

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

Member Owned and Controlled

In 1938, the Blue Ridge Electric Association was formed to provide affordable and reliable electric service to the sparsely populated areas of extreme Northeast Georgia and Western North Carolina. The association co-op was member-owned and controlled. Supposedly, it still is today.

Straight Shooting

Charles Duncan



I say supposedly because there is little transparency afforded the membership about the recent dilemma involving the former President of the Board of Directors' indebtedness that included a five-digit unpaid electric bill for his commercial operations.

In this edition of the Towns County Herald, we hope we have shed some light on the situation. The information was a bit shocking and the actions of administrators past and present allowed former President Terry Taylor to amass a debt of more than \$100,000.

In consideration of board members past and present, the information we were able to uncover indicates that the only board member who knew of Taylor's indebtedness was Taylor himself.

However, Taylor's plight was known by Blue Ridge Mountain EMC administration. The current General Manager Matthew Akins was reprimanded by the Board of Directors according to documents obtained by the newspaper.

However, he remains as GM because it was a situation that Akins reportedly inherited when he took the reins of the member-owned utility cooperative, according to documents obtained by the newspaper. Taylor owes more than \$100,000 in unpaid utility bills and a loan he received from Blue Ridge Mountain EMC.

The Board of Directors accepted Taylor's resignation, or "retirement" on April 17. But no resignation can restore the credibility that was lost prior to Taylor stepping down.

I'm sure I'm like most folks in the five-county area provided services by BRMEMC. I pay my bill on or before the fifth day of each month. We pay our bills because we owe them. BRMEMC has never let us slide on these bills. They can't afford to, they have an operation to keep running.

As co-op members, just when you think the Taylor incident is behind us, the bill keeps coming. The Board of Directors has voted to pay up to \$30,000 to hire an attorney to determine how the debt was allowed to happen in the first place.

As we speak, the meter is running and the debt is more than \$130,000 for a dirty little secret that continues to get under the nails of the membership like tiny thorns from a rose bush.

You'll read about it in your electric bill, there will be opposition for the board members whose terms are almost expired.

The membership is getting tired of reading and hearing about BRMEMC secrets from sources other than the Board of Directors.

I'm just guessing here, but, I believe that the term "member-owned and controlled" becomes a little more important in the weeks ahead.

The Middle Path

by Don Perry

For nearly two generations the automobile has been the nexus between our culture and our economy. Our automobile addiction has terraformed the landscape with countless miles of asphalt and concrete and it has punctured and fractured the globe in search of fuels to feed its insatiable appetite. The automobile has shaped the way we live as we spread across the land, far from our cities and far from our sources of food and energy. The automobile dependent civilization demands a vast infrastructure to guarantee that a resident in the suburbs can drive to the city for work. The gratification economy supports us when we wish to drive ten miles for a bag of potato chips.

There is nothing more American than the automobile. There is often nothing more important than an American behind the wheel of his or her chariot of choice. I think we would all admit that driving does not always bring out the best features of our characters. Empowered and somewhat ensorcelled by the fantasy that, in driving we are insulated from the consequences of our actions, we are much more likely to act aggressively and inconsiderately in a car than in a crowd.

We do not often see, for example, someone at the grocery store accelerating their buggy, narrowly avoiding a collision with nearby shoppers, rushing to be next in line at the checkout. We do see on a regular basis the impatient and the self-important cutting off drivers in traffic or pulling out in front of someone at the last minute like a jack-in-the-box. Standing in line at the movie theater or the post office, we don't see pedestrians breathing down the necks of the persons in front of them as if this could somehow push the line forward, but every day of the week we see the lords and ladies of the highway crowding the bumpers of those commoners who have the audacity to stay on the road without speeding up or pulling over onto the shoulder to let those who are more important pass by. Indeed, the automobile can be the ultimate expression of self-importance.

Speaking again to self-importance and inconsideration, we don't often see a pedestrian who, after drinking a Starbucks in the grocery store, then tosses the empty container onto the floor, but how often does a cup, or fast food bag or Miller Lite can or Mountain Dew bottle escape from the window of a moving automobile and collect in an unbroken trail on the side of the road? (A word of thanks to the gentleman I saw last weekend picking up trash along Highway 76. Your efforts were much needed and greatly

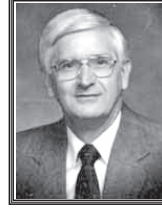
appreciated.)

Consider another example of the inconsiderate driver that occurs on a daily basis in the narrow little parking lot outside our post office in Hiawassee. It is challenging enough to back out of a parking space into the one lane passageway shared by those of us trying to ingress and egress the post office without having to account for those who insist on treating this narrow strip as the main entrance to Ingles. I cannot begin to account for the willfully ignorant choice to inconvenience and endanger post office patrons when much larger and safer approaches to the grocery store are only a stone's throw away. It's almost as if the post office parking lot is some kind of ancestral trail such as the ones used by our local bears and deer long after civilization has wiped out any visible evidence of their original traces.

Any discussion of imperial driving habits in North Georgia is not complete without mentioning the truly dangerous situations that occur between drivers of automobiles and riders of bicycles on mountain roads. I cannot fault anyone for wanting to enjoy the beauty of the mountains in a more personal way than watching it fly by through a windshield. I admire the desire to engage in healthy exercise and to breathe in some fresh mountain air, along with a little car exhaust. I support the State of Georgia and local communities in their efforts to encourage biking and attract more of that kind of economic stimulus to the state. However, a few "Share the Road" signs is not enough, as anyone who has driven, or ridden, over the mountain to Helen during a biking event can confirm.

Any government entity that encourages biking needs to be prepared to build bike lanes. The entitled driver, at pains to even accept the existence of other drivers, will never accept the fact that a bicycle has a right to exist on the same pavement. The idealistic bike rider, at least among the many I have seen crossing Unicoi Gap, seems to have difficulty understanding that the laws of physics will always trump the laws of man. How often have we seen a car swerve around a bicycle and narrowly miss an oncoming vehicle? How often have we been that vehicle?

We live in an aggressive and competitive society and the self reliance promoted by our cultural heritage can often translate into self importance. Unfortunately, the technology of the mighty, emphasizing power, speed and luxury, often serves to amplify that self importance more than it does kindness and consideration.



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

How's your driving?

Have you ever noticed the question written on the back of some trucks that asks "How's my driving?" Usually, right under that question is a telephone number you can call to report the driver's driving whether good or bad. I certainly would not want that question on the back of my car.

Over the years I have had people to ask me why I don't have a clergy sign on my car. My answer has always been there are times I would be embarrassed to let folks know I am a preacher. My driving has not been a very good testimony at times. Sometimes we don't walk the talk or demonstrate while driving that we are children of God. My wife tells me that when I get behind the wheel of a car my personality changes.

I heard about the lady who was rushing to an appointment. She was driving like Jehu in the book of Kings. The man in front of her was driving the speed limit and she was tailgating him. They came to a traffic light, the light turned to caution and the man stopped. The lady almost hit him and was furious that he didn't speed right on through. She started blowing her horn, beating the steering wheel and cussing a blue streak. All of a sudden she heard a tap on her window and looked around into the face of a policeman. He ordered her

to exit the vehicle with hands in the air. He handcuffed her, put her into his police car and carried her to the police station where she was searched, photographed, finger printed and placed in a cell. After a few hours the jailer unlocked her cell and escorted her to the front desk. The arresting officer met her and said, "I apologize for the mistake. When I pulled up behind you, you were shaking your fists, blowing your horn and cussing a blue streak at the man in front of you. I couldn't help but notice all the bumper stickers: "Honk if you love Jesus," "What would Jesus do," "Choose life," "Abortion is murder," and the chrome-plated Christian fish emblem on the trunk. I just naturally assumed that you had stolen the car. Again, I am sorry for the mistake." How humiliating for the lady!

The moral of this story is that you had better drive as a Christian because folks are reading your driving as well as your bumper stickers. On the highway of life we don't need to send mixed signals. People are confused enough without the children of God adding to the already complex situation.

Sometimes I interrogate myself with questions such as: "How's my preaching?" "How's my giving?" "How's my leadership?" "How's my role as a husband?" "How's my record in sharing Christ?" "How's my testimony as a parent to my children and to my grandchildren?" Lately, I have asked "How's my driving testimony?" My wife would say there is room for improvement.

Letters to The Editor

Letter to the Editor:

What is the status of the latest fiasco at BRMEMC? According to a TC Herald's newspaper article: an unpaid bill of \$48,643.54 is due from the ex-chairman of the board of directors, and NO payments have been made since March 22, 2012. Is that what they mean by "Members serving Members", or is it about, "Management serving Management"? If the EMC board of directors and management say they just recently found out about the \$48,000+ dollars, two years after it started occurring; then they are incompetent and need to be replaced. As "Members" of EMC we "may have our service discontinued if the current bill is not paid 10 days after the due date." Where are our community leaders and elected officials: the Towns County Homeowners Association, Movers and Shakers, City Manager, Towns County Supervisor, Towns County Sheriff and our State representatives? Plus we have over 43,000 "Members"; why are we letting THEM take advantage of us and "Stonewall" us every time a negative situation comes up? How about the smart aleck - arrogant response when at an annual meeting a "Member" asked about, what does the "customer charge" cover? The EMC attorney responded, "That's the cost of doing business". Maybe the \$48,000+ that the Chairman of the board owed in back electrical bills is part of "that cost of doing business!" Over 43,000 "Members" presently pay \$18.30 per month for the "customer charge". For one month that equals \$779,590 per month -every month over and above the metered electric charge; and that is \$9,355,080 per year. That "customer charge" has gone up from \$8.69 in March of 2010. Therefore, every time BRMEMC needs extra income, they can tap their private "ATM" machine, with NO accountability. EMC electricity rates or actions are NOT controlled by the Georgia Public Utility Commission, but by another group called the Georgia Electric Membership Corporation. What are they doing about this travesty? Do not the "Members" deserve to know what is happening with that \$48000, which is due our co-op? Also, we deserve to have an unbiased audit of the EMC management and their co-op procedures and financial statements! Come on BRMEMC "Members" (all 43,000 of you); let's do something and stop the unchecked spending (like the EMC Country Club Headquarters building and grounds), and the arrogance, the opaque operations, policies, and cost accountability, and the "Stonewalling". LET'S HOLD THEM ACCOUNTABLE!

Gordon R. Frank

Letter to the Editor:

While out of state I saw the Atlanta news about our EMC here in Towns County. I was embarrassed to say the least. The director must think he lives in Washington DC where the rules do not apply to the "elite", only the common man. I am on disability and get my check at the end of the month. Sometimes that puts me past the 10 day cut off and I cannot do a thing about it. So how did this man go for over two years and not have his power cut off? First the EMC buys what has to be some of the most expensive land in the county to build on. Then it builds "the Palace" and has it professionally decorated. It has a massive fire place that has to be at least 20 feet tall and you know that heat rises, so it has to be a waste of energy. The EMC's position was that they had to build something that would blend in with Brasstown Valley Lodge. Give me a break. You can't even see the Lodge from the highway and it is unbelievable that any business near it would have to try to build something to blend in with it. I bet the new church going up across the road from the EMC doesn't feel compelled to "blend in". Now we have the added cost of "doing business" on our bills. How ridiculous is that? Their own private slush fund at our expense. I only hope that the state of Georgia will take some action to regulate the EMCs. This is supposed to be an Electric Membership Co-op. The members don't have a say in anything the EMC does which makes that title laughable. A more apt name for it would be the Blue Ridge Mountain Electric Dictatorship.

C. Schuster



Elected Officials Elected Officials Elected Officials

- Governor Nathan Deal, Georgia State Capitol Atlanta, GA 30334, 404-656-1776
- Sen. Johnny Isakson, U.S. Senate, Washington, DC 20510, 202-224-3643
- Sen. Saxby Chambliss, U.S. Senate, Washington, DC 20510, 202-224-3521
- U.S. Congressman Doug Collins, 9th District, Washington, DC 20515, 202-225-9893
- Rep. Stephen Allison, Georgia House of Representatives, 404-656-0177 or 0185
- Sen. John Wilkinson, Georgia State Senate, 404-463-5257
- Towns County Commissioner Bill Kendall, 706-896-2276
- Clerk of Superior Court Cecil Dye, 706-896-2130
- Tax Commissioner Bruce Rogers, 706-896-2267
- Magistrate/Probate Judge David Rogers, 706-896-3467
- Sheriff Chris Clinton, 706-896-4444
- Coroner Tashina Eller, 706-489-9519
- Enotah Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley, 706-896-6489
- Board of Education: 706-896-2279, Michael Anderson, Donna Hedden, Jerry Taylor, Bob Gibby, Emily Phillips. Superintendent: Melissa Williams
- Hiawassee Mayor Barbara Mathis, 706-896-2202
- Hiawassee City Council: Janet Allen, Jay Chastain, Joan Crothers, Steven Smith, Pat Smith
- Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby, 706-379-3171
- Young Harris City Council: Terry Ingram, John Kelley, Hilary Martin, Matthew Miller, Stuart Miller, Sam Leslie

he said simply, "Honey, tonight I'd like for you and me to have a talk." That's all. But he knew those words would re-play in her head all day. After dinner he invited her into the family room to "have a talk." She seemed a little uncomfortable he thought, so quietly he began. "I want to explain something to you. Doors are for coming and going; windows are not. Since you apparently forgot that last night, today I nailed your window shut with 4" nails. It will stay that way for three months. If I should find it open during that time I will replace the nails with wood screws and glue."

"But daddy," she protested, "it gets really hot in my room and it's nearly summer. I'll die!" "I don't think so," he replied. "But I do believe the discomfort will help you remember what I want you to remember from this event." Even her pleading during the August heat wave that summer didn't affect his resolve. Three months later, with just a bit of a ceremony, dad removed the nails. And he was right; she would remember.

After finishing high school she joined the Marines and did a very successful hitch there. Seems she had learned to respect authority and to play by the rules. I spoke to her father recently and he's about as proud of her as a dad can be. She is enrolled for college in the fall, focused, mature, responsible. Her side of the story is that she had some really good coaching when she was a teen.

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

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.

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