If an offender has a legitimate reason to be on campus, perhaps to visit a son or daughter, Hayes said the school makes sure that someone monitors the visit with an open door. Conferences with the students and teacher are always held in the office so they can be monitored.

Hayes admits that no system can possibly be foolproof, but he is happy that Manatee County is at the forefront of school safety.

"We feel like we are taking steps to be progressive and out in front," Hayes said. "We train the teachers, the students, and we have high expectations. We can't guarantee that something terrible won't happen, but we think this is working and the system is doing a great job."