



Mitch Albom
SYNDICATED COLUMN

Good luck with your new right

In the centuries that straight Americans like me have had exclusive domain over marriage, we have managed to take it from a sacred and binding institution to one that ends in divorce nearly half the time.

We're taken it from a union of fidelity to one in which 30 percent to 60 percent of spouses cheat on one another.

We've taken it from an institution designed to create economic stability to one in which "I want half!" is a common phrase.

We've morphed it from fostering children in stable, loving homes to a nation's worth of bitter custody battles and kids who celebrate four Christmases in a single day. We've moved it out of the church and into Las Vegas, out of family photos and into reality TV.

We've created alimony, divorce law, child support, counseling and therapy, all as a means of dealing with its problems.

So now that the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that gay marriage is officially part of the American system, the straight world might want to say this to its celebrating gay peers:

Good luck doing better with it than we have.

Because what a shame it would be if after all these hard-fought battles, all the name-calling and finger-pointing, all the endurance and resilience that is being trumpeted in feature stories across America, gay couples quickly lapse into the same cavalier mistakes that straight couples have been making.

Not all straight couples, clearly. Not even the majority. But a great number.

Sadly, don't be surprised if it happens.

Julie and Hillary Goodridge were the lead plaintiffs in a case that eventually led to same-sex marriage in Massachusetts in 2004. They got married right away.

Two years later, they separated. Three years after that, they divorced.

Talk show host Rosie O'Donnell has been an outspoken advocate for gay marriage, including her own. She's now dealing with her second divorce, and in a bitter custody battle with her current estranged wife.

Of course, you can't insist that gay couples hold marriage in higher regard than straight couples. That's the whole point of the Supreme Court ruling. No double standards, right?

Now that the Supreme Court largely has settled the issue, even critics may admit some relief in knowing where the country stands. No more one state this, one state that.

As Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder said in a statement, "Recognizing that there are strong feelings on both sides, it is important for everyone to respect the judicial process."

And respect each other. That cuts many ways. Respect for the newly recognized gay marriages by their previously vocal critics, yes.

But also respect by same-sex marriage advocates for churches and faiths that choose not to perform such unions. They didn't lose their standing just because five justices voted one way and four voted another.

Most of all, we could all stand to show some respect for the institution of marriage itself. This should not be some in-your-face victory.

This should be about embracing an institution that is joyous, yes, but also solemn, serious, difficult, demanding, committing and requiring of sacrifice.



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EDITORIAL

UWF downtown: 'We're all in'

What promised to be a revival in vision for the Community Maritime Park just became the epicenter of downtown Pensacola's burgeoning economic renaissance. Welcome to the University of West Florida Center for Entrepreneurship.

Officials from UWF, Quint Studer and Mayor Ashton Hayward gathered at the News Journal last week to deliver the exciting news. The university and Studer have partnered to create the center that will focus on "community building, education, research, supporting small business and professional development." UWF is in the process of developing the curriculum, degree and nondegree programs that will take place at the center.

As reported by the PNJ's Carlos Geiseken, the physical home of the center will be a \$10 million, 55,000-square-foot building Studer will build on parcel 6 which fronts Main Street on the northwest corner of the park. The campus-like headquarters will stand as an iconic welcome point on the park's western entryway. Construction of the center awaits final approval of the ground lease from the Community Maritime Park Associates and the Pensacola City Council.

In addition to the brick and mortar, Quint and Rishy Studer have given \$1 million in seed money to help UWF launch its expanded new downtown presence. Geiseken reports that the center will also include a number of other entities and initiatives that will support

UWF's College of Business and the larger mission of helping our community grow economically.

Studer told the PNJ that the vision for this has been in the works for some time. It extends from economic research into the crucial elements that make downtowns thrive. The Center for Entrepreneurship will manifest three of those crucial elements — a place for young businesses to learn and grow, a specific funding source for those young businesses and entrepreneurs when Studer establishes the Greater Pensacola Entrepreneur Fund and, of course, a university/academic presence downtown.

This isn't just something that sounds like a nice idea. There's real science behind this. And we're not the only city that's figured it out.

Just this year, both Tampa and Orlando were seeking millions in taxpayer dollars from the Legislature to establish a university presence in their downtowns. The Miami Herald reported that \$17 million was being sought to relocate University of South Florida's Morsani College of Medicine "as part of a major downtown Tampa redevelopment" priority. Meanwhile, Senate President Andy Gardiner was seeking \$15 million to begin establishing UCF's downtown presence in Orlando. Gov. Scott vetoed that request.

Needless to say, we're extremely fortunate that the UWF Center for Entrepreneurship isn't going to require the bless-

ings of Tallahassee politicians.

But it does require buy-in from local leaders.

At the meeting last week, Studer said a development like this is something he and Mayor Hayward have been talking about for a long time. The mayor was enthusiastic about UWF's expanded presence near city hall and attested to what the university means to the city and, personally as to what it has meant to members of his own family. The Studers, UWF and the mayor were all at the table in agreement: "We're all in."

Now we need CMPA board members and City Council to pledge the same. We're confident they will. After all, this is a huge moment for continuing Pensacola's positive momentum. Economic wins are spreading like wildfire. Geiseken listed off the current boom in projects — the new YMCA, Beck Property's new multiuse building at Community Maritime Park, a Holiday Inn Express on Main Street, the expansion of the Institute for Human and Machine Cognition, Bobby Switzer's rejuvenation of the Blount Building and Studer's housing development at the old PNJ site.

We're flourishing. And in mission and meaning, UWF's Center for Entrepreneurship ties it together.

Beyond just the success of our city, this is about the success of our community. All of us have a vested interest in that. Indeed, we're all in.

Women are necessary to politics



Diane Mack

VIEWPOINT



U.S. Rep. Elise Stefanik (R-N.Y.) at 30 is the youngest woman ever elected to the House of Representatives. During her campaign last year, a couple who had never attended a political event brought their young daughters to a rally to hear her speak. "They wanted to show their daughters," Stefanik said in an interview for the New York Post (4/27/2015), "what they can achieve, too."

What do girls and young women see as they interact with the world around them? They see few women at the upper levels of business, organizations, and government — and in elected office.

Gains in the 2014 elections boosted the number of women in the Congress from 19 percent to 20 percent. For all of Escambia County, the city of Pensacola, and the town of Century, 13 women have been elected to legislative or executive positions (29.5 percent). For Santa Rosa County, the cities of Gulf Breeze and Milton, and the town of Jay, the number is 14 women (24 percent). In the Florida legislature the proportion of women is 25 percent.

In conversations about such disparities a comment is sometimes made that there are no barriers to keep women from run-

ning for office, so what's the problem?

The problem is that while there may be no legal barriers faced by women candidates, there are a number of others: cultural, financial, social, and political. The barriers are such that not only are the percentages of elected women in the 20 to 29 percent range, but they have been in that range for over 20 years. Women's rise in the political arena has reached a plateau. A group of women in this community have concluded, as have women's groups throughout the country, that it will require organized, concerted and persistent efforts to rise above the plateau.

For Escambia, Santa Rosa, and Okaloosa counties that organized effort is the Institute for Women in Politics of Northwest Florida, founded in August 2013 by seven women of diverse backgrounds from Escambia and Santa Rosa. This institute is a nonpartisan, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to change politics by achieving greater representation of women in office and government in our region. We are an

all-volunteer organization led by a board of directors, and our work is funded primarily by the annual dues of a growing membership.

The means by which we will endeavor to accomplish the institute's mission include outreach, training, and mentoring programs. In these first two years we concentrated on developing and offering workshops on election laws, campaign management, building relationships as a preparation for political life, public speaking, and coming this September, on fundraising.

As we begin our third year, having put a great deal of start-up work behind us, we are excited that we are now in a position to reach out to you in the community with the message that capable women are necessary to restoring dignity and integrity to the practice of politics. And we are honored that the Pensacola News Journal has partnered with the institute to launch our community outreach effort via this column, which will appear the first Sunday of each month.

Our vision for our region, state, and nation is that women will one day be fully engaged, represented, and respected as an integral part of the political process at every level. When that has happened, little girls will no longer be curious to see a woman running for office. They will grow up taking it for granted.

Diane Mack is president of the Institute for Women in Politics of Northwest Florida and founder of the Women's Civic Forum. She served on the Pensacola City Council from 2009-2010.