

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

Letters to The Editor

Thankful for a Near-Miss

Dear Editor,
September 11th this year will be very special for me, the 20th anniversary of the day I almost died in a terrorist attack on the Pentagon. At the time I was working for Northern Virginia Community College. As a military retiree who once served a tour in the Pentagon, I still had a building pass, and the college naturally selected me to operate their extension office there. On 9/11, I planned to arrive early, but as I backed out of our driveway, I noticed an apparent food stain on the front of my shirt. So, I went back inside and changed, a process that took about 10 minutes. That's about how much I missed the plane crashing into the building. While still on the highway about a mile away, I could see a tall, dark column of smoke rising from the site. When I got to the parking lot, hundreds of people were running from the building and police and fire trucks were everywhere. I later learned that 125 persons, some of whom I knew personally, had died inside.

Reporters were announcing the attacks on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York and speculating that another mysterious plane was en route for an attack on the White House or Capitol. This was especially worrisome, because my wife was at work near the White House and our daughter at the U.S. Forest Service between the Pentagon and White House.

Traffic was gridlocked on all major highways, so I steered onto city streets, eventually making my way home, and got on the telephone (we had no cellphones then). There was no answer from either my wife or daughter's office. Our son was frantically calling from California, where he had just got the news and was worried that his whole family had perished. It was almost six hours later before we could confirm that we were all still alive, although in a deep state of shock.

We lived about 12 miles out of Washington, D.C. in a noisy location with an airport almost in sight and six-lane interstate highways on both sides. Now, most of the road and air traffic has stopped, and I will never forget the weird, uncommon quiet with only an occasional fighter jet making a pass over the city.

That was by far the strangest day of my life, and I am forever grateful to have been spared thanks to that coffee spill on my shirt.

Wm. Ronald Gibson

Request to Commissioner Bradshaw

Dear Commissioner Bradshaw,

I have been a visitor to Hamilton Gardens many times over the years. It is a treasure that surely must bring pride to the residents of Towns County.

I have noticed an improvement in the gardens over the past few years. The current group that manages the garden has done an outstanding job in maintaining and promoting the gardens.

My understanding is that the current managing group, Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge has started a process to dissolve the organization because they are limited in ways that can manage the gardens. They have been limited in the way they can raise funds to support the gardens. This means that they are totally dependent on donations from local sources.

I am writing to request that you give consideration to supporting the efforts of the current managing group to obtain a working arrangement that would allow the continued management by the current organization with the ability to work independently and use their efforts to obtain financial support outside local efforts.

It is my understanding that the current managing groups' board of directors have offered a counter proposal that will change the operating conditions of the gardens such that they would have the exclusive use and management, maintenance and development of the gardens.

Based on what I have seen over the last few years such an arrangement will result in the continued improvement of the gardens.

Ken Gohring, Secretary
The Azalea Chapter
of the American Rhododendron Society

Thank You, Dr. Kelley

Dear Editor,

I want to thank you and Dr. Kelley for the front page article regarding the COVID vaccines. Hopefully his appeal to the people in our county to get vaccinated will result in a much higher rate of people getting vaccinated and a much lower rate of hospitalizations in our local hospitals. "The bottom line is, if you care about others and you care about people in your community, then I think you're going to be vaccinated." Amen, Dr. Kelley!

Suzanne Paul Carter

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
P.O. 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.



Laying it on a Little too Thick

"Advertising is to a genuine article what manure is to land, - it largely increases the product." P. T. Barnum

Once upon a time, we talked about weather when the conversation began to lag. Weather was a neutral topic suitable for idle chit chat. It wasn't a topic for those who were gifted with gab. It was Romeena Ancrum at Mrs. Wiley's weekly reception. "It'll be a nice evening if it doesn't rain. You know, it rained last Saturday." To which Ernest T. Bass answered for many of us when he said, "I know. I was right there in it."

Then weather got interesting. After centuries of relative calm, something was different, and our perception of weather began to change also. The science is fascinating. The technology which allows real time monitoring from satellites and Doppler Radar is impressive. Increasingly accurate short term predictions made possible by sophisticated algorithms processed by supercomputers allows anyone with a phone or a computer to have access to more data than a professional meteorologist had 20 years ago. With interest came popularity, and anything that popular is irresistible to someone seeking to leverage an advantage. After a decade of abuse and misdirection, our opinion on the weather today is often a political litmus test. Every weather disaster and every story of human tragedy (whether weather-related or otherwise) is packaged and resold to feed our insatiable addiction to drama. Every television station has its own weather celebrities, and we have national weather celebrities too. Some are truly dedicated to their craft, and hold themselves accountable for helping keep people safe.

Others are just celebrities.

I remember when The Weather Channel was a startup that made a great background for a busy day. Their low key weather reports punctuated 24 hours of weather graphics and local forecasts, often with a background of good music. It was weather straight up, backed by sound meteorology and undiluted by much else. I have no doubt the science is still there, and the budget is significantly bigger since TWC has been sold and resold, existing now as part of the Allen Media Group LLC. The Weather Channel has its own stars, and several of them have national name recognition. We expect to see some of those faces in every major storm, reporting live and braving the elements.

Such was the case during the recent Hurricane, Ida. From a street corner on the Louisiana coast we saw two of TWC's intrepid reporters, decked out in full rain gear, bracing against the horrific winds, struggling to stand their ground as they demonstrated to their attentive audience just how bad things were. At precisely the wrong moment (for a director who couldn't yell "cut" during a live report), two guys strolled casually into the shot, seemingly unaware they were in danger of taking flight in the strong wind. One of them was wearing a t-shirt and shorts, his head nonchalantly inclined toward his phone as he strolled by, apparently impervious to the wind.

We have no wish to detract from the actual devastation and loss of life visited upon a large swath of the nation by this dangerous tropical system. The point is, it's a curious thing when corporate media chooses to dramatize what is already sufficiently dramatic. The short answer is that truth is not the primary goal of their productions. They are producing a show to sell as a product, and with so many competing shows, each one has to strive to be noticed.

We're not just picking on The Weather Channel here. Frankly, we find them to be more factual and less biased than just about any other major news organization. Unfortunately, one would be hard pressed to find any corporate entertainment peddler which hasn't been caught embellishing or downright manufacturing stories. It would be wise to assume that everything they serve up is influenced by its entertainment value, even when there is no political or social agenda behind it. Best not to forget that for a moment, because millions of dollars in advertising and serious scientific study goes into getting us to become immersed in their shows, just like the most critically acclaimed video games seek the elusive "immersion" factor wherein the player is so attentive to the game that he forgets it actually is a game. There is nothing wrong with being immersed in a fantasy to give flight to the imagination. The problems come when we use the information from these "shows" to inform our take on reality, to judge other people, and to begin to incorporate into our daily lives the drama and the fear that show business uses to capture our attention.

Which brings us back to addiction, which has become a recurrent topic here as peddled information has grown to be a constant presence in our lives. People take drugs to escape reality, or because they do not perceive reality in a way that holds their interest. It can begin with intentions that are purely casual or recreational, but there are no casual encounters with addictive substances. Let's be honest. How many times did we check the weather page at work or refresh the radar while Ida was approaching the Louisiana coast? How often do we ingest anger with breakfast and digest worry with dinner because we tell ourselves we need to "be informed." Alas, being truly informed takes work. One must find reliable sources, verify and cross reference them and then sift each declaration for bias, all before applying syllogistic reasoning to arrive at a logical conclusion. It's much easier to just watch the show.

Finally, in all fairness to the guys at The Weather Channel, I suppose it is much safer to do a dramatic enactment of what it's like to stand in gale force winds than to actually do it, and we know that sometimes you do actually do it. We get the point either way, as long as we're all clear about what is being staged. Just be careful that you're not laying it on too thick.

Outside
The Box
By: Don Perry
worldoutsidethebox.com

Crepe Myrtles

Crepe myrtles are a great landscape tree. They come in lots of different sizes, so you can get one that fits your space.

UGA extension
Watching and Working
Jacob Williams



Many folks have them planted around their yard or business, but I've gotten more questions than normal about people having problems with them. While they are usually pretty hardy against diseases and insects, there are a couple of things that can affect them, so I will discuss those here. One of the most concerning things that I've gotten calls about on crepe myrtles is ambrosia beetles. We have ambrosia beetles every year, but this year it does seem like there are more of them around. Ambrosia beetles are boring insects that will attack a variety of trees including crepe myrtle, dogwood, redbud, maple, cherry, apple, persimmon, rhododendrons, azaleas, and others. They burrow into the heartwood of the tree where they make their galleries. Generally, they attack young plants, but they will attack mature trees, especially if they are under stress. That stress could be from drought, flooding, or mechanical wounding. The adults will introduce a fungus they and their young will feed on inside the tree. The adults are only 2.5 millimeters long, so they are very small. The simplest way to identify ambrosia beetle is that they push out some thin strands of sawdust that look like toothpicks attached to the tree. Because ambrosia beetles are feeding on the fungi they introduce and not the tree, a systemic insecticide will not kill them. You can use an insecticide like permethrin or bifenthrin as a preventative spray on your trees. If you catch the infestation early on mature healthy trees and treat them, they may be able to recover.

You can create a trap to monitor when ambrosia beetles start to show up. Collect a bolt of wood that is 2-4 inches in diameter and about 2 feet long. Drill a half-inch diameter hole into the wood as deep as possible. Fill that hole with Ethyl alcohol that is at least 70% and put a stopper cork in the top of the hole. Isopropyl alcohol does not work. Place the near the wood line where you have crepe myrtles. The ambrosia beetles will attack the trap first, and you will see the sawdust toothpicks form on the trap. When you see that occur, start treating your trees.

Powdery mildew is a common disease on crepe myrtle. You'll see this growing as a white fuzz on the leaves. It's something that we get every year; it's just a matter of when. This disease may look unsightly, but it will not kill the tree. Leaves that have a lot of powdery mildew on them may start to shrivel up and drop early. Flower buds that are infected may not open.

Cercospora leaf spot creates large dark brown leaf spots on the leaves. This can lead to leaves dropping early. Some cultivars are more susceptible to leaf spot than others are. Susceptible varieties are more likely to lose their leaves early.

Sooty mold is dark brown or black coating on leaves and stems. It can be rubbed off. It is a fungus that grows on honeydews. An aphid feeding on the plants most likely forms the honeydews. Sooty molds only cause superficial damage. The aphids causing the honeydew can be treated with an insecticide, but usually treatment is not necessary.

If you have questions about crepe myrtles, you can contact your County Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

Let Us Never Forget

As we approach this coming Saturday, September 11, 2021 just because 20 "antiquated" years ago, let us not forget that we still live in a hostile world. A whole doggone lot of folks in this old world just aren't as nice, sweet, civilized, gracious, and gentle as are most of us Americans. Today we live in an environment not much different than our pre-WWII era in the 1930s. And who paid the ultimate price and made sacrifices to save, not just America, but our entire civilized world from those who thought that our global environment needed to be "fundamentally transformed"? That answer is those who have ALWAYS provided that rescue, before, during, after and always will, our men and women of our military forces. They volunteer to serve that which is far and away greater than self, no matter how bad the elite political class tend to just mess things up as often as possible.

Our men and women of the Army, Navy, USAF, Marine Corps, and USCG were more than ready, willing and able to do what needed to be done immediately after that infamous morning of 20 years ago. I personally to this day simply cannot watch any of those videos taken of our two WTC buildings on fire, crashing and falling down with innocent Americans just there for a day's work jumping to their deaths to escape being burned to death. Honestly I tear up 20 years later just typing this short message. And I don't even like going to NYC! But I do love America!

This Saturday, September 11, 2021 there will be several events to recognize and honor Freedom, our military forces, First Responders, and patriotic Americans held throughout our Blessed North Georgia Region. Here in Towns County at our beautiful Towns County Square beginning sharply at 11 AM, we will share fellowship and honor our nation with a solemn ceremony. And let us not forget, in attendance will be many of us Veterans standing strong for God, Country and family alongside our First Responders, as those Firemen, cops and medical folks died trying to save innocent lives within those crashed and burning buildings 20 short years ago would have done before they too made the ultimate sacrifice for others. We in America have a huge "barrel full" to be thankful for and a duty and responsibility to understand that none of this would be remotely possible without those who serve in uniform in our military, as well as our First Responders who serve in various uniforms as well as civilian attire.

Never forget! -Semper Paratus

The Veterans' Corner
Scott Drummond
USCG Veteran



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