

# DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

## Letters to The Editor

### Dear School Board Members:

On April 6th Towns County Schools were notified of being one of the worst School Systems in the Nation and they are eligible for millions of dollars in grants and other funds to correct the problem. The catch is you will need to fire the administration and at least half the current staff.

The alternative is to continue raising our taxes to fund a program that is not working and ignore the problem.

A quality school system is vital to the economic health of this community. By allowing our school to fall into the bottom 5% in the Nation you have devalued every piece of property in this county. You have denied every child of a quality education. You are preventing new business from locating here which would provide needed jobs. You are preventing families who work from home through the Internet from locating here who would stabilize our economy which is currently dependent upon tourism alone.

If you are unwilling to make the necessary changes then I would ask you to resign and let someone with the necessary integrity and courage to do the right thing take your place. If you are willing to be part of the solution then I hope everyone in this community stands behind you because of the job you must do. Firing friends and relatives will not be easy but it must be done for the sake of our community and the children who live here.

I call upon Dr. Richard Behrens to resign. Under your watch our School System has failed miserably. To take a line from Ted Turner, We Could Have Finished Last Without You.

**Greg Diehl**  
Parent, Businessman, Taxpayer

### News from the Principal

**Roy Perren**  
Principal  
Towns County High School



Towns County High School was recently identified as being among the "persistently low achieving schools" in Georgia. While I know that we have room for improvement, I have to say that I was baffled as to how we could appear on such a list. I was curious as to what defines a persistently low school. According to the dictionary persistent is defined as existing for a long or longer than usual time or continuously.

The same government agency that has defined our school as persistently low achieving has defined us as a distinguished school the past four years. We have consistently met the requirements as set forth in the Federal No Child Left Behind Law by making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) the past six years. As I researched this I could find only four high schools in the state that have made AYP more consecutive years than we have at Towns County High School. In case you are wondering how many high schools make AYP; last year only 55.8% of Georgia high schools made Adequate Yearly Progress.

Last year Towns County High School had one of the highest graduation rates in the State of Georgia at 95.9%. We were 17th among 348 public high schools in the state last year in graduation rate. The Georgia high school graduation rate for the Class of 2009 was 78.9%.

So how did we get on the low achieving list? Each year our 11th graders take the Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHS GT) in the areas of English, Math, Science, Social Studies, and Writing. In 2009 students had to earn a score of 200 or better to pass the English, Science, and Writing sections of the test and 500 or better to pass the Math and Social Studies sections of the test. Students must pass these tests in order to graduate. While the overwhelming majority of our students pass the test on the first attempt, students who do not pass have several additional opportunities to retake any tests that they have failed in order to pass them before the end of their Senior year.

In 2009, 92% of our students taking the math section of the GHS GT passed the test outright earning a score of 500 or better. For AYP purposes the Federal government requires

that Georgia students earn a score of 516 or better on the math section of the GHS GT. This enhanced score is used to compute AYP results. Our enhanced pass score for the math section of the GHS GT was 67.2% in 2009. In 2009, 17 of our students earned a score better than 500 and less than 516 on the math section of the GHS GT. Three of those students scored 515 and four of the seventeen scored 514. These 17 scores created the difference in our overall pass rate of 92% against the 67.2% enhanced pass rate. While we did offer those 17 students the opportunity to retake the test last summer to go over the 516 mark, not a single one took us up on the offer. Honestly, if I were an 11th grader who had passed the test meeting the graduation requirement, I probably would not have taken the test over again myself.

While our enhanced score pass rate on the math section of the GHS GT dropped from 80.2% in 2008 to 67.2% in 2009, we did still meet the requirements to earn AYP through the confidence interval. Although we still made AYP, the 13% drop in the enhanced pass rate from 2008 to 2009 on the math section of the GHS GT placed us on the list of low achieving schools. This list was used by the Federal Government to offer School Improvement (SI) Grants. The Federal SI Grant that was offered to Towns County High School used the enhanced measure of student achievement in math and English Language Arts to identify possible candidates for the grant. The SI grants looked at increases or decreases in these scores over a three year period of 2007-2009. It did not factor in the actual level of proficiency or whether or not the schools met AYP. In other words, this formula did not look at the higher level of the scores at Towns County even though the school met AYP standards during the three years that were used to compute the SI grant ranking. We are the only Tier II high school on the list that made AYP last year.

We are taking actions to be removed from this list. We offered extensive tutoring to our students to help them be better prepared for not only the math test but for all sections of the GHS GT. We invited the state to do a Georgia Assessment of Performance on School Standards (GAPSS) Review at the same time as we had our

five year Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) Accreditation review. While earning our SACS Accreditation through 2015, we received recommendations that when implemented will serve to make us a better school. Through these series of articles we will keep you updated on our School Improvement Plan and the progress we make. This year's 11th grade class took the GHS GT last month. We should receive those results in late May. Along with our graduation rate, the results of the 2010 GHS GT will determine if we stay on the low achieving list.

I know the label of a "failing" school disturbs our community. I have to admit that I was shaken myself as a result of the news. As a parent with four children in our school system I know that we want better for our children than a failing school. While we are not perfect and there is room for improvement, I hope that you know that we at Towns County High School are dedicated to giving our best to our students.

I can not thank you enough for the outpouring of support we have received for our school since the news became public.

With the exception of seeing the 17 scores between 500 and 515, there is nothing that I have mentioned in this article that is not available for you to look up on the Internet. While I am not proud of being on this list, I am proud of our school and the progress that we have made over the past six years. Test scores are going to fluctuate from year to year. Our small size magnifies the test score fluctuation both to the good and the bad. While I do not agree that one test score should result in us being classified as a failing school, I do promise you that we will work hard to get off this list and to stay off this kind of list in the future. We will redouble our efforts to fulfill our vision of providing the environment and opportunities for our students to be successful in high school and beyond.

**Roy Perren, Principal**  
Towns County High School

## The Middle Path

by Don Perry

Technology can be a blessing or a curse, or both, depending upon how it is applied. The splitting of the atom provided weapons capable of destroying human life, but also tools for preserving and extending life. The age of information provides unprecedented access to knowledge and communication tools, and at the same time it presents the undisciplined mind with a bewildering array of contradictory claims. If you want to learn how global positioning satellites work, a brief search of the Internet will provide you with volumes of information. If you want to believe that the world is flat and surrounded by monsters that guard the boundaries, the Internet will provide you all the information you need to sustain that belief.

One effect of advances in communication technology has been the spread of instant communication around the globe. Cell phones and PDA's, or Personal Digital Assistants, are ubiquitous. Damage from an earthquake in China twenty years ago might have remained a mystery for months, but today such information is available almost instantly despite China's continued secrecy and censorship. Instantaneous information makes it much harder to keep secrets, but it also makes it easier to obscure the truth, like hiding a ping pong ball in a snow bank.

If you want to predict what adults will be doing 10-20 years from now, take a look at what kids are doing today—and it isn't reading printed material. According to a recent survey, if kids are awake, then they are consuming digital media and often from more than one source at a time. In 2009 the average amount of time an

8-18 year old was exposed to media in a 24 hour day was 10 hours and 45 minutes. The average adult spends 8 ½ hours in front of some type of screen every day.

There are other trends that bear watching as well. For most of us a hand written letter bearing the thoughts and feelings of the author in well crafted and grammatically correct phrases is a thing of the past. If we write anything by hand or receive anything hand written it is probably in the form of a "sticky-note." Email long ago surpassed the written letter in frequency of use and quite recently social networking services (like Facebook, with over 100 million users in the US alone) overtook email.

With the advent of "texting" and other mediums which encourage the use of compact and abbreviated sentence fragments, some educators are seeing students who have difficulty communicating complete thoughts or writing essays longer than a paragraph in length.

Can cultural literacy survive a generation with short attention spans that communicates in brief bursts of data gleaned primarily from digital media which has as its primary purpose the goal of marketing to consumers? What good is all of this information without discernment, without time and technique dedicated to reason and assimilation?

Is the brave new world of the information age to be a new generation of consumers more easily controlled by manipulation of desire, programmed from birth against a background of drama and a constant state of emergency maintained by media throughout a lifetime?

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### GUEST COLUMNS

From time to time, people in the community have a grand slant on an issue that would make a great guest editorial. Those who feel they have an issue of great importance should call our editor and talk with him about the idea. Others have a strong opinion after reading one of the many columns that appear throughout the paper. If so, please write. Please remember that publication of submitted editorials is not guaranteed.

**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR SHOULD BE EMAILED OR MAILED TO:** Towns County Herald, Letter to the Editor, PO Box 365, Hiawassee, GA 30546. Our email address: tcherald@brmeme.net. Letters should be limited to 200 words or less, signed, dated and include a phone number for verification purposes. This paper reserves the right to edit letters to conform with Editorial page policy or refuse to print letters deemed pointless, potentially defamatory or in poor taste. Letters should address issues of general interest, such as politics, the community, environment, school issues, etc. Letters opposing the views of previous comments are welcomed; however, letters cannot be directed at, nor name or ridicule previous writers. Letters that recognize good deeds of others will be considered for publication.\*  
*Note: All letters must be signed, and contain the first and last name and phone number for verification.*

### "IT'S ON MY MIND..."

**Danny H. Parris**



### Pretty weather, pollen and pills

The past few days can only be described as gorgeous, beautiful and breath-taking. Spring time is a great illustration that life is a mixture of the good and the bad. This season of the year is truly uplifting with all the beautiful flowers and trees sporting their newest fashions, but all of this new growth produces a yellow, dusty, gritty irritant called pollen. It covers your car, outdoor furniture, porches, decks and yards like a layer of snow. Your hair attracts it. It gets on your clothes. It gets in your eyes, you breathe it through your mouth and nose. As a result you have watery, itchy eyes, a runny, drippy nose; sneezing seizures and coughing. You are not really sick you just feel, well, so unnecessary. Pollen probably won't kill you but it might aggravate you to death. What I don't understand about pollen is the fact that when I was a kid growing up in McCaysville and Copperhill, we never heard of pollen. Of course, we had what was called yellow "flue dust" that polluted the air and killed all the vegetation. When you don't have trees and grass I guess you can't have pollen. Come to think of it though, there was no pollen in the surrounding areas no matter how dense

the vegetation. It seems to me that pollen is mostly a modern thing. Does pollen really originate from trees, flowers, grass, etc? Do you think that it could be a conspiracy of the pharmaceutical companies to sell us pills? You just pay a visit to your local pharmacy and look at the selection of the hundreds of brands of allergy medicines and it makes you wonder—there are pills for every allergy known to man. They come in all sizes, colors and shapes. But my goodness, do you ever read those pages of warning instructions? Do you know that those little colored pills can possibly cause strokes, heart attacks, liver diseases, kidney failure, blindness, deafness, paralysis, nervous breakdowns and a thousand other things? In fact, just reading the warning label could cause you to have a nervous breakdown. I have chosen pollen over pills. I am going to sneeze, cough, blow my nose and wipe my eyes for a few days, no matter how aggravating rather than risk choking to death on a pill or suffering a fatal reaction of some kind. Pollen, like a lot of other things in life is only minor and temporary. It soon runs its course. Sometimes we allow small things to distract us to the point that we fail to enjoy the beauty, the greatness and the glory of God in all of His creation. Summer has its heat. Winter has its snow and ice. Fall has all of those dead leaves. Spring has its pollen. But I thank God for all seasons. Oh, the wonder of it all! Just blow your nose and thank God you're alive!

# Community Calendar

**Towns County Water Board Meeting** 3rd Monday of each month at 6 p.m. in the TC Water Office Building.  
**Mountain Community Seniors** meet the second Thursday of each month at the Senior Center in Hiawassee at 2 p.m.  
**Towns County Democratic Party** meets the 2nd Thursday of every month. Please call Kim Bailey at 706-994-2727 or 706-896-6747 for details.  
**Towns County Republican Party** meets the 1st Tuesday of each month from 5 p.m.-6 p.m. Dinner at Daniels Steak House, 6:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m. meeting, 896-7281.  
**Towns County Planning Commission** is held the 2nd Monday of each month at 7 p.m. in the Courthouse.  
**Towns County Commissioners** meeting is the 3rd Thursday at 5:30 p.m. in the courthouse.  
**School Board Meeting**, 2nd Monday each month at 7 p.m. in the auditorium.  
**Hiawassee City Council** 1st Tuesday of month 4 p.m., at City Hall.  
**Young Harris City Council**, 1st Tuesday of month at 7 p.m., Young Harris City Hall.  
**The Hiawassee River Valley Kennel Club** meetings are held at 7 p.m. the 1st Monday of each month at Brother's Restaurant on Hwy 64 in Murphy, NC. Call President Kit Miracle: 706-492-5253 or Peggy Moorman: 828-835-1082.  
**The Unicorn Masonic Lodge #259** meets on the 2nd Monday of the month at 7:30 p.m.  
**Stephens Lodge #414 F & AM** meets the 1st Thursday of each month at 7:30 PM in Young Harris.  
**Board of Voter Registrars** meets

the 3rd Wednesday of the month at 4:30 p.m., Courthouse.  
**Towns County Board of Elections** holds its monthly meetings on the 2nd Wednesday of each month at 4 p.m. at the Elections Office (Old Rock Jail).  
**Towns County Historical Society** meets the 2nd Monday of each month at the Senior Center in Hiawassee at 5 p.m. Annual dues \$15, PO Box 1182, Hiawassee, GA 706-896-1060, www.townshistory.org  
**Bridge Players** intermediate level meets at 12:45 p.m. on Mondays & Fridays at the Towns County Health Dept. Call Eden at 706-896-6921.  
**Mountain Regional Arts and Crafts Guild, Inc (MRACG)** meets the 2nd Tuesday of each month at ArtWorks Artisan Centre, located at 308 Big Sky Drive (behind the Holiday Inn), Hiawassee. Refreshments at 6 p.m. & the meeting begins at 6:30 p.m. Contact us by calling 706-896-0932, mtnregartsandcraftsguild@hotmail.com.  
**VFW Post #7807 Fish Fry** will be 2nd and 4th Friday of the month, 4:30-7 p.m., \$9 a plate, all you can eat.  
**Mountain Computer User Group** meets the 2nd Monday of each month at the Goolsby Center at YHC. Q & A at 6 p.m., meeting at 7 p.m.  
**FPL Retirees Breakfast** will meet the 2nd Tuesday of each month at the Hole in the Wall Restaurant on the square in Blairsville at 9 a.m.  
**Chattahoochee-Nantahala Chapter, Trout Unlimited** meets 2nd Thursday of each month at Cadence Bank in Blairsville. 5 p.m. Fly Tying - 7 p.m. General Meeting.

Everyone welcome. www.ngatu692.com.  
**Military Officers Association of America (MOAA)** meets the 3rd Monday of each month at various area restaurants. For information call John Quinlan at 706-896-2430 or visit www.moaa.org/chapter/blueridge-mountains.  
**Alcoholics Anonymous:** 24 hour phone line 828-837-4440.  
**Mothers of Preschoolers** meets on the third Thursday of each month at First Baptist Church of Blairsville from 6 - 8 p.m. Call the church office at 706-745-2469 for more information.  
**Chatuge Regional Hospital Auxiliary** on the 3rd Monday of each month, except the months of July, October and December, in the hospital cafeteria at 1:30 p.m.  
**Old Fashioned Square Dance Lessons** each Mon. in Hiawassee, GA, 6 p.m. at the Senior Center (2 blocks south of the town square, beside the Courthouse) Hiawassee, GA 706-896-1060  
**Mountain Magic Table Tennis Club** meets 6 p.m. Thursdays at Pine Log Baptist Church Fellowship Hall in Brasstown. Ping Pong players welcome. Call Lee (828) 389-0924.  
**Mended Hearts Support Group** meets the 2nd Monday of each month at Chatuge Regional Hospital Cafeteria from 5:30-7 PM. For information contact 706-994-6988.  
**We do Family Oral History** of all of our residents. If you have not had your family history recorded ad would like to do so, Please call the Towns County Historical Society at 706-896-1060.



**Towns County Herald**  
Dedicated to the promotion of Towns County

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