

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

Letters to The Editor

With Disappointment and Disgust

Dear Editor,

It was with disappointment and disgust that I read last week's article indicating that the Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge non-profit will be dissolving this year. This group has worked hard since 2016 to reinvigorate, restore and improve the Hamilton Gardens after years of neglect by the Towns County Lions Club and the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds Board of Directors. Now the fair board wants to end the management agreement with this group because they see it as asset. What they fail to see is how this group of volunteers has benefited both the Fair and the county with added tourism. In the 1980s Fred Hamilton donated his large collection of Rhododendrons and Azaleas to the county for the benefit of Towns County residents and the general public visiting our area. It was his hope that the Lions Club and the Fair board would use its volunteer organization to maintain the Gardens and improve it over time, making it a public treasure for Towns County. However, over the years the Lions Club members gave little time to the Gardens. Many of whom, never even set foot in the Gardens. Plants were not properly cared for and the buildings and small greenhouse were abandoned to deteriorate. And, most of the monetary donations during the blooming season and for memorials were diverted to the fairgrounds to cover non-garden expenses rather being re-invested in the Gardens.

In the mid-2000s, the Fair Board did hire a gardener and for a brief period, some improvement was made in the Garden's care. This ended when the fair board and gardener had a dispute over his pay, which the Board withheld until threatened with a law suit. At which point, they paid him then fired him. It is not true that the Fair board approached the Master Gardeners to help maintain the Gardens as stated in last week's article. On the contrary, prior to his firing, a small group of people developed a vision for the Gardens future and began to think about forming a non-profit specifically for its care and improvement. Thus, the Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge was created with its own Board of Directors. This amazing group of people began to work wonders at the Gardens. Since 2016, they have increased revenues and made many improvements. These include repairing and updating the pavilion bathrooms, building a large equipment shed, building a new bridge and repairing smaller bridges, adding a lookout deck at Fishing Rock, establishing various garden projects and, of course, restoring, improving and maintaining the many plants in the Gardens. They have taught classes, held forums, and started free evening concerts. Most importantly, they have increased community awareness, increased donations and been able to garner community support from a multitude of volunteers.

Now, sad to say, the fair board refuses to recognize how they have benefited our area and benefited the fairgrounds. With many visitors from around the world, it has not only attracted visitors to the Gardens but the annual fairs too. Now who will maintain the largest Rhododendron Garden in the southeast? Will the Lions Club and Fair board actually pitch in and do the hard work these tireless volunteers have done? Instead, I am afraid the Gardens will quickly fall back into its previous state of neglect. The fair board should realize that an "asset" is not an asset unless it is maintained.

I urge Towns County residents to voice their disapproval of the fair board's actions by writing to the fair board, the Towns County Commissioner and responding to this letter to the editor. Pressure needs to be put on them to reinstate their agreement with Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge and preserve this beautiful treasure we have in our midst. "Where there is no vision, the people perish (in this case the Hamilton Gardens)..." (Proverbs 29:18).

Douglas Canup

We are All the Losers

Dear Editor,

All 3 parties have a lot to lose, but the big loser in the turf war between the Hamilton Gardens Board and the Fair Board is you and me, the citizens of Towns County. If I read the article correctly in July 7th's Herald, in 2016 The Fair Board apparently did not have the resources to restore the neglected Hamilton Gardens so they asked a group of master gardeners to take the project over and refurbish the gardens.

Today, 5 years later the group has far exceeded everyone's expectations and Hamilton Gardens is on the threshold of raising itself to the next level of attractiveness and usefulness to us the citizens. According to the article, a representative of the Fair Board stated that they are pleased with the job the Hamilton Gardens people are doing and would like for them to continue. I believe everyone agrees that the gardens are impeccably maintained, the enthusiasm is high and a beehive of activity is constantly taking place in upgrading the gardens. The only thing Hamilton Gardens needs is more funds to continue its plan of upgrading the gardens. And it looks like there are government grants available to upgrade the gardens. The problem is and the point of contention apparently is that the Hamilton Gardens Board needs an exclusive leasehold on the land that makes up the gardens to qualify for these grants.

Does the Fair Board need the property on which the gardens lie, to maintain the fair? So far information made public has not shown that to be the case. If the Fair Board takes back the maintenance and improvement of the gardens would the gardens be maintained and improved upon in a better manner? Seems like they would have not asked for help 5 years ago if it was not needed. I have much respect for the Fair Board and for the Hamilton Gardens Board. Both have made our community a much better place to live and work. I also have much respect for our Commissioner, Mr. Bradshaw. Does Mr. Bradshaw as our citizen's representative have the power to make this happen? Can he mandate a lease agreement? Let us not hold him responsible for this without all of the facts. Does the Fair Board have the authority on their own to reclaim the property? Does the Hamilton Gardens Board need all they are asking for to obtain government grants? It seems that it would clear the air for a public hearing to be held in order to hear both sides of this most important issue before we jump to conclusions on either side.

John Scott

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There can be Only One

Our title is the signature line from the "Highlander" series of movies and television shows. If you haven't seen it, the plot revolves around a group of "immortals" who vie for power, fated to fight and destroy each other until only one is left to receive "the prize." The scale of our story this week is not so grand. Some of you will remember the cautionary tale of Cuthbert, the Rooster. We raised him from a chick to a magnificent animal worthy of Foghorn Leghorn himself, though he was not, I say not an amiable fellow like our favorite cartoon character. Cuthbert and I came to an understanding when he finally submitted to the mysterious powers of our collection of water guns, which he never quite understood. All he knew was that at any given moment I could extend my opinion from far away, long before he could get a good run on to flog me.

Tracey was quick on the draw as well, but she was never able to relax with old Cuth. He had the same effect on the hens, who were always very nervous when he was around. Nervous hens pluck feathers and they don't lay well, so we found another home for Cuthbert. Immediately upon Cuthbert's departure, the dynamics of the pecking order began to evolve. Soon a "Gang of Three" hens were ruling the roost, and what was once a single flock controlled by Cuthbert became a loose confederation of small groups and a cabal of three who ate first, took the biggest share and climbed to the most desirable perch. It wasn't a perfect society, but it was much more relaxed. On the downside, the flock that was once held together and guarded now roamed freely in little cliques, which increased their vulnerability to predators. The girls were without a rooster for several weeks, which was a long time in chicken years, and plenty of time to become established in their new society. We found a friend who was eager to give us one. The morning of their arrival I discovered not one, but two new young roosters hiding as far away from the Gang of Three as they could get. When I picked one up to rescue him, he looked at me and in his best Sidney Poitier said, "They call me MISTER Tibbs." The name stuck, and I decided on the spot that he would be the one to inherit Cuthbert's role as protector.

Mister Tibbs was shadowed by a slightly smaller and much more subdued companion. We called him "Thirteen," reluctant to give him a name since we planned to find him a new home as soon as possible. When it comes to roosters, there can be only one. After the shock of new arrivals had worn off, the flock dynamics began to change again. Scarcely anyone who achieves power gives it up voluntarily. The Gang began to turn a hostile eye toward Mr. Tibbs and the hapless Thirteen. Tibbs was fast on his feet, canny, wary and forward thinking. He stayed on the perch until all the hens had left the area, then hid in the weeds on the outskirts of the flock and out of range of the Gang of Three.

Thirteen, however, just wanted to be loved. The meek will certainly inherit the earth, but not right away. Thirteen kept trying to join the foraging hens, and they punished him for that. One morning I heard a horrendous noise coming from the chicken house and discovered that the Three had trapped him in a corner, attacked him and removed most of the skin from the back of his head. Thirteen spent the next several days in our "chicken clinic" healing and gaining strength. Our hope was that he could survive long enough to find a new home, or at least grow big enough to defend himself. Our second attempt to reintroduce him failed also, so I setup separate quarters for him. This worked fine for a couple of weeks.

Chickens are very social sociopaths and they seek the company of other chickens. Thirteen's fate was sealed the night that he joined the rest of the flock in the hen house instead of going to his own roost. All seemed well for several days and we thought that, against all odds, he had finally managed to be accepted. On the last morning of his life I found Thirteen in the corner of the hen house paralyzed from a strike to the back of the head that pierced his skull. In close and guilty proximity were the Gang of Three - and Mr. Tibbs.

From barn yard chickens to strutting politicians, we are all creatures of instinct, and the instincts of warm blooded vertebrates demands some form of hierarchy. Chickens peck; lions roar; sheep butt heads and humans...we have myriad ways of trying to ascend above our fellow humans. We have just as many ways of keeping our emotions in check. Cultural norms and taboos guide many, and where those disappoint, personal integrity constrains. Faith creates and nurtures personal integrity, and when all else fails we have government as a failsafe. Our hen house ideals were noble, but flawed. While it's true that animals can be conditioned to override their basic instincts, it's rare, especially in creatures with the mental capacity of a chicken. Our human capacity is so much greater, but our emotions are complex and convoluted, and the "humanist" has what seems to me to be a Pollyanna belief in the ascent of humanity that denies the animal instincts with which we contend. Faith is anathema to many. Integrity has devolved into personal choice where emotions and desires magically create reality, and in my opinion, it is weakness of character which has tipped the scale in the beliefs of so many toward ideas that are purely marxist, no matter how they are clothed in terms of social justice. A society where there are no winners and no losers denies our basic instincts, which continue to exist no matter how we "feel" about them. They become suppressed and subsumed, but they still motivate our actions, and without faith and a civil society to govern those, the failsafe grows ever more powerful. Witness the grotesque mutations of suppressed instinct that have appeared throughout the history of marxist regimes. As George Orwell so succinctly stated in "Animal Farm," "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others," and as western civilization flogs itself over diluted and convoluted ideals, the foghorn of big government grows ever louder, for in the contest for coercive power, there can be only one.

Outside The Box
By: Don Perry
worldoutsidethebox.com

Is it Ripe?

One question that people will call me with is how to tell if a fruit or vegetable is ripe or not. Different plants ripen differently. Some will continue to ripen after they've been picked, others need to ripen attached to the plant. Let's talk about what causes plants to ripen and how to tell if some common fruits and vegetables are ripe or not.



Fruits and vegetables are divided into climacteric and non-climacteric. The difference between these groups is their response to the hormone ethylene. Ethylene is a hormone that plants produce to induce ripening. Climacteric fruits and veggies will continue to ripen after they have been picked. Non-climacteric fruits and veggies won't continue to ripen. Instead, they will soften and rot as they age. Some crops are sensitive to ethylene and so shouldn't be

stored with climacteric crops that produce ethylene.

Apples, pears, peaches, plums, potatoes, and tomatoes are some examples of climacteric plants. Blueberries, blackberries, raspberries, cherries, cucumbers, eggplant, grapes, strawberries, peppers, squash, and watermelon are all examples of non-climacteric crops. Some examples of plants that are sensitive to ethylene and so shouldn't be stored with climacteric crops are asparagus, broccoli, cucumbers, green beans, kale, onions, peas, peppers, squash, and watermelon.

Now that we know a little more about the ripening process let's talk about how to tell when the best time to pick some of the most commonly grown crops around here are.

Tomatoes are an easy one to tell when they are ripe because they start to turn red. You can pick tomatoes before they are fully ripe on the vine. Because they are climacteric, they will continue to ripen. I've put tomatoes up in the kitchen window-sill so that they'll ripen. Sometimes it is advantageous to pick something before it's fully ripe so that you make sure critters don't get it before you.

Apples and pears can be a little more challenging to tell when they are ripe. Different varieties will ripen at different times. In addition, the entire tree may not ripen at the same time. If the apple or pear stem breaks away easily from the tree then it's ripe. Turn the fruit sideways to see if it pops off. Depending on the variety, you can use color to tell if the fruit is ripe. If you cut an apple open and the seeds are dark brown, it's ripe.

Blueberries will be plump with a deep blue color. They also have a white powder on the skin that keeps them fresh longer.

Squash and zucchini should be harvested when they're 4-8 inches long. They'll both grow longer if left on the vine, and you can still eat them if they're big, but they get tougher as they age. You should be able to push your fingernail into the skin.

Sweet corn is ripe when you can puncture a kernel with your fingernail and milky fluid comes out. As soon as corn is picked, it starts to lose flavor. Refrigerate it to retain flavor.

Pick peas when the pods have plumped out. If they start to wrinkle, they're getting overripe. You can always open a pod to see if the seeds are swollen, but still tender. Beans are ready when you can see the seeds bulging through the sides of the pod.

Pick peppers when they are shiny green. If you let them sit on the bush longer and they start to change to orange or red and they're getting hotter. If that's what you're looking for, let them sit.

If you have questions about when plants are ripe contact your County Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

Long Overdue Recognition

As one of several VSOs (Veteran Service Organizations) attached to VFW Post #7807 Hiawassee, our Marine Corps League, Unicoi Detachment #783 currently meets in Blairsville at the Major Leon Davenport Veterans Center in Blairsville. Originally chartered in Helen, GA on September 19, 1991, then moving to VFW Post #7807, Hiawassee, then to Veterans Center, Blairsville for monthly meetings every third Saturday 10 - 11 hours. Marines and associates from Hiawassee, Blairsville, Hayesville, NC, points south in Florida and elsewhere meet there. A great bunch of men and women. I knew of the MCL and have personally known USMC Veterans and members thereof for years. Love and appreciate the USMC as all Americans should! However I knew precious little about the MCL, ignorantly believing their membership was for Marines exclusively. After being requested to come to their meeting a couple of months back, protesting that, "Hey, I'm not a Marine!" I was told that it doesn't matter as long as I'm an Honorably discharged Veteran. Now to the purpose of this missive. I was asked to join, which I applied for as an "associate member" and was accepted. As an "associate" I'm not allowed to vote on pertinent issues. Similar to VFW Auxiliary and American Legion Auxiliary and SAL members. As such our local MCL detachment, as does EACH of our VSOs, needs new members, preferably younger ones who are not so "long in the tooth" as most of us. Our wonderful homes, here in the North Georgia Mountains are heavily populated with Veterans of all branches and eras of service to our Blessed USA. Fellowship and kindred spirits await their membership.

Contact Alton "Doc" Coleman, Commandant, Marine Corps League Detachment #783 @770-335-0417 or go to www.unicoi783mcl.org.

"It is said that the Marine Corps is not only the world's best fighting force, but that it offers a brotherhood like no other. In an effort to keep the Marine Corps League effective, recruiting is an essential element. There is strength in numbers, and it takes active members for a Detachment to fulfill its mission. Our mission is to support Marines, FMF Corpsmen and FMF Chaplains and their families. Efforts can range anywhere from wellness checks to veterans' relief, to Toys for Tots. In addition, Unicoi Detachment 783 provides support and assistance to both Union and Towns County. As our membership continues to grow it will make our detachment stronger, and will be able to better serve in the capacity that we took an oath to serve in. I look forward to seeing you at our next detachment meeting and my door is always open to you. I welcome your ideas, suggestions, and feedback as much as I do your participation and efforts." Semper Fi, Richard Szafranski, Jr. Vice Commandant, Unicoi Detachment 783, Marine Corps League.

Semper Paratus



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