

Commas, colons celebrated

BY SHAUNA MCVEY

DOVER - Sunday will be the last “race day” of the weekend for the thousands who crowd Dover.

It’s also another “day.”

But like many misplaced commas and mistaken possessives, National Punctuation Day will go unobserved by the masses.

The founder of the day, Jeff Rubin of Pinole, Calif., is trying to change that.

This “holiday” doesn’t come with perks like greeting cards and gifts, but it does shed light on the often-unnoticed world of punctuation.

It’s even recognized by the ultimate guide to holidays and anniversaries, *Chase’s Calendar of Events*.

Mr. Rubin has made it his mission to educate the public about those little marks that are significant in writing.

“Punctuation is important in helping children learn to read and understand what they read,” he wrote in the summer 2006 edition of his newsletter, *The Write Stuff*.

“Statistics show that students who read well do better in school, get better jobs, earn more money and live more satisfying lives,” he wrote.

Mr. Rubin hopes National Punctuation Day will serve as an excuse for teachers and parents to teach children about the often-neglected subject.

He even created a classroom-friendly program to aid in the learning process.

Mr. Rubin designed Punctuation Playtime to incorporate punctuation into the classroom through interactive performances and activities.

His live appearances are available to elementary school students in California, but teachers across the nation will soon be able to bring the learning fun into their classroom with “Punctuation Playtime in a Box.”

The product, set to be released for the holiday season, will feature a DVD of his presentation, lesson plans, activity kits, posters and much more.

“You get these little kids and introduce these concepts when they’re young,” Mr. Rubin said.

“Maybe when they are adults, they will be able to write a literate sentence.”

With a background in journalism and 25 years as the editor of his own newsletter business, he knows when to use a semicolon instead of a period.

He was born with a rare respect for the written word that evolved into a thriving career, but his talent for proper grammar and punctuation ultimately became a curse.

He used to read the newspaper with red pen in hand and became furious with many of the poorly punctuated e-mails he received.

He once sent a book back to the publisher because he found an error on the first page.

“I wasn’t going to be able to read the book for its enjoyment because there would be so many mistakes,” Mr. Rubin said.

“I reached a point where I saw how poor writing skills were and thought I could help rather than sitting around complaining.”

In 2004, he started National Punctuation Day as his rebuttal to America’s careless attitude.

The celebration date was originally scheduled for Mr. Rubin’s birthday, Aug. 22, but he decided to move it to Sept. 24 so it would fall during the school year.

Mr. Rubin even assembled a Web site to assist anyone who wants learn.

NationalPunctuationDay.com offers mini-lessons, a list of resources and fun products with sayings like “a semicolon is not a surgical procedure,” “a comma is not a state of being” and “It’s not possessive.”

It’s also the place to purchase “Punctuation in a Box.”

Mr. Rubin has been busy spreading the word and has found that he isn’t alone in his battle.

An army of punctuation savvy people has emerged across the country to celebrate National Punctuation Day.

One national bank celebrates an entire week with punctuation contests.

Punctuation trivia contests and “pin the apostrophe on the sentence” contests also have originated.

Still, Mr. Rubin claims that many people view writing skills to be insignificant, especially with new technology.

Modern communication tools, such as text and instant messaging, breed an entire language of odd abbreviations and punctuation errors.

Mr. Rubin said the most common offense is the misused apostrophe.

He says people don’t know the correct way to punctuate or they just don’t care.

“People judge us by the way we present ourselves - how we act, how we look, we speak and how we write,” he wrote in his newsletter.

“Writing well shows your customers and prospects you’re educated, competent and serious about success.”