

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

The Middle Path

by Don Perry

There is a frustration shared by many in our area and a common concern for the fate of our communities as the rate of change in our lives seems to accelerate with each passing year. As you turn the pages of this newspaper, something is happening in Towns County which seems to me to be a watershed event in the history of our community. Gigantic pylons are being inserted deep into the earth which will carry much needed electricity to the eastern half of our county. There is nothing inherently wrong in this. Power lines are not pretty but on a hot day, air conditioning is indeed a beautiful thing and on a cold day, heat is a life saver. No, what frustrates is the realization of what this new and unavoidable construction represents.

What we may become remains to be seen, but Towns county is no longer and will never again be what many of us thought, or imagined, or wished it could be. We are not exactly the quaint mountain village or the traditions of generations of Mountain People reflected in the fading images of the Georgia Mountain Fair. We're not exactly the ideal retirement haven pictured in the thousands of brochures we mail to Florida every year. We remain a beautiful place to live, a gentle place to live and a fine place to raise a family - if one has the financial wherewithal to bring a family here at all - but we are most assuredly not a good place for a young person to find a job and build a career and we are not fertile ground for the entrepreneurial spirit to take root.

This is not to say that we cannot be that kind of place, but right now and for the foreseeable future, the jobs just aren't here. We bet the farm on the housing boom and a few of us won big for a while, but like so much of the country we discovered we were holding a losing hand in the fall of 2007. The inertia and stubbornness and randomness of local politics and intrigue have so far deferred any chance of attracting high tech business to this area. We have few incentives to attract this kind of business

and no real consensus as to whether we should attempt to do so in the first place. Some businesses hedged their bets on tourism, but the stream of tourists has dried to a trickle - in part because of the economy and in part because we are not high on the list of destinations for vacationers anymore, perhaps because we have become something little different from so many other developed areas in the country.

What we are is a kind of hybrid, a collection of circumstances and unintended consequences born of the frenzy of unplanned and uninhibited development that occurred between 1996 and 2007. We are part native and part migrant, but we are all, and predominantly, consumers here. We consume food, gasoline, electricity, prescription drugs and a diminishing list of services as local businesses close their doors. Many of our shrinking number of producers are looking for work. Some have already gone elsewhere to find it, but we cannot, even if we wanted to do so, return to the good old days of unregulated growth. The goose that laid that golden egg was slaughtered to feed an insatiable and short-sighted hunger. We have, by active participation or the acquiescence of inaction, consented to the choice to take the natural beauty of our area and monetize it - convert it to capital - and in the process we have destroyed much of that natural beauty forever. A decade of rapid development with little or no planning, few regulations and inconsistent enforcement of what few standards we had, have left us with clusters of intensely developed and often inaccessible properties spread out over a large area difficult to provide with basic services like electricity and water. We allowed the impatience and shortsightedness of greed to overwhelm foresight and planning. The flowers we grew to attract the bees were run over by the honey wagon.

Even if we could start over again with the unspoiled vistas and low property values of, say, Kentucky, the economic turmoil that has left hundreds of properties unsold and dozens

of local businesses closed - is far from over. When (and if) business does pick up again it will do so without the artificial stimulus of unlimited credit. In other words, the property boom is over and it won't be coming back to Towns County, but that boom has left us with obligations that we must meet. And so here we are. Picture a pen tied to a rope and we are charged with sketching our future by pulling at both ends. On one side we have those who, from their mountain top perch or lakeside vista have pulled against any kind of growth or change, now that THEY are here. On the other side are those who would package the very mountains themselves in little boxes and ship them away if they could find the buyers. The resulting picture has all the randomness and inconsistency one might expect from such a tug of war. There have been too few hands on the rope, too few people making decisions that affect all of us. Most of us are unfortunately on the sidelines of this conflict, trying to make a living or trying to preserve the living we made which brought us here. Many of us have made the connection, observed clearly the causal link between the ridgelines stripped of vegetation and covered with trophy homes and the march of transmission lines across the county. One is just as pretty to look at as the other.

Where we go from here is uncertain. For our community to thrive, we need creativity, consensus and leadership which we may have to look to a younger generation to find. We need more people involved in making decisions for our future, more and different, different from the same old few who have brought us to the present.

The pylons go up. Property values and our tax base goes down and local businesses close their doors. We have a high percentage of citizens who, being retired, on limited incomes, having liquidated much of their assets to move here or saw them liquidated by the tanking economy - are no longer mobile. We are stuck with each other and there are more of us here now than our infrastructure can support in the style to which we have become accustomed. The days ahead are going to cry out for leadership that is creative and adaptable and for a community spirit that is cohesive. The wisdom is here. The talent is here. This will be difficult to accomplish as long as a single pair of hands holds the que and a few dozen voices call the shots.

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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@brmcmc.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.

Resource Pages Support Implementation of Lake Chatuge Watershed Action Plan



Installing a residential rain garden can be an attractive, relatively inexpensive way to help solve storm-water ponding problems



Stormwater bioretention areas often look just like a professional landscaping feature while working to reduce runoff and enhance water quality

The Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition recently released a series of 13 supplemental resource pages that were developed to provide more detail and technical assistance to landowners working to implement recommended water quality improvement strategies in the Lake Chatuge Watershed Action Plan.

With a couple of clicks on HRWC's web site (www.hrwc.net), you can learn what a riparian buffer is, where to go for detailed instructions on how to create a backyard rain garden, or find tips for water conservation.

You can also learn

more about erosion control best management practices, what the elements of a "conservation-based" development are, and the value of post-construction stormwater BMPs for controlling flooding.

Printable versions of HRWC's newly released fact sheets are available for free download from the Publications page www.hrwc.net/publications.htm or by mail by contacting the HRWC office (828) 837-5414.

The fact sheets will also be available at the Wine Tasting and North Georgia Lakes Celebration to be held at Crane Creek Vineyards on

Friday, May 8. Tickets are still available for \$15 each. The event begins at 5:30 and will again feature free tastings of local wines offered by Crane Creek, as well as live music and hors d'oeuvres, made from primarily locally grown and organic foods. Non-alcoholic beverages will also be served.

Visit the HRWC website for online ticket purchases or more event information, including directions to the vineyard: www.hrwc.net or contact the HRWC office at 828-837-5414. Tickets can also be purchased at Crane Creek or from any HRWC board member. NT(Apr22,23,N)SH



"Kinda gives you a sense of being part of history, doesn't it?"



Letters to The Editor

Thank you from City of Hiawasse

The City of Hiawasse wishes to express their appreciation to David and Chris Furby with Furby Tree Co. for the excellent job of the removal of tree stumps along the sidewalks near Chatuge Regional Hospital.

Thanks, guys, for helping beautify the city. We greatly appreciate your generosity.

Barbara Mathis

Have you noticed the signs?

I mean...the literal, wooden, nicely-painted signs. They're everywhere. "Jesus", "Repentance", "Pray" are some I have noticed. I don't know who put the time into making them and hanging them, but I know whoever it is will be blessed. As we drive down the road (of life) we can look up to see the Name above every Name...the Name of Jesus and what He said to do...repent and pray. Even my 8-year old son has noticed them and commented on how wonderful it was for someone to hang them up for everyone to see. I just wanted to say thank you. Is the "lowest prices" advertising sign on the road going to make a difference to anyone 50 years from now? NO. Are the faith-based "Jesus" signs going to make a difference to someone 50 years from now? Definitely. I don't know who you are, but thank you for the hard work you put into making these signs and hanging them around the county. May God bless you.

Lisa West

Towns County Herald

Dedicated to the promotion of Towns County

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The Towns County Herald is not responsible for errors in advertising beyond the cost of the actual space involved. All subscriptions must be paid in advance.

Community Calendar

Towns County Water Board Meeting 4th Monday of each month at 7 pm in the TC Water Office Building.
AARP meets the 2nd Thursday of each month at the Senior Center
Towns County Democratic Party meets at 5:30 every 2nd Thursday of the month at Crossroads Restaurant. Meeting begins at 6. Please call Kim Bailey, 706-994-2727 or 706-896-6747.
Towns County Republican Party meets the 1st Tuesday of each month from 5 p.m.-6 p.m. Dinner at Daniels Steak House, 6 p.m. - 7 p.m. meeting, 896-9021.
Towns County Planning Commission is held the 2nd Monday of each month at 7 pm in the Courthouse.
Towns County Commissioners meeting is the 3rd Thursday at 5:30 pm in the courthouse.
School Board Meeting, 2nd Monday each month at 7 p.m. in the auditorium.
Hiawasse City Council 1st Tuesday of month 4 pm, at City Hall.
Young Harris City Council, 1st Tuesday of month at 7 pm, Young Harris City Hall.
The Hiawasse River Valley Kennel Club meetings are held

at 7 p.m. the 1st Monday of each month at Brother's Restaurant on Hwy 64 in Murphy, NC. Call President Kit Miracle: 706 492 5253 or Peggy Moorman: 828 835 1082.
The Unicoy Masonic Lodge #259 meets on the 2nd Monday of the month at 7:30 p.m.
Board of Voter Registrars meets the 3rd Wednesday of the month at 4:30 p.m., Courthouse.
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 pm. Annual dues \$15, PO Box 932, Hiawassee, GA 706-896-1060, www.townshistory.org Bridge Players intermediate level meets at 12:45 pm on Mondays & Fridays at the Towns County Health Dept. Call Eden at 706-896-6921.
Mountain Regional Arts and Crafts Guild, Inc (MRACG) meets the 2nd Tuesday of each month at ArtWorks Artisan Centre, located at 308 Big Sky Drive (behind the Holiday Inn), Hiawassee.

Refreshments at 6 p.m. & the meeting begins at 6:30 p.m. Contact us by calling 706-896-0932, mtnregartsandcraftsguild@hotmail.com.
VFW Post #7807 Fish Fry will be 2nd and 4th Friday of the month, 4:30-7 PM, \$9 a plate, all you can eat.
Mountain Computer User Group meets the 2nd Monday of each month at the Goolsby Center at YHC. Q & A at 6 pm, meeting at 7 pm.
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. 5pm Fly Tying - 7pm 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/blueridge-mountains.
Alcoholics Anonymous: 24 hour phone line 828-837-4440.