

editor's message



Guns and Fear

I was having lunch at My Thai Express on South Walnut recently when a large, disheveled woman came in with a pistol holstered loosely on her hip like an old-time cowboy. I sensed palpable concern, alarm, and fear on the faces of the other half-dozen diners as she sauntered to the counter at the rear of the restaurant. My Thai Express is a small eatery with nowhere to take cover or hide. I took a couple more bites and left.

Guns carried openly make people uncomfortable. They fear for themselves and for their children. By now, we are all too aware that mass shootings can happen anywhere—in a bar or school, at a concert or place of worship, in a movie theater or shop or restaurant. They happen in big cities and in small towns. In Bloomington, people openly carrying pistols and assault weapons have shown up at the 4th of July parade, at a municipal swimming pool filled with children, and at other public venues. Recently, three gunslingers entered a restaurant/bar, causing considerable consternation among the staff and patrons.

I have often wondered why people openly carry firearms. What statement are they trying to make? Does it signal, “Don’t mess with me?” Does it make them feel more manly? Do they imagine coming upon a crime in progress, drawing their weapon, and saving the day by performing a heroic act? (We know how that often turns out. In New York City, police chased down a shooter who had just killed his former boss. In the ensuing gun battle, nine bystanders were wounded, all by police bullets.)

Although the Indiana legislature prohibits municipalities from enacting regulations concerning the carrying of firearms, private businesses can do so. Pursuant to Indiana Criminal Trespass Statute IC 35-43-2-2, a private business that prominently posts a sign referencing the criminal trespass language can deny entry to those carrying firearms, and an employee who sees a customer carrying on

the premises can call police without first confronting the individual.

In an effort to help local businesses (or so we thought), *Bloom*, with the help of Indiana University Law Professor Jody Madeira and White Rabbit Copy Service & Digital Printing,

created signs that stores, restaurants, and other places of business could post proclaiming their establishments to be gun-free environments.

I took these signs around downtown and offered them free to storekeepers. To my surprise and disappointment, many places declined, citing fears of another sort.

I halfway expected that some businesses might be reluctant to post the signs for fear of offending gun-carrying customers. What I didn’t anticipate was that some would reject them for fear they might encourage gun carriers to act in some way—perhaps even violently—against their establishments.

Even some bars turned down the signs. Yet no one could deny that guns and alcohol make for a dangerous cocktail.

I understand parents who want to protect their families and homes from intruders. But openly carrying a firearm wherever one goes is far more likely to cause harm than any imagined good.

An old Johnny Cash song says, “Don’t take your guns to town son.” If you know that ditty, then you know how it ends.

If anyone would like a sign, they are available at the *Bloom* office, 414 W. 6th St., and at White Rabbit, 601 S. Walnut.

Malcolm Abrams
editor@magbloom.com

