

What's Happening

IN CALIFORNIA ?

BY LAWRENCE GABLE

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Sunnyvale Calls for Gun Safety

December 14 was the first anniversary of the killings at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut.

There were remembrances all around the U. S. The people of Sunnyvale did not wait until then to take action though. In November they approved a new gun safety ordinance. It became law on December 6.

Sunnyvale is a city of 146,000 in Silicon Valley. The average income and education level there are high. It has a lower rate of violent crime than most cities its size. If it leads the state in something new, it is likely to be related computers or technology.

One person there wanted his city to respond to Sandy Hook with stricter gun safety laws. He and others made petitions and asked residents to sign them. When they had more than 1,000 signatures, they presented the petitions to Sunnyvale's leaders.

The City Council did not support or oppose a new gun safety ordinance. Instead it decided to let voters decide. It called the proposal Measure C, and it appeared on the ballot in November. Two-thirds of Sunnyvale's residents voted for it. As a result, Sunnyvale now has stricter gun laws than the State of California has.

The ordinance makes three basic requirements of gun owners. One, they must notify the police within 48 hours of the loss or theft of any

gun. Two, they must keep guns locked up when they are not handling them. Three, people may not own ammunition magazines that hold more

than ten rounds. A fourth part of the ordinance requires ammunition sellers to keep buyers' names for two years.

Sunnyvale's voters knew that legal challenges would follow. Indeed, the owner of a gun shop is part of one lawsuit against the City. That suit argues that State law already addresses magazines. A powerful organization, the National Rifle Association, also has filed a suit. It argues that banning large magazines violates Americans' right to self-defense.

The issue of ammunition magazines shows a difference between California's law and Sunnyvale's. In 2000 the state banned the purchase of magazines that hold more than ten rounds. However, people who already owned large magazines can keep them. In Sunnyvale, though, people are not allowed to keep them in the city.

Sandy Hook shocked and changed Americans. In Sunnyvale the people decided that their laws needed to change too. The mayor believes that change can happen

locally, then spread. In fact, other cities already have contacted the mayor for advice. The national discussion about gun safety will not end soon, but Sunnyvale has made its voice heard.



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BIOGRAPHY

SHIKHA HAMILTON

CALIFORNIA CAMPAIGN MANAGER

BRADY CAMPAIGN TO PREVENT GUN VIOLENCE

Shikha Hamilton has been interested in gun safety since 2000. That is when she volunteered to help with a protest called the Million Mom March. She thought she was just going to lick envelopes, but her involvement has gone way beyond that. Now she manages California's 24 chapters of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence.

When she was four years old, Shikha's family moved to California from India. As in many Indian families, education was their top concern. Shikha did great in school, and she also made time for volunteer work. All through high school she worked as a candy striper at a hospital. That began a lifetime of volunteering her time to important causes.

After college Ms. Hamilton attended law school. During two of those three years she volunteered too. She worked on reforming the prison system. For a while she worked as a lawyer in San Francisco, and in 1995 she moved to Detroit, Michigan. There she continued to work as a lawyer. Then a shooting took place that changed her life.

The shooting involved two children. A 6-year-old boy shot and killed a little girl. Ms. Hamilton had heard about other senseless killings before. This one affected her differently though, mostly because her daughter was young then too. That is when she began working for the Million

Mom March. For 13 years after that she volunteered her time to prevent gun violence.

In 2001 that organization joined with the Brady Campaign. Gun safety has become

Ms. Hamilton's cause. She has traveled to various cities, given speeches, held press conferences and been in debates.

In recent years she has led the Brady Campaign chapters in San Mateo County and Santa Clara County. Ms. Hamilton knows that individuals can make a difference, and she saw it happen in Sunnyvale. A member of the Santa Clara County chapter wanted to do something in his hometown. His idea ended up becoming the law that the people of Sunnyvale passed.

Six months ago the Brady Campaign hired Shikha Hamilton. It made her the California Manager for the 24 chapters in the state. On the one-year anniversary of the killings at Sandy Hook, she helped to organize 27 events. She believes that those killings have caused people to think differently about gun safety.

Shikha Hamilton knows that change begins with individuals. They can turn their passions into action, and in the process they can change the world. When that little girl died in 2000, gun safety became her passion. Since then she has been working with others for change. She feels that they are saving lives, and that is more than she ever expected to do.



"I was part of an organization that got a million people to walk out their doors."

Background Information

Sunnyvale's ordinance requires ammunition sellers to keep records that include the buyer's name, address, date of birth, driver's license number and thumbprint.

Owners of magazines that hold more than ten rounds must remove them from Sunnyvale by March 6. They can sell them to a licensed gun dealer in California, or sell them outside California. They also may hand them over to the police, who will destroy the magazines within 90 days.

Sunnyvale's residents may continue to own large magazines, but they may not keep them within the city limits.

A law firm in San Francisco will represent the City of Sunnyvale in the courts for free.

The National Rifle Association's lawsuit names Mayor Tony Spitaleri as one of the defendants.

The former Mayor of New York City, Michael Bloomberg, founded an organization called Mayors Against Illegal Guns. Mayor Spitaleri is one of the organization's 1,000 members. Mr. Bloomberg contributed \$3,000 to the campaign for Measure C.

Each part of Sunnyvale's ordinance resembles bills that failed to become State law in 2013. Senate Bill 108 would have required owners to lock up their firearms whenever they are not home.

All firearms sold in California must have a state-approved safety device such as a trigger lock or cable lock, unless the buyer proves that he or she owns a gun safe.

In 2013 California banned conversion kits that turn regular magazines into high-capacity ones.

In 2014 the State's legislators will consider a bill that requires all buyers of ammunition to pass a background check.

Supervisors in San Francisco have approved a high-capacity magazine ban similar to the one in Sunnyvale. The National Rifle Association is preparing a legal challenge.

In 2005 San Francisco voters banned the manufacture, sale, transfer or distribution of firearms or ammunition, and also banned handgun possession. The National Rifle Association and other groups filed a lawsuit against that ordinance, and a court ruled against the ban.

Topics for Discussion and Writing

Pre-reading:

- Describe what you felt after you heard about the killings at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

Comprehension:

- Identify the four major parts of Sunnyvale's gun safety ordinance.

Beyond the Text:

- Why do you think Sunnyvale continued with Measure C even though it knew that it would face lawsuits?
- Where does an organization like the National Rifle Association get its political power from?
- Do you think a community should be able to make laws that are stricter than the laws in its state?

Vocabulary

Article-specific: anniversary; remembrance; ordinance; petition; proposal; ballot; ammunition magazine; lawsuit; to ban

High-use: to approve; income; rate; technology; to respond; strict; resident; basic; to notify; legal; challenge

Sources

San Jose Mercury News December 18, 10, 2013

Washington Post December 18, 2013

Washington Times December 17, 2013

Contra Costa Times November 3, 2013

City of Sunnyvale www.sunnyvale.ca.gov

Common Core Curricular Standards

Reading — Grades 5–12

- Quote accurately from text
- Cite textual evidence
- Draw inferences
- Determine central ideas
- Analyze structure of text
- Interpret words and phrases