

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

From the Desk of:



Sheriff Clinton of Towns County

Recently, while compiling information for grant proposals, I came across some statistics from the years 2007 and 2008. I learned that, according to the Georgia Crime Information Center, based on uniform crime reporting, in the first year of this administration there has been a 12.6 % reduction in property crimes and crimes against persons, as well as a 43.5 % reduction in burglaries. During the same time period there were nearly two and a half times the drug arrests of the previous year according to jail booking records.

I have always said and still believe that drugs and other crimes go hand in hand. By being proactive we have been able to see a significant decline in crime. These efforts would not have been successful without the support we have received from the community. By keeping us informed of suspicious activity and being involved in neighborhood watch programs, we as a community have taken a stand against crime and it is working.

I encourage each community to be an active part of a neighborhood watch program. We can't be everywhere, but each community is able to be the eyes and ears by working together to spot and report any suspicious activity. Any community with an active neighborhood watch

program is very unlikely to have unsolved burglaries. By working together we are able to identify those who are committing these crimes. Thank you to all those who have been so active in helping us keep your community safe!

The following information is a list of the activities of the Uniformed Patrol Division for the month of May. It does not take into account the activities of Detention Center, Court Services, DARE/School Resource, detectives or administrative staff. These are based on daily logs completed by deputies and verified and totaled by supervisors. Typically, a patrol officer's time is divided mainly between calls of service, self-initiated activities and serving warrants, civil papers and other court related documents.

During the month of May, deputies responded to a total of 283s call of service, performed 16 case follow-ups and took 143 reports. Deputies checked warrants on 150 persons and 127 vehicles, served two warrants and attempted to serve five others. Deputies served six civil papers and attempted six others, as well as served five subpoenas and attempted six others. Deputies also performed 651 business checks, 62 school visits, 467 residential checks and made 1,470 personal contacts with the public. There were a total of 30 arrests for the month, including nine drug arrests and one DUI. There were 24 citations written and 58 warnings.

This information is included in our monthly electronic newsletter. You may sign up for the newsletter by using the form located on the homepage of the sheriff's office website at www.townscountysheriffsoffice.com.

A letter to Georgia's citizens



Chris Clark

Georgia is blessed with abundant natural beauty and a rich cultural heritage. Many of these amazing landscapes and historic sites are part of our award-winning state parks system, with 63 properties from the mountains to the coast. During the last month, I've seen families hiking the highest waterfall on the East Coast. I've watched children paddle a kayak across a pristine mountain lake. I've helped a retired couple park their RV beside a rolling river. I've seen my son touch his first snake as a park ranger explained. The list goes on and on.

Unfortunately, the economic crisis is hitting these special places. Because of declining revenues and budget cuts, the Department of Natural Resources recently announced significant operational changes, including reducing services at some state parks, cutting days of operation at 12 historic sites, layoffs and furloughs. If revenues continue to decline this summer due to the weak-

ened economy, our facilities will be at even greater risk.

Georgia's state parks need your help. What can you do?

Buy an annual ParkPass. These funds are used specifically for repairs and maintenance.

Stay overnight. Our campgrounds, cottages and lodges offer affordable summer vacations.

Book an event. Our facilities are great for family reunions, company retreats and other gatherings.

Join your local chapter of Friends of Georgia State Parks & Historic Sites. The benefits are many, including free admission and discounts.

Volunteer. Now more than ever, we need help with fund raising, maintenance, programming and other activities.

I take very seriously the role that state parks and historic sites play in our local communities. They offer outstanding outdoor recreation and they also stimulate the economy, particularly in rural areas. As we continue to evaluate operations during this difficult time, our emphasis will be on partnering with local communities, businesses and non-profits to keep these sites available to the public.

So come and visit. The dollars you spend go directly towards protecting our natural resources and preserving Georgia's state parks and historic sites for future generations.

Chris Clark, Commissioner Georgia Department of Natural Resources
www.GeorgiaStateParks.org

The Middle Path

by Don Perry

Quiet is for many of us an essential component of our quality of life and the reason we gravitate to the hidden coves, the sheltered valleys and the lonely vistas of our beloved mountains. Our quiet is not the sterile silence of the vacuum of space. It is rather an absence of the noises of civilization with its traffic and industrial grind and a scarcity of the neighbor's music played too loudly. In an environment where the sounds of nature are allowed to become noticeable, the concerts and conversations of birds, the whisper of the wind in the trees and the laughter of water on rock can allow an easier passage to another quality of life that seems increasingly rare in our culture – quietness of mind.

Fifteen years ago I worked for an outdoor experiential education program which endeavored to return candidates from youth detention centers to their homes and families. One of the core components of the program was a period of introspection in which the candidate was placed in a solo camp for 72 hours. Alone in a campsite, isolated from staff and students with minimal camping gear and some journaling materials, this period of enforced quiet was for many the hardest part of the entire program. Being alone with their own thoughts and emotions and without the distractions of technology or social interaction to intervene, many of the candidates found this 72 hours of quiet to be more stressful than any of the physical hardships and privations endured while living for a month in the wilderness. Fifteen years ago we already had a generation of young people, many of which were incapable of spending time alone and in silence without anxiety.

Our civilization today is considerably more "noisy" than it was fifteen years ago. Today the noise comes in many forms inconceivable to our parents' generation. Recently while sitting in a movie theater I was distracted by several bright lights which came from all sides. When my eyes adjusted to the glare I realized that the lights were from cell phones and PDA's. I was surrounded by kids who were texting – thumbing sentence fragments and abbreviations. This behavior persisted throughout the entire movie, and upon exiting the theater, many of the kids (and their parents) continued to talk and to text, walking, talking, and typing all the way to their vehicles and then onto the highway. This phenomenon

is so widespread that doctors have noted a rise in skeletal and muscular problems in our texting and talking generation which have grown out of the habitual use of the related devices.

Our generation which keeps the television on constantly, which cannot work or drive without music or talk, has spawned a new generation which is not comfortable unless it can instantly share whatever pops into its head, is anxious when left alone, and which seems addicted to a constant high traffic of chatter. The implications for this generation are at best, interesting, and at worst deeply disturbing. There is some knowledge and insight which cannot be gained without the quietness of mind which allows information to integrate, to say nothing of the meditation and prayer necessary for spiritual development. Information overload is not only inimical to peace of mind, it creates vulnerabilities in the individual. A generation which is constantly logged in, tuned in and connected is also exposed to the marketing and manipulation which is the constant companion of anyone who accesses media.

If you resemble any of these remarks, I challenge you to perform the following experiment: Disconnect for a while. Turn off the television. Turn off the cell phone or the PDA. Disconnect from the Internet. Put down the newspaper and close the book. Take a walk in the woods or sit by the garden and just listen. Listen not only to the sounds of nature, but listen to the conversation going on inside your head as you continuously think of things while your brain interprets the data of your five senses. Take note of the thoughts, the memories, the worries which rise to the surface of your consciousness. If, in the quiet, you are soon at peace, then you are among the lucky ones, and the more you can silence your internal conversation the more deeply you will be able to experience all that you perceive. If you are anxious or ill at ease without technology to distract you from your own thoughts and emotions, then perhaps these thoughts and emotions require your attention – if ignored, they will manifest nevertheless and often in ways that are unhealthy or painful. Imagine what it must be like for a young person, constantly distracted, who has little or no access to his own internal dialogue.

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 editors 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@brmenc.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.

"I'm really glad Barnes decided to run again... I thought we'd never get another chance to vote against him!"



Extension Tips



by **Robert Brewer**

Amend Soils for Landscape Success

The old saying, "Never place a \$5 plant in a 50-cent hole," is true. The condition of your landscape soil may be the most important aspect of gardening success.

Whether you work with south Georgia sand or north Georgia's clay soils, soil amendments are vital commodities to have.

But it can boggle the mind to look around the garden center and try to distinguish between soil amendments. There are manures, top soil, potting soil, peat moss, mushroom compost -- and the list goes on.

The important things to remember are the goals of soil amendments: to improve the soil's tilth (loosen it up) and drainage and perhaps possibly add some nutrient value.

I suggest focusing more on organic amendments' to loosen the soil and less on nutrition.

The price of amendments varies greatly, and the bags whose fancy covers tout their nutritional excellence may not be any better than the others.

Get in the habit of reading the label on everything to see what's actually in the bag you're buying. By reading the label, you can more easily compare apples to apples.

Stay away from just buying pure peat moss. This makes a poor soil amendment on its own. It tends to dry out too much during dry times and stays soggy when the weather's wet.

Home compost can be a good soil amendment, too, if it's been composted completely. Completed compost should have the consistency of dark topsoil. Use partially finished compost as a mulch on top of the soil, or leave it in the compost bin to finish its conversion to humus.

Once you've decided on an amendment, it's vital to add it to your soil the right way.

One of the most common errors in planting is to dig a hole, pour in a soil amendment and then insert the plant into a hole you'd need a shoe horn to get it into. This will spell disaster. The moisture level around the plant will fluctuate drastically over time.

The right way is to create a consistent, universal soil the roots of the plant can expand in. Then, in this amended soil, dig a planting hole at least twice the width of the root ball.

If it's a new planting site, incorporate a 3- to 4-inch layer of the organic amendment into the soil. This is best done with a tiller in larger beds, but a spade or stiff pitchfork will work in small spaces. Be sure to thoroughly mix the organic matter into the native soil. Don't create two separate soil layers.

You can add organic matter to existing landscapes, too. Just rake back some of the mulch and lightly incorporate about a 1-inch layer around plants. Use a pitchfork to work some of the soil into the existing medium.

Take care not to damage your plants' root systems. Amending existing landscape beds annually will greatly improve the growing conditions for the plants and help insure against compaction and poor drainage.

Take a soil sample. While many amendments will add some nutritional value to your soil, you will most likely need to supplement with synthetic fertilizers.

Taking a soil sample to your county Extension agent is the best way to know the true fertilizer and lime requirements. Sampling every other year will allow you to closely monitor your plant's nutritional needs.

Amending your soil can be one of the easiest ways to avoid plant stress or prevent future disease problems. It's a great way to improve the health of your soil and ensure the long-term success of your landscape.

The University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences.

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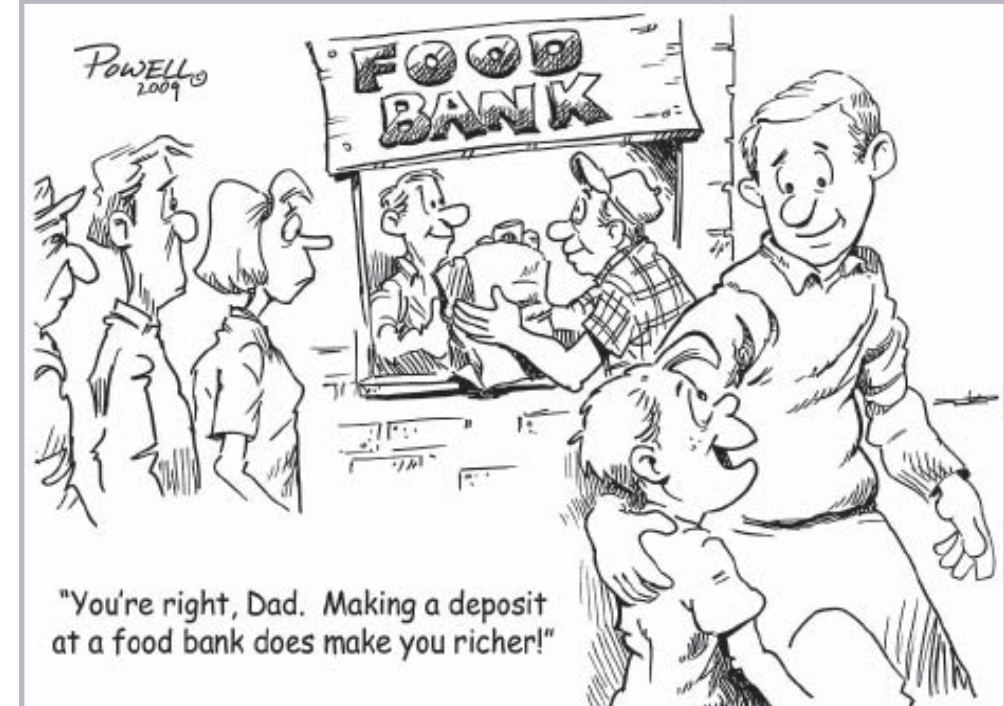
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