

Commentary

THE NEWS RECORD



Editorial

The Depot's Ours - Let's Put It To Use

It will probably be the best dollar that Marshall Mayor Anita Ward has ever spent.

Ward dug down deep last week, offering to pay the first year's rent on the old Marshall depot, which, if things go according to plan, will soon be converted into a museum of railroad history.

That might sound a trifle generous... a small town mayor paying an entire year's rent on a historic landmark. But Southern Railway has offered to lease the depot property to the town of Marshall for the paltry sum of \$1 a year. The company is throwing in the building for free.

And that makes the railroad company the truly magnanimous party in this story-with-a-happy-ending.

Southern Railway officials at first seemed, at least to some Marshall folks, like the bad guys. They had closed the old depot and were about to lower the wrecking ball on the building when town officials and residents sprung into action to save the depot -- and a piece of Marshall's history.

The railroad then offered to give the building to the town on one condition -- it had to be moved to another site in town. The depot's location, right-smack-dab between the railroad tracks and U.S. 25-70 (also known as Main Street Marshall), made it a safety hazard, the railroad officials said, and could leave Southern Railway open for a major lawsuit.

Apparently, the head honchos up in company headquarters in Virginia didn't realize that almost the entire town of Marshall is located between the railroad tracks and the highway. With a mountain on one side and the French Broad River on

the other, there wasn't really anyplace else to put the depot. That's why the town -- and the railroad and the depot -- are where they are today.

Finally, after months of negotiations between the town of Marshall and Southern Railway, the railroad company drafted a 10-page agreement which, in effect, donates the depot to the town and leases the property to Marshall for one buck a year.

Although the document, full of licensees and parties of the first part, might seem a little much for such a simple agreement, you can't really blame the railroad company for wanting to make sure it has kept itself covered. In an era where lawsuits are filed at the drop of the hat, it seems that multi-million dollar corporations can't be too careful.

Current plans call for renovation of the depot into a museum that will illustrate the impact that the railroad system had on Western North Carolina.

Back in December, during a public hearing on the future of the depot, some of those at the forefront of the "Save The Depot" movement called the proposed museum the cornerstone of a revitalization of Marshall's downtown economy.

As Beatrice Banks of Marshall said at that December public hearing: "To remove the depot from that end of town would change our future as well as our past. The Southern Railway depot shaped our past. Please allow it to help us shape our future."

Southern Railway has given Marshall that chance. Now it is up to Marshall to take full advantage of this golden opportunity.

Do You Feel \$1.5 Trillion Safer?

Since Ronald Reagan became president, Americans have paid dearly for a stronger national defense. And yet, multi-starred military officers tell Congress, the United States still isn't as prepared as it should be for sustained combat. Have taxpayers been had.

In the Reagan years, the United States has spent nearly \$1.5 trillion on defense. And with so much money thrown at the problem, it's not surprising that some of it has managed to make a difference. Soldiers, airmen and sailors are paid better. The country has new aircraft carriers and other ships, new tanks and helicopters -- in fact, a vast array of the world's most sophisticated weaponry.

But the nation is not \$1.5 trillion more secure. This is so for several reasons: the development of superfluous weapons, mismanagement of available resources and a failure to match weapons programs to an overall military strategy. The Reagan years have been marked by both a distortion of the threat posed by the Soviet Union and the simplistic attitude that more is better, bigger is better.

The 10-warhead MX missile has been set for deployment, but the U.S. land-based arsenal remains as vulnerable as before. The House Armed Services Committee reported last week that the B-1B bomber -- 100 of them cost \$20.5 billion -- cannot perform completely its assigned mission. The Pentagon itself gave up on the DIVAD gun.

The basic point made by the admirals, generals and Pentagon officials who have been testifying on Capitol Hill is this: while billions have been poured into fancy hardware, the country has been shortchanged in ammunition, sea and air

transport, battlefield medical backup and spare parts. They have a point in that the Reagan administration and Congress tend to favor highly visible, jobs-producing weapons programs. But, if the military lacks sufficient "readiness," the military itself shares accountability for the failings, as Richard A. Stubbing makes clear in his recent book, "The Defense Game."

Stubbing, a defense analyst who spent 20 years in the federal budget bureau and now teaches at Duke University, reports that from 1980 to 1985, there was a 32 percent increase in real spending for manpower and readiness-related functions. "The real tragedy is that these funds have not been spent more efficiently in improving combat readiness," he writes.

Looking at the big picture after five years under Reagan, Stubbing concluded, "The defense budget for 1985 is 50 percent greater after inflation than 1980, yet our military force structure is not 50 percent greater -- in fact, it is almost identical to 1980. Nor are we producing 50 percent more weapons than in 1980 -- again overall improvement in weapons production is minimal."

Over the last two years, Congress and the administration have struggled over the level of defense spending. Indeed, the defense budget shouldn't be immune to cuts in any effort to control the federal deficit. But, at whatever level of spending on defense, the American people have the right to expect their money's worth -- and the Reagan administration just hasn't delivered.

Know Comment

Values, Religion Not Same Thing

By JOSEPH GODWIN

Recently, I have read much about values or ethics as these relate to the public school curriculum. Much to my horror, a great deal of what I read implies, or states, that values cannot be taught without involving some form of religious bias or without violating the religion clause of the First Amendment.

Balderdash! In the first place, all people have some form of value system -- some sense of relative worth and preference hierarchy. Nor do all of these derive from religion in any formal sense of the term.

Secondly, it is a comparable level of civilization rather than relatively comparable religious beliefs that make for comparable value systems or ethical structures.

While no person has a right to impose his or her private theological beliefs upon another human being, every teacher has an obligation to teach those positive elements which make for civility and stability in all societies and cultures.

We hear the empty-headed notion that schoolteachers don't know how to teach ethics or morality without involving religious preference in the public school.

I disagree! Any person who cannot teach morality at any grade level in public school without ever touching religion is either too immature to teach or is short on morality himself.

Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Hinduism all prohibit stealing. Well, then, when I refuse to engage in thievery, which of these religions am I practicing? Maybe none of them. I'm just aware that human interaction is more pleasant work runs more smoothly if no stealing takes place.

That fact was known from the laboratory of life long before Moses ever carved in stone, "Thou shalt not steal."

Every one of us learned for ourselves that we don't like to be lied to nor lied about nor to be mistreated. And this comes not from reading Moses ("Thou shalt not bear false witness") nor from reading Jesus ("Do unto others as you would have them do unto you").

I find it indicative of myopic stupidity for educated people to allow some people to put other people into prison for malconduct, yet not allow some people to teach other people to avoid the conduct that lands them in jail!

Before everyone learned that very little rehabilitating goes on in prison, we thought prisoners ought to be taught in prison how to live in freedom.

Obviously, such lack of rehabilitation know-how and effort cannot keep us from teaching the elements of right and wrong to our children from an early age in the home and in the school.

Much of the trouble our young people get into is not because they are bad nor because they want to cause trouble.

At best, they are ignorant; at worst, they are despondent. And all the time, they are confused without clear voices and responsible models to show them what is right and what is wrong.

This adult generation cannot claim the personal rights of the younger generation as an excuse for not teaching them that personal responsibility pays off in terms of public good and personal satisfaction.

Letters To The Editor

Why Was He Fired?

To the Editor:

In time all things pass and hopefully as time goes by, things will improve on Bald Mountain. Mother Nature will take care of much damage done by the storm, but time and Mother Nature may not take care of all Bald Mountain's other problems.

On Saturday, Feb. 28, during the storm, we tried to get to our home. We were not told directly, but I heard over the radio communication, and I quote, "They (my husband and I) had no business on the mountain." Well, we bought and paid for our home at Wolf Laurel and in my opinion that is "business" enough. The statement was not appreciated or overlooked.

On Tuesday, March 3, my husband and a friend, Shag Rice, (then an employee of Bald Mountain), on his off day and as a favor to my husband who has multiple sclerosis and is unable to work, went to our home to clean up the driveway so that we could get up to our house. A few limbs and branches were loaded on Shag's truck and removed. At this time, I received a letter in the mail (my husband was not aware of this letter until he came home that night) stating that no wood could be taken through the gate until someone decided who the wood belonged to. (If you buy property, does the wood on that property not belong to you?) The trash loaded on Shag's truck was not wood. If we choose to leave this trash on the side of the road, then who removes this trash? Bald Mountain does not have this kind of money, or does it? We clean our own property and do not expect anyone to clean up for us.

My husband and I were shocked to say the least when we received a phone call saying Shag Rice had been fired for removing this trash from our property. Shag was aware of my husband's illness and had offered to help us. Should anyone be fired from his job for helping a friend?

Ample time has passed and it appears that this wrong (in our opinion) is not going to be corrected.

If this is the kind of management Bald Mountain has running a beautiful resort, then I personally would not recommend the purchase of land or a home on Bald Mountain until there are several changes in management.

Shag Rice, in our opinion, was the best and most courteous employee that has worked on the mountain. A man with 19 years of service should not be fired for helping a friend. What is the real reason Shag Rice was fired? It's hard to believe that removing trash from property of a friend for a friend is reason for losing your job.

Also, I do not understand management that will deal you such a blow one day and send you a letter the next day asking for money. Well, if I am to assume that we are responsible for Shag losing his job, then in the future, if we have any extra money, it will be given to Shag until he finds employment somewhere else.

By our choice, we do not belong to any organization and do very little socializing when we are on Bald Mountain. I don't feel that we bother anyone up there when present and expect the same.

Sincerely,
Duain and Cora Mundy
East Flat Rock

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