

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

Letters to The Editor

Letter to the Editor:

The Center for Public Integrity, Public Radio International and Global Integrity recently bestowed the State of Georgia with the honor of being the Most Corrupt State in the Nation. The report cited many issues. For the sake of brevity I will only list a few. 1. Lack of oversight of employment practices. 2. Lack of accountability at Local and State level. 3. Lack of enforcement of policy and rules.

What the report points out is, if elected or appointed officials lack the integrity to police themselves and set and follow Standard Approved Practices, there is nothing to prevent or deter corruption. Georgia's sunshine laws which require open and properly noticed meetings are regularly ignored or violated in Towns County. A recent example of another Gray area of Georgia law is the public notice of a job opening by the School Board. Under the Georgia Public Records law I requested a copy of the advertisement for a New Principal, Vice Principal and Graduation Coach at Towns County after the announcement in the paper last week, that these positions had been filled. I was provided by the Superintendent Ms. Williams, the following response to my records request. "NO SUCH RECORD OR DOCUMENT EXISTS". In short, they did not advertise for any of the positions.

According to the Georgia Department of Education and the Georgia States Attorneys office, failure to properly notice a position such as Principal as available, might be acceptable in some instances such as death, removal for discipline or where the vacancy might jeopardize the health welfare or safety of the children. Everyone I spoke with said, if the vacancy did not meet those standards then failure to properly advertise MAY violate State law, but at the least, is a very questionable practice.

My question as a parent and taxpayer, is what did we have to lose by advertising the position? The current Principal Mr. Perrens, who I certainly did not always agree with, but always found to be a good, decent and honest man, is finishing the school year. Therefore, I fail to see the urgency of appointing Mr. Gibson without at least advertising the position for a few weeks. Perhaps an experienced administrator with a PhD or Specialists degree who comes from a School system with better test scores and programs than Towns County currently has, would have applied.

I have never met Mr. Gibson. He appears to be in his early twenties and I have been told he and his family have been friends of Ms. Williams for many years. If his education and experience stand up when compared to other applicants, then I believe he should be hired for the position. My concerns are, on first glance this smacks of Chicago style cronyism politics. My concerns are not only for the School but for this young man's career. West Point graduates some of the finest men and women this Country has to offer every Spring. We don't make them Generals a year or two later. We require them to serve under proven leaders and gain the knowledge, wisdom and experience required to earn the respect of their peers and the citizens they serve. We require our Presidents to be 35 years of age. Obviously our forefathers felt going from the Frat House to the White House might not be a good Idea. I would hope our School Board and Superintendent will reconsider and advertise the positions. There is too much at stake to make a mistake or miss an opportunity to improve our schools.

Accountability is the responsibility of the media and voters. If the voters are not informed they cannot make good choices. Exposing this issue and others like it should not fall on the shoulders of parents and citizens. If the local media are unwilling or unable to deliver fair and balanced news, they need to get out of the business or find a method to make that service available. Not only is it their responsibility, it is the Right Thing To Do.

Greg Diehl

The Middle Path

by Don Perry

During the declining years of the Roman Empire, the poet, Juvenal, wrote: "Already long ago, from when we sold our vote to no man, the People have abdicated our duties; for the People who once upon a time handed out military command, high civil office, legions — everything, now restrains itself and anxiously hopes for just two things: bread and circuses." Last week we discussed the bread; now the circus.

When television was young it was hailed as the greatest educational tool ever developed. It has been that and more. Television has been a tool for informing the public, for promoting social change, and for achieving political goals. Television is, to paraphrase Karl Marx, the opiate of the people.

The value of a tool or a drug depends how it is used. Some of our best memories were gathered, as we grew up in front of the tube, sitting with the family and enjoying a laugh or pretending not to cry during an emotional episode. Documentaries stimulated our interests. Public television expanded our view of the world.

On the other side of the coin, television has been used to promote less benevolent goals. Last week we discussed the widespread, studied effort of business and government to manipulate our behavior. Television has been at the forefront of that effort. The networks with their talking heads, our obsession with celebrity — movie stars, sports figures and mass murderers — the incessant and inescapable dialogue about who we are and what we are doing has become our national consciousness. This constant flow of infotainment is like a carrier wave for an FM radio station, and riding on that wave is the agenda, hidden in plain sight, of profit and control.

Technology has both expanded and focused the ability of business and government to reach into our consciousness. The Internet and social media have added to the arsenal. Television, telephone, newsprint and radio are all merging into one unified, interconnected matrix of broadcast media. We have a new kind of need in the Information Age. It is a child of our basic human need for companionship, but it is a "genetically engineered," mutated offspring. We will call it the need to be "connected."

Now let's get personal. Long suffering readers of this column would hopefully agree that we have tried, during the long course of our shared investigations, to remain self-aware and open minded, tinged with a healthy dose of skepticism. These efforts were not enough to prevent your humble author from becoming attached to the matrix of information himself and conflicted as to how best to manage that connection. Bear with me.

The awareness of my own unhealthy connection to the zeitgeist began with Facebook. Television was something I thought I had under control. Between the mute button and the DVR, I would

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@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.

not suffer a commercial to live. In the last ten years the only item I could remember purchasing that was influenced by TV was a "Lint Lizard" for cleaning lint out of a clothes-dryer. (Those actually do work, by the way.) The influence of Facebook on my consciousness was subtle and unexpected.

Living in a remote area and separated from old friends by the miles and the years, Facebook began for me as a great way to reconnect. In the beginning, the novelty of the interface was exciting. There were many moments of sincere fellowship and good humor and many good thoughts were exchanged in a way that was not too far removed from the days when pen pals would exchange words on paper or in an ancient email. Facebook, however, was more immediate. Gone was the sense of expectation at the mailbox, either at the Post Office or in my email program.

In an amazingly brief period of time, the novelty wore off. The thoughtful exchanges of ideas and information diminished. Rather than serving as a means of communication, Facebook became an opportunity to "like" pictures of cats, dogs, babies, and barbecues. Like my wisecrack. Like this picture of my plate of food. Like my platitude. Like my quotation of someone else's words. Facebook became so effortless that original thought was not required. Somewhere in some outsource land, three people are drawing pictures with facetious captions that we can all post for the collection of "likes."

My work requires a computer and an Internet connection. Facebook became the "break" from research and too much concentration for too long. It was always on, just a click away; ready to reaffirm my connection to "friends." Over time I began to notice that Facebook was spying on me, noticing the things that I "liked" and watching the websites I visited so that it could offer me opportunities to buy things reflective of my interests. This was annoying, but understandable. After all, they have to pay the bills somehow. But one morning I woke up to a moment of sobriety when I read about a new program at Facebook called "Graph Search."

Graph Search is Facebook's "One Ring to Rule Them All" effort to link all of the valuable data contained in the huge record of the lives and likes of almost a billion people to the public domain. Graph Search will be valuable to us as a way to know instantly how many of our friends like to eat at Popeye's Chicken. It will be valuable to the bread and circuses crowd for other reasons. Stay tuned.



"IT'S ON MY MIND.."
Danny H. Parris

Wind needed

The month of March always brings back boyhood memories. Some of the happiest days of my life were days spent making and flying kites. My brothers and sisters collected string from every source we could find. We would tie the ends together and roll it up on a smooth stick. By the time March rolled around we would have several hundred yards of twine. Mom would save us the large laundry covers from the cleaners. We would select two of the finest young silver maple trees. They would be four to six feet in length and about one-half to three quarter inches in diameter. The longest stick was prepared and laid in a vertical position. The shorter stick was secured horizontally onto the vertical stick, approximately one-fourth the length from the top of the vertical stick. Notches were cut in all four ends of the sticks. String was placed into the notches to give stability and to secure the paper that was cut allowing two inches overlap. The overlap was folded over the string and glue was made from flour and water to seal the paper over the string. A long tail was made from old discarded clothing and attached to the kite. The end of the ball of "cord" (string) was securely tied at the cross point. We were ready to fly our kite. In spite of all of our efforts we could never get that kite airborne without God's wind. We would wait for God to stir the air and when we felt the wind our kite would be tossed into the current. What a beautiful site as it sailed into

the heavens above.

The Bible likens the spirit of God to the wind. He told Nicodemus that "the wind bloweth where it wills and you can hear the sound but you cannot tell from whence it cometh nor where it goeth, so is everyone who is born of the spirit of God." (John 3:8) The wind is a mystery and it has its circuits. Since my boyhood days the winds of change have swept across our years. You don't see many kites anymore, especially homemade. I have changed a lot, but you know March has not changed. It still gives to us those winds that signal the end of winter and the coming of spring. God's spirit has not changed one whit. The power of His Presence tells us that He has brought an end to sin, death and hell. His spirit has brought a new and living way to all of those who will allow Him to breathe His life into them. There are a lot of windbags in our generation who are blowing in a different direction from God. Some are pretty blustery and a lot of folks are blown about by every wind of doctrine. Elijah found out that God was not in every wind, no matter if it could break the rocks in pieces (I Kings 19:11). Vast numbers of our generation refuse to make decisions until they see which way the wind is blowing (Ecc. 11:4). They want to see the latest poll or see what their favorite group is saying before they speak. We don't need to catch the spirit of the age; we need to catch God's spirit. My prayer for my fellow ministers and myself is that we may have God breathe upon us and through us. As we gather Sunday, I pray that we could hear in our congregations "the sound as of a rushing mighty wind" (Acts 2:2). God help me not to be a windbag, but help me to be a prophet!



RARE KIDS; WELL DONE

By Don Jacobsen

Hope Stout grew up in Charlotte, NC. Well, almost grew up. On June 27, 2003 she was diagnosed with an aggressive form of bone cancer. She was 12. In a few months it spread from her knee to her hip, her shoulder, her back and her lung. Six months later the disease took her life.

But it's her life, not her death that inspires us. Hope was a bright, pretty, high-energy red head. She played basketball, was a cheerleader, and tumbler. But there were some other things you need to know, too. Her church sponsored a camp every summer for disabled kids. Each was assigned a counselor, plus a "camper buddy" to be at their side every minute. Hope served as a camper buddy from the time she was seven.

Her church also sponsored an annual REACH project. Families raised money, then went to a rural southern community and rebuilt houses that were in disrepair. It was transformational to the folks whose homes were repaired, and to the communities. Hope and her two sisters worked right beside their mom and dad, down on their knees installing new floors or hanging from a ladder painting window frames.

The family's values were building in Hope a heart for helping others. That helps explain

why, when the Make-A-Wish® folks came and asked what her final wish might be, instead of answering their question, Hope asked one: Are there other kids waiting to have their wishes granted? Yes, about 150 in our region, she was told. OK, said Hope, my wish is to grant the wishes of all 150.

Some quick calculations showed that her wish would cost \$850,000; couldn't she please choose something simpler like a trip to Disney? Hope was in no mood for negotiation. This began a life-transforming saga for 150 kids that was born in the heart of a 12-year old. She was interviewed on local radio and the people of Charlotte fell in love with this plucky red head. They opened their hearts and their wallets. At a fund-raising gala three weeks after her death they tallied the funds that had been given - \$1,160,000. Hope's final wish had been granted.

Hope's story inspires me because of what it teaches me about parenting. Mom and Dad Stout - Shelby and Stuart - were intentional about helping their kids develop a heart to serve. At the age of 12 she impacted an entire city and beyond. Rare parents; well done.

Send your parenting questions to: DrDon@RareKids.net.



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!

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 at 5 PM at the Senior Center. Please call Kim Bailey at 706-994-2727 or 706-896-6747 for details.

Towns County Republican Party meets at 6:30 PM the 2nd Thursday of each month at Daniels Steak House. For more info call 706-379-1371.

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 in Murphy. Call Kit: 706-492-5253 or Peggy: 828-835-1082.

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.

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 5:30 p.m. Annual dues \$15, PO Box 1182, Hiawassee, GA. We do oral family histories of residents. 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 and Crafts Guild, Inc (MRACG) meets the 2nd Tuesday of each month at ArtWorks Artisan Centre, Hiawassee. Refreshments at 6 p.m., meeting begins at 6:30 p.m. Call us by 706-896-0932 or mtnregartsandcraftsguild.org.

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/blueridgemountains.

Alcoholics Anonymous: 24 hour phone line 828-837-4440.

Mothers of Preschoolers meets the third Thursday of each month at First Baptist Church of Blairsville from 6 - 8 p.m. Call the church at 706-745-2469.

Chattahoochee 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.

Mountain Magic Table Tennis Club meets 3 p.m. Thursdays at Pine Log Baptist Church Fellowship Hall in Brasstown. Ping Pong players welcome. Call Jerry (828) 837-7658.

Prostate Cancer Support Group meets the 3rd Monday of every

month from 5-6 PM in the Cancer Treatment Center Auditorium in Blairsville. For more info call Steve 706-896-1064.

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. Caregivers or family members are encouraged to attend. For more info call Carol at 706-896-6407.

The Appalachian Shrine Club meets the 2nd Thursday of each month at 6:30 PM at the Allegheny Lodge in Blairsville. For more info call William 706-994-6177.

Georgia Mountain Writers Club meets at St. Francis of Assisi Church the 2nd Wednesday of every month at 10 AM.

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

Shooting Creek Basket Weavers meets the 2nd Wednesday of every month at 10 a.m. at the Shooting Creek Fire Hall Community Center. For more info www.shootingcreekbasketweavers.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 evenings at 7 PM at the Red Cross building (up the hill from the chamber office 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 Hiawassee Senior Ctr. from 7-9 PM. \$5/person to dance. Free to watch. Call 706-379-2191.

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Dedicated to the promotion of Towns County

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