

# Fields Of Blue

BY BILL FAVER

Sometimes during the period from March to May we are likely to experience some fields of blue.

These open areas are covered by a small and frail plant called toadflax. Individually these plants are not very impressive, but when they blanket roadside fields we are forced to notice them.

Toadflax belong to the snapdragon family and have the scientific name of *Linaria Canadensis*. The part we see is the one-to-two-foot stem with two-lipped blue flowers along the stem. Small leaves are clustered at the base of the stem and may not be noticed.

These plants prefer dry, sandy soils such as old fields and roadsides. Some grow behind the dunes along the beaches if they don't have to compete with other plants.

Flowers are pale violet to blue and have two humped, white lips with a spur beneath them. A patch of color at the narrow entrance to the supply of nectar would suggest these flowers are pollinated during daylight hours, since the nectar guides would be useless in the dark. The nectar within the flower is in a long spur, which suggests the pollinators are long-tongued insects or hummingbirds.



PHOTO BY BILL FAVER

Individually, toadflax plants are small and frail, but give us each spring some fields of blue.

Another variety of the plant has orange-yellow flowers and is called butter and eggs, but we have none of these in the coastal plain where the blue variety is plentiful.

Toadflax is another good example of plants we consider to be

weeds. That is probably because we have not taken the time to look closely at this remarkable little flower and to learn to appreciate the frailty and complexity and beauty of this gem of the plant world. Enjoy the fields of blue.

## MORE LETTERS

### Attorney Takes Exception To Article

To the editor:

This is in response to Eric Carlson's article on the Leo Hewett matter in the April 15 *Beacon*.

Before getting into the substance of that response I would like, through you, to congratulate Eric on the attainment of his law degree and license. I didn't know he was studying the law, much less that he had become licensed and proficient in that field.

With respect to his allegation that (Acting County Manager John) Harvey violated both state law and county policy in this matter, it is my considered opinion that Mr. Harvey did not.

Perhaps there was a miscommunication in my response to Eric when he asked if I had advised Mr. Harvey of the legality of the Hewett action. Mr. Harvey and I never specifically discussed the question of legality because the action was clearly legal and within Mr. Harvey's authority.

State law, G.S. 153A-82 provides that a county manager shall make appointments, etc., with approval of the board or, by resolution, the board can delegate that authority to the manager. The last part of that statute reads that if the board has allowed the manager to exercise that authority without prior approval (which in Brunswick County it has) then it may require the manager to report the action to it. It is my recollection of events that this is just what Mr. Harvey did, although not required to by the board.

As to the allegation that Mr. Harvey violated county personnel policy, Mr. Carlson assumes the action was taken under those sections cited by him. His assumption is incorrect. Like a first-year law student he seizes onto the first section which

appears to answer the question, assumes the correctness of his premise and then quixotically jousts with windmills thereafter.

Unfortunately, disclosure of the pertinent applicable provision of that policy would by necessity reveal confidential personnel information. Even Mr. Carlson knows that state law does not allow disclosure of any but the most basic information concerning county employees.

I can say, however, the Leo Hewett action was, in my opinion, properly done under specific provisions of the county personnel policy.

To sustain credibility in the future, I suggest Mr. Carlson be more cautious before jumping to legal and factual assumptions. His desire to practice in a field in which he is not qualified or to scoop a story, should not besmirch a dedicated public servant like Mr. Harvey. He should also be aware that accusing someone of a willful, illegal act is libelous, per se. I think he owes the gentleman an apology.

Michael R. Ramos  
County Attorney

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Our story did not accuse Mr. Harvey of an illegal act. It noted that the county manager's actions "raised legal questions" and "may" have violated policy and statutes. Mr. Ramos was asked to comment, and his response was reported. The *Beacon* also consulted David M. Lawrence, professor of public law and government employed by the University of North Carolina's Institute of Government.

### Whose Mouthpiece?

To the editor:

Many thanks for Eric Carlson's reply to a letter from Shirley Hewett. Ms. Hewett made a number of charges about David Clegg, none of which was substantiated by facts. When Mr. Carlson asked if she had written the letter, her response gave the whole show away.

A number of people who are constant observers of Brunswick County politics know exactly who used Shirley Hewett as their mouthpiece.

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# The Instrument Of The Devil

There's a joke that's gone around for many years in journalism circles. It's an editor's definition of hell: A place where the telephone never stops ringing and you MUST answer it.

The cynic Ambrose Bierce would have sympathized. It was he who called the telephone "an instrument of the devil." And so it can be.

After all, the telephone presents a volatile setting, a combination of the personal and the anonymous, of contact and distance, of technology and humanity. For some that is a form of liberation. They will say things over the telephone they would never have the gall to say face-to-face.

For others, having to communicate with voice alone is a handicapping situation. Studies indicate that up to 70 percent of our communication is non-verbal—our body language. That means when using the telephone we may not be sending or receiving the intended message.

It helps if you can "read" voice tone and inflection, but those can be readily misinterpreted or even misleading.

For some special people I know, it seems to be a way to playfully test out new roles or identities, the "sexy" voice one day, and perfect secretary the next.

People who are nice, even solicitous in person can turn icy cold and indifferent on the telephone. It is just

Susan Usher



them, or have you caught them at a bad time? Those who are friendly and helpful in person can seem gruff and even rude on the telephone.

Making or receiving telephone calls can be frustrating. For starters, it can be time-consuming and humiliating as we play telephone games like "keep me on hold indefinitely" and "dominoes" to get to the right person by Sunday. Finally you get the right office and the person either isn't in, or can't or won't talk to you.

Then there are the incoming callers who can't or won't take no for an answer. They usually buzz on Tuesdays, which is the day this newspaper goes to press and every person (in the newsroom or otherwise) who works here is under the gun.

As you might guess, we do try, but we're not necessarily on our best "telephone behavior" on Tuesdays. That's especially true as deadlines loom and the calls have nothing to do with stories we're working on for that edition of the paper. We try to keep in mind that people who don't

deal with daily and weekly deadlines as we do have trouble understanding what that entails.

However, some callers just won't accept that our weekly newspaper doesn't have an inexhaustible supply of reporters and photographers available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Maybe they're under the gun, too, perhaps because they promised to "arrange some publicity" and forgot to call ahead and arrange for a story to run in advance of the event.

Try explaining that no one's in a position around here to scoot out on a Tuesday unless it's been a very slow week, or the story is a "must-have," important enough to get at some sacrifice in other news.

Face it, very few of us are not really good at using the telephone. I, for one, have known for some time now that I could benefit from telephone training, even when you take into account the guy from a Greensboro radio station who liked my voice so much that he drove to the Associated Press office in Raleigh one Saturday just to meet the desk editor who went with it. (He WAS disappointed, by the way.)

They offer those telephone courses periodically at Brunswick Community College but, you guessed it, on Tuesdays. C'est la vie!

Perhaps only on an instrument of the devil would such telephone training be needed.

## GUEST COLUMN

# Getting Your Money's Worth

BY THOMAS GOOLSBY

Most of us are still smarting from the bite of the tax man. However, before we forget the pain of taxes until this time next year, we must all make this promise to ourselves—we will get as much of our money's worth as legally possible out of our tax dollars over this next year.

How can this be done? One of the best and most enjoyable ways to get the maximum out of your tax dollars is to make use of all the "free" things provided to you as a citizen of the Tarheel State. After a recent weekend trip from my Wilmington office to Highlands in the Blue Ridge mountains, I realized just how beautiful our state truly is.

Many of us complain, and rightfully so, about the size and expense of government, but too often we don't stop and smell the roses. We all pay, out the nose many times, for our public lands, and we might as well enjoy them.

Since you have already paid for it, why not use it? Look around you. No matter where you live in this great state, there is a beautiful state

park, battlefield or forest near your home. Make a promise to yourself—today—that at least one weekend a month, you will get out of the house and enjoy "your" land.

Stop by your local bookstore. You will find numerous well-written books that list hundreds of day trips and give fascinating details about the history of our land and its people. Get the spouse and kids out of the house and away from the TV set. If you're not married, have no children or just wish to get away from the kids, make it a romantic day jaunting through the woods.

Regardless, get out of the house. Put off washing the car until the next weekend. Hire a neighborhood kid to mow the lawn. Take along a picnic lunch. Slow down and enjoy the fruits of your labor.

Tens-of-thousands of people visit our state every year and enjoy North Carolina's beauty and hospitality. Sadly, most North Carolinians never experience all or even part of the wonder this land offers.

Have you ever visited Jockey's Ridge State Park near Nags Head,

Cape Hatteras Lighthouse, Carolina Beach State Park or Fort Fisher outside Wilmington? Have you ever enjoyed the Eno River State Park near Durham, the Cliffs of the Neuse State Park off Highway 70 near Goldsboro, or Morrow Mountain State Park outside Albemarle?

Have you ever visited the State Capitol in Raleigh, driven the Blue Ridge Parkway or climbed White-Side Mountain near Highlands for a breathtaking view of the Appalachians?

All of these sights and hundreds more are yours for the visiting, and you are paying the bills to maintain every one of them. Each offers good, clean fun at very low cost—in addition to the taxes you already pay.

The weather is heating up and the winter hibernation is over. You have no excuse. Break the umbilical cord of the TV set and get out and get all of your money's worth! You won't regret it.

Thomas Goolsby is a writer and attorney who lives in Durham.

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