

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

Letters to The Editor

Future of Hamilton Gardens

Dear Editor,
I read with dismay the dissolution of the Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge. I have followed the transformation of the Gardens with awe that a small group of dedicated individuals with an excited, supportive community made such enormous strides to restore this natural wonder. First and foremost, I want to congratulate the "SWAT Team" and their leader, Grace Howard for their vision and subsequent actions for the Gardens. Their commitment and hard work made the impossible possible.
Now, the Georgia Mountain Fair Authority wants it back because, in the words of their treasurer Terry Taylor, "it is an asset". Has he forgotten how the Authority treated this asset - the overgrown paths; broken bridges; a tattered pavilion, neglected foliage, damaged wildlife. And the Authority's future ideas - install more parking lots; camping grounds, etc. that will ultimately cause permanent damage to this mountain gem.

Pure and simple, this decision hurts the County and future generations.

Rose Kennedy
Board Member (retired)
Wisconsin Master Gardeners' Association

The County is the Landlord

Dear Editor,
Read with interest the two letters concerning Hamilton Gardens in the July 14 paper.

As everyone knows, the Gardens had fallen on hard times due to lack of stewardship and lack of resources of both the Towns County Lions Club and the Georgia Mountain Fair. As one article said, in the 1980s Fred Hamilton donated his collection of flowers to the County for the benefit of the citizens. He would be pleased with the return of Hamilton Gardens to its current glory but disappointed with what is occurring now.

The citizen volunteers have worked thousands of hours over many years to bring it back. It is true that the Fair has hired a part-time gardener to help but that can't replace the dozens and dozens of volunteers. Towns County should step in and make Hamilton Gardens a separate entity for the benefit of the Fair, the Lions, Towns County and the citizens of the County. The Fair structure of the TVA, Towns County, Lions Club Board, Fair Board, Fair Authority and the State of Georgia is a nightmare but the County is the landlord. It can be done. The County took back the baseball fields when they were neglected and annexed the land where the pickle-ball courts reside. It would be a shame to lose such a beautiful venue that is so important to the County.

Herb Bruce; Past President-TC Lions Club, Past Director-GA Mtn. Fair Board

Swimming Against the Current

Dear Editor,
It is difficult to swim against the current of public opinion set in motion by the media and governmental designs to perpetually keep us at odds with the truth of our plight. On the other hand, reason and logic urge us to kneel and give thanks for every small sign of true kindness. I refer to the misunderstanding between the Fair authorities and the Hamilton Gardens volunteers who have done so much for the preservation and improvement of an incredible resource.

The volunteers, in their quest to consolidate improvement have apparently "stepped on the toes" of the Fair authorities by appearing to have annexed the Paris Pavilion and an adjacent parking area.

The Fair authorities, in their quest to expand the profitable camping sites, have reacted to this as an intrusion to their authority.

This is really not about the Gardens at all. Unexpected intrusions of compromise - that is what life is.

Clifford Revell

Loss to the Community

Dear Editor,
I would like to thank Mr. Canup and Mr. Scott for their comments regarding the dissolution of Hamilton Gardens in the July 14, 2021, TCH. In full disclosure, I was formerly a Hamilton Gardens Board of Director. I was integrally involved in the transition between Georgia Mountain Fair (GMF) and Hamilton Gardens in 2016. As one of the crew leaders of the restoration efforts, below are some examples of the deferred maintenance left by GMF which posed serious liabilities. We rebuilt the 125 foot long bridge. Many of the support posts had visible dry rot. Removing some of the decking exposed a number of floor joists that had completely rotted through. The lack of structural integrity was such that the bridge could have collapsed at any time. Georgia Mountain Fair, TVA and Towns County were exposed to potential liabilities.

The Paris Pavilion restrooms were grossly neglected. Commodes leaking or not working, rotten partition walls, peeling paint, broken windows, etc. - an embarrassment to the citizens of Towns County.

Improper electrical wiring (reverse polarity) in the greenhouse. One of the garden volunteers was shocked and fortunately not seriously injured.

No plans or asbuilts exist. So underground utilities and structural concerns were difficult to overcome.

General care and grounds: At the time of transition, there were weeds 2+ feet tall in the pathways, areas overtaken by invasive plants, dead trees and limbs throughout the gardens, leaking irrigation, infested hemlocks, etc.

Gross negligence is not strong enough to describe the condition of the gardens and structures the Hamilton Gardens Board had to deal with in 2016.

In summary, the County has the authority to do what is in the best interest of the citizens. GMF has demonstrated their lack of care in the past. It is interesting that the county facilitated the exchange of the now pickle ball property with the offset of somewhere in the range of \$400,000-\$600,000 of unpaid rent owed by agreement by GMF to the county. BTW, The Georgia Legislature Document, House Bill 1069, Law #747 requires three (3) appraisals prior to conveyance of land by GMF. I requested copies of the appraisals from Commissioner Bradshaw on November 30, 2020, and have yet to receive a response.

For the gardens to succeed, professional, caring, and knowledgeable individuals are essential to continue the legacy the current board has achieved. Control of the future, beyond a two and five year agreement, is essential to raise money and obtain grants to achieve the potential this property has to offer to Towns County residents and tourism.

Noel Turner



A Tip of the Hat

The baseball cap, beyond its namesake function of keeping the sun out of a ball player's eyes, is much more. Despite the fact that in some sophisticated but unfortunate circles of urban cliff dwellers it has been assigned a role in lampooning those of us who are blessed to reside in rural areas, when I walk into a place where ball caps are worn, I'm almost assured of finding good company and common interests.

Sadly, those who might poke fun may never know that beyond its usefulness as an article of clothing, the ball cap is also an accessory and a tool. It is, in fact, the Swiss Army Knife of clothing, and for many a nimble dad and grandpa, the baseball cap is a martial art.

There are days when the cap is the only clean place to lay that sandwich. When you come upon a blackberry bush that has more berries than you can eat, a John Deere cap will hold enough for a good sized pie. When the heat and humidity demand an unscheduled swim in the pond, the hat will keep your keys and sunglasses out of the sand, and when you forget to take a basket to the hen house, the hat will hold enough eggs to fill a carton.

These are but a few of its uses. As to its utility in the martial arts, I once saw my grandfather decimate a nest of Guinea Wasps when my brother thought it would be interesting to throw a handful of fertilizer into a dark hole in an old hollow tree. I can still hear Granddaddy's hat whistling and snapping like a buggy whip, and while I'm not the Hat Master my grandpa was, I've taken down many a horsefly with my own faithful cover. Once I even confused a copperhead long enough to jump back, with a spinning throw that would have looked good in a kung fu movie.

The baseball cap can even claim a place in the proper upbringing of unruly children, and I confess that I've had a welt or two raised by the precisely aimed steel button that sits on the top of any decent ball cap.

On that note, a word of advice to some of our younger cap wearers: While it is your natural function to push out the boundaries of common sense, the only time a ball cap should be worn backwards is when you're welding, or need to get up under something to put a wrench on it. You'll realize this when that extra nanosecond it takes to reach back for the bill means you'll be nursing a yellow jacket sting.

I have an old Ben Meadows cap that, it has been suggested to me, should have long ago been retired, but I have to disagree. It's got a history, and as ragged as it might look, just the mention of its name brings fear and trembling to the horsefly clan. I got it on a trip to a Ben Meadows store with my dad many years ago, and it holds that memory and many others.

Another ragged adventurer is the fishing cap from Southeast Adventure on St. Simon's Island. It was just getting broken in when a gust of wind took it off my head and into the Brunswick River, but a remarkably skillful (lucky) cast from the pier that my wife still talks about today, snagged it before the current took it out to sea.

I have hats from my grandfathers, and several from my dad, who covered the back on an entire door with his collection. The Atlanta Braves baseball cap from the world championship year and the Tin Can Sailors cap he liked to wear, both hold special meaning.

Gone is one of my all time favorites, the Dixon Ironworks cap given to me by a good friend from one of his first business ventures.

It vanished with a puff of wind into the vastness of the Grand Canyon the first time I laid eyes on that wonder, coming upon it unexpectedly off of an unmarked road somewhere on the North Rim.

The hat is gone, but the memories of our young adventures still shade my eyes from the bright glare of this virtual world of the fragile and the self indulgent.

I was raised to believe, and through faith I know that the measure of a human being is in the quality of their character and nothing else.

Our culture, however, seems obsessed with identity, so if I'm forced to identify, so be it. I identify with the baseball cap wearing members of our society, no matter what other labels they may choose to wear.

Of course the cap tells me nothing about the quality of their character, but when I see one it does tell me that there is a better than average chance that the wearer has needed to shade their eyes from the sun, has cranked a chainsaw or climbed a pole, or fished in a lake or stuck a paddle into a river, or hiked up a mountain, or stood at attention in formation and saluted the flag.

All of God's children have in common what is most important, but with some people you have to work harder to see it. For me, it just comes a little easier with the folks who wear baseball caps.

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Outside The Box
By: Don Perry
worldoutsidethebox.com

Leyland Cypress

Leyland cypress trees are a very common and popular landscaping plant. I've seen them planted by people all over Georgia. However, there are a couple of issues that are commonly seen in Leyland cypress trees. Let's talk about Leyland cypress trees, what some of those issues are, and what steps you can take to reduce the chances of your Leyland cypresses getting diseased.

Leyland cypress was bred in 1888. It is a cross of Alaska cedar and Monterey cypress. They can grow to be over 40 feet tall. When they are young, they grow very rapidly. They'll grow at a rate of 3-4 feet per year. Later on in life, they will continue to grow very rapidly at rate of about 2 feet per year. They typically have a Christmas tree shape. In some places, people have even begun to grow them to be sold for Christmas trees. Typically, people plant them for a barrier or privacy screen.

Leyland cypress trees are relatively insect pest free. They are very prone to environmental stress and a few canker diseases. Environmental stress such as heat, lack of water, or too much water leads to the insides of the trees turning brown. Another thing to keep in mind is that these trees have an effective lifespan of 15-20 years. So if your trees are that age and don't look healthy, they probably aren't going to get any better.

The two canker diseases that Leyland cypress trees get are Seiridium and Botryosphaeria canker. Seiridium canker is the most common and destructive of the two in Georgia. The symptoms from both diseases look very similar. You will see individual branches begin to die off. Sometimes you'll see resin in spots on the branches because of the cankers. These cankers are essentially suffocating the branch, leading to the branch turning brown.

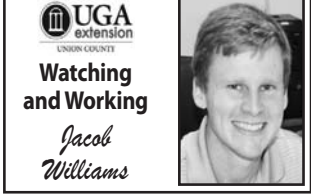
Stressed trees are going to be more susceptible to cankers. During times of drought, trees that are already infected will spread the disease much more quickly. Ice damage and spring freezes can create wounds where infection is able to occur. Trees that are near buildings that reflect sunlight will also be more stressed.

Unfortunately, with canker diseases there is not a fungicide that can be used to eliminate the pathogen. Even if there was, spraying a 40-foot tall tree is not practical. Once a tree has been infected the best treatment is to remove the dead branch and dispose of the branch. Try to keep plants from becoming stressed by laying mulch around their base. This will increase the moisture retained by the soil, and suppress competitive weed growth. During dry, hot summer days, water the trees if the soil has become dry.

If trees are extensively damaged by cankers, then they will need to be removed. When planting Leyland cypress make sure to dig out an area 3-4 times larger than the diameter of the root ball. This will improve soil drainage, resulting in your trees being less stressed and less susceptible to root rot diseases. In addition, planting trees at least 15 feet apart will reduce disease incidence.

There are some alternatives to Leyland cypress trees that are better adapted to our environment. Green Giant arborvitae and Arizona cypresses are both trees that serve the same purpose in landscape and are more disease resistant. For anyone planting trees as a barrier or screen, I would encourage them to look into these alternatives.

If you have questions about Leyland cypress please contact your county Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.



Eden has Fallen

The pall spread as rapidly as kudzu and dog hobble when the dissolution of Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatue was announced last week.

Before the 501(c)(3), was formed in 2016, the garden had been unkept and neglected so long that the thuggish invaders of the botanical world had been allowed to run rough-shod over the tender, timid native vegetation forcing the natives to succumb to the bullying and retreat. The hand-selected Rhododendrons and Azaleas were in dire need of pruning, not just for eye appeal, but for vital air circulation that is crucial to disease control. Jammed and crammed, the regal plants suffer like too many chickens in under-sized coops. Living entities need what they need when they need it. There is a lot to that plot. Mowing the grass once a week isn't enough.

It is impossible to cite, not only all the improvements but the life saving resuscitation that the garden has received since 2016. Acres of poison ivy, oak and other plants dangerous to people and the creeping, crawling, climbing and twining "chokers" had to be dug, hoed and pulled into submission before the first plant, art, or even bird house could be tended or placed. Without the use of banned Agent Orange this will always be a continuous war preformed by dedicated human hands. Dedication isn't all that is needed. Knowledge and constant vigilance are also required. There are very few days since the inception of Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge that at least one staff member, trained volunteer or Board Member has not been on The Gardens premises. This garden tending stuff is full time if done properly. Detainees slinging gravel, while helpful, can't always be available. I love The Gardens, but as a citizen of Towns County, when the storm drains are clogged, gravel be Hoover Dammed. The drains are where the detainees can best serve.

There are numerous reasons why this dissolution is coming to pass, Thank God that here in the United States of America, even if nobody wants it, I can give my opinion without fear of reprisal. Since the Tennessee Valley Authority permanently leased discussed property to Towns County Government that in turn leased to the Georgia Mountain Fair Authority, wait, let me pause here to ask what does "with some apparent oversight by Georgia Mountain Fair Inc." mean? I saw that in last week's paper but am unsure how to interpret it. Does doing wrong a long time make it right or make it wrong longer? Could it be that Towns County Government has the better steward or maybe even the obligation to legislate the better steward for the gracious gift bestowed by Fred Hamilton?

Cherished native plants are returning. They may be the very same ones your granny enjoyed. Better catch them while you can. Here today but gone tomorrow?

See You Around Towns!



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