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Flag incenses neighbors

Business owner flies upturned American flag to point out nation's distress. Veterans have taken offense to it.

By Alan Blank

Wrapped around a tall, silver pole, the American flag at the Piecemakers craft store in Costa Mesa is partially hidden by trees, but if you looked closely Tuesday you might have noticed it was flying upside down. And it's no mistake, according to the energetic, outspoken 87-year-old founder of the religious sect that operates the store, Marie Kolasinski.

"We're a nation in distress," Kolasinski said, lashing out at the government with profanity-laden diatribes about the disappearance of American values. "We've lost those, so I'll be damned if I fly it now."

Kolasinski's fervent activism and penchant for swearing might not be immediately apparent to someone who walks into her rustic, wood-walled arts and crafts store and meets the short, white-haired grandmother dressed in a black turtle neck with a poinsettia broach.

The gesture has outraged some nearby workers and local residents. One military veteran rode by on a bicycle and stole the flag multiple times — Piecemakers replaced it each time — until he was recently caught by the group, employees said. They did not turn him in to the police, but admonished him.

"He said he was a Christian and a veteran and couldn't abide by the fact that we're flying it upside down," said Piecemaker Kerry Parker. "What's worse: stealing or hanging our flag upside down?"

Longtime Costa Mesan Debra Cohrone, who sat in the waiting room of a chiropractic office that shares a parking lot with the Piecemakers, is incensed by the demonstration. She wore a T-shirt with an American flag printed on the front and said her husband was a veteran.

"I think it's a slap in the face of the American public. If they don't want to fly it correctly, take it down," Cohrone said.

Piecemakers, also known as the Body of Christ Fellowship, has a long history of refusing to comply with government regulations. Kolasinski served jail time early last year when health inspectors attempted to raid her tea room, which she had adamantly refused to let them search.



The fellowship says that God's law supersedes the government's law, and the government should not be allowed to impose regulations on how restaurants serve food.

Many people who live in nearby Mesa Verde and even people who work at businesses in the same complex haven't noticed the flag upside down because it's up high in the trees where one probably wouldn't expect to find something unusual.

Robert Thomas, who works at Pacific Coast Credit Union across the parking lot from Piecemakers, wasn't even aware the store flew a flag, but he was disappointed when he found out it was upside down.

"I don't think it's the right way to display the flag, no matter what the state of the country," he said. "It represents too many things to too many people."

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