

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

Letters to The Editor

Letter to the Editor:

This is in reply to a previous letter's criticism of holding the National Day of Prayer (NDP) at the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center. He bases his disapproval because it "flies in the face of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution." I am quite sure that the Towns County government officials are not advocating a particular religion when they support such activities. Although it is called a national day of prayer, it is up to each local government to determine whether or not to hold such a day of prayer. That is, the right of individuals and groups to hold a NDP is very securely protected by the U.S. Constitution. Many communities nationwide include a short prayer as a part of school board meetings, town council meetings, legislative sessions, and other public functions. This in no way is a violation of the First Amendment. As the Supreme Court has noted, "To invoke Divine guidance on a public body entrusted with making laws is not, in these circumstances, an 'establishment' of religion or a step toward establishment; it is simply a tolerable acknowledgement of beliefs widely held among the people of this country." Marsh v. Chambers, 463 U.S. 792(1983). Thus, the fact that some individuals may disagree with a national day of prayer being held in a public governmental setting does not make the practice unconstitutional. It is important to note that the Constitution cannot be interpreted to purge all religious reference from the public square.

Timothy W. Groza

Letter to the Editor:

Thank you Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall for clarifying your municipal policy allowing religious and other groups to meet in taxpayer supported facilities. However, I would argue that prayer meetings are a misuse of public funds. Where in the Towns County charter does it call for officials on the public payroll to be organizing and leading religious prayer meetings on county property? Isn't this the role of the many hundreds of churches and ministers in our community? The Constitution says the government shall not recognize one religious set of beliefs over all others--to do so is an infringement on the rights of non-believers and is a form of discrimination.

Others wrote letters claiming godlessness resulted in Communists killing millions in Russia and China. This is blatant red baiting and has no place in honest debate. Allowed to go unchallenged, this tactic recalls the dark period of red scare McCarthyism.

Unfortunately, Mr. Kendall tries to conflate my Letter to the Editor, defending the 1st Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, calling for the separation of church and state, as somehow disrespectful, "distasteful" in his words, of Memorial Day observances. Again, this is a red herring of the worst order. His angry rebuff is an attempt to stifle opposing views and squelch debate by the intimidation of his office and by using front-page headlines in the *Towns County Herald* to vilify opposing views.

Fundamentalists wishing to turn classrooms over to religious learning also favor religious indoctrination in public schools. These and other civil rights violations have been and are being adjudicated in the courts. For example, in *Everson v. Board of Education*, 330 U.S. 1 (1947), a case dealing with a New Jersey law that allowed government funds to pay for transportation of students to both public and Catholic schools. Citing Jefferson, the court concluded, "The First Amendment has erected a wall between church and state. That wall must be kept high and impregnable. We could not approve the slightest breach." In earlier court decision, Jefferson's concept of "separation of church and state" first became a part of Establishment Clause jurisprudence in *Reynolds v. U.S.*, 98 U.S. 145 (1878) quoting the "separation" paragraph from Jefferson's letter to the Danbury Baptists.

Browbeating and intimidation by public leaders serves only to cloud the discussion and confuse the debate on separation of church and state. Our nation's founders fought to protect the rights of all Americans without discrimination. This includes discrimination on religious grounds, especially by public officials.

Lance G. Jobson

Letter to the Editor:

To use a previous writer's words, I am also a "non-believer". However, for decades I have not understood how the practice of other folks' religious beliefs and practices have anything to do with any non-believer? How does it hurt us? And why do we have to make a great deal in stopping others from practicing their beliefs. It seems to me that they must be insecure in their non-beliefs if they are so threatened by the beliefs of others.

I was brought up a Christian, taught the Bible, and one day made a choice of my own. My wife brought up our children as Christians with my total support so that some day if they felt they needed to make a choice they could make it with the knowledge and teachings of their faith, without any input from me. I know that their choice to follow the Christian faith or not is made with an education that allows them to make an intelligent decision. The reasons for me becoming an atheist, oh, yes, lets call a spade a spade, we are atheists not PC non-believers, those reasons are solely mine, I did not feel I had the right to pass them on to my children, they have the right to make their own choices. And when I pass a religious display, whatever religion it may be, I don't feel threatened or offended by it. We should be happy that in this great country we all have that right and not have it shoved down our throats by government or laws.

A man lives in Oregon and drives by a cross on private land in the US southwest to honor those lost in WW I and takes it all the way to the Supreme Court. Come one, do people have nothing else to do in their lives? Does it mean that if you are a Christian you have to give up your right to freedom of expression? My wife and our children follow their faith why? Because they have the right to do so anywhere they please. Anywhere. Just as I have the right not to.

Ninety-nine percent of atheists do not give a darn, yet one percent or less find it necessary to give the rest of us a black eye. Please, please, grow up and get a life. And Mr. Commissioner, we all are paying for that building, so if any of us need to use it, please let us all use it.

And to clear up just one last point, yes there is an abundance of "worship centers" (is there a problem with using the word "Church", too?) all around our county, but none large enough to hold all those who chose to attend the National Day of Prayer service.

Respectfully submitted,
Brian Fraser

To the Editor:

I'd like to extend my appreciation to Bill Kendall and Roy Perren for their responses in last week's paper to a previous writer's erroneous letter to the editor from the week before. I hope many more of us will respond and address his sore misunderstanding of the First Amendment. The only prohibitions found in the First Amendment pertain to the actual government itself. It protects citizens' rights to express the religious/spiritual beliefs of their choice without governmental interference or persecution. "Separation of church and state" is falsehood that has misled Americans like the previous writer for years. If our nation should remove all Biblically-based laws, then perhaps murder can finally be legalized since the words "thou shalt not kill" are in the Ten Commandments.

The writer further challenged the prayer assembly due to the fact that he is a non-believer. It is one thing for an individual to stand for his or her beliefs, but I have difficulty understanding why anyone would protest as such for the sake of not believing in something. Peace and joy are difficult to find under those circumstances. I am saddened for the writer in that he feels this way.

If his tax dollars are the prime concern, then I can only imagine the amount of tax dollars that go into funding causes in our nation that I believe are wrong...such as abortion, Muslim support, LGBT communities, handouts for able-bodied men and women who refuse to work and pay their own taxes, illegal immigrants, and multi-million dollar vacations for several of our Washington politicians. As a taxpayer in today's environment, I am clearly subjected to fund and be tolerant of all of these aforementioned things. I figure that I as a taxpayer should be permitted to peacefully worship and honor my Lord in the venue of my choice, whether it be public or private.

How sad that the same people who have so greatly benefited from the words of our Constitution continue abusing, misquoting, and trampling over it. This document grants freedoms that only we in America have been blessed with...something of which we Americans should nurture, practice, and appreciate on a daily basis. No law required Towns County to hold the National Day of Prayer Ceremony at the Recreation Center and no law required its citizens attend. In addition, no law can be made prohibiting such either. Freedom allows the American people to enjoy such a privilege. That same freedom allowed the writer to stay home and express his distaste at what the First Amendment permits the American people to do. And freedom allows me to express my strong disagreement at his misinformed judgment. In my opinion, the writer's concept of the Constitution, and the United States in general, is terribly off base.

I am so thankful for the freedom that I have been given not only as an American, but as a child of God. I pray that He continues His blessings on this great country.

Alan Kendall

To the Editor:

I recently had lost my billfold while at an event held at the Towns County Senior Center in Hiawassee last Thursday evening. I was quite frustrated and back tracking my steps the day after I noticed it missing and I was called by Jewell Nicholson of The Legacy Link of Towns County that she had my billfold. Two other honest folks at the Senior Center found it as they were cleaning the meeting room and turned it in to Jewell. I would like to thank Jewel Nicholson, Brenda Mannock and Randal Mathis for their honesty! Having my billfold returned with all contents intact was a huge relief!

Rob Murray

Dear Editor:

I'm writing in response to a previous letter. Sir, I'm afraid you're under a misconception as to the separation of church and state. Your rights were not infringed upon. You are free to attend, or not, any religious gathering. You are not required to take part in any religion in order to take part in governmental activities. This is the basis of this amendment.

The prayer breakfast was a community (not governmental) sponsored event. It took place in a non-governmental building, built for the use of the citizens of this county.

Most of the people in this country believe in God and a good many are Christians. We are tired of our rights being shoved aside to please a few.

I personally love God and I can truthfully say that you don't know what you're missing.

Diane Berrong

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, 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.



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

Are we there yet?

Parents who have raised children and have ever taken a trip have heard that famous question, "Are we there yet?" Regina and I were blest with a son and a daughter and we did quite a bit of traveling in an automobile. Sometimes we would barely get out of the driveway, when one or both of our children would ask, "Are we there yet?" Most of the time other questions followed in quick succession, such as: "Well, how much farther is it?" "Will we get there before dark?" "Can we stop and go to the bathroom?" "When are we going to eat, I am hungry." While we were in seminary, we drove from New Orleans to our church field in Maurepas, Louisiana each Friday and returned Sunday night or Monday. It was 80 miles one way. Every weekend with two young children Regina and I had to answer a lot of questions and do a little refereeing along the way.

On weekends when there were not a lot of questions, our son and daughter, Mike and Michele seemed bent on irritating each other. You know what I mean, "Mom", "Dad", "Mike looked at me." "Mom", "Dad", Michele is over half-way of the seat." "Tell her to stay on her half." (We were riding in a 1968 Volkswagen). There would be weekends that everything was funny. They laughed until we couldn't stand it anymore. Well, you have been there, done that,

and got a tee shirt. You and I know the reason for that kind of behavior in us at that age, and in our children. It is what we refer to as impatience and immaturity.

That's what was wrong with Israel as Moses sought to lead them to the Promised Land. That's the problem with us today. We get our mind fixed on the destination and fail to enjoy the journey. There are a lot of hardships between Egypt and Canaan. In this life we depart a lot of Egyptians on the way to destinations of Canaan. We want to arrive at these points as quickly as possible and when it takes longer than we anticipated or we run into unexpected delays we become restless and irritable. Because of impatience many vacations and otherwise enjoyable journeys are spoiled with undue stress, anxiety and quick tempers.

Let me encourage those of you who are looking forward to vacations to enjoy the journey. Likewise, children of our Heavenly Father, let me encourage you not to get so heaven-minded that you become of no earthly good. Remember that God is awaiting us at the end of the trail, but remember also that He is with us every day. Enjoy the journey! There are many points of interest along the trail, but please don't just shoot for the high peaks. Between the high points there are a lot of joys. No, we are not there yet, but we will be soon enough. Until then, enjoy your children, your brothers and sisters, your schoolmates, your parents, your grandparents, your church families and your friends and neighbors. We are not there yet, so relax, release all that stress and rejoice on the way. God bless.

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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 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 the 2nd Thursday of each month at 5 PM at the new Senior Center.

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 Hiwassee 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 artguild-store.com.

Mountain Computer User Group meets the 2nd Monday of each month in Young Harris. Meetings start at 6 p.m. and visitors are welcome. A "Q & A" session follows. Details can be found at www.mcug.org.

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 at 706-896-2430 or visit www.moaa.org/chapter/blueridge-mountains.

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.

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.

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.

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 6:30 PM at the Allegheny Lodge in Blairsville. For more info call William 706-994-6177.

Georgia Mountain Writers Club meets at Cadence Bank 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.shootingcreek-basketweavers.com.

Friendship Community Club meets the 3rd Thursday of each 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 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.

VFW Post #7807 will be hosting a fish fry their 2nd & 4th Fridays of each month April - October. \$9. all you can eat from 4:30 - 7 PM.

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 Al 706-896-9614 after 6 PM.

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

Towns County Herald
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OFFICE LOCATED AT 518 N. MAIN ST. SUITE 7
"THE MALL" HIAWASSEE (706) 896-4454
Publication Number 635540. 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.
EMAIL Address: tcherald@windstream.net

POSTMASTER: Send change of address to:
TOWNS COUNTY HERALD
P.O. BOX 365 HIAWASSEE, GEORGIA 30546

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