

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

Letters to The Editor

Dear Editor:
I am a combat veteran and am thankful for all the kind things said and done during the recent Veterans Day events. However, at the risk of possibly appearing ungrateful, which I certainly am not, I must say that the deplorable sidewalk conditions at Veterans Park are an embarrassing eyesore. I hope and trust that this lamentable and inexcusable failure to honor our veterans with appropriate dignity and respect will be swiftly addressed and corrected.

Claude Spears

Dear Editor:
As I was scrolling over my Facebook page the other day, I was saddened and brought to tears over the loss of over 37 animals at an animal shelter up North due to a fire. I was devastated by the loss of those innocent and precious little critters. Being the animal lover that I am any way and all.

I wrote to Castoff Critters as well as the Humane Society Mountain Shelter to ask if they had sprinkler systems and something like an ADT security system to detect the slightest array of fire or any thing going wrong. Castoff replied and said they did not; that would require donations, and/or some one to just do it for them.

I assume the same for the Mountain Shelter as well. So okay, I had much rather see a wet animal, than one dead and burned up. I also don't like the idea of them having to be caged up either but I know they have to but like the fire department told me when they came to install smoke alarms the other day in our house for us, a cat will usually get frightened and run away where a dog will too but will often come back because he/she knows that is their security.

Any way...long story short...we need to get donations in, and some one to come in and install the sprinklers and some type of ADT or security system. That way the slightest thing going wrong can alert some one to respond hopefully quickly to insure the safety of the animals. All shelters should have some type of system of this nature. They can catch fire too, be robbed, etc., just the same.

Let's get busy people! Let's help save lives even if they are animals!

*Thank You,
Delores Barnes*

Editor's Note: The Towns County Herald was able to contact the Mountain Shelter and was informed that they do have a video security system and fire and smoke alarms in place but donations would gladly be accepted to be applied towards a sprinkler system. We were unable to contact Castoff Pet Rescue.

Dear Editor:
The trouble with patriotism is it usually blinds the possessor with a fast and loose version of the truth. Case in point is Lt. Col. Ronald Gibson's speech at Veterans Memorial at Foster Park, (see: *Towns County Herald*, 11-25-15). In Gibson's speech, he falsely claimed English Pilgrims settled at Jamestown, VA in 1607. This is not correct, the historical record, in fact, shows the Pilgrims settled on Cape Cod, MA in 1620. The Gibson speech also vilifies the true patriotic spirit of Americans when he claims anti-Vietnam War protestors "assaulted" servicemen disembarking for that war.

In fact, thousands of returning veterans protested the war by throwing their medals into the crowds at anti-war demonstrations. As an activist that fought against U.S. racist wars on poor peasant peoples, I am one protestor amongst hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of patriotic Americans that opposed the Vietnam War, which, like the Iraq War, was and is based on pretext, lies and phony threats to national security.

In 1964 Vietnam, the "slam dunk" fabrications were about attacks on U.S. Navy ships in the Gulf of Tonkin that never happened. Then, after the war was concluded in 1975, US leaders had the mendacity to call the Vietnam War a "mistake" - another big lie!

Lance G. Jobson

To the Editor:
How serious is the threat from climate change

In response to Tim Groza's letter concerning Bernie Sanders' statement about the serious threat from climate change, I would like to add a few comments. I think we have to look at the dangers combating humanity at this time. Obviously, the worst threat in the short term is the danger from radical fanatics such as ISIS, but I believe we will conquer it. People who try and rule by threat and terror will ultimately be defeated. We do have to put great resources into combating this threat. However, the threat from climate change will affect our children, grandchildren, and countless generations to come. If we do not act on it quickly, it will leave a severely damaged world for hundreds of years. The suffering and deaths from this will far outweigh anything that will happen from ISIS. Looking at it from that perspective, it certainly could be considered more of a long term threat to our earth.

We cannot allow that to happen! Where is our moral conscience? Now 99% of climate change experts agree that climate change is real and caused by humans. But what if only 50% agreed? If you were going to cross a foot bridge with a 2000 foot drop beneath, and there was only a 50% chance that it would break and send you to your death, would you try and cross? If there was only a 25%, or even a 10% chance, would you cross? If we would not take that chance at 10% with our own lives, how can we gamble with the lives of countless billions of lives of future generations for hundreds of years to come by not acting on climate change? Are we saying our own lives are more valuable than billions of lives of future generations? I agree with Pope Francis. We have a moral duty to act!

Vernon Dixon, MD

Christmas tree fires

As we approach the holidays many people are focused on decorating for the season and don't think about the risks that they are exposing their homes and businesses to with the decorations. Modern decorations are safer than they used to be but still the risk of a structure fire is definitely increased. The winter holiday season should be a joyous time of year, however, certain types of fires and injuries associated with holiday decorating are much more common during this season.

Here are some statistics from the NFPA that should make you think about the old Christmas tree. NFPA estimates that Christmas trees, both natural and artificial, were the item first ignited in an estimated average of 230 reported home structure fires per year during 2007-2011. These fires caused an estimated average of six civilian deaths, 22 civilian injuries, and \$18.3 million in direct property damage per year. These estimates are based on data from the U.S. Fire Administration's (USFA's) National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) and the National Fire Protection Association's (NFPA's) annual fire department experience survey. During the same period, holiday lights and other decorative lighting with line voltage were involved in an estimated average of 150 home structure fires per year. These fires caused an average of nine civilian deaths, 16 civilian injuries, and \$8.4 million in direct property damage per year although these fires are not common, when they do occur, they are unusually likely to be serious.

On average, one of every 40 reported home structure Christmas tree fires resulted in a death compared to an average of one death per 142 total reported home structure fires. Similar shares of home Christmas tree structure fires were in December (43%) and January (39%). Christmas tree fires are more likely after Christmas than before. For example, none of the ten dates with the largest shares of home Christmas tree structure fires were before Christmas. Electrical failures or malfunctions were involved in one-third (32%) of the home Christmas tree structure fires. One in six (17%) occurred because some type of heat source was too close to the tree. Decorative lights on line voltage were involved in 12% of these incidents. Seven percent of home Christmas tree fires were started by candles. Twenty percent of home Christmas tree structure fires were intentionally set. Half of the intentional Christmas tree fires occurred in the 20 days after Christmas. The risk of fire is higher with natural trees than artificial ones. Researchers found that dry natural trees burned easily but trees that had been kept moist are unlikely to catch fire unintentionally.

Holiday lights and other

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.

Executive Director of RC&D

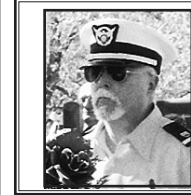


Frank Riley
decorative lighting with line voltage were involved in an estimated average of 150 home structure fires per year in this same period.

Fifteen percent of these fires began with Christmas trees. Electrical failures or malfunctions were factors in nearly two-thirds (64%) of the fires involving holiday or decorative lights. In a study of fall-related injuries during the holiday season, it was estimated that an annual average of roughly 5,800 fall injuries related to holiday decorating were treated at hospital emergency rooms between November 1 and January 31 in 2000-2001, 2001-2002, and 2002-2003. Sixty-two percent of those injured were between 20 and 49 years of age, compared to 43% of the population in this age group. With 43% of the injuries resulting from falls from ladders and 13% caused by falls from the roof, it appears that the majority of these falls occurred during outdoor decorating. Falls from furniture, typically inside the structure, accounted for 11% of the injuries. Some falls occurred when people tripped over or slipped on tree skirts or other decorations. I know that a lot of us leave our trees up for a while after Christmas; some just don't want to let the season go, or family members visit after Christmas, or some of us just don't get around to it as soon as we should.

One of the most important safety tips when dealing with the old Christmas tree is to remove the tree from your home when it begins dropping needles and dispose of it properly because dried-out trees burn easily and should not be left in a garage or placed against the home, and always unplug or switch off all holiday lights before leaving home or going to sleep. Take holiday lights down after the holidays, because holiday lights are for temporary, seasonal use up to 90 days. During the holidays we create more fire risk for our homes, businesses, and even our lives, so we must be more diligent about fire safety. Our Citizens Coalition is ready to help with information for our citizens to use to reduce their risk from a destructive fire.

For more information on Fires, Firewise, Ready Set Go or wildfire education contact Frank Riley, Executive Director, Chastatee/Chattahoochee RC&D Council at www.frank.ccrd@gmail.com.



The Veterans' Corner

By *Scott Drummond, USCG Veteran*

A soldier's burden

This was given to me by our own US Navy Iwo Jima Vet, "Chief" Bud Johnson, from his Battleship Missouri Association memorabilia. A very appropriate poetic remembrance for our Vietnam Veterans who are very often overlooked, written by one of their own brothers, Stan Hutchinson, MSG, US Army (Ret.) RVN 1968-69.

As we near Christmas please remember and pray for all our active duty men and women; honor and revere all those who have served. After speaking to one of our own Hiawassee, Towns County, GA US Army infantry Veterans who served in Vietnam and was with Clyde Owenby who gave his all for all of us, then reading this poem, it became imperative that this poem needed to be presented for all readers to share. Alvin Gibson served with Ernest Garrett, who also gave his life, in that far away place and it should be noted that our VFW/Legion Post 7807 bears their names in perpetual honor of their sacrifice as well as their family's unforgettable losses. Alvin also informed me that Bruce Keen and Tommy Gibson were a part of our infantry over there back in those days. The following poem is dedicated to all of those, who committed to do so much, written by one whose skills far supersede my own limited ability. Our One Nation under God would not survive minus these type Americans, thus none of us would be celebrating our forthcoming Christmas. Whether they volunteered or were drafted, they did their duty as best as they could.

A Soldier's Burden

Lay down that burden, soldier
You've done your duty well
You honored
Your fallen brother

In ways that words can't tell
You met him
And made friends
In that far off distant place
And still today,
In your memories
You can see
That youthful face
You lived
And laughed together
Into combat,
You flew side by side
Until that day
He did not return
That day,
Your good friend died
You mourned
For your comrade
Though you
Held back your tears
And he flew with you,
In your soul
For all these many years
You did so many things
"for him"
In your mind,
With him, you'd share
The fun and crazy
Things in life
As this burden
You continued to bear
Now, today you
Stand here at his grave
On the grass
Where he now lies
And the emotions come out
As tears fall from your eyes
Then you feel a great relief
As a weight
Comes off your chest
You stand there in honor
Where a warrior lies in rest
For all those
Many, many years
You never spoke
Of how you feel
Now is time to
Lay down that burden
The time has come to heal
And we shall not
Forget your friend
As we honor
Those from the past.
But we'll also hold open
Our hearts for you,
So you can lay down your
burden at last.
Semper Paratus

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"The eggs are okay. It's the issues that are hard to swallow."

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