

OPINION



Off the Record

By Kellen Holtzman

• Since we're in the midst of a fuel crisis, I thought I should share some insightful, helpful tips on how to handle the gas shortage: Go to your nearest gas stations. If they have gas and you need gas, get some gas. If they don't have gas, leave and try again the next day. If they don't have gas and you're out of gas, enjoy your day off. An alternative that I don't recommend is stockpiling gasoline like a maniac and acting on wall-to-wall TV news coverage of an event that the Great Toilet Paper Depression of 2020 should have prepared us for.

• To be clear: I'm not blaming the news. I am the news. And most news outlets have responsibly relayed official advice against the panic-buying of gasoline. Yet the U.S. Consumer Product and Safety Commission actually had to issue a warning that advised people not to fill plastic bags with gas. There's a psychological component at play here that is much more complex than simply blaming the "media" or elected officials.

• May is Mental Health Awareness Month. Some of us are keenly aware for the other 11 months as well. Look no further than the people filling plastic bags with gasoline.

• The lake should be thankful, and I'm sure its inhabitants are, to have a group like the Lake Gaston Community 911 Taskforce led by Sherry Herzing. Their work will save lives. More on that next week.

• While we're doing previews, the next edition of Lakelife is full of interesting visuals and reads. It'll be out soon.

• The Durham Bulls played host to the Jacksonville Jumbo Shrimp last week. I don't mind ridiculous team nicknames at lower levels of sports. You can only have so many Wildcats, right? But this is Triple-A baseball. One step away from the big show. Do better than Jumbo Shrimp, Jacksonville.

• The Oakland A's recently threatened to relocate if they don't get a new stadium, and Charlotte is one of the many cities that talking heads have speculated could emerge as a landing spot. Relocation should never be the way a city seeks to land a franchise, especially a city like Charlotte, which had the Hornets ripped away from it in 2002 through a similar arena dispute.

• Russell Westbrook of the Washington Wizards broke Oscar Robertson's NBA record of 182 career triple-doubles last week. Westbrook is averaging 22.2 points, 11.5 rebounds and 11.7 assists this season at the age of 32. Despite winning MVP honors in 2017, Westbrook doesn't seem to get the credit he deserves for being one of the best professional athletes of his generation.

• I've had three inquiries in recent days to my cell phone about the kittens I am purported to have for sale. I don't have any kittens! Which one of you is behind this ruse? If I get a fourth inquiry, I'm selling the whole lot. Cash up front.

"If you drive a car, I'll tax the street
If you try to sit, I'll tax your seat
If you get too cold, I'll tax the heat
If you take a walk, I'll tax your feet"
- The Beatles, "Taxman"

SENIOR NEWS LINE

by Matilda Charles

Favorite Foods Missing From Grocery Shelves

You'd think that the grocery store shortages would be long gone by now. But no ... they never completely went away. Only the missing items have changed.

My neighbor and I laugh and compare notes about "the toilet paper of the month," recalling the long period when getting name-brand toilet paper was impossible around here. At this point, the missing item is a type of soup, which has been gone for nearly four weeks. A particular flavor of baked beans, gone. No-salt canned green beans, vanished. Jasmine rice, steel-cut oatmeal, low-sodium tuna ... no more. Even the tags are missing from store shelves in all three shopping locations here, and managers can't order them.

My neighbor and I weren't laughing today, however, when we realized it had been a full month since a certain chocolate bar had been seen on shelves in any store here. "We're in trouble," she said, and she's right. "Do we dare order it online?" she wondered? We're considering doing just that.

The worst, though, was when I couldn't find the one cat food my elderly kitty is supposed to eat. For health issues, she can't have anything else. I finally called the manufacturer and was told that they were unable to produce it due to lack of ingredients. Eventually, and just in time, it became available and I ordered a three-month supply. But it's something I now track on a weekly basis.

Here's what I found after contacting a few food manufacturers: Many of them are cutting out, forever, products that were slow movers. If certain food items have vanished from your store's shelves, it might be time to do an online search. Look for "discontinued foods." You could discover that it's time to stop looking because those items just aren't coming back.

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Reader letter

Ebony Rezoning/Dollar General Appeal Update

On Monday (5/3/21) we had the second Demurrer hearing for the Ebony/Dollar General rezoning Appeal. The first Demurrer hearing was in August 2020. The Demurrer phase is when the County attempts to have the case dismissed and not move forward to trial. After hearing from both sides, the Judge once again, said it would take him some time to reread and digest all of the case documentation presented by both sides and would render his decision in writing as soon as possible.

For those who are not tuned in, on 1/29/20 the Brunswick County Board of Supervisors voted 3-2 to rezone property from A1-Agriculture to B-1 Business to allow a Dollar General to be built across the road from Ebony General and Murray's Race-In, between one of the historic homesteads with active farming and the Prospect Church and Cemetery, and surrounded by other neighboring residences and farmland. Home district Supervisor, Zubrod, voted against this harmful rezoning that will enable destructive, incompatible commercialization in this location and was supported by 1 other Supervisor.

An appeal was filed on 2/28/20 - to save Ebony - and has been in the court system ever since. We have a solid case based on evidence that the 3 Supervisors evaded Virginia statutes, local ordinances, the Comprehensive Plan, and their own accountability when they approved

the rezoning in a vacuum. The County Attorney firm, Sands Anderson, is certainly benefitting to defend the 3-2 vote. Through April 7, they have billed the county \$54,477.20.

While petitioned by neighboring property owners (Anne Hartley and the Prospect Cemetery Association), the Appeal case represents all those who opposed the rezoning:

- Local community of nearby property owners including those who live in the community where multi-generational families will be detrimentally impacted.
- An extended community who wants to see the historic Ebony community and its heritage continue to be preserved.
- Opposition to the unchecked and aggressive proliferation of Dollar General stores that are destroying rural America.

If you fall into one of these groups and want to add your support in a meaningful way, please donate to the legal fund. Make checks payable to "Keep Ebony Country Fund" and mail to Keep Ebony Country, c/o Kay Whitehead, PO Box 36, Ebony, VA 23845. Our ability to get this far is because of community-based funding.

For more information please visit <https://keepebonycountry.org/>. Stay connected via the Facebook page: Keep Ebony Country

ANNE AND AL HARTLEY
Ebony, VA

Womack Publishing welcomes letters from readers on matters of public concern. Letters should be no longer than 500 words and may be sent to Lake Gaston Gazette-Observer, 378 Lizard Creek Rd., Littleton, NC 27850, emailed to news@lakegastongazette-observer.com or faxed to 252-586-3522. Letters must be signed with full name and include the writer's address and daytime telephone number (telephone numbers are used for verification only). Unsigned letters will not be published. The Lake Gaston Gazette-Observer will accept no more than one letter per month, per person or organization, except in certain situations. Womack Publishing reserves the right to edit or reject any letter at the discretion of the publisher.

VETERANS ★ POST ★

by Freddy Groves

Once-Homeless Vets Test Job Market

In the month since the homeless veterans had moved into the attic dormitory, three of them had gotten jobs of one kind or another. Sarge had gone banging on doors up and down the main street, looking for available work within walking distance.

The accountant-to-be, he of the formerly long hair and a face hidden by an immense beard, was keeping books and answering phones afternoons at a real estate office, wearing a clip-on tie and a collared shirt with the sleeves rolled down to cover the tattoos on his arm.

Another veteran was only working three nights a

week washing dishes at a restaurant. "But he's trying," said Sarge. "He was out on the streets a long time, has PTSD, and a noisy restaurant kitchen is hard on him. He goes outside a couple times each shift and does breathing exercises with the stress app on his phone. He's really trying. Restaurant owner loves him."

The third dormitory veteran was working the building supplies pro desk at the hardware store, quietly mulling his options. "Store manager called me," said Sarge as we stood outside the coffee shop's back door. "Asked if I knew my veteran had once owned a construction company. I did not know that."

Sarge had looked the guy up online and found an old website full of what he said were the most beautiful, high-end kitchens he'd ever seen, along with additions and custom playhouses. "And our boy was the company owner. He never said a word. Never says much of anything."

"But here," he said, pulling some pages out of his pocket and handing them to me. "I found these drawings in the trash."

The sketches were floor plans for tiny homes with storage built-ins and loft bedroom space. At the top of the pages was the notation Veterans Village. The veteran's initials were penciled in the lower corner.

Sarge smiled. "At least we know what he's thinking about."

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Our Mission: to be a written and visual record of what makes our community special.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR
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