



Choctaw Sun photo by Tommy Campbell

Pedaling for a cure

Jim and Sue Graham wave as bikers participating in the Relay For Life "Pedaling For a Cure" Bikeathon came rolling into Gilbertown Tuesday morning on their 100-mile trek from Chatom to Meridian. The caravan of bikers left Chatom at 8 a.m. and made it to Gilbertown about

11:30. The group expected to make it to Meridian about 5:30 on April 17th. Several local business owners and well-wishers lined the streets and released helium balloons in honor of their effort to raise money for the fight against cancer.

Dee Ann

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know for certain. We can never be fully assured that when we send our children to school in the morning that they will return in the afternoon. We can never be certain that when we send our young people off into the world to make their own way that they will be safe. All we can do is prepare them as best we can and bathe them in faith and prayer.

In a few short weeks, many of us will see our precious young people leave the relative security of our small town. They will don their caps and gowns and take a walk that will

lead them to unknown territory, and this fall, they may leave the nest altogether to join other young adults at a university like Virginia Tech.

Can we know that they will be safe? No. Can we know that nothing horrible will happen? No. Can we prepare them for anything and everything that may happen in their lives? No.

Can we even dare to think that our kids who are still at home are safe on their school campuses either? The next time, the bomb threat may be real. It may not be a hoax. And it may result in a tragedy of untold proportions.

Can we do anything to stop it? Perhaps. Can we take precautions to guard against it? Of course. But can

we ever know for sure that nothing like the Virginia Tech massacre will happen to our kid? No.

Yet we can keep our eyes and ears open. We can take all the precautions available to us, and we can severely punish those who would make a joke out of a very real fear in our country today.

Above all, we can give our children the one thing that they need above all else. We can give them the faith to know that, no matter what happens in their lives – whether good or otherwise – they do not have to live in fear because their lives and their souls are safe and secure in the hands of the One who created them.

SoundOff

From page 5-A

the city limits the better as far as the prices will be for those who will be served by the sewer. I live in this area and I am in full support for a sewer system, as well as the annexation of Hwy. 17 south, and also east on the Barrytown Road. I encourage the leaders in Gilbertown to allow a vote on annexation. There are more advantages to being inside the city limits than to not be. One advantage is that, with a larger population, Gilbertown would get more grants such as those that Butler gets. I am not asking for the town's leaders to make this decision for us, but for the town to allow us, the residents who live in these areas, to decide it for ourselves by the process of a referendum. The only people who could vote would be those of us who actually live in the area which would be affected by annexation. If it passes, so be it. If not, then we can't say we didn't try and the issue can be put to rest with no hard feelings on either side. If there are others out there who feel the way I do, I would encourage them to write letters to The Sun, SoundOff, and to be at the next Town Council meeting and respectfully ask that the Council set a date and time for an election. Does the Sun know when that meeting date will be?

(ED. NOTE: Town Hall tells us that the next regularly scheduled Town Council meeting is set for Monday, May 14th at 7 p.m. Readers in those areas are invited to write or email and tell us what you think about this proposal. -- Tommy.)

As a veteran who served in two wars, and with children and grandchildren who are currently in the military all over the world, I would like to respond to that pathetic loudmouth who called our soldiers "airheads." You know, there's an old saying, it takes one to know one!

As long as a person is dressed decently, why should it matter if a woman is wearing pants, jeans or a dress? If we had more LOVE and less LEGALISM in our churches, more people would be IN church.

I wouldn't lose any sleep over those people who keep taking jobs at you in SoundOff, Dee Ann. My own daddy was killed in combat in Vietnam four days before I was born, and I LOVED your article on how these men were treated when they came home. My daddy never got to experience such cowardly insults, thank God, and he gave his life fighting for what he believed in. I will always love him and be proud to be the daughter of this man that I never knew. Please don't get discouraged, Dee Ann! Keep up the good work, girl!

The person who thinks our soldiers are airheads is living proof that not all nuts grow on trees.

Could someone show me the scripture in the Bible that says you will go to hell if you are divorced, have long hair, tattoos, ride a Harley or have facial hair???

(ED. NOTE: It doesn't, which was exactly the point of my commentary. -- Tommy.)

I am thankful for what our veterans did for and continue to do for this country. I have a son in Iraq and his mama and me worry every day about his safety, but we are proud of what he and every other soldier is doing there. It was his choice to enlist two years ago, well after the Iraq war started. You anti-war, anti-American, terrorist sympathizers, including some of our own federal legislators, need to get that through your thick heads.

I believe we need to get out of Iraq as soon as possible. Those people have been fighting and killing each other for hundreds of years. I say let 'em have at it and finish

their own selves off, then we won't have to worry about no terrorists!

Hey Tommy, if we knew who that slimebucket is who keeps bad-mouthing the military, some of us patriotic VETERANS who are damn proud to have served our country would be glad to come over to his house and read to him from the Book on doing the right thing. If I was a bettin' man I'd say he was raised by a bunch of liberal Democrats or either he's been watching too much CNN. Either one will mess up a person's thinking.

A few thoughts on your editorial, Bro. Tommy. I am a retired pastor and in my 51-year ministry I saw judgmental doors slammed in the faces of so many people who were on fire for the Lord and willing to serve but who were not accepted or allowed to serve, or even sing in a choir at one church, because of divorces. I resigned from that "social club" church because of the choir decision. Many people are "run off" from churches because of this very thing, and most of them never come back. We often forget that, in God's eyes, SIN is SIN, no matter if that is gossip, divorce or any other. One sin is just as bad as the other to our Lord. I applaud you for your article, brother, and I pray that people's lives will be changed because of it.

I want the person who thinks soldiers are "airheads" to know one thing ... it would take a thousand of your kind to equal the character, courage and bravery of just ONE American service man or woman.

I am 18 and will graduate from high school in May. I saw that SoundOff from the guy who thinks the military people are "airheads." Well, here's the deal. I am a straight "A" student and I could go to any college I want. I have several college scholarship offers but I am

turning them down because I have chosen the U.S. Military. It's what I want and my parents back me 100%. I will go overseas too, if that's where they send me.

I have visited a lot of churches and found that many look down upon newcomers who don't wear the latest and greatest fashions or who don't have high paying jobs or whose kids don't attend a certain school. It's a shame to see this in any church because a church family is supposed to be about outreach and love, and a lot of these newcomers have a lot to offer. A church should not be a clique. At least that's my belief. Jesus didn't hang out with the "in crowd", now did He?

It is wrong for our justice system to make up the law as they go along. I was accused by a man of doing something that I did not do. He had me arrested and I had to miss work to go to court. I think it is wrong for the law to send out warrants and let people file them without checking them out first. It ruins people's lives when they are lied about. While we were in the courtroom it was like a zoo. There was nothing in order. The judge acted like he was at a baseball game. My name was put in the paper and this man stood in front of the judge and told him that he lied, that he was trying to get back at a relative of mine because he put a warrant out on him for trespassing. He admitted to cutting the locks on a gate and – by the way – my father gave this man a key to begin with and then this man took advantage of it. He has bragged to the court system that no one can keep him off this property and that he is going to continue to trespass and he has done so since the court date. I tried to talk to the judge to make the man pay for slander, to make him clear my name and to pay for my loss of work, but the judge told me he didn't have time to hear that case.

Letters

From page 5-A

Words cannot express my appreciation to all of you for the love, concern, and all the acts of kindness shown during this very long time of recovery from the heart surgery and the second eight day hospital stay with cellulites in my leg.

This difficult time since March 7 has been made less painful by your prayers, visits, beautiful flowers, calls, gifts, food, and untold acts of kindness. Without you and my gracious God, I would not have made it this far.

Special thanks to all the doctors and staff at Springhill Memorial Hospital, as well as Dr. Kay Manning, Dr. Douglas Smith and staff, Mr. Wesley Knapp, and Primary Home Health for their loving care. Also, little Trish Roberts lifted my spirits with her visit.

May God bless you all. I love you!

Carlene D. Griffin

Top Ten

From page 7-A

business that must now compete for the shrinking rural dollar, it is not. Communities are made up of people first and structures second. Change must be addressed in those terms.

5. Parochial Attitudes

You hear the term parochial brought up in discussions regarding rural communities, even with those trying to work together regionally. Many people do not know what parochial means or why it is used in the context of community development. Our definition refers to small rural communities being insular or narrowly restricted in focus or scope.

Parochial attitudes in small rural communities address the ability for these areas to shut themselves off from the outside. Communities, particularly small rural communities in the Midwest, have the notion that they have always managed to do it on their own, and they don't need any outside help. It is this independent desire of the people that is reflected in local institutions and their way of doing business.

The problem with this attitude today is that small rural communities cannot do it on their own as we transition from a local to a global economy. This reflects change and upheaval in the traditional sense of economic and social development.

6. Lack of Resources and Capacity

Due to depopulation, the changing face of agriculture, and dwindling businesses in towns, the ability to find what we need locally has diminished. We are forced to look to outside resource agencies for help and to find the resources we once found locally.

Viewing this in economic terms creates a bleak picture, but not one without hope. Choices become clearer when we understand the realities. We may still need to buy products out of town, and we may need to ask for help from outside agencies. But when we make our own community development choices, we can strengthen the local economy based upon the diversity our choices bring.

7. Negative Attitudes

It is easier to be an art critic than it is to be an artist. In small rural community development, we all know what we will hear from many of the residents of a town. It is nearly always negative and destructive.

I often say in meetings in small rural communities that I can find out everything that is wrong with the community in one hour at the local coffee shop. It takes me much longer to get people to talk about what is good about their community.

We need to focus on positive contributions of the community and its people to the world as we know it. Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) is an approach that works well in identifying positive attributes of our communities and starts the conversation in a positive direction. We will discuss this concept and practice later.

8. Lack of Participation across the Generations

This question is always brought up in two ways. The lack of volunteers for community events causes an outcry, yet youths and senior citizens complain of not being asked to participate in a meaningful way. I often hear, "Why should I voice my opinion, they don't care anyway?" This is brought up by both young people and the elderly.

Small communities talk about the crisis in the dwindling number of volunteers for special events and the burnout that occurs with the volunteers they do have. So why are the elderly and youth left out? Communication is a big key to crossing generations and finding a meaningful way to include all of the community rather than a few overworked individuals. An inclusive, open communication process benefits all.

9. Purpose of Existence

Community identity is often clouded by confusion over the true motive for the community's existence. Every small town in America, rural or not, has an identity and a purpose. This is part of the culture that is passed from one generation to the next. Communities have forgotten why they exist, and when change has altered that reason, they have not learned to adapt to the change.

History plays a large role in establishing the purpose and ultimately the pride we feel towards our hometown. The key to survival is to not live in the past. The truth is that history is not static; it is dynamic.

We are making history in our communities everyday. History is the change we make to our communities to make them better. In the end these changes serve a purpose for the community's very existence.

10. Leadership Capacity

Of all of the factors and indicators of small town demise, I see the lack of leadership as the biggest of all. We are changing, and leadership is needed to address these conditions. The very definition of change is the ability to bring people and ideas together without coercion or force.

I heard a leader in one of the rural communities I work with say to me, "Why should I take leadership training, I am already a leader!" What this said to the community was that he was unwilling to lead the town in a positive direction. There is untapped leadership in every community, and one of our goals should be looking for those resources.

(ED. NOTE: Larry Lee is a member of the Black Belt Action Commission, former executive director of the Southeast Alabama Regional Planning & Development Commission and the Covington County Economic Development Commission. He is co-author of Beyond the Interstate and Crossroads and Connections, along with Dr. Joe Sumners of the Economic and Community Development Institute at Auburn University.)

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