

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

We Go Forward

Horrified. Shocked. Dismayed. This is the family of feelings every American should be experiencing after the Jan. 6, 2021, raid on the U.S. Capitol Building. The attack was a dark day in our history, an assault on our democracy. A full accounting must take place, with all actors directly involved held maximally responsible for their terrible actions. Yet the question remains: where do we go from here?

As an optimist, I believe the answer has to be, we go forward. Fortunately, our republic is infinitely more robust than the aims of a small group of would-be insurrectionists, who took hold of and shook a pillar of our democracy but utterly failed to make it fall. In my mind, this is compelling evidence that our system is working.

Dozens of arrests have been made and a rhetorical reckoning is sweeping the American political system. Unmoved by whatever nefarious purpose these rioters were hoping to enact, freedom won the day. Electoral votes were counted, the presidential election was certified, and the sitting president conceded. All this was inevitable, and now, it is time to move forward.

To accomplish this, Americans of every political persuasion must put aside their wagging fingers, their accusations, their I-told-you-so's. Every American. Just as we cannot place blame for the actions of a few radicals at the feet of millions who clearly do not condone such behavior, we must also be honest about the role each of us has played in allowing such tensions to rise.

Sadly, we are locked in a longstanding culture war that has escalated on both sides. What each side fails to acknowledge is that we are largely talking past one another, causing more conflict and preventing resolution. As self-segregated disparate tribes, our camps have been operating on different sides of the same battlefield, combatants glaring with increasing intensity across enemy lines. This has left everyone with a one-sided view of the war.

I ask again: where do we go from here? I say we swallow our pride collectively, individually, and march toward our supposedly sworn enemies, approaching the middle from both sides. As we walk closer to common ground, realization will dawn – our enemy is actually our fellow American. Only in this shared space of understanding may we get a full view of the battlefield, of the complicity of both sides, and from here, we may begin to heal together.

Hot Ashes

Did you know that embers and ashes from a fire can stay dormant for days, even weeks after the fire has been extinguished?

If oxygen is introduced, the debris can easily flare back up causing a small fire or worse.

For this reason, it is important to know how to safely dispose of the leftover ashes. Ashes have a low thermal conductivity.

That means that one hot ember will not be felt unless you put your finger directly on it. The rest of the ash bed will insulate the hot part and you will not feel it. Ashes should only be taken out in a metal bucket or metal container with a tight-fitting lid. Plastic buckets have been tested with ashes, and they burn fairly quickly.

Here are some guidelines for handling ashes from your fireplace. Please use this checklist next time you clean out your woodstove or fireplace: Wait until the wood burning appliance has cooled down. Do not remove ashes while they are hot.

Use a metal bucket or container with a tight-fitting lid for transporting the ashes. Plastic buckets will melt if there is enough heat. A tight-fitting lid will reduce fresh oxygen supply to the ashes. Get the ashes outside and away from the house immediately. Do not leave them sitting somewhere until you have a chance to dispose of them. Pour water in with the ashes to ensure they are out, wet, and cold. Then let them set for a week.

If you want to dispose of the ashes in the garbage, pour cold, wet, week-old ashes in your garbage can when you put it out for pickup. Better yet, sprinkle the ashes on your garden (not if you have straw, mulch, or any other combustible covering on the garden however).

Over the winter, that material will settle into your garden plot to be worked in next spring and all wood ash can be used as fertilizer. Gardeners can raise the soil's pH by applying wood ash to their soil.

Prior to using your wood-burning stove or fireplace you should have a licensed, bonded, and insured chimney sweep clean and inspect your chimney. This should be done at least once a year or possibly more if you use your fireplace or wood-burning stove frequently. A dirty flue in your chimney can eventually result in a chimney fire that can spread to your home and cause significant damage.

Signs of a chimney fire: A loud, crackling or popping noise from the chimney flue like the sound of a large bonfire. A lot of dense, thick smoke coming from the fireplace or out of the top of the chimney. Flames or things that are on fire coming from the top of the chimney. Wood tar chimney fires can create temperatures up to 1200 degrees centigrade inside the chimney. A chimney fire will often cause clay liners to crack and therefore the chimney will probably need to be relined. As the chimney heats up during the chimney fire it expands - this causes plaster-work to crack and even blow off and can cause structural damage to the chimney.

Chimney deposits expand when heated. In the worst-case scenario, they can expand to the extent that they block the chimney, and the chimney fire will then seek oxygen from the nearest available source - usually the stove or fireplace - which means that the fire can come out of the bottom of the chimney. In extreme cases where the integrity of the top of the chimney is already compromised the top courses of brick can blow off due to the pressures inside the blocked chimney.

Heat from the chimney fire can transfer into joists and weaken them through smoldering and cause them to catch fire. Sparks and debris flying out of the chimney can also set fire to the roof if there are tiles missing or there are leaves and debris there.

For more information on fireplaces and wood stove hazards and how to not burn your house down contact your fire department or Chest-Chatt RC&D at www.info.ccrd@gmail.com. To see what can happen when ashes are improperly handled, check this YouTube video out: You can Google House on fire White Oak Mountain.



From the Editor's Desk

Shawn Jarrard



Cousin Eddie

Sometimes on a Saturday evening in the winter months, when it was too cold to play outside or perform dangerous experiments in my secret underground laboratory disguised as our basement, the television would be left on and Hee Haw would catch my attention. I wasn't old or wise enough to appreciate the music, but the skits were funny. I remember one skit in particular. It went something like this: "Jack and me went to the circus. Jack got hit by a bowling pin. Jack and me got even with the circus. We bought a ticket but we didn't go in!"

A futile gesture, no doubt, but that little verse came to mind recently on a wintry day when my current secret underground laboratory was short on dangerous experiments and long on tools that wanted sorting and items in need of repair. In the throws of procrastination, I failed to follow my own advice, and like an alcoholic who thinks he's doing better because he's "not drinking as much," I took just a sip of social media. It starts with a sip and then you come to hours later, tired and angry and your head hurts, thinking, "I just sat down; why is it dark outside?"

Back to the "circus." We've been under the big top for at least a year, perhaps much longer, and everyone is mad at the circus and longing to get even with it. We outraged. We're "fiery but mostly peaceful protest" mad. We're storming the Capitol mad. We're so mad that we just have to express our feelings, and everyone wants to hear about them. It makes us feel good to tell everyone how mad we are, and we know we'll feel even better when our friends "like" our little tantrums and contribute their own. It's good to be outraged at the bad people.

Of course, most of us are too busy to actually climb a wall, break a window or burn a neighborhood business, and those things are wrong, especially when they are done by people we don't like, but we can push pixels from just about anywhere and at anytime, and feel righteous and united in our outrage against the bad people. Then the professional pixel pushers will gather up our contributions and repackage them with images of the people who were desperate or dumb enough to let their outrage take the wheel. Those people are relatively few in number, but the professionals will broadcast their antics over and over until everyone has a chance to see them, and express their outrage about them, which inspires more outrage and leads to more burning and breaking, which leads to more outrage.

It's an effective business model, this self-perpetuating outrage circus, and it generates billions in revenue. The best part of it is that the people who traffic in outrage, politicians, pundits, media companies, news networks, social media platforms, apocalypse bloggers, don't have to create or produce anything. They just have to do a bit of pixel herding, tweaking and manipulating, and it's almost free money. Left to our own devices, we're easy marks. We're wired for anger. It's a survival mechanism rooted in the amygdala, the higher brain's "Cousin Eddie" (as in "Christmas Vacation") who shows up at the most inopportune moments to embarrass the rest of the family.

A good portion of human history involves our efforts to overcome the influence of Cousin Eddie. Religion, philosophy and government are all necessary to help us cope with it, and to minimize the damage we do when we can't cope. Civilization itself hinges on how successful our beliefs and institutions are in elevating our better angels over the fear and anger that can issue forth from those two little almond shaped clusters in our heads, and we've seen what devastation we can cause when they fail.

We've all heard the term "rageaholic," and somewhere in the back of our heads where memories are stored, we remember that "some" people seem to be addicted to getting angry. Not us, though. We don't go around shooting people on the freeway or destroying property or threatening government officials.

But hold on. If arson is the crime, is the one who strikes the match more guilty than the ones who carry fuel to the fire, or the ones who throw gasoline on it? After all, we're about to impeach a president for allowing his own Cousin Eddie to take over his social media accounts. What about our contributions – the memes, the insults, the accusations and the name calling presented in the self righteous cause of partisan politics?

In our defense, as thin as that might be, one might say that we have an addiction. As it turns out, anger really can be addictive. Cousin Eddie is a pusher. He's handing out neurotransmitters known as catecholamines, and little dime bags of dopamine, adrenaline and noradrenaline, and though we may hate ourselves in the morning, it feels good to feel bad, at least for a moment, so we do it again. You might think we would be better off without these little brain buttons inherited from the dinosaurs, but our relationship with Cousin Eddie is more complicated than that.

The amygdala is also involved in emotional learning and the process of forming memories. Which makes it prime territory for anyone who wants to manipulate us by feeding our addictions. As it turns out, our righteous anger is about as valuable to the process of building a better world as Jack's unused circus ticket. Where it does have value is in creating revenue for media giants, and for keeping us all so thoroughly distracted that we miss what's happening to our economy and our national character right under our noses.

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Outside The Box

By: Don Perry
worldoutsidethebox.com

Radon Action Month

As it is every year, January is national radon action month. This year feels different. Many of us are spending more time at home to keep each other safe and focus on our health. This makes it even more important that we test our homes for radon, a colorless, odorless gas that is the second leading cause of lung cancer. This December Lamar Paris, Union County Sole Commissioner, released a proclamation January 2021 would be Radon Action Month in Union County. In Union County, about 45% of homes have elevated levels of radon. In Towns County, about 34% of homes have elevated levels of radon. (Data from radon.uga.edu) Over the course of many years, exposure to this gas can cause lung cancer, even in non-smokers. In fact, radon is the leading cause of lung cancer among non-smokers. Radon is a naturally occurring gas that comes from the breakdown of uranium in soil and rock. Often granite rock naturally has high levels of uranium, which is part of why radon is such a persistent problem in Georgia. The gas seeps out of the soil and rise up through crawlspaces, foundations, and basements into a home. About 800 Georgians die annually from radon induced lung cancer.

Fortunately, testing for radon gas is simple and inexpensive. A short-term radon test is hung in the lowest level of the home for three to seven days before being mailed to the laboratory. The laboratory will then send the homeowner results after it processes the test kit. Tests can be obtained from the UGA Radon Program website (radon.uga.edu) or a hardware or big box store. We also sell them at the Towns and Union County Extension Offices for \$10. During the month of January, Georgians can receive \$5 off their online radon test kit order at (radon.uga.edu) by using the code NRAM2021 at checkout.

If the radon level in your home is high, you can install a radon reduction system. A radon reduction (or radon mitigation) system reduces high levels of indoor radon to acceptable levels. The system most frequently used is a vent pipe system and fan that pulls radon from beneath the house and vents it to the outside. We also have curated a list of people who are certified radon mitigators and do radon mitigation work in our area that I would be happy to share with you.

Radon exposure from drinking water is primarily a concern in private wells. In Georgia, wells drilled into granitic crystalline rock aquifers, usually in the northern part of the state, are at risk of naturally occurring radon contamination. This is where the uranium that decays to radon can be found at higher levels. If you don't know whether there is radon in your well water, have the water tested. The UGA Agricultural and Environmental Services Laboratories in Athens test water samples for the presence of radon. To get a water testing kit, contact your County Extension office. We sell the radon in water test kits for \$40.

Radon is a real and serious issue in our area. If you have questions about radon contact your County Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

Watching and Working
Jacob Williams



RC&D
Frank Riley
Executive Director



Towns County Loses a Patriot

Almost 99 year old WWII Veteran, Bud Johnson, friend to all, mentor, inspiration and fellow Patriot was called Home by our Supreme Commander on the evening of January 1, 2021.

He will be missed by Towns County and indeed our Veterans Community. To say that he was a jewel and unique would be an understatement. Just ask anyone who spent time with him. As such I'd bet that he's in glory with all those other Veterans trying to organize some sort of "committee", with God's smiling approval. Yep! Bud was and is that kind of guy. He never, ever quit until the very end!

While there is a long line of fellow Veterans who spent time helping Bud in his many endeavors, always for others, I would be amiss if I didn't sing praises of Jeanie Loiacono and her husband who joined in with many of us who spent time with Bud over the past 15-18 years or so. She was also the last person with Bud before he passed. And she contributed to the joy of Bud's last days on this earth by making sure he attended all of our Towns County Republican events. He was grinning ear to ear at every assembly of Towns County Patriots. Bud even enjoyed a last boat ride at one of our "Trump Armadas".

I am informed that his celebration of life will be on President's Day, at Foster Park in front of our Towns County Iwo Jima Monument. More from Jeanie: "A simple, honorable, God-loving, American patriot, all he wanted was to help his fellow servicemen. He said everyone had to have purpose; God-given purpose. That was his and he fulfilled it to a T. I am sure through his legacy he will continue to do so in perpetuity.

Thank you all for the outreach so far. He is and always will be a respected and loved resident of Towns County. No one who ever knew him will be able to drive by the Hiawassee Camp Ground without looking for his car. Flags are flying half mast at many homes, businesses, and especially in front of his RV." I conclude this understated column with tears in my eyes.

Bud has lived here in our mountain community for decades serving all fellow Veterans with a kind heart, positive attitude for God, Country and our fellow citizens. So much of our Veterans' work and maintaining history has been spearheaded by Bud.

Most important to Bud, is his love of Jesus, he lived a very strong Christian life. Here's what Bud had to say about all this: "What more could a seaman want than fair winds, a following sea, and a safe port at the end of his journey." "The Supreme Commander blessed me with the ability to navigate by His celestial planets and stars, to pilot His mighty oceans deep, and to respect His furious seas." America is graced indeed to have such men.

Here, we were blessed to have Bud and many more Veterans who have served our nation and given the best they could give so that we could enjoy our freedoms we are blessed with today.

Thank you, Bud and thanks to all Veterans. Bud was an advocate for all Veterans as well as a life member of the VFW and American Legion. Good grief! We miss him!

Semper Paratus

The Veterans' Corner
Scott Drummond
USCG Veteran



Towns County Herald

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Publication No: 635540

Advertising, News deadlines: Friday at 5 p.m.

Towns County (1 Year) \$25. Out of County (1 Year) \$35. Entered as second-class matter on November 8, 1928, at the post office at Hiawassee, Georgia under Act of March 3, 1879. With additional mailing points. The Towns County Herald is not responsible for errors in advertising beyond the cost of the actual space involved. All advertisements are accepted subject to the Publisher's approval of the copy and to the space being available, and the Publisher reserves the right to refuse any advertisement. Postmaster: Send change of address to: Towns County Herald, P.O. Box 365, Hiawassee, GA 30546.

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