

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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Who Would Do Such A Thing?

The plant pilferers are at it again, literally digging up landscape plants from the grounds of the Brunswick County Government Center in Bolivia and stealing away with them.

Who would do such a thing? That is low, low behavior. Unfortunately the perpetrators don't share that opinion. In fact, one woman was greatly offended when caught by a county employee while in the act of stowing some publicly-owned azaleas in her car.

It seems the harder the staff works to beautify the grounds, the bolder become the thieves. They don't seem to understand or care that the plants are intended to be enjoyed by all of us, not just a few.

Earlier this year, according to Brunswick Veteran Service Officer Jess Parker, the groundskeeping staff planted 40 azaleas as a backdrop to the county's Veterans Memorial and framed them with camellias. The idea was to have a showplace next spring. But the plants keep vanishing, and not because of moles.

If those stealing the plants are so desperate for foliage and flowers, Parker has an offer not to be refused.

"Would the ones who are stealing the plants please check in at the Veteran Service Office," he suggests in a recent note. Seems he has some nice potted azaleas, and even a few camellias to give away. But, take warning, his supply is limited. Any rush on his office could result in a "Thief of the Day" drawing, he says.

Meanwhile, as Parker suggests, all of us need to be on the lookout for those who are too bashful to "check in."

Let's make sure they get what's due them.

Let's Hear Some Cheers For Commission Decision

The N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission should be commended for its decision not to permit mechanical clam harvesting in Brunswick County waters. Not only did the commissioners make a lot of friends locally, they also did the right thing.

But the commission's decision to allow clam dredging to continue in areas to the north is also a practical one.

Supporters of hand clamming point to the harmful environmental effects of mechanical harvesting, while dredge boat operators claim their methods are no more damaging than any other.

In fact, research on the effects of mechanical harvesting is quite limited. And until it is known for certain what happens to the marine habitat when dredge boats dig for clams, it is a smart decision not to expand the area open to clam dredgers.

By the same token, however, it is logical to allow mechanical harvesters to continue operating where they have been for the past decade.

Cutting off their source of income would have been just as wrong as opening the local gates to dredges and leaving clambers standing on the shores with clean rakes and empty baskets.

Some people may believe the commissioners chickened out and made a decision that would pacify both groups. Whether or not that's the case, it turns out the commission's ruling is a sound one.

Senator Sam Was More Than Just A Country Lawyer

Senator Sam has been on my mind lately. I don't know why.

Maybe it's because the Fourth of July—our chief patriotic holiday—is right around the corner, and the late senator from Morganton is high on my list of great Americans.

Or maybe I started thinking about him after I noticed that several area bookstores still carry one of his books. Whenever I browse through the "regional interest" shelves, I see his picture on the bookcover and feel as though I'm visiting with an old friend.

Of course, Sam J. Ervin Jr. is best remembered by the American public as the Watergate Committee's homespun chairman. He even described himself as "just a country lawyer."

But when I think of Senator Sam, I'm reminded of more than just the humorous, down-home tales he told

Rahn Adams



during the Watergate hearings to make his position clear—his stance being to preserve the rights and freedoms we enjoy in America.

In simplest terms, I remember him as the quiet neighbor who lived in a nice brick house down the street from me. And while most other lawyers in town sported European luxury cars, he drove a Carolina blue Cadillac.

I also remember him as the slightly cranky, aging old gent who granted me an interview, even though he was tired of talking to

it figures. The other day we needed a tick and couldn't find one. We wanted to run its photo in the newspaper, with a story on tick-related diseases.

All Don and I have to do—usually—to find one or more ticks is walk from our house through the woods to an adjacent golf course, or go over to the Shallotte Township Park.

In fact, sometimes one has to wonder if enjoying the great outdoors is worth it. In our adventures we sometimes bring back even more than ticks, such as tiny little chiggers or "red bugs" with nasty, itchy bites.

And there are always, but always, the mosquitoes, even though they haven't been too bad at our house lately. But wait until it rains. Boy, oh, Boy! They'll be thicker than ever when all those waiting eggs hatch.

Susan Usher



However, the real assault is taking place on the ground, not in the air, and in our semi-tamed yard, not in the wilds across the street.

We've discussed the small, tunneling critters in the front yard whose breed I won't mention.

But that's not all. It's not safe anywhere anymore, folks. Our gardening has been sporadic this year, with a few tomatoes, peppers, onions and herbs. But the other day I decided to start some summer

squash (in tubs) and also to set out a few watermelon vines.

Wearing cheerful red Dr. Scholl's sandals left over from some healthy foot kick of the past, I dug up some dirt and made some "hills," then laid black gardening cloth over the works. So far, so good, I thought, wiping away sweat with the tail of my T-shirt. I cut a few slits in the covering, planted and watered both plants and myself.

There was just one thing left to do—mulch. With no pretty, fresh straw left, I turned to the pile of stuff waiting its turn as compost and grabbed an armful or two. No problem.

Then—out of nowhere, there they were: small, red-brown ants scurrying everywhere. Over my toes, between my toes, up my legs and over my arms, like the first wave of tanks rolling onto Omaha Beach. They

weren't just traveling, they were biting, hard. Their mound must have been under the pine straw, about the only place in the yard that hadn't already been treated for the little monsters.

Don mounted a fierce counter-attack while I ran for homemade relief, a paste of household ammonia and meat tenderizer with a dose of antihistamines.

Folks, it may not be entirely safe outside, but what the heck. Life is meant to be an adventure. Nothing risked, nothing gained. And while our watermelons and squash may be kind of late, they'll certainly be appreciated.

And the next time a tick tries to hitch a ride, I'm going to lay out the bare facts: Brother, you have already missed your ticket to Hollywood and fame. Take a hike!



So Where Did You Learn To Drive?

I've been asked by a lot of people recently (nearly everyone who has taken a seat in my car, for that matter) where I learned to drive.

And each time the question has been posed, my reaction has been the same. "Why do you want to know that?" I ask suspiciously. "Is there something wrong with the way I drive?"

Almost always, the passenger will respond with the most insincere "No" you can imagine and follow it up with a question concerning the number and severity of automobile accidents in which I've been involved.

"One accident," I tell them. "I hit a parked car with the tank we used to call a van. Never saw it coming. There were no injuries."

At that point, my passenger usually insinuates that I'm the biggest liar since the Big Bad Wolf who took a liking to Red Riding Hood, and promptly reaches for the seat belt.

I learned to drive in Pennsylvania, for crying out loud, where only the strong and crazy survive life on the streets. In Philadelphia, law-abiding drivers are chastized and literally run off the road by those who thrive on close calls, the smell of fresh tire rubber and the screeching of disc brakes.

By the way, for those who don't like tailgaters or horn blowers, and possibly have a nervous condition to

Doug Rutter



start with, I don't recommend a drive through the City of Brotherly Love. Suffice it to say that any place where taxi drivers cut over sidewalks and median strips just to get to the airport 20 seconds early is no place for the weak-hearted.

Needless to say, growing up and witnessing that style of driving had its effect on me. Not that I make a practice of hopping median strips or jumping on my horn when someone starts daydreaming in front of a green traffic light, but my driving tends to be more aggressive than defensive.

Anyway, the habits of other drivers, not me, are the focus of this column.

Like any person who is forced to come up with an innovative column each week, or at least one that a jury wouldn't find to be plagiaristic, I never waste time during my daily drive to and from work. The gears are always churning inside my head, although sometimes they're stuck in reverse.

For some time now, I've been analyzing the way people drive and determining, at least in my own mind, the latent characteristics of each person who takes the wheel.

Whether I'm behind a station wagon full of screaming, sunburned kids and two tucked out parents or a silver luxury sedan with a retired couple in the front seat slowing down to admire every house on the beach, I've been paying careful attention to detail because I knew I would need something to write about sooner or later.

The net results of my informal study place just about every driver in the country into one of three categories. Each category has numerous subdivisions, but if you want the lowdown on those, you'll have to wait for my first book.

To begin with, there is the POKESTER. While this style of driving is most common in elderly people, it can afflict young people at any time, usually right after they receive their first speeding ticket.

Commonly, the POKESTER will drive along at half the speed limit, which I've found is sometimes more dangerous than driving twice the speed limit.

This creature will also be the one who sits motionless at an intersection even when he or she has the right-of-way. They won't wave you through or proceed until you wave them

through. Often, the pokeser won't drift into the intersection until you have frantically waved them on three times and begun to move forward yourself.

For some reason, many tourists fall into this category. Although they may be perfectly competent drivers under normal conditions, the tag of tourist seems to bestow upon them the responsibility of holding up everyone else who isn't fortunate enough to waste the day driving to the beach.

Another subhead of the POKESTER is the Sloth—a person who slowly pulls out of their driveway or a side street 50 feet in front of you as you're cruising 55 m.p.h. or better down U.S. 17. On a personal note, I can stand the common tourist, but a Sloth is the most aggravating driver I know.

The classification SPEEDSTER, so named for his or her lack of respect for the speed limit, includes a rather large group of people.

Although he takes many forms, the speedster is usually young, fearless, rebellious and impatient. In many cases, the speedster is someone your grandfather might have called a whippersnapper.

Subclasses of this animal range from the Barbarian to the Bozo to the Prat, depending on the extent of their aggressive driving. I would most likely fall into the Bozo classification because I'm sort of a conservative speedster.

In between these two extremes are what I've termed the ROADSTERS. Figuratively speaking, these folks, which make up the largest classification, are middle-of-the-road drivers. They obey the laws and get from one place to another without getting anyone upset or giving anyone gray hairs.

So there you have it. Where do you fall in this spectrum of driverhood? I'll just bet the answer would provide some clue about the place where you grew up.

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"Senator Sam carried the torch of freedom and fought for our Constitutional rights as Americans," one person said. "Now that he's gone, the question is: Who did he pass the torch to?"
 That was a good question then and still is now.