

OPINION

Thomasville Times

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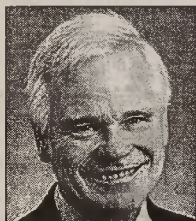
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A happy Sept. 11 anniversary

VIEWPOINT



D.G. MARTIN
 N.C. Columnist

Last week on September 11 we marked two important, life-changing anniversaries.

First, of course, was the remembrance of the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. But there was another, happier celebration marking Sept. 11, 1935, when the Durham-based Nello L. Teer Company began construction of the Blue Ridge Parkway.

It would be hard to find anybody who would argue that the Parkway is anything but one of North Carolina's (and Virginia's) great treasures. More than 17 million people drive on the Parkway every year, making it the most visited unit in the National Park System.

We take the Parkway and the beautiful mountain scenery for granted. We don't even ask how did this incredible road ever get constructed.

First of all, the Depression made the Parkway possible. It was part of Roosevelt's stimulus package.

The connection to the Depression is just one of countless other compelling and instructive stories about the Parkway told by Anne Mitchell Whisnant in her book, "Super-Scenic Motorway: A Blue Ridge Parkway History."

My favorite of Whisnant's stories is how North Carolina "stole" Tennessee's share of the Parkway. This story is too rich and complicated to summarize, but I will give it a try. The Parkway links the Great Smoky Mountains and Shenandoah National Parks.

Both of the two final proposed routes took the Parkway from the Virginia line to a point near Linville. The "Tennessee route," unanimously recommended by an advisory committee appointed by Secretary of Interior Harold Ickes, took the Parkway from Linville through Tennessee and down to Gatlinburg. The other proposal, ultimately approved by Ickes, takes the Parkway via Asheville to a Park entrance near Cherokee.

Why did Ickes overrule his own advisory committee? Lots of reasons: The higher elevations and dramatic scenery

on the North Carolina route. The passion of Parkway boosters in Asheville, which was desperate for more tourism. A passionate, well-prepared, and eloquent state employee named R. Getty Brown, who presented North Carolina's case to people who might influence the decision.

All of these factors helped North Carolina, but the key was an inside track North Carolina had to President Roosevelt. The Raleigh News & Observer's Josephus Daniels had been Roosevelt's boss when both were part of President Woodrow Wilson's administration. They became and remained good friends. Daniels was reluctant to use his friendship to ask for favors for his home state, but he finally did ask Roosevelt to get involved. The President saw that the North Carolina route had some advantages, and gave North Carolina and Daniels the nod.

Don't feel too sorry for Tennessee. Thanks to Roosevelt, it got the TVA.

Not all the stories Whisnant tells are happy ones.

The Parkway's right of way divided small mountain farms and took some farms outright, driving families off lands their families had worked for generations.

The National Park Service's rigid limits on commercialization denied local businesses some of the anticipated benefits they hoped would come from Parkway visitors.

The Service's approach to historic preservation along the Parkway has been inconsistent. In one case, an old farmhouse was stripped of its "improvements" to reveal an original log cabin for display. Later, persuaded that the true history of the farmhouse should show it as it existed in 1930s, those stripped-away improvements were restored. The conflict between maintaining and creating beautiful scenery and presenting "true history" with all its warts might make for an impossible challenge.

Still, once on the Blue Ridge Parkway, who wants to worry about all these conflicts? Only those of us who always have to remember that many of the good things the past has left us came about only after determined effort and painful conflict.

D.G. Martin hosts UNC-TV's North Carolina Bookwatch, which airs Fridays at 9:30pm. (This week only, the Sunday 5 p.m. broadcast will be preempted for special programming.) For more information or to view prior programs visit the webpage at www.uncv.org/ncbookwatch/.



Surveys help analyze content

VIEWPOINT



LISA WALL
 Editor

For any business to be successful, it's necessary to frequently analyze its product by asking for feedback from customers. This helps to ensure the ever-changing needs and interests of customers are met in order to produce a product that best suits them.

In late July and early August, the *Times* published a survey for two weeks asking readers to share their ideas and comments concerning what news they considered most important. While only a small percentage of subscribers returned the survey, those who did helped to provide some insight into how they feel about the *Times'* coverage.

After adding up the results from the nearly 50 submitted surveys, the results are as follows: The categories that reflected the highest percentage of interest were education and schools, crime and police reports, health and wellness, religion, opinion and city government. Nearly two-thirds of surveys said that stories relating to those issues were most important. Only a handful said that those categories were of little importance.

Youth sports, children, family and parenting, business and economics and entertainment categories produced mixed results, with a near split of those ranking it very or somewhat important. College sports was somewhat important to readers, with only a handful saying it was either of high or little importance.

Three-fourths of readers said they felt news in the

Times was reliable, trustworthy and useful. About 50 percent said the paper was the best source of local news, yet two-thirds said it was the best source for local school news and information.

Nearly all those surveyed said they relied on ads and information in the newspaper for shopping and buying decisions and 95 percent used the inserts to determine how and where to shop. A majority of people said they didn't own a computer or rarely visited the website, with one saying they were unaware the *Times* had a website.

Of the columnists published in the paper, there was a lot of good feedback as to readers' interests. Receiving the highest number of votes were local writers (in order of votes received) Larry Murdock, Doug Creamer and Bill Hill. Those tied for number of votes were Josef Walker, Dr. David Lipschitz and staff writer Erin Wiltgen, followed by staff writer Eliot Duke and Bookwatch host D.G. Martin. Of the syndicated columnists published, Joe Conason, Susan Estrich and David Harsanyi split votes. One reader said he enjoyed sports columns the most, regardless of the author.

Many of the survey forms contained additional comments, such as circulation issues, concerns about proofreading and suggestions for the type of news they'd like to see more of in each edition. All of these comments were not only read and noted, but were addressed immediately. All of the surveys with comments regarding circulation were passed along to the *Times'* circulation department. To address the proofreading issues, I have tried to realign staff schedules as much as can be to ensure that several sets of eyes are available to look over each page. Of course, there always will be the nights when meetings are late, deadline is looming and I am working solo, which creates the greatest chance for mistakes. But I assure you, we will do our very best to catch every

misspelled word or improper grammar usage or that pesky "Name Here" placeholder beneath mugshots.

Overall, the results of the surveys helped give insight on the issues that are of greatest concern to readers.

Now, I will take a moment to give readers some insight as to what the *Times* would like to see from them. It would benefit the newspaper and readers to see more Letters to the Editor being submitted. This helps give other residents an idea of how issues and decisions impact them. I'd also like to see more teachers, school personnel and businesses submit photos and information concerning projects, events, milestones, etc. that happen in their profession. With only a four-person staff, we can't be everywhere, all the time, so our "community reporters" are important to informing others about the many things that happen in Thomasville that we're unable to cover. Since feedback is important to every business, please feel free to contact me via phone or email to offer suggestions on what you, Dear Reader, would like to see in the *Times*.

On a final note, those who completed the survey were also given the opportunity to win a gift certificate from three participating restaurants. The three randomly drawn gift certificate winners are Aldeen Robbins of Thomasville, who will receive a \$25 gift certificate to Carter Brothers Restaurant; Betty Mills of Thomasville, who will receive a \$25 gift certificate to Panera Bread; and Jack Hiatt of Thomasville, who will receive a \$25 gift certificate to oSo's Restaurant. Congratulations to the winners, and a big thank you to all those who took the time to complete the survey. Your input will go a long way to helping us improve our business and your newspaper.

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www.tvilletimes.com

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

All letters should include name, address and daytime phone number. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Letters should be no more than 400 words, unless otherwise approved by editor. Limited to one letter every 30 days. All letters are subject to editing.

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EDITORIALS

All unsigned editorials are the consensus of Editor Lisa Wall and Sports Editor Zach Kepley