

EDITORIALS

Bigger lots, smaller signs to make us more attractive

As residential and commercial growth continues to sprout in the Back Mountain, it's good to compare our status with areas farther along on the developmental path. One such place is the "Research Triangle" area of North Carolina, a conglomeration of cities and towns that runs the gamut from relatively poor small city to tony suburbs. While there are striking differences with this region, some things are obviously transferable.

The Back Mountain compares favorably with Chapel Hill, an admittedly more affluent suburb, but one that only a decade or two ago look much like our region. As they have here, homes and stores have gradually replaced open space, and empty two-lane roads have become busy highways. That much is the same, but there are a couple of ways in which we can learn from our Southern neighbors.

First, we can control development much better by separating residential and commercial areas as much as possible, and by setting aside a greater portion of land for lower density housing than is now the practice. It may seem egalitarian to allow homes on lots as small as 6,000 square feet, and there certainly should be some areas to accommodate people of modest means. The resulting pressure on services is not matched by tax receipts, however, despite what developers may want us to think. On the other side of the equation, the largest lot requirement outside of "conservation" zones is only 15,000 square feet in some towns, about one-third acre. Again, developers gain when they can stick as many homes as possible on an acre of ground, but the result is often neither attractive nor a good use of the land. There are ways to "cluster" homes within a site, so the average density is two or three per acre along with shared open spaces, and that may be a useful alternative, but it's more theory than practice at this point.

A more obvious way to control our destiny — and make our region much more attractive — is seen in sign regulations. Chapel Hill is only one of many communities that have banished ugly, large lighted signs, and the result is striking. Imagine driving down Rt. 309 and not seeing a single free-standing sign taller than a Jeep. Talk about a win-win situation; our towns would look neater and businesses wouldn't have to engage in "sign wars," trying to outdo the competitor down the street with a larger, more garish, more expensive sign to attract attention. At the very least, those horrid portable signs with letters that always seem to fall out should be banned entirely.

We know some people get defensive when the Back Mountain is compared to other places. "We're not like them," they say, and they're right. We have our own unique look and feel, and we should be proud of it. But we also shouldn't bury our heads in the sand and ignore good ideas when we see them.



Reflections on the season past. Photo by Monica Marzani.

LETTERS

Poet-in-Residence program a success in Dallas schools

Editor:
I would like to commend the Dallas School Board for their decision to provide funding for the Poet-in-Residence program for the Dallas elementary and Westmoreland elementary schools.

Through a matching grant from

the PA Council of Arts administered through NEIU #19, Archbald, Poet Craig Czurry spent several weeks with the students in both schools. He met with students from all grade levels and conducted a variety of poetry sessions.

I had the pleasure of assisting in the conclusion of this program,

a Poetry Night entitled "Words on Fire" held on Nov. 19 at the Dallas Middle School.

Nearly 50 students from both schools and various homerooms met for the first time 15 minutes before the show. They received minimal instruction and performed like professionals when

they read poems they had written themselves.

It was a wonderful experience for all of us and their parents and teachers should be extremely proud of these students.

Mary Barbara Gilligan
Dallas

Publisher's notebook

Ron Bartizek



Seen any "Furbys" lately? Neither have I, and I don't expect to. Like a recurring bad dream, the "must have" Christmas toy is back with a vengeance, prompting painful flashbacks for survivors of the Cabbage Patch Kids riots and other debacles. Can you imagine people who would get up in the wee hours of the morning and trundle down to the local shopping center to wait in line for an overpriced toy that will probably break about 10 minutes into Christmas morning? I can't, but, as the King said, "Different strokes for different folks."

I get itchy when they put up the chain at Wendy's because more than four people are waiting for Dave's latest creation. When I was young — not that long ago — there was no drive through service, but everyone in the universe didn't go out for lunch either, so service was quick. Have you noticed that the higher the prices at McDonald's get, the slower the service? There must be a mathematical formula to explain that one.

But I digress. Lines are not for me, with one exception — Disney World. My single-season record of about an hour was set waiting to go on Splash Mountain last year, and it was worth it. But you've got to give the Mousepeople credit; they know how to make you feel like you're making progress as you while away the afternoon inching toward your goal, having spent a week's pay for the privilege. These masters of slow motion know that as long as you're moving a little, you'll stay the course.

The prize, however, must be worth the wait. For me, that would total about three seconds if the end result was plunking down 30 bucks for a Taiwanese ball of fur.

A Case for conservation



Alene N. Case

On the afternoon of August 25, 1998, the ozone level in Cove Mountain, Tennessee, was 135 parts per billion (the current federal limit is 80 ppb over an eight hour period). Cove Mountain is not a large metropolitan or industrial area. In fact, it is in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park — an area of more than half a million acres of some of the most pristine forestland in the eastern United States.

So, why, on 35 days this year, were park rangers warning people about the quality of the air instead of cautioning them about the dangers of getting lost or leaving food in tents where bears might smell it? Because ozone does not respect park boundaries.

As a matter of fact, ozone is not generally emitted by smoke stacks, tail pipes, or other discharge conduits. It is formed when other pollutants like nitrogen oxides (NOX) and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) react with oxygen

Ozone and nitrogen oxide pollution

in the air in the presence of sunlight to create photochemical smog. And, once it forms, it can be transported by the winds from one place to another. Or, perhaps the NOXs and VOCs are transported by the winds to a sunny place (like a mountaintop) and there transformed into ozone. How then does one do something about this form of pollution?

The US EPA has been struggling with this problem for decades with relatively little success. As they have been successful in decreasing the emissions of carbon monoxide from automobiles or sulfur dioxide from industrial stacks, they have inadvertently led to the emission of more nitrogen oxides. Fully seventy-five percent of all nitrogen oxides come from power plants (28%) and automobiles of one kind or another (49%). The remainder is produced by other petroleum burning processes such as home heating or industrial processes (excluding the aforementioned power plants). Therefore, it seems logical to address these major sources.

There is no doubt that the automobiles on the road today burn cleaner than those on the road in the early 1970s when the first environmental laws were enacted. Several factors, however, have re-

duced the impact of this improvement on our air quality. First, earlier regulations focused on cars, not trucks or even vans and utility vehicles. Second, smaller engines with higher temperature combustion may have made our vehicles more efficient and less polluting in most ways, but they actually produce more nitrogen oxides than the old fashioned motors. Third, the vehicle fleet has expanded so fast as to virtually eliminate the gains made in pollution control.

According to the AAA, in the 40 years since the US interstate highway system has been in operation, our population has increased 60% while our annual total miles traveled has increased 500%!

Finally, the increasing air temperatures (whether or not associated with carbon dioxide emissions) have meant more days when smog and ozone could form.

After an unfortunate relaxation of regulations during the 1980s, the US EPA has recently begun an all-out effort to control nitrogen oxide and ozone. They have issued an order to 22 states in the eastern half of the country to reduce nitrogen oxides by amounts ranging from 2% for Rhode Island to 51% for West Virginia. Pennsylvania must, by 2003, reduce our annual output by 24% of 1997 levels, or by 79,338 fewer tons.

That will not be easy. However, it should help us breathe easier, literally, and also add less nitrogen to the Chesapeake Bay, where it is contributing to the abnormal fertilization of the estuary.

One of the other strategies of the EPA is closer regulation of air emissions of trucks of all kinds, light utility vehicles (SUVs), and vans. There will also be an attempt to decrease the pollution from boat engines, lawn mowers, and other non-road motors.

Ozone pollution is one of those problems that requires many solutions. No one city or state, or National Park can solve the problem alone. We must all watch our consumption of energy, from the gasoline in our cars to the fuel in our furnace to the way the electricity is produced for our lights. As Don Barger, an official with the National Parks and Conservation Association, said in a recent interview, "If we wait until we come up with a solution that will simultaneously address all of the sources of air pollution, we will die of asphyxiation."

If we all work together, perhaps doctors can get back to treating ingrown toenails instead of asthma and emphysema and park rangers can again point to the spectacular views.

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ONLY YESTERDAY



60 Years Ago - Dec. 9, 1938 LOST HUNTER FOUND AFTER NIGHT IN WOODS

Warm rains which washed last week's record-breaking snow into the tributaries of the Susquehanna River sent the stream on a rampage and threatened to test Wyoming Valley's new flood levees. U.S. Army Engineers, who watched the river level rise eight feet in three days, said the freshet had caused no damage, and had not afforded a serious test of the huge dikes which were well above the high water mark.

The return of Charles Hoffman, 24, Shavertown hunter lost on North Mountain Saturday evening stayed a Sunday morning rescue party of 54 volunteers and a State Motor Police detail after an all night search. Trailing a wounded doe and confused in the darkness, he spent the night in the Forkston District.

50 Years Ago - Dec. 10, 1948 ACME MARKET TO BE BUILT IN DALLAS BOROUGH

One of the largest commercial real estate transactions in Dallas Borough in some months was announced yesterday by Ralph Garrahan who with George Ruckno is co-owner of Shavertown Builders Supply. Garrahan said his firm purchased the triangular plot of land between Church and Lake Streets from the Oliver Estate and will erect a new store building to be leased by Acme Markets.

Christmas lights were turned on in Dallas for the first time Tuesday evening. Shortly thereafter a fuse blew out in the Main St. transformer belonging to Luzerne County Gas and Electric Co. and threw a large part of town in darkness. A repair crew replaced the fuse within an hour. Lights extend from Back Mountain Memorial Library to Himmler Theatre and Commonwealth Telephone Co. building.

40 Years Ago - Dec. 5, 1958 BURGLARS BREAK INTO LABAR HOME IN FRANKLIN

Burglars on Saturday forced their way into the home of Mr. and

Mrs. Caddie LaBar, Franklin Township and took personal items including hunting equipment valued at approximately \$1,107. The burglary took place between 3 and 9 p.m. while members were at their place of business. The thieves entered the home by breaking a cellar window, then ransacked the home and leaving three doors to the house open on their departure.

You could get - Loin veal chops, 79¢ lb.; frying chickens, 27¢ lb.; sweet corn, 49¢ doz.; cucumbers, 4/19¢; eggs, lg., 59¢ doz.; tub butter, 63¢ lb.; whipped cream puffs, 3/35¢.

30 Years Ago - Dec. 12, 1968 SEWAGE SYSTEM TO INCLUDE BACK MOUNTAIN

Plans for a Sewage Disposal System in three districts of the Back Mountain is progressing well according to Traver Nobel, member of the Authority from Dallas Township. Nobel told members of the Supervisors Board that Haddonfield Hills, Shrine Acres and Country Club Road would be added to present plans. Nobel said, "We're pretty much on schedule now. Dallas Borough may have some added areas to map and we hope to be awarding con-

tracts by May of 1969.

Two more men were named to the Recreation Board of Kingston Township last week. Ned Hartman and David Phillips will join other board members in providing facilities for local children to have recreation. A sum of \$5,000 has been set aside in next year's budget for this purpose.

20 Years Ago - Dec. 7, 1978 DALLAS BORO TO PASS \$10 OCCUPATIONAL TAX

Dallas Borough Council has publicly served notice of its intention to pass an ordinance to levy a \$10 occupational privilege tax on persons within the borough. Council will share the tax 50-50 with Dallas School District rather than pass an ordinance to attach one half of the school district's right to work tax. If Dallas Borough Council passes the occupational privilege tax ordinance and the school board does not reenact the tax next June, the borough could collect the full \$10.

You could get - Arm roasts, \$1.49 lb.; Blue Bonnet margarine quarters, 2-1 lb. pkgs., \$1.00; grapefruit, 8/\$1; Royal chocolate pudding, 4-6 oz. pkgs. \$1; Sanka Instant Coffee, 4-oz. jar, \$2.69

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