

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

Old Man and a Bucket of Shrimp

Every Friday evening, almost without fail, the sun resembling a giant orange ball, dipping into the ocean, old Ed came strolling along the beach to his favorite pier. In his hand was a bucket of shrimp. Ed walks out to the end of the pier, where he almost has the world to himself. Out on the end of the pier, Ed is alone with his thoughts...and his bucket of shrimp.

Shortly, he is no longer alone. From the sky a thousand white dots come screeching and squawking, winging their way toward that lanky frame standing on the pier. Dozens of seagulls have enveloped him, their wings fluttering and flapping wildly. Ed stands there tossing shrimp to the hungry birds. As he does, if you listen closely, you can hear him say with a smile,

“Thank you. Thank you.”

When the bucket is empty, Ed doesn't leave. He stands there lost in thought, as though in another time and place. Turning around toward the beach and home a few of the birds hop along the pier with him until he gets to the stairs, and then they fly away. Old Ed quietly makes his way down to the end of the beach to home.

If you were sitting there on the pier with your fishing line in the water, Ed might seem like ‘a funny old duck’. Or, to onlookers, he's just another old codger, lost in his own weird world, feeding seagulls with a bucket full of shrimp. To the onlooker, rituals can look either very strange or very empty. They can seem altogether unimportant, maybe even nonsensical. Old folks often do strange things. Most of us would probably write Old Ed off, down there in Florida. That's too bad. We'd do well to know him better.

His full name: Eddie Rickenbacker. He was a famous hero in World War I, and was in WWII. On one of his flying missions across the Pacific, he and his seven-member crew went down. All of the men survived, crawled out of their plane, and into a life raft. Captain Rickenbacker and his crew floated for days on the rough waters of the Pacific. They fought the sun. They fought sharks. Most of all, they fought hunger and thirst. By the eighth day their rations ran out. No food. No water. They were hundreds of miles from land and no one knew where they were or even if they were alive. Every day across America millions wondered and prayed that Eddie Rickenbacker might somehow be found alive.

They needed a miracle. That afternoon they had a simple devotional service and prayed for a miracle. They tried to nap. Eddie leaned back and pulled his military cap over his nose... All he could hear was the slap of the water against the raft... suddenly Eddie felt something land on the top of his cap. It was a seagull!

Old Ed would later describe how he sat perfectly still, planning his next move. With a flash of his hand and a squawk from the gull, he managed to grab it and wring its neck. He tore the feathers off, and he and his starving crew made a meal of it - a very slight meal for eight men.

Then they used the intestines for bait. With it, they caught fish, which gave them food and more bait and the cycle continued. With that simple survival technique, they were able to endure the rigors of sea until they were found and rescued after 24 days at sea.

Eddie Rickenbacker lived many years afterwards, never forgetting the sacrifice of that first life-saving seagull... He never stopped saying, ‘Thank you.’ Thus almost every Friday night he would walk to the end of the pier with a bucket full of shrimp and a heart full of gratitude.

And now you know another story about the trials and sacrifices that brave men have endured for your freedom.

Reference: (Max Lucado, “In The Eye of the Storm”, pp...221, 225-226).

Semper Paratus

The Veterans' Corner
Scott Drummond
USCG Veteran



The Wisdom of Letting Go

We hear a lot about the wisdom of letting go. Letting go is often recommended by daytime television hosts and their guests. It's almost a panacea for all the ailments of modern life. There are, of course, many things that should be let go, and some of them the quicker, the better. There is nothing to be gained from holding on to a grudge, a bad relationship or an angry cat. We appreciate the old adage about how holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal and expecting it to burn someone else. We do hold on to our memories, at least the ones that help us. If we are lucky enough to survive into old age with our memories intact, or if we live so long that we have more memories than we have family or friends, we don't just hold those memories, we cling to them like the life preserver they have become. As is the case with so many of the choices that make up our lives, we seek a middle path, and we don't worry too much about popular opinions and catch phrases. We hang on to the memories that help us. We let go of the ones that don't, or that no longer have anything to teach us.

These are the things we think of as we're sorting through the contents of the old family home and preparing for an estate sale. The old house holds many memories, and we're beginning to understand how people can become pack rats when they get a little older. “Things” are just things, granted, but some things preserve memories and focus them. Our parents saved things from their own childhood as well as ours. Old toys, children's books, tools and trinkets, all carefully wrapped and labeled and packed away in the hope, perhaps, that someone some day would unwrap them and remember.

The pocket knife your dad always carried, the one he peeled apples with, and cut walking sticks when he hiked with you in the woods, that knife is more than just a thing. Your mom's sewing kit that she always brought out when she mended your jeans or added a new decoration to your Christmas stocking, is more than just a thing. Even a weathered but sturdy old screen door is more than just a thing when it slams with exactly the same sound as it did when you were in the second grade. It is a time travel device. The perfectly seasoned cast iron skillet your mother never allowed anyone else to clean is more than just a thing. Every time you use it to make cornbread, she's right there with you. (And it's still perfectly seasoned.) Your dad's jacket and hat that have been hanging on the same peg in the basement for decades are more than just things. Every time you go down the stairs and see them out of the corner of your eye, even though he's been gone for many years, it's just like he never left. It's hard to take these things down, to remove them from their accustomed places.

But we do take them down, eventually. We let go of the old to make room for the new. This is a fundamental, and inescapable, feature of this physical reality. But sometimes it seems as if American popular culture encourages us to let go too quickly. We don't remember what happened last year, last week, or even what happened in the last paragraph if it's longer than a text. We tear down our old buildings and cut down our century-old trees. This may prove to be a disadvantage when we have rivals on this small planet who honor their ancestors who lived a thousand years ago and make plans for 200 years into the future. Today, as we visit with the past, we are not overly concerned with what happens 200 years from now, but there is some consolation in knowing that a new family will move into our old house and someone else will hang their hat and jacket on the peg. Someone else will grow up slamming the screen door and filling the house with memories they

will come to cherish one day. Nothing can stop the turning of the circle of life. We hold on as long as we can, until it is time to let go.

The Middle Path

By: Don Perry

Bluebirds

Once referred to as “blue robins” because of their vibrant blue hue and rust colored chest, bluebirds are a desired addition to any homeowner's backyard. Because of numerous challenges, most importantly loss of habitat, these charismatic little birds have been facing a population decline. However, you can promote the presence of bluebirds on your property by crafting houses for them and maintaining a bluebird-friendly habitat.

Bluebirds eat insects such as grasshoppers, crickets and caterpillars, as well as berries during the colder months when insects are not as abundant. They are also cavity dwellers, meaning they normally nest in tree holes. However, as development increases, the number of trees suitable for bluebird nests is rapidly decreasing. Homeowners can help to combat this problem by placing their own bluebird houses. Installing a bluebird house is much more complicated than nailing a birdhouse to a tree, though. In order to ensure that bluebirds will be the one living in the happy little home you provide for them, you need to make sure it is well suited to their needs.

When building the house, use untreated wood that is about one inch thick. Pine, cedar, and cypress are all good choices. If you would like to paint the house, choose a light color as it will reflect the sunlight and prevent the shelter from becoming too hot. Also be sure to provide small ventilation holes at the four corners of the bottom to allow air movement and any accumulated rainwater to escape. Make an entry hole of about one inch but do not provide a perch for the house. Bluebirds do not use perches, so this will only encourage other species to inhabit your houses. Contact our extension office if you would like a publication that includes plans for how to build a bluebird house.

After the house is built, it is important to choose an appropriate place to install it. It is always best to put bluebird houses on their own separate pole about with a conical shield on it to minimize the chances of a predator such as a snake climbing the post. Houses should be placed about six feet above the ground and at least 100 yards apart because bluebirds are very territorial when nesting. The entry should also face southeast to protect the nesting birds from winds. Once nesting and breeding season has ended, it is important to clean out the box to ensure the return of its beloved little blue friends. Bluebirds will not return to a house if they think it is occupied, so in the winter make sure to remove any nests leftover from the previous year.

While the appropriate shelter will encourage bluebirds to come to your yard, providing ample amount of food for them to eat when insects are scarce will help to make sure they stay there and return again to nest the next year. Bluebirds, and most other songbirds for that matter, love any sort of berry bush. Blackberries, blueberries, hackberry and numerous other native shrubs provide food that will keep bluebirds happy and healthy.

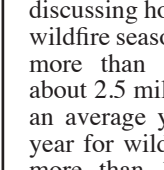
Union and Towns County Extension will be hosting production meetings over the next month. We have our North Georgia Vegetable Production Meeting on February 28th at the Georgia Mountain Research and Education Center from 5 to 8:30 p.m. and the Northeast Georgia Corn Production Meeting March 13th, from 5 to 7:30 p.m. at the Georgia Mountain Research and Education Center. Pesticide credit will be available for license holders, and dinner provided at both of these events, but ONLY to those who pre-register by calling Union County Extension at 706-439-6030 to reserve a plate.

From the Ground Up
Melissa Mattee



There will be fire: Congress fights over how to fund response to wildfires

RC&D
Frank Rixley
Executive Director



Western lawmakers are pushing for Congress to address funding and management challenges at the U.S. Forest Service as the government struggles to respond to an extreme year for wildfires. Democrats and Republicans representing states affected by wildfires say the problem demands the same attention as recent hurricanes, as fires have become larger, more frequent, deadlier, and costlier, forcing the Forest Service to borrow from other government accounts when money runs out. Fixing fire borrowing and providing the Forest Service with the funding it needs to prevent and put out wildfires is a bipartisan idea and has been from the beginning. But lawmakers disagree (imagine that) on how to address the funding problem, with some pushing for any fix to be matched by forest management reforms that they say will address the root causes of fires and prevent them from being started in the first place.

“By returning responsible management practices to our forests, we will improve forest health, reduce escalating suppression costs, and lower the risk of catastrophic wildfire threatening communities and the environment” says Rep. Rob Bishop, Chairman of the House Natural Resource Committee. “Over the long term, new funding without the management component

is futile”. The committee is discussing how to respond to a wildfire season that has burned more than 8 million acres, about 2.5 million more than in an average year. The severe year for wildfires comes after more than 10 million acres burned in 2015, the worst fire season in decades. But this year's fires are different, and more urgent, because fires are increasingly burning close to homes and people as the West becomes more populated. From California to Utah and Montana, thousands of people have been forced to evacuate their homes this fire season. The largest wildfire in Los Angeles history this month forced hundreds of residents to evacuate, with the fire burning more than 5,000 acres. Experts say that the human element is one of a confluence of factors that have increased the cost of firefighting response.

In the past, everybody thought fire was a bad thing, so they put out all these small fires, which built up fuel levels in forests. Throw in climate change, longer fire seasons, and millions of houses being built in the Western landscape, and that has made firefighting more expensive. As costs have risen, Congress has tried for years to fix the funding mechanism for fighting forest fires but has failed to find consensus. This month, legislation will be introduced with four Democratic and four Republican co-sponsors that would allow the Forest Service to use disaster relief funding once the original money dedicated to fighting fires runs out. Under current law, forest fires are not treated the same as other disasters such as hur-

ricanes. That forces the Forest Service to take money from a wildfire season dedicated to preventative maintenance, such as clearing underbrush. In 1995, the Forest Service, which is the largest agency that responds to wildfires, spent about one-sixth of its budget on wildfires. Today, it regularly spends more than half of its \$5 billion annual budget on firefighting. “I will keep pushing Congress to pass the bipartisan bill to end fire borrowing, stop the Forest Service from becoming the ‘Fire Service’ and start treating wildfires like the natural disasters they are,” says Wyden.

But some Republicans won't fix the funding problem without adopting what they call “preventative” reforms. Bishop supports legislation introduced by Rep. Bruce Westerman, R-Ark., that addresses the funding issue, allowing extreme wildfires to qualify for money from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The bill differs from Sen. Ron Wyden's, D-Ore by allowing the Forest Service to thin trees in forests that are 10,000 acres or less without having to go through certain environmental reviews under the National Environmental Policy Act. The Forest Service could then more quickly pursue what are known as “forest management projects,” in which the agency removes dead or dying timber and sell it to mills, and then can use the proceeds to care for the forests and make them more resilient to wildfires. Westerman's bill passed the House Natural Resources Committee in June, and a previous version of it passed the full House with the support of 20 Democrats

CAREER DAY 2018 ...

"I am a nurse, and I help sick people."
"I am an engineer, and I build things."
"I'm a farmer, and I grow food to feed folks."
"I am a politician, and I run for re-election!"

before dying in the Senate. Westerman, a licensed forester who has a master's degree in forestry from Yale University, says his bill will preserve the national forests and treat them as a “treasured resource.” “The proposal we have put out addresses the root problem with forest fires, that we have seen an increase of forest fires as we have a decreased the level of management of federal land,” says Westerman. “There are a lot of benefits that come with healthy forests, and it's really sad we are not managing them better.” “It doesn't matter what you do to reduce paperwork to get things done if you don't fix the budget,” Robert Bonnie said. “If you make investments in restoration now, over the long term, the fire threat will subside because we got ahead of it. It's not that there won't be fire. There will be fire. But you will be able to control it.”

For more information on wildfire funding contact Chestatee-Chattahoochee RC&D, Georgia Forestry Commission, US Forest Service and particularly your Congressman to voice your opinion.

Towns County Community Calendar

	Every Monday:	
Bridge Players	All Saints Lutheran	12:30 pm
Bingo	Brasstown Manor	9:30 am
	Every Tuesday:	
Free GED prep.	Old Rec. Center	4 pm
	Every Wednesday	
SMART Recovery	Red Cross Building	7 pm
	Every Thursday:	
Bridge Players	All Saints Lutheran	12:30 pm
Free GED prep.	Old Rec. Center	4 pm
	Every Friday:	
Alcoholics Anon.	Red Cross Building	7 pm
	Every Sunday:	
Alcoholics Anon.	Red Cross Building	7 pm
	Third Monday of each month:	
Hospital Auxiliary	Cafeteria	1:30 pm
Water Board	Water Office	6 pm
	Third Tuesday of each month:	
YH Plan Comm.	YH City Hall	5 pm
Co. Comm. Mtg	Courthouse	5:30 pm
Humane Shelter Bd.	Blairsville store	5:30 pm
	Third Wednesday of each month:	
Quilting Bee	McConnell Church	10 am
MOAA	Call Jack @ 828-321-2896	
	Third Thursday of each month:	
Friendship Comm.	Clubhouse	6 pm
Republican Party	Civic Center	5:30 pm
Democratic Party	Civic Center	6 pm
	Third Saturday of each month:	
Goldwing Riders	Daniel's Restaurant	11 am
	Fourth Monday of each month:	
Red Cross DAT	1298 Jack Dayton Cir.	5:30 pm
	Fourth Tuesday of each month:	
Lions Club	Daniel's Restaurant	6 pm
	Last Thursday of each month:	
Humane Shelter Bd.	Cadence Bank	5:30 pm

Towns County Herald

Legal Organ of Towns County

Kenneth West Owner/Publisher
Charles Duncan Editor
Shawn Henrikson Copy Editor
Lowell Nicholson Photographer

Derek Richards Advertising Director
Shawn Jarrard Assistant Editor
Lily Avery Staff Writer
Website: townscountyherald.net

Publication No: 635540

Advertising, News deadlines: Friday at 5 p.m.

Towns County (1 Year) \$25. Out of County (1 Year) \$30. Entered as second-class matter on November 8, 1928, at the post office at Hiawassee, Georgia under Act of March 3, 1879. With additional mailing points. The Towns County Herald is not responsible for errors in advertising beyond the cost of the actual space involved. All advertisements are accepted subject to the Publisher's approval of the copy and to the space being available, and the Publisher reserves the right to refuse any advertisement. **Postmaster:** Send change of address to: Towns County Herald, P.O. Box 365, Hiawassee, GA 30546.

Office located at: 518 N. Main St. Suite 7 "The Mall", Hiawassee
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