

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

Letters to The Editor

Editor of the Towns County Herald

Thank you Mr. Duncan for printing my letter last week. Had I known you were going to run an OP ED about our school I would have been a little more informative in my letter. Since you provided space for about 15,000 words from Dr. Behrens and Principal Perrens I would request enough space for a short rebuttal.

Dr. Behrens states "all about one test" in your headline. The fact is it may have been one test that pushed them over the edge into what is known as the Death Penalty zone. That is where the United States Department of Education steps in and basically says this program is so messed up we need to start over. Every State is different in their method of measuring success. The USDE uses real figures to monitor all the states programs. Georgia uses what can only be called Fuzzy Math to come up with some of their performance totals.

Example; Towns County averages about 100 to 110 students entering the 9th grade every year. That number of students is about average for all classes throughout the school and remains consistent with move ins and transfers up until the class reaches 9th grade. Between 9th grade and graduation Towns County loses about 40% to 45% of their class. We graduate 60 to 70 students on average. But, our graduation rate is listed at 95%. The real number is 60% to 65%. Did the other 40 students disappear? No, most were (Transferred) to the Mountain Learning Center where some complete their studies but most dropped out and hopefully get a GED. But, they are off Towns County Schools drop out books. The USDE looks at the whole picture not the transfer game being played by local school Administrations.

The attempt to lay the blame off on the economy is simply not true. There are many schools in the State of Georgia with over 75% of their students on free lunch programs that did not make the poor school list. Towns County going over 40% was another contributing factor but it was far from the cause of the problem. While we are speaking of economics lets discuss the amount Towns County spends per student when compared to other Schools. Depending upon the source of the statistic, Towns County spends more per student than most other schools in this state. According to Public School Review www.publicschoolreview.com.

Towns County spent \$20,434 per student last year. The State average was \$11,275 per student. Hayesville spent \$8,906 per student during the same time period. Are we getting our money's worth?

I also believe Mr. Behrens needs a reality check when it comes to his constant complaining about the need to furlough teachers for five days. I know many people who have been "Furloughed" now for about two years. They have no health insurance, no retirement, no sick leave or other benefits. Don't get me wrong I think teaching is one of the most commendable and honorable professions there is. But times are different today. People all over are tightening their belts and taking cuts. I challenge Dr. Behrens to name one other local person who has had their pay increased over 50% in the last five years as he has.

If that pay raise was based upon performance and production as most private sector jobs are, what would he be paid today. Going to the taxpayer well for more money every year is getting old.

Georgia Schools are usually in the bottom 3% to 5% in the nation depending on which statistic gathering center you look at. Over the past few years Georgia has become very creative in their methods of reporting progress of their schools. I guess it is easier to market improvement than to achieve it. Towns County Schools have become very proficient at using all the methods available to conceal the real numbers. Now that the United States Department of Education has called them out, I believe Dr. Behrens and Mr. Perrens time would be much better spent fixing the problems than writing front page stories for local papers trying to spin the bad news into a positive light.

Can our schools be fixed? The simple answer is yes. Because they are so small they can not only be brought up to standards but they can become schools of excellence very quickly if the right management team is in place. We have some excellent teachers in our schools. We have some very poor teachers that need to be shown the door. We have administration that is a little top heavy and could be trimmed down. We lack a Gifted program that could not only help lift our test number it could attract new families to our area who would bring their Internet jobs and incomes with them. With YHC evolving into what I believe will be one of the premier small colleges in the Southeast, a great school system would attract what I believe is the industry of tomorrow, the Internet employed family. It's a clean, good paying industry that requires many support jobs. It is the only industry Towns County has a prayer of attracting. However, until our Schools are really fixed (not fixed with a pencil and eraser) those people and their income and support jobs will avoid this area like the plague.

Dr. Behrens, Mr. Perrens and our local School Board members are all good people. They did not intentionally allow our schools to get where they are. With that said, I believe it will take some new ideas and probably some new faces to turn our schools around. If I am wrong then show me with some action. I have heard all the talk I care to listen to.

Greg Diehl
Parent, Businessman, Taxpayer

Towns County Herald

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Dear Fellow Parents:

My jaw dropped last week when I read the Towns County Herald Letters to the Editor section and the letter to the school board members calling upon Dr. Behrens to resign. I also read Mr. Perren's column that was printed next to it and Dr. Behrens' interview on the front page of the paper.

I moved my family to Towns County in 2005 to escape the Gwinnett County School System. The elementary school my son was attending in Gwinnett scored in the lower half of the elementary schools in the State of Georgia. In Gwinnett, drugs and gangs are prevalent at the middle-school and high-school levels. English is a second language for the majority of the students. Overcrowded schools are the norm.

The reason we moved to Towns County was the quality of the school system. Our research on the internet showed the Towns County School System was among the top school systems in the area.

Prior to moving to Hiwassee, I managed an office with about 30 employees. If one person or one department under performed, I worked with the person or the department to improve; I did not consider resigning and firing half of the staff as suggested in the Letter to the Editor. That was using a sledge hammer to kill a fly.

As a businessman who derives part of my income from the federal government, I know from way too much experience how convoluted the government scoring system can be. When dealing with the government the 1% you miss often carries more weight than the 99% that was done right.

Therefore, I would encourage anyone looking at the results of the 2009 Georgia High School Graduation Tests to look at the overall picture and not just the 1% spot on the picture. When you look at the whole picture, the Towns County High School graduation rate of 95.9% put the school in the top 5% of the high schools in the State of Georgia.

For the record, I do not know the person who wrote the Letter to the Editor; I do not have any relatives or ex-relatives working for the school system, and I did not consult with Dr. Behrens, Mr. Perren or anyone in the school system before writing this Letter to the Editor.

When you are driving down the road and hit a pothole, you don't replace your car, you repair it and go on. With six consecutive years of performance improvements, the high school is moving in the right direction. All we ask is for them to continue to strive to improve.

Wayne Austin
Parent (first), Taxpayer (too much) & Businessman

The Middle Path

by Don Perry

The generation known as the Baby Boomers grew up with the benefits of an empire that with only 5 percent of the world's population consumed a fifth of the world's energy and resources. Nature abhors a vacuum or an imbalance and so politics and the best laid plans of the empire builders aside, it was inevitable that this situation would correct itself sooner or later.

Looks like it may be the sooner. Not that there are enemies at the gate or that there is anything on the horizon which could threaten the sovereignty of the United States with its unchallenged and battle hardened military. Even with a 10 percent nominal and 20 percent effective unemployment and a mountain of debt worth more than our combined assets, our standard of living still ranks us among the most affluent humans of all time.

The problem is, when one goes on a diet the process is often accompanied by a

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, Hiwassee, GA 30546. Our email address: tcherald@brmemc.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.

great deal of physical and psychological discomfort. As a consumer who grew up with a bewildering array of choices available for consumption, even knowing intellectually that I will benefit from spending less, eating less, consuming less, the actual process of having to cut down can be unnerving. It's annoying that prices have gone up while packages have shrunk. It is inconvenient that unless you shop online, stores have smaller inventories and fewer varieties from which to choose.

My own family is fortunate. We will consume less and be healthier; save more and be better prepared for retirement. But there are millions who will not be so lucky. Recent numbers underline the largest spike in food prices in 26 years.

Those of us who are already clipping coupons did not need to be told that, but families trying to feed children on extended unemployment benefits or those working two and a half jobs with no benefits will be pushed ever closer to the brink by the process of rebalancing our economy with the world's other 5.7 billion inhabitants.

Over the edge of that cliff are the increasing numbers of America's economic serfs, totally dependent on government for their subsistence. Though many of us reading this may currently feel the economic readjustment as merely a tightening of the belt, we should be very concerned about the millions living close to the edge. As they move closer to the brink, so do we all, and like rock climbers scaling a treacherous slope, we are all connected.



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

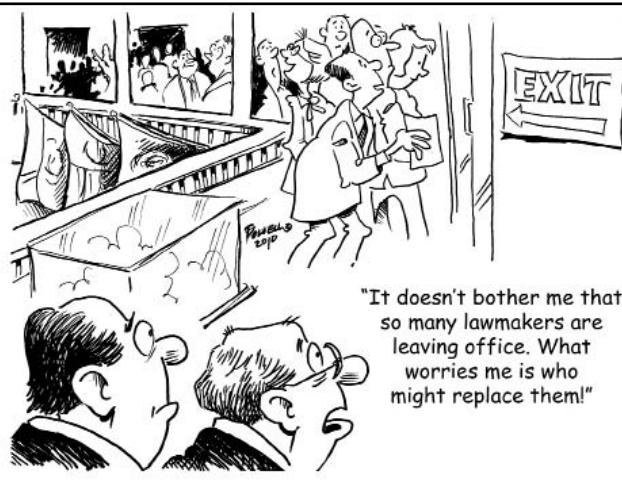
Read all about it
Isn't it amazing how things change? People change more than anything else. People's appearance changes. Their hair changes color, slides off and to the sides of the head. In fact, you know you are getting old when more hair grows in your nose and ears than on your head. My hair is now gray (snow white) and a friend of mine thought I had gotten my hair wet and it had molded. One fellow said when he was young he would look in the mirror and his head reminded him of the ocean. It was just wave after wave of beautiful black hair. He said his head still reminds him of the ocean - it's all beach now. I look into the mirror now and I am more well rounded than I have ever been. When I was in high school I was as skinny as a rail. I had to walk twice in the same place to make a shadow. In fact, I used to tell folks that I was so skinny that I had to tease the hairs on my legs to get my socks to stay up. Have you noticed that where you need to get fat you don't? My legs are still skinny, but I can't say that for the rest of my body. There are some things about life that you never understand. For instance, brain cells come and go, but fat cells stay forever. I am not only heavier now, I am shorter. That's hard for me to understand. I am not only shorter but I am slower. In my younger days I could run so fast that when I reached where I was going it would take my shadow fifteen minutes to arrive where my body was. Now my shadow arrives before my body gets there. We recognize appear-

ance changes quite readily. However, we are not so quick to recognize aptitude changes. When you discover appearance changes you have some options. There are all kinds of surgical procedures, pills, vitamins, exercise programs, diets and other things available to help us keep a youthful appearance. One lady said that she had had so many face lifts that it was necessary to have her lower body raised to keep up with her face. It's a little different when you start slipping mentally. You are more embarrassed about that than you are your appearance. You really don't want to admit that to yourself and you surely don't want anyone else to know it. For forty-nine years I have preached about the hereafter and warned folks about the hereafter. But you know I am more occupied with the hereafter, as I grow older. Everywhere I go I ask myself - "What am I hereafter?" My wife, Regina and I have devised a plan as we travel. She plans to remember where we are going and I plan to remember who we are. Well, I hope you can laugh or at least smile about life, as you grow older. We don't need to look back so much at things as they used to be, but look forward to things as they are going to be. Praise God, someday, we will be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, we shall be changed. We will have a new body, and a new life in a new land where we will never grow old. Thank God I have heard of a land on a far away strand where we will never grow old. You can read all about it in the Book called the Bible. It's the only Book in the world that tells us how much better life is going to be for all of those who trust Christ as their savior. Read all about your future in the Bible.

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