

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

# OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

## US Coast Guard busy always

Bad guys think we're busy with only hurricane relief -- not! Submitted by former Coasty, Ron Willis, aware that our USCG does every mission imaginable, including those that most folks will never know of. Ron is also well aware that the Dili is one of my former "homes". Yes, the Diligence is that old! But still performing better than I can.

**The Veterans' Corner**  
 Scott Drummond  
 USCG Veteran



Coast Guard offloads more than \$50 million worth of cocaine.

A Coast Guard Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron MH-65 Dolphin helicopter crew and a small boat crew from the Coast Guard Cutter Tahoma arrive to a 226-foot tanker in the Caribbean in August, 2017. Coast Guard law enforcement officers seized 60 bales of contraband from the tanker, which later tested positive for cocaine. Lifejackets and cuffs are shown on the ground after suspected drug smugglers were transferred from the Coast Guard Cutter Diligence to law enforcement officials in St. Petersburg, Florida, Sept. 17, 2017. Diligence crewmembers offloaded more than 1,800 kilograms of cocaine after the Coast Guard Cutter Tahoma interdicted the contraband in the Caribbean in August.

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Coast Guard Cutter Diligence crewmembers offloaded approximately 1,800 kilograms of cocaine worth an estimated wholesale value of more than \$50 million in St. Petersburg, Saturday.

The offload is a result of a drug interdiction in the Caribbean by Coast Guard Cutter Tahoma crewmembers in August.

While on routine patrol, Tahoma crewmembers detected and intercepted a 226-foot tanker suspected of smuggling contraband. The Tahoma crew launched a Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron MH-65 Dolphin helicopter and small boat to the tanker. Coast Guard law enforcement officers seized 60 bales of contraband, which later tested positive for cocaine.

The tanker, contraband and suspected smugglers were turned over to federal law enforcement officials in St. Petersburg.

"This offload sends a direct message to those that seek to exploit a disaster to smuggle contraband at sea, that our operations continue to support border and national security," said Rear Adm. Peter Brown, commander of the Coast Guard's 7th District. "While we continue to support hurricane response efforts, our interagency partners at the Department of Homeland Security and Department of Justice remain focused and committed to dismantling these criminal organizations."

The Coast Guard increased U.S. and allied presence in the Eastern Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Basin, which are known drug transit zones off of Central and South America, as part of the Western Hemisphere Strategy. During at-sea interdictions in international waters, a suspected vessel is initially located and tracked by allied military or law enforcement personnel. The interdictions, including the actual boardings, are led and conducted by U.S. Coast Guardsmen. The law enforcement phase of counter smuggling operations in the Caribbean Sea are conducted under the authority of the 7th Coast Guard District headquartered in Miami, Fla.

The cutter Diligence is a 210-foot Medium Endurance cutter homeported in Wilmington, NC.

The cutter Tahoma is a 270-foot Medium Endurance cutter homeported in Kittery, ME.

The Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron MH-65 Dolphin helicopter crew is based in Jacksonville, FL.

*Semper Paratus*

## Quality Costs More if you can find it

Yesterday I threw away an unrepairable pressure washer which stopped working after only half a dozen uses. The electric motor burned out. (A replacement motor, had I been willing to wait 4-6 weeks for delivery, would have cost almost as much as the original washer.) Of course, the warranty had expired.

It was a moderately priced unit purchased at Sears. After each use it was drained and stored inside. A similar unit purchased at Sears by my dad almost 15 years ago is still functioning after scores of uses.

We have discussed before the decline of "quality" in our civilization. This is not the conclusion of a scientific study, but it is a growing opinion among those of us who have purchased junk in the last few years. A friend who is a contractor recently observed that what was once considered "contractor grade" material is now priced as premium, and premium quality material is almost impossible to find. (He searches salvage stores and estate sales to find quality in items made decades ago.) This may be another consequence of the steep decline in the purchasing power of the dollar, but that's a discussion of "quality" for another time.

Since beginning this discussion, the new Briggs and Stratton pressure washer we ordered was delivered. It was American made, supposedly in Milwaukee, WI. It looks like a tool, with metal parts and heavy duty connectors, while the one it replaced looked more like a toy. It took a lot more devalued dollars to purchase this unit than the discarded toy.

Appearances are deceiving. We found two loose screws in the box which did not fit anything we could find on the pressure washer. Too bad they didn't fit the pump, which was missing two screws and hanging loose on top of the unit.

At the top of the warranty it says, "Do not return this unit to the store." So we called Briggs and Stratton's toll free number. We were on hold about 45 minutes. The customer service representative was very nice and seemed to have a sincere desire to help us, but she had a limited command of the English language and a heavy accent which made communication very difficult. Eventually I was given to understand that Briggs and Stratton was kindly offering, not to replace the unit, but to give me the opportunity to drive the washer 30 miles to the nearest authorized repair shop.

The lighting fixtures we bought at Home Depot two years ago are already rusting. The Lenovo computer a friend purchased less than a month ago turned into a brick. The new door we purchased, which cost more than my first car, came with pre-installed scratches.

Just a small window into the state of modern business practice, where much study and expense has gone into being able to get and keep our money, with less emphasis on quality and pride of workmanship.

I have long believed that one of the secrets to success in criminal investigations is networking and sharing information with other law enforcement agencies. In 2007, after being elected Sheriff of Towns County, I became a member of the Appalachian Drug Task Force. At that time we had four sheriff's offices in the task force. In 2012, the other board members saw fit to ask me to serve as Vice Chairman of the Board. Around that same time one of the four sheriffs decided to pull out of the task force, leaving only three sheriffs involved. Many tried to pressure me to pull out of the "drug task force" calling it a waste of time. I did not believe this to be true and still do not.

After our board members voted to become a regional drug enforcement office serving North Georgia the name was changed to the Appalachian Regional Drug Enforcement Office (ARDEO). By this time, Banks County Sheriff's Office had joined us and we were back to four. As it stands today, we have grown to include Towns County Sheriff's Office, White County Sheriff's Office, Lumpkin County Sheriff's Office, Banks County Sheriff's Office, Habersham County Sheriff's Office, Stephens County Sheriff's Office, Rabun County Sheriff's Office and Franklin County Sheriff's Office, along with the Cleveland Police Department, Lavonia Police Department, the Georgia National Guard Counter Drug Task Force, the Department of Public Safety, and the Georgia Bureau of Investigation.

That is a lot of agencies, sharing a lot of criminal intelligence. But, has it been effective? By 2016, the ARDEO had made seizures of more than \$36,000,000. ARDEO is one of three Regional Drug Enforcement Offices in the State of Georgia. The other two are the West Metro (Atlanta area) and Savannah, Chatham County. As large as those areas are, the ARDEO has kept pace and, in some areas, surpassed the standard set by the other two.

A recent weekend was no exception. The following information was provided originally by Georgia Bureau of Investigation Special Agent in Charge Mitchell Posey, who supervises our drug agents. On Friday, September 15, 2017, the Appalachian Regional Drug Enforcement Office and the FBI's North Georgia Major Offender Squad disrupted a methamphetamine trafficking

**The Middle Path**  
 By: Don Perry

ring in North Georgia. A traffic stop of Angel Luis Rivera-Santiago and Victor Rafael Aponte yielded the seizure of 15 kilograms of methamphetamine. During the subsequent investigation, Lumpkin County Sheriff's Office and FBI Agents executed a search warrant at 990 Flanders Road, Dahlonega, GA. Valentine Duarte-Vejar ran from this residence, but was captured in the possession of a handgun. This search warrant yielded a few grams of cocaine and \$166,000. Agents continued to follow investigative leads until a conversion lab was located at 843 Cooper's Creek Road, Suches, Union County, GA. A conversion lab is used to convert liquid methamphetamine to its crystal form. Agents located a handgun and 15 kilograms of crystal methamphetamine at the lab. ARDEO Agents processed approximately 300 pounds of environmental waste largely containing methamphetamine oil. Agents on scene estimated this lab was capable of producing a minimum of 25-50 kilograms of crystal methamphetamine at a time. This short but effective investigation was a federal, state, and local partnership that disrupted and dismantled a drug distribution network's attempt to flood our communities with this destructive drug for their own financial gain. The street value of the 30 kilograms of crystal methamphetamine is \$3,234,000.

Five arrests were made. These five men were transported to the Lumpkin County Detention Center. The immigration status of these men is still pending. This investigation continues.

None of this would have been possible without the combined efforts and partnerships developed. I think we are on the right track in keeping our community safe from the dangerous criminals and the poison they pedal. If you have information regarding criminal behavior, please do not hesitate to contact your sheriff's office at 706-896-4444 or in an emergency dial 911.

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## Firewise Practices

With all the news of fires in the Northwest, I'm sure we're all reminded of the horrible wildfires we faced last year. While we have had much more rain this year, wildfires are natural parts of the Appalachian ecosystem so we are always at risk. It is important to always make sure your home is as protected from fire as possible, because it could take minutes for a home to be ruined.

Always ensure that a thirty foot perimeter around your house is cleared of any excess vegetation. This critical area is known as the "home defensible zone" and needs to have little flammable material as possible. If you have any outbuildings such as sheds, garages or guest houses, this perimeter extends to them as well.

Plants are obviously some of the most flammable things homeowners can have in this zone, but responsible landscaping can reduce the risk. Keep plants such as bushes and trees appropriately pruned and prevent them from becoming overgrown and too close to the house and roof.

When you do prune, remove all trimmings, and rake away any leaf litter. This is especially important around evergreens such as Leyland cypress and arborvitae because they drop large amounts of needles throughout the year that are highly flammable when dry.

If you are landscaping, opt for stone and brick materials as opposed to wooden rail ties or other flammable materials. Also, though it may be convenient to have your firewood pile right next to the back door, especially on cold nights, it's incredibly dangerous to have such a flammable area near your home. All firewood piles should be placed outside of the defensible zone and far away from any propane tanks, which should also have a ten foot perimeter cleared around them maintained with gravel when possible.

Though many of us strive to keep the natural forest areas around our home, forested areas on our properties still require some maintenance. Be aware of the vertical arrangement of vegetation. This means take down any vines, dead trees that have fallen against live trees, and shrubby weeds that grow around trunks. These cause what are known as "fire ladders," which allow fire to spread along the ground and up trees that would otherwise have not caught if the ground were cleared.

It is equally important to make sure that your house itself is as fireproof as possible, which can be done with some easy modifications if you are in the process of updating your home. Residing your home with brick or stone and re-roofing with class A shingles or other non-flammable material can make your home incredibly fire-resistant.

Also, make sure your fireplace as an effective spark arrestor and have your chimney inspected and cleaned annually to remove buildup and check for cracks. Always make sure to clean gutters and roofs to reduce the amount of flammable leaf litter that could catch fire.

Finally, be sure to clear any vegetation that could be obstructing your mailbox or other surface that shows your house number, and keep your driveway clear of low-hanging branches. Firefighters can't help if they can't find reach your house!

Union and Towns County Extension will be holding a Pesticide Safety Course on Wednesday, October 11th from 9:30am to 2:30pm at the Union County Extension Office. Private applicators will receive 2 credit hours, and commercial applicators will receive 4 credits in any one category. There will be a \$40 registration fee to cover costs of speakers. Please RSVP to the Union County Extension Office by 5pm Monday, October 9th to secure your spot.



| Towns County Community Calendar |                                       |                               |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Bridge Players                  | <b>Every Monday:</b>                  | All Saints Lutheran 12:30 pm  |
| Bingo                           |                                       | Brasstown Manor 9:30 am       |
| Free GED prep.                  | <b>Every Tuesday:</b>                 | Old Rec. Center 4 pm          |
| SMART Recovery                  | <b>Every Wednesday</b>                | Red Cross Building 7 pm       |
| Bridge Players                  | <b>Every Thursday:</b>                | All Saints Lutheran 12:30 pm  |
| Free GED prep.                  |                                       | Old Rec. Center 4 pm          |
| Alcoholics Anon.                | <b>Every Friday:</b>                  | Red Cross Building 7 pm       |
| Alcoholics Anon.                | <b>Every Sunday:</b>                  | Red Cross Building 7 pm       |
| Mtn. Amat. Radio                | <b>First Monday of each month:</b>    | 1298 Jack Dayton Cir. 6:30 pm |
| Alzheimer's Supp.               | <b>First Tuesday of each month:</b>   | McConnell Church 1:30 pm      |
| American Legion                 |                                       | VFW Post 7807 4 pm            |
| Hiaw. City Council              |                                       | City Hall 6 pm                |
| Young Harris Coun.              |                                       | YH City Hall 7 pm             |
| Quilting Bee                    | <b>First Wednesday of each month:</b> | McConnell Church 10 am        |
| Stephens Lodge                  | <b>First Thursday of each month:</b>  | Lodge Hall 7:30 pm            |
| Red Cross DAT                   | <b>Fourth Monday of each month:</b>   | 1298 Jack Dayton Cir. 5:30 pm |
| Lions Club                      | <b>Fourth Tuesday of each month:</b>  | Daniel's Restaurant 6 pm      |
| Republican Party                | <b>Fourth Thursday of each month:</b> | New Senior Ctr. 6:30 pm       |
| Humane Shelter Bd.              | <b>Last Thursday of each month:</b>   | Cadence Bank 5:30 pm          |

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## Towns County Herald

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## Letters to The Editor

### What Are We Doing To Our Earth?

Dear Editor,  
 I would like to thank Mr. DiChiara for his thoughtful editorial about hurricanes, average global temperatures, and climate change. However, I deal in science and facts, and we must look carefully at those facts and what they are telling us. The last 3 years have been progressively the hottest 3 years on record, and yes the temperatures are gradually increasing, according to all scientific reports. CO2 levels have increased by about 43% since the industrial revolution, and it is the % increase that is important. Yes, we are gradually cooking our earth. It is a scientific fact that hurricanes are stronger with increasing temperatures, and are more dangerous as the amount of moisture in the air increases with increasing temperatures. Warm air holds more moisture.

Hurricanes Irma and Jose both had winds greater than 150 MPH. This was the first time in recorded history that 2 Atlantic hurricanes have packed that much strength at the same time. Houston has had three 500 year floods over the last 3 years. Records show that sea levels are rising progressively faster as glaciers melt, and world wide we have had a progressive increase in natural disasters from wildfires, extreme precipitation events, extreme temperatures, droughts, and tropical storms. The devastation from Irma and Jose have been catastrophic, and what price can you put on the untold human suffering? Expert scientific consensus tells us that all this will get progressively worse as temperatures steadily increase from our burning of fossil fuels.

It is truly a moral decision that we must make to convert to clean energy sources as quickly as possible. Plans such as the conservative, market based carbon fee and dividend plan as proposed by Republicans George Shultz, Jim Baker, and Henry Paulson can help to combat climate change as well as grow our economy. We do not have to choose between our economy and clean energy, for investing in clean energy actually grows our economy.

It is the future of my children and yours that is at stake. And what if the experts are wrong, and climate change is not real? Then we will be stuck with a cleaner, healthier, more prosperous America. I personally don't think that would be too bad!

Vernon Dixon, MD

### Fanning The Flames

Dear Editor,  
 Concerning recent letters from Mr. Jobson concerning reparations for minorities, I just have to say this whole business of reparations is nothing more than an effort by the Far Left to keep fanning the flames of racial discord. The Far Left benefits from this discord by enjoying undeserved support from minority communities.

I have never owned slaves nor have any of my ancestors in this country. I think the vast majority of people in this country fall into that same category. Today it's the Far Left that is holding minorities back by denying educational choice to poor people and promoting programs that lead to slow economic growth. Shame on Mr. Jobson and his Alt Left friends.

Jim Soltys