

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

Letters to The Editor

Dear Editor:
To: Towns County Deputies, EMS, First Responders, Red Cross and all volunteers

Thank you so much for the rescue and evacuation of residents of Enchanted Valley. My friend and I had to be carried out to safety due to rapidly rising water which was not there earlier that night.

The shelter provided by the Red Cross at the new Rec Center was very nice, along with the care packets with sweet pictures drawn by children.

We later transferred to the Holiday Inn Express which was so nice. It was good to have a good comfortable bed and shower and put my care packet to use! We enjoyed a wonderful breakfast the next morning also.

Again, thanks for all your services provided. You do not get enough recognition!

Sincerely,
Elizabeth (Betty) Woodall

It's time to get the incentives right on wildfires

Every year we hear about the devastating effects of wildfires, with lives risked and millions of dollars spent defending homes. But something is different this time.

People are now asking: Why do we keep building houses in fire-prone areas? A fire marshal in a Wyoming resort community, thinking about the safety of her firefighters, refers to these places as "suicide subdivisions."

Defending homes can lead to tragedy. Firefighter fatalities have doubled in the last 30 years, and in 2013 19 hotshots died defending an Arizona town that had done little to prepare for the inevitability of wildfires. The town had been evacuated, yet the crew was sent in anyway. As a parent of one of the firefighters said, "Brave men died defending empty structures". The cost trends around wildfire also are troublesome. Since 1990, the number of homes destroyed has tripled. Yet in the last 30 years, 60 percent of new homes in the U.S. were built in the Wildland-urban interface (WUI), the private land next to public forests. Federal firefighting costs average \$3 billion annually; also triple the amount from a decade ago. Research indicates that at least one-third and up to 95 percent of the firefighting bill goes to defend private homes.

In some fires in the Sierra Nevada, agencies can spend \$200,000 to \$400,000 per home. An example of the high costs is the recent King fire, which destroyed 12 homes and burned almost 98,000 acres, and cost more than \$53 million to fight. Half of the Forest Service's budget today is taken over by fire suppression, so fewer dollars are available for things the public enjoys, like campgrounds and hiking trails. Perversely, the agency also "borrows" money internally from funds designated to reduce future fire risks such as fuel reduction. One logical step is to treat wildfires like other natural disasters and fund them through FEMA. This will eliminate "fire borrowing," but we are waiting for Congress to act. Other efforts like voluntary programs to increase the survivability of homes and selective clearing of fuels through prescribed burning or logging, are important, yet not enough, as the trends keep worsening. What has not yet been tried is altering the pattern of future home development on fire-prone lands. The key is to get the incentives right. Currently, local governments benefit from a federal government subsidy that pays the bulk of firefighting costs and underwrites risky

Executive Director of RC&D



and expensive developments. Passing on more costs to local governments – where home building is permitted – would incentivize better planning. A portion of the Forest Service's \$2.2 billion fire budget – say 1 percent or \$22 million – could be directed to communities to facilitate land-use planning. Taking a lesson from flood-plain management, a community rating system could direct more assistance to communities that help themselves through some type of zoning (if the local government has zoning); transferable development rights programs, incentives for cluster development, open-space programs and other planning tools. In limited cases, it may be cheaper to buy the land instead of fighting successive years of wildfires. Public land managers also could be required to alert local governments about proposed new developments that would be at high risk from wildfires. And we must map fire risk to alert would-be homeowners of dangers before they commit to living in a tinderbox. Building homes with the Forest Service as a backyard always will be dangerous. We can manage wildfire to an extent, but need to learn to better live with fire which means we must alter the pace, scale and pattern of future development. For this task, nothing works as well as giving people incentives – negative consequences for decisions that increase risk, and positive rewards for decisions that reduce risk. The good news is that most carrot-and-stick approaches can be applied today, without having to wait for Congress. Those of you that think it won't happen here, check out what happened in White County Georgia last week, a careless cigarette dropped in leaves around a "non-Firewise" house. It wasn't hundreds of homes lost, just one damaged and was "two minutes from disaster" according to the chief, but for those people who almost lost their home it could have been a tragedy just the same.

For more information on wildfire education programs such as Firewise, Ready-Set-Go or Fire Adapted Communities, contact Frank Riley, Executive Director, Chestatee/Chattahoochee RC&D council at frank.crcd@gmail.com.

The Middle Path

by Don Perry

I'm not a republican or a democat. I'm not a big fan of the current president, or of the several who came before him. I'm very much opposed to the ever increasing coercive powers of government, particularly of the executive branch. However...

The gun debate has gone off the rails, driven again by the same tired old conservative vs. liberal bias. But as a card carrying conservative liberative, I do not have a problem with the idea of background checks for weapons purchases. In fact, I'm not entirely comfortable with supposedly sane people owning weapons without some form of training. Crazy people, and stupid people, should not be allowed to own assault rifles. The thought of the people that I see at Walmart being allowed to carry concealed weapons, or to own any kind of weapon (including an automobile) is frightening. It occurs to me that since the mandatory and privacy-invasive process of licensing and insuring an automobile does not prevent stupid people from driving, I don't see much hope that background checks for guns will result in fewer stupid people owning them, but we can at least take some steps to make it less likely that someone can leave the mental ward and head down to the gun show to pick up a few thousand rounds.

The numbers clearly show that there is not, in fact, an "epidemic" of gun violence in America. (There is, however, an epidemic of media hype around gun violence.) Even President Obama in a recent "town hall" meeting conceded that violent crime is decreasing in America, but he went on to say that, as in automobile safety, we should strive to continue to improve. I agree. But I think that what some of my conservative friends realize, and this realization drives their objection to Obama's recent executive actions, is that these actions are part of an overall pattern and philosophy which is in line with increasing the coercive powers of government.

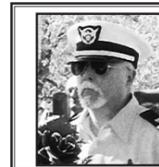
It's all about data. The intent of our modern oligarchy is to achieve total information awareness through the monitoring of all of our actions, personal, social and financial. The corporation wants to profile us to increase profits, and the social engineer or the community organizer who knows what is best for us, wants to control us for our own good. Conservatives understand this on a visceral level.

As for my liberal friends, you are of course free to choose how to best defend your own life, but I think you need to refrain from judging your conservative neighbors who choose to exercise their Second Amendment rights. I wish we lived in a world that reflected your best ideals. We do not, and we are a long way from that world. The fact is, you have inherited the right to work for that world, and to voice your opinions with no fear of retaliation, from people who carried guns. Many died to preserve these rights.

Conservatives and liberals alike abhor violence, but it's too easy to talk like St. Francis of Assisi if you can pick and choose how closely to follow his philosophy. I've heard some of you say that you could never kill anything. That is an admirable notion, but something died for that hamburger on your plate and for the leather in your shoes, even for the lettuce on your veggie burger, because plants have awareness too. Someone died for the petroleum used to make your charge card. The point is, life depends on, and feeds on, life. That is an inescapable fact, and that means that sometimes in order to preserve your own life of the life of someone you love, you either have to defend it yourself, or allow someone else to do so.

Another inescapable fact is that there are monsters among us, and people who make monstrous choices. My liberal friends make a good point when they say that we are all capable of those choices, and that by making weapons readily available we run the risk of increasing the damage that can be done when Jekyll turns to Hyde. I've seen numbers that support both sides of that argument, but I personally believe that the right of millions of people to protect themselves and their families supersedes the possible consequences of the occasional abuse of that right. By the same token, the criminal justice system sometimes allows the guilty to go free in order to protect the rights of the vast majority from injustice in the courts.

Ultimately I think that the argument over gun control is being manipulated for its divisiveness, just like our other habitual arguments that are taken down from the shelf and dusted off in an election year. These arguments distract us from more serious issues, including primarily the death and destruction caused by the expansion and defense of the financial empires that are digesting and poisoning the planet and creating refugees, desperate people and enemies. While we argue about gun control, birth control and even the control of the discourse we have to understand one another, the blood and treasure of our nation is being spent to extract the wealth of other nations at the point of a gun. That is the gun which we need to control above all others.



The Veterans' Corner

By
Scott Drummond,
USCG Veteran

USCG daring rescue

18 February 1952, 64 years ago, marks a most famous day in USCG history, often referred to as our USCG's "most daring rescue". Any rescue can be transformed into a "daring" and/or extremely dangerous event; no matter how routine or mundane it begins, when Murphy decides to intervene with one of his unexpected laws. This rescue began with all of Murphy's Laws fully operational! Ergo, a mission impossible rescue that by the numbers couldn't be successful.

Nevertheless, those gritty, brave, dedicated and, no doubt scared Coasties on that day volunteered for what appeared to be a certain "suicide mission" in their small (36') wooden lifeboat in order to rescue 84 men who would have and most likely should have perished in the 80 foot seas off the coast of Cape Cod, Massachusetts.

Petty Officer 1st Class Bernie Webber, Petty Officer 2nd Class Andy Fitzgerald, Seaman Ervin Maske and Seaman Richard Lively were ordered out to sea in not much more than a dingy, in the middle of a Nor'easter, a blinding blizzard which had just split two, 500 foot WWII era oil tankers half in two. Those Coasties aboard the little CG 36500 were beat and battered by gigantic waves which often flipped their boat into the air. Their compass was broken and the windshield was smashed, imbedding shards of glass into one crewmember's arms.

Five miles off the coast of Cap Cod, eight sailors on the

bow section of the "Pendleton" were killed instantly. The "Fort Mercer", some twenty miles away suffered the same fate, with five killed instantly resulting in seventy-six others clinging to broached and broken sections of both tankers, awaiting certain death. There were several other USCG cutters involved thus saving the remaining crew of the Fort Mercer aboard the much larger cutters, nevertheless endangered in that hellish storm.

However, one of the most miraculous rescues ever was that of the remaining 33 men of the Pendleton, of which one, a Mr. George Myers, was killed during the rescue attempt, and 32 sailors were saved, along with our 4 USCG crewmen aboard a wooden 36 foot lifeboat designed for only 12 people, the CG 36500! Seventy lives of 84 were saved that rough, freezing cold and terrible night by those who are dedicated to give their own lives, "So That Others May Live", if need be. Our men and women of the USCG, today, as then in war or peace stand ready to do whatever mission comes their way.

Casey Sherman, who grew up on Cape Cod, co-authored a full length book account of this "mission impossible" titled "The Finest Hours", which I understand is soon to be released as a movie. Not being much of a movie goer, I will probably amend my ways for once, in order to see how our "most daring rescue" appears on the big screen, as it should be exciting and inspiring.

Semper Paratus



"The 2016 session of the General Assembly will now come to order."

Community Calendar

American Legion Post 23 meets 1st Tuesday of each month at 4 PM at VFW Post 7807, Sunnyside Rd., Hiawassee. Call 706-896-8387 for details. We need your support!

VFW Fish Fry April - October on 2nd & 4th Fridays each month from 4:30 - 7. \$10 per plate.

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 1 p.m.

Towns County Republican Party meets at 6:30 PM the 4th Thursday of each month at the new Senior Center. For more info call 706-994-3919.

Democratic Party of Towns County meets 2nd Tuesday of each month at 5 p.m. at new Senior Center. Newcomers welcome. Questions please contact the T.C. Dem's at Townscountymdemocrats@gmail.com.

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 Unicoy 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. Sat. morning breakfast 2nd Sat. of each month from 8 - 10:30 AM. \$6 adults, \$3 12 & under.

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 old Rec Center in Hiawassee at 5:30 p.m. 706-896-1060, www.townshistory.org

Bridge Players intermediate level meets at 12:30 p.m. on Mondays & Fridays at the Towns County Rec Center.

Mountain Regional Arts & Crafts Guild meets 2nd Tuesday of each month at 6 p.m. at Calvary Chapel on Hwy. 76 in Hiawassee. All local artists and crafters are welcome, for information call 706-896-0932.

Mountain Computer User Group meets the 2nd Monday of each month. Meetings start at 6 p.m. and visitors are welcome. Details can be found at www.mcug.org.

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 Gary at 706-896-4308 or visit www.moaa.org/chapter/blueridgemountains.

Alcoholics Anonymous meets every Friday and Sunday evening at 7 at Red Cross Building at 1293 Jack Dayton Circle. 24 hour phone line 828-837-4440.

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.

The Humane Society Mountain Shelter Board of Directors meets the last Thursday of every month at 5:30 p.m. at Cadence Bank in Blairsville.

The Towns County Alzheimer's Support Group meets the first Tuesday of each month at 1:30 PM in the Family Life Center of McConnell Memorial Baptist Church. For more info call Carol at 706-896-6407.

The Appalachian Shrine Club meets the 2nd Thursday of each month at 6 PM at the Shrine Club, Industrial Blvd., Blairsville.

GMREC Garden Tours every Monday 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

Shooting Creek Basket Weavers meets 2nd Wednesday of every month at 10 a.m. at Shooting Creek Fire Hall Community Center. For more info www.shootingcreekbas-

ketweavers.com.

Friendship Community Club meets the 3rd Thursday of the month at 6 PM at Clubhouse, 1625 Hwy. 76, 706-896-3637.

Goldwing Road Riders meets the 3rd Saturday of each month at Daniel's Steakhouse in Hiawassee. We eat at 11 and meeting begins at 12.

Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meets every Wednesday evening at 7 PM at the Red Cross building on Jack Dayton Circle.

Caregiver support group meets 2nd Tuesday of each month, 3 p.m. at Brasstown Manor, located at 108 Church St., Hiawassee. Call 706-896-4285 for more info.

Enchanted Valley Square Dance Club. Dances 2nd & 4th Fridays at Towns Co. Rec. Ctr. from 7-9 PM. \$5/person to dance. Free to watch.

Brasstown Woodturners Guild meets 1st Saturday of month at 9:30 AM in HHS shop. For more info call J. C. at 706-896-5711.

Mountain Amateur Radio Club (MARC) meets 6:30 PM the 1st Monday of month at 1298 Jack Dayton Cir. (next to EMS), Hiawassee. For info call AI 706-896-9614 after 6 PM.

The Board of the Towns County Chamber of Commerce meets the second Monday of every month at 8 a.m. at the Chamber office, 1411 Jack Dayton Circle, Young Harris.

The Quilting Bee at McConnell Memorial Baptist Church in Family Life Center, Room 216. 1st & 3rd Wednesday of each month from 10 AM - 3 PM. Bring a sack lunch. For more information call Kathy at 706-835-6721 or Marilyn at 706-897-4367.

Mountain Coin Club meets the 2nd Tuesday of each month at 6 p.m. at the North Georgia Tech campus in Blairsville. Guests are welcome. For more info, call 706-379-1488.

Monday morning BINGO at Brasstown Manor every Monday morning at 9:30 a.m. 108 Church St., Hiawassee. Players meet in the Bradford. Questions 706-896-4285.

Towns County Lions Club meets 2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month at 6 p.m. at Daniel's Restaurant, 273 Big Sky Drive, Hiawassee.

Towns County Herald

Dedicated to the promotion of Towns County

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