

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

Partners in the Garden

A garden tells us everything we need to know about what it means to be human. As someone who travels from community to community, I've had the privilege of seeing countless gardens – from makeshift urban rooftop plots to sprawling suburban yards to vast rural homesteads. But it was a conversation with an experienced gardener that opened my eyes to the profound nature of our partnership with the Divine.

Echos from Sinai
"Torah for Everyone"
Rabbi Yonatan Hambourger



"People think gardening is about controlling nature," she told me, gently training a vine along its trellis. "But it's really about partnership. We can't create the seed, can't command it to sprout, can't force it to flower. What we can do is create the conditions for growth." She paused, brushing soil from her well-worn gloves. "We work with what G-d has already set in motion."

This wisdom illuminates one of our tradition's most fundamental teachings: that humans are created in G-d's image. But what does this really mean? Look closely at a garden, and you begin to understand. Like the Master Gardener, we don't create from nothing – we can't. Instead, we're given the extraordinary ability to nurture, shape, and guide what already exists. We can't invent photosynthesis, but we can decide where to plant. We can't manufacture rain, but we can build irrigation systems. We can't design a seed, but we can choose when to sow it.

This is the profound meaning behind G-d's mandate in Genesis to "subdue the earth." According to Rabbi Mendel Schneerson, of blessed memory, this directive isn't about domination but about sacred partnership. When G-d created humans in His image, He wasn't describing our physical form but our potential role: to be conscious partners in the ongoing work of creation.

Consider how a gardener approaches their plot. They must first observe and understand – where does the sun fall? How does water flow? What does the soil need? Then they make choices: which plants will thrive here? How should they be arranged? When should they be pruned? This is precisely how G-d invites us to engage with His world – not as passive inhabitants, but as active participants in its unfolding.

Yet this partnership also teaches us humility. Every gardener knows that despite their best efforts, some seeds won't sprout, some plants will fail, some seasons will disappoint. We can create optimal conditions, but ultimately, growth remains a divine mystery. This tension – between our power to affect change and our inability to control outcomes – defines our role as beings created in G-d's image.

The garden also teaches us about time and patience. No gardener plants a seed expecting immediate results. They understand that growth happens in stages, that fruit comes in its season, that some of their most important work won't be visible for years. When we partner with G-d in tending His world, we must embrace this same perspective – seeing our role not just in the immediate moment, but as part of an unfolding divine plan.

This understanding transforms how we view our place in creation. We are neither powerless observers nor independent actors, but something far more profound: designated caretakers of G-d's garden. Every choice we make – how we treat our bodies, how we use our resources, how we interact with others – becomes an expression of this sacred partnership.

The next time you pass a well-tended garden, observe how it embodies this divine-human collaboration. Notice how human intention works with natural growth, how boundaries guide but don't constrain, how each plant contributes to a greater whole. This is the model for our role in creation: partners with G-d, empowered to act but humbled by mystery, capable of shaping but not controlling, responsible for nurturing what we've been given.

In this garden of existence, we serve as G-d's designated gardeners, entrusted with tending not just our own plot but contributing to the flourishing of all creation. This is what it truly means to be created in G-d's image – to accept the profound responsibility and privilege of partnership with the Divine, while remembering whose garden this ultimately is.

Yonatan Hambourger is a rabbi and writer dedicated to serving spiritual seekers of all backgrounds on behalf of Chabad of Rural Georgia. You can contact him at y@tasteoftorah.org.

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 E-MAILED OR MAILED TO:

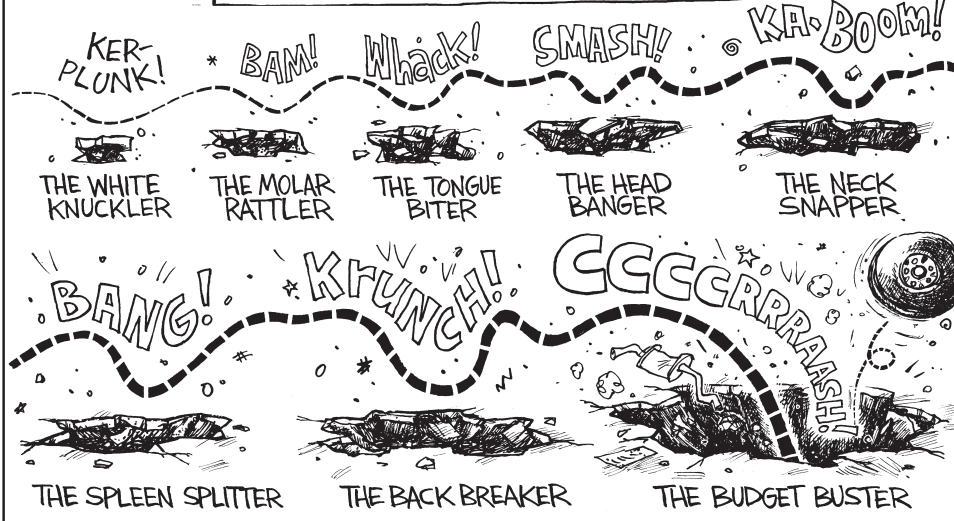
Towns County Herald, Letter to the Editor
P.O. Box 365, Hiawassee, GA 30546
Our email address: tcherald@windstream.net

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.



A FIELD GUIDE TO POTHOLES



Home Cooking / Baseball

My Dad and his brother played baseball during the summer with a bunch of boys from Trapptown. In those days all the little communities had baseball teams which traveled all across Alabama and Tennessee playing baseball against anyone wishing to play. Magical sounding names like Pebble, Dime, Bear Creek, Hackleburgh, Leighton and Russellville all had traveling baseball teams. But, everybody's dream was to play the big boys down in Birmingham. One day, Roy Reeves, the manager of the Trapptown team, announced to his boys, "I have secured a home and home series with the boys in Birmingham."

Around The Farm



Mickey Cummings

The Trapptown Team made the trip to Birmingham to play baseball in front of a crowd of 1,000 spectators, which was more people than most of them had ever saw. Yes, they were nervous, but, they were good players. Dad was playing shortstop. Uncle Bud was playing first base. Harold Cohen was in center field while the Trapp brothers were playing third and catcher. The boys were really good, and the game was a tight one. The score was 1 to 0 in the top of the 5th inning. Dad was at bat and hit a ball over the head of the center fielder. There was no fence and the ball was hit so well that it rolled 150 yards after it hit the ground. As Dad rounded the bases the home plate umpire told him to go back to second base. It seems the hit was ruled a ground rule double because there was no fence and the runner on first was sent back to third. The next batter struck out for the third out and the score remained 1 to 0.

In the bottom of the 6th inning Uncle Bud was batting and hit a line drive that went under third base. While the third baseman from Birmingham was looking for the ball, Uncle Bud ran all the way to third base. Finally, the third baseman found the ball under the base and the umpire ruled the hit as a foul ball. The boys from Trapptown lost that game 1 to 0.

The next game was played in Trapptown. Skeeter Trapp was an old man of 38, but was still able to get a single and make it to first base. He was leading off a little when the pitcher tried to pick him off, and as he tried to get back to first base the young first baseman of Birmingham tried to block the bag. He told the young man not to block the bag because he would get knocked down. The young boy tried to block the bag again after the next pitch. As the elder base runner came back to the bag he lowered his shoulder and knocked the boy off the bag and down into the dirt.

Immediately, the boy's father rushed from the stands and pulled a knife to cut Skeeter. The local deputy sheriff happened to be next door at the country store next to the ball field. He jumped into his car and drove right up to first base. Deputy Looney was not a big man but he meant business. When he got excited and under stress his face would turn red and the pitch of his voice went up an octave or two.

As the police car came to a stop he jumped from the car and with a high-pitched, shrill, and feminine sounding voice asked, "What's the problem here?" The man from Birmingham paid no attention to the high-pitched voice of the deputy as he took another swing at the ball player from Trapptown with the knife, all while cursing the deputy at the same time. The Deputy did not like being cursed, so, he pulled his revolver, cocked the hammer and spun the man around. Looney placed the barrel on the end of the man's nose and told him to put the knife down. The man looked at the business end of a .38 revolver and the strength in his knees left him. He just passed out right there on first base.

The boys from Trapptown won that game 7 to 0 without any home cooking from the bunch out of Birmingham.

Towns County Community Calendar

First Monday of each month:	School Board... HS/MS Media Center	6:45 pm
Every Tuesday:	Storytime for Children... TC Library	10:30 am
First Tuesday of each month:	Hiaw. City Council... City Hall	6 pm
	YH City Council... YH City Hall	6:30 pm
Second Wednesday of each month:	Board of Elections... Elections Office	4 pm
Third Monday of each month:	Planning Commission... Temporary Courthouse	6 pm
Third Tuesday of each month:	Commissioner's Mtg... Courthouse	5:30 pm
	City of Young Harris Planning Commission...	
	Meeting Room in City Hall	5 pm
	TC Water Authority Board Meeting	6 pm

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Volunteer Appreciation Week

This week is Volunteer Appreciation Week. Volunteerism is an important part of our society, as many organizations would not be able to operate without volunteers. Extension is no exception to that. Between Towns and Union Extension we have over 90 volunteers who give their time to serve their community. Our volunteers are either Master Gardeners or 4-H volunteers. Each year these volunteers contribute over 13,000 hours of time to make their community a better place in a variety of ways. I don't have the space here to go through all the names of our fantastic volunteers and the ways that they make our community better, but I will highlight a few of the ways that they have served over the past year.

UGA extension
Watching and Working
Jacob Williams



Master Gardeners work on over 30 projects between Union and Towns counties. Their projects have a focus on educating the public about gardening and making our community a more beautiful place. A project that you may be familiar with is the Ask a Master Gardener Booth at the Union County Farmers Market. Every Saturday during the season the public can stop by and ask gardening questions of trained Master Gardeners. They also support and host events for the public like educational seminars, Arbor Day, and United Community Bank Customer Appreciation Day (Tomato Day). Master Gardeners support a number of demonstration gardens like the libraries in Blairsville, Young Harris, and Hiawassee, Market Garden, Ethnobotanical Garden at GMREC, Cupid Falls Park, Vogel State Park, the Hiawassee Square, Beasley Knob, Lloyd's Landing, USFS Pollinator Garden, and more.

4-H volunteers support the youth of Towns and Union in a number of ways. Some volunteers spend a week at camp during the summer making sure that youth have a blast and stay safe. Others are coaches for our shooting sports teams, hosting practices and taking kids to competitions. Last year one of the Union county shotgun teams won State, and the Union county BB team went to Nationals. Some volunteers help with summer events where 4-Hers get outside and learn about the natural resources around them. We also have a number of volunteers who assist with public speaking and 4-H dances that are beloved by many current and former 4-Hers.

I want to say a big THANK YOU to all of our volunteers. They make the community in a great place to live by making it more beautiful, educating the public on gardening, and investing in the next generation to be leaders in our community. The volunteer hours that they provide across both counties is valued at nearly \$400,000 a year. The work that Extension does is taxpayer funded, therefore, our volunteers also make Extension a great return on investment for everyone by acting as a force multiplier for the work that we do.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer contact your County Extension office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu. You can also contact the 4-H program leaders for Union and Towns by emailing Katherine.Hayes@uga.edu (Union) and Kerri.Bradshaw@uga.edu (Towns). Our volunteers work with youth, which is a responsibility that we take very seriously. All volunteers must sign a code of conduct, go through background screening, and a reference check before they are cleared to volunteer.

Ticket To The Stars

The Farmer's Almanac I buy every December has not been opened since, and I'll admit there's nothing in that book I couldn't find faster on my phone. But there it sits with its planting guides and planetary positions, short stories and anecdotes, a decorative but dusty bit of nostalgia.

My grandfather would chuckle when people spoke of planting on the moon and go on to say that he preferred to plant his crops in the ground. Some people swear planting by the signs makes all the difference, and I don't know that they're wrong, but as a planter with a full-time job away from the farm, I know his comment acknowledged the expedience and pragmatism of farm life. You plant when you have the time, when the weather allows, when any one of a hundred other chores isn't demanding immediate attention.

The memory of his comments came to me as I glanced at the recent celebrity space hop on Blue Origin's New Shepard spacecraft. It was a quintessential example of the disconnect between "the stars," the contrived ones, not the ones space flight is attempting to reach—and the rest of humanity grounded in the day-to-day concerns of survival.

If space flight was a rodeo to raise awareness of women leading us into a hopeful future, this one was all hat and no horse. The passengers barely broke the Kármán line (the internationally recognized boundary of space); something the X-15 did numerous times beginning in 1963. No, Katy, you're not an astronaut.

Indeed, much of the response to the event has been negative, aside from the usual display of celebrities talking amongst themselves about each other. Studies suggest that skepticism toward celebrity culture is growing among the general public. The spell has been broken, particularly as more famous names run their brands aground on the rocky shores of politics.

Overlooked by the self-replicating autophagic echo chamber that never stops talking, there were, in fact, two accomplished women on the flight who are more than worthy of mention. Amanda Nguyen is a bioastronautics research scientist who has worked on space medicine and astronaut health. Aisha Bowe is a former NASA rocket scientist and aerospace engineer. You can probably guess which of the six women on the flight I would prefer my own daughter to consider when mapping her future.

Our ticket to the stars will not be achieved by people wearing form-fitting outfits designed by Monse. An opportunity was overlooked in the infotainment reaction to the New Shepard flight. We stared straight through it without noticing. A profound and definitive message of hope could have been achieved by focusing on the women who helped build the science and technology which made that flight possible. Or how about an all-female crew additionally composed of mothers, teachers, nurses, public servants, and other women filling the host of essential roles necessary for maintaining the foundations of our society? Unfortunately, only celebrities and CEOs can afford the fare, and where is the hope in that?

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