

OPINION

Chamber Talk

Thanksgiving week is finally here! On Thursday most of us will gather with friends and family to enjoy a delicious meal and count our blessings. The traditional Thanksgiving meal will feature turkey, prepared in several delightful ways – roasted, stuffed, injected, fried, smoked, grilled, etc. Accompanying the turkey will be



By Christina Wells
President/CEO

such items as dressing, cranberry salad or sauce, mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes, rolls, green bean casserole, and more. For my family, one of the required side items is collards, which I always volunteer to provide and have already purchased in a large container from B & J's Cash and Carry in Roanoke Rapids. Of course, there will be the requisite desserts, my favorite being homemade sweet potato pie.

I hope we all remember that if we are blessed enough to have a roof over our heads, warmth for our bodies, and food in our bellies, we should share some of that bounty with others. From now through Christmas, the Chamber will be collecting non-perishable food items for our friends and Chamber member Big Heart Food Pantry in Henrico, NC. Feel free to bring your donations of canned fruits and vegetables, soups, sauces, pasta, beans, rice and more to our office, where it will be gathered and shared with people in need around the Lake Gaston region. We are wrapping up a collection of winter clothing, books and toys for Chamber member Calling Angels that supports area foster children. Since our office is closed to celebrate the Thanksgiving holiday, items can be dropped off with our friends at Lake Gaston Outfitters. We are also collecting toys for The John 3:16 Center now through mid-December. If we can be of help to any other organizations doing good in the Lake Gaston region, please don't hesitate to reach out to us.

I am personally looking forward to Small Business Saturday this week – the focus of which is spending money on holiday shopping with locally-owned, small businesses instead of the big box retailers that are the focus of Black Friday. I hope all of you will do your holiday shopping with the many wonderful small businesses around the Lake Gaston region. When you do, you will not only be giving unique gifts to your loved ones but also be keeping your hard-earned dollars making an impact on our local economy and helping keep our businesses healthy and successful.

To encourage more local shopping, the Chamber

See CHAMBER, page 9

Simba (Conclusion)

The following is reprinted from November 2013

In a small town in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains lives a good friend of mine named John, who, like me, is a devoted wild animal person. We are kindred spirits in that each of us understands and shares the other one's passion for wild things.

I came to know him many years ago when I was having trouble rehabilitating a baby bobcat that became lost from his mother. It wouldn't eat much when I tried to feed him the usual kitten diet. I called another rehabilitator in High Point for advice. She didn't know much about bobcats, but gave me John's name and phone number, and said that he was real good with wild felines. That phone call activated a friendship that has endured many years. He told me to mix some lamb baby food with plain yogurt and add a half-cup of condensed milk. The frail bobcat kitten loved it, and in no time

was in perfect health. Over the years, that formula has saved the lives of many orphaned bobcats and lynxes.

John has visited us at our rehab center, and I have been to see him several times. A few years before I came to know him, he came into possession of a very young baby cougar. John wouldn't say how he got the little cougar or where it came from. He named it "Simba," and it lived a very good life with John.

Simba lived in a comfortable pen, but spent most of his time in the company of John, which included riding on the front seat of John's car almost everywhere he went. Before he was a year old, Simba had bonded deeply to John, showing much love by licking and purring loudly. John took wonderful care of him with a great diet of raw chicken and red meat, and regular visits to a local veterinarian for check ups and shots. Eventually Simba grew too big to ride on the front seat of John's car, so John let him stretch out on the back seat. People around town were accustomed to seeing a big cat riding in a car.

When he was about 6 or 7 years old, things began to go bad for Simba. On his last visit to the veterinarian, he had grown to about six feet long, over 30 inches tall and weighed about 180 pounds. John had him on a leash as they came through the door to the vet's waiting room. Inside were two women, each holding a housecat in her lap, and a man holding a medium-size mixed breed dog. Before Simba was halfway through the door, those two cats tore away from their owners, climbed a wall and tore down two Venetian blinds, and the dog let out a half bark, half yelp and tried to crawl under a chair, but turned it over. The veterinarian, who had been treating Simba all his life, told John not to bring him ever again.

Along about the same time John ran into a bit of financial difficulty and found it almost impossible to continue buying food for all his animals. Simba could eat 10 pounds of meat at a meal, and John had several other animals besides him. So John called me and said, "Frank, I am going to give Simba to you. I want you to come get him." I replied, "I probably can't afford to buy meat for him either, and I don't have a pen large enough for him." I had right many animal patients at the time, including a big timber wolf that could eat almost as much as Simba, so I basically said, "Thanks, but no thanks."

John called again in a few days and said, "I just want to tell you that you are Simba's last chance." I asked,

See FRANK, page 9

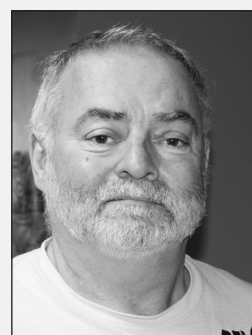
Lake Views

Q: What is your best holiday shopping advice?



"Buy everything online."

—Kendra Pierce



"Shop small, shop local, and support the community."

—Stephen Barcelo



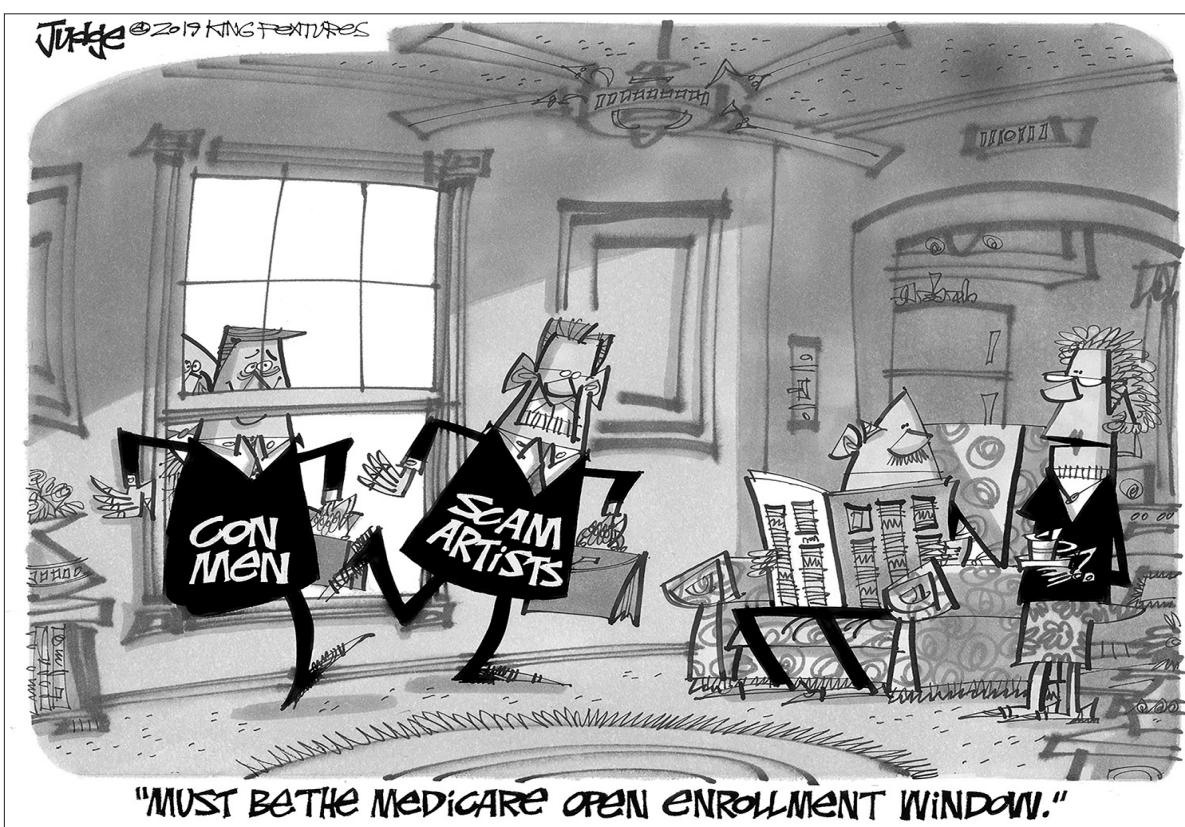
"Wait for the crowds to go away or just shop online."

—Caitlin Dunlevy



"Let your spouse do all of the holiday shopping."

—Keith Dunlevy



Reader letter

Residents stand up for Ebony preservation

Many thanks to all who stand for preserving Ebony, Va., by opposing rezoning and Dollar General. In particular, the 16-18 voices of opposition, petition signatures from both local stores, and opposition attendance that overflowed the room at the Planning Commission public hearing on Nov. 12 were heard and made an impact. Three spoke in favor: Dollar General, the landowner, and one other resident from the community. The vote was deferred.

Perseverance is key. Please stay tuned to upcoming meetings and attend if at all possible. There are also petitions at both stores in Ebony. The next Planning Commission meeting is Dec. 10 at 7:30 p.m. in Lawrenceville, Va. It has been confirmed that they will vote at that meeting. The Board of Supervisors is expected to take this up at its January meeting and will make the final decision. This will be the second public hearing.

What Is At Stake:

- The proposed rezoning will essentially redefine Ebony and destroy the historic integrity, rural authenticity, and community pride that inspired a community-written Ebony history book (published in 1993), as well as private investment to fix up the historic structures to preserve the legacy and charm; this will also introduce the possibility of a business corridor all the way to the historic Prospect Cemetery and Church; not consistent with the Brunswick County Comprehensive Plan 2037 ("2037 Plan").

- While the immediate scrutiny is the proposed incompatible Dollar General, other incompatible business opportunities will come along in the future.

- With respect to Dollar General:

- o Bringing in Dollar General will put the two community stores at risk; they are already serving the community and have become favorite gathering places of locals as well as Lake Gaston population and tourists; there are two other Dollar Generals within 10 miles as well as Family Dollar and Food Lion that are just 6.5 miles away.

- o Dollar General's aggressive business model targets rural America, in particular, where there tends to be no or lax land management practices; there is now push back occurring across the country that looks at the true need, whether it is a fit for the location, and the overall cost and benefit to the community. Profits primarily go back to the corporate entity.

- o What happens if Dollar General is allowed in and then the volume of business does not materialize? At that point the land is already zoned business, and the seller will not care who buys and what they plan to do as a business. There is a long list of compliant businesses that could be pursued with little to no county oversight or approval process.

We hope that Brunswick County leadership will choose to look at the whole picture in making its final decision to do what is best for now and the future. This decision will set a precedent for Ebony and Brunswick County as a whole.

Will we indiscriminately choose to convert agri-

See LETTER, page 9

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

Lake Gaston Gazette-Observer
www.lakegastongazette-observer.com

Published each week by Womack Publishing Company, Inc.
378 Lizard Creek Rd., Littleton NC 27850
Phone: 252-586-2700 Fax: 252-586-3522
Email: editor@LakeGastonGazette-Observer.com
(USPS 011-434)
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ROUTE SALES: Lee Enfant Harris and Mack Hayes

GRAPHIC DESIGN:
Amanda Meadows

Subscription Rates: Warren, Halifax & Northampton Counties in NC & Mecklenburg & Brunswick Counties in VA - \$46/Year • Elsewhere - \$64/Year • Online E-Edition - \$31/Year
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Lake Gaston Gazette-Observer, 378 Lizard Creek Road, Littleton, NC 27850

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