

## **COMMENTARY: Surfer billboard isn't what blights our cities**

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The Kelly Slater mural atop the Spyder Surfboards shop in Hermosa Beach is slated for the wrecking ball, so if you want a look, you'd better hurry.

In the off-chance that you've never heard of Kelly Slater, he's won an unprecedented, and likely never to be repeated, 10 world surfing championships, oh, and welcome to California.

Why can't the mural stay up just a bit longer?

We all recognize the necessity of city codes when it comes to signage and building structures. Dennis Jarvis, the owner of Spyder, gets that. We don't want our cities to become unseemly. I was raised in Hermosa during the Eisenhower administration and it truly was what the word means in Spanish - beautiful.

But as I was driving through the beach cities to see the mural, I began observing the South Bay from a different perspective; had it retained its beauty over the years? Kelly Slater's gotta go - but what about that billboard with the topless blonde wearing the elf's hat? Why does she get to stay? And the other blonde advertising the adult convention seems to have a long-term lease. (Nothing against blonds. Kelly Slater used to be blond).

Driving deeper into Hermosa I came upon a building that was a candy store when I was a kid. A harem of life-size mannequins standing in the huge display window, wearing outfits that would make Victoria's Secret models blush, were making their best efforts to cause an accident. I can't remember if they were north or south of the porn shop. One Manhattan Beach mom told me that when she enters that stretch of Hermosa she takes a detour to keep her young son uncontaminated by the exhibit. But Kelly Slater must go? Are we stepping over dollars to pick up pennies?

I thought I'd comfort myself with a Hot Dog on a Stick at the Del Amo Mall. As I sat in the food court, I noticed another mom and her three small children sitting nearby. Mom was making her best effort to distract her

youngsters from the multiple screens offering family-unfriendly entertainment.

These music videos for public consumption were blasting the patrons with a constant smattering of thrusting, touching and grinding; not to mention the lyrics which, thankfully, I couldn't understand. At the risk of sounding old (though I know it's way too late to worry about that), I couldn't help but think of how they cut off the bottom half of Elvis when he first appeared on The Ed Sullivan Show in order to avoid flaunting his inappropriate gyrations. Elvis would be a choir boy next to these videos.

Speaking of lyrics, I offered to be a volunteer coach in one of our local high schools. After one of our first away games, the ninth-grade girls on our team began commenting on the music the school was playing between sets; they were shocked! The dirtiest words available in the English language were being blasted in the high school gym to keep the teenagers fired up and the crowd entertained. But at least we've managed to remove the Kelly Slater mural.

Before the makers of Christmas movies decided what we really needed were stories of drunken, psycho Santas, Frank Capra made a movie entitled "It's a Wonderful Life." The movie revealed what would happen to a particular city, Bedford Falls, in the absence of one man, George Bailey. George had managed to keep the evil Mr. Potter from ruining the town. But the nonexistence of George had transformed Bedford Falls into Pottersville - a grotesque city lacking values, beauty, order or any genuine love and concern for neighbors. The South Bay is beginning to make Pottersville look like Shangri-la.

The final stage of my odyssey was the Hermosa Beach Community Center on Pacific Coast Highway, twixt the Slater mural and the mannequins. The community center was once the junior high both my sisters attended. Carved into the side of the building are the remains of a lost society; it reads, "Where there is no vision the people perish." That's a quote from the Bible. Imagine that, a passage of Scripture on a public school!

That passage does not mean people must have dreams in order to prosper. In the Hebrew (the original language of the Old Testament) that phrase means "where there are no eyes to see the truth of God's word, the people are consigned to destruction."

We're not living as if there is no George Bailey; we're seeking to live as if there is no God, no Christ, no Bible. And the alternatives are a host of Mr. Potters who haven't the eyes to see, nor the hearts to care, about the societal trash can we seem to be constructing.