

OPINION

Herald/Times

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October 21, 1999 Section A, Page 4

Student attendance is serious matter

It's time to talk seriously about student attendance in our school system. Clearly, regular attendance at school is related to better achievement. We seem to have a relatively large number of families who don't seem as concerned about regular attendance as I would hope they would be. In my next two columns I want to look at the attendance challenge we have and solicit your support in improving our record.



Bob McRae
Superintendent
KM Schools

State law references the responsibility of parents who have children in school to be sure they attend "continuously" during the time of their enrollment. What this really means is that children should go to school regularly, on time, and for the entire day. Our problems not only relate to daily atten-

dance but to an excessively large number of tardies and early sign-outs.

Three of our schools - East, North and West - have attendance percentages which are quite good, each ranking in the upper 22% of all schools in North Carolina. From there the marks fall off rather quickly. Grover, Kings Mountain Middle School, Kings Mountain High School, and Davidson School all rank in the lower half of the state's schools in regards to attendance. However, even at our other four schools we experience problems with tardies and early sign-outs. Incidentally, for the last school year, our system's attendance ranked a paltry 101st out of 117 school systems in the state.

First, let's consider general school attendance. There are seven lawful reasons for absence from school: illness or injury, quarantine, death in the immediate family, medical or dental appointments, court or administrative proceedings, religious observance, and educa-

tional opportunity. Obviously, several of these will seldom come in play. Illness or injury is the most common legitimate reason for absence. We do not want students to come to school if to do so would put them or others in attendance at risk. However, some absences for illness reasons are simply contrived. It's easy to claim being sick. One should not miss school for this reason unless there is a legitimate sickness.

Many of our students take school attendance too casually. Apparently, so do their parents. We experience situations where parents cover for the absences of their children. At times, parents have students run errands for them instead of sending them to school. Some parents do not even know when their children are absent from school. Also very frustrating is the KMHS tradition of "Senior Skip Day." Apparently, some parents actually believe we would tell students they could have a day off from school occasionally during the year just because

they are seniors. That always amazes me. Wake up out there - there is no such thing as a school approved Senior Skip Day.

I am especially frustrated by parents who do cover for their children's absences. When the parent knows his or her child has been caught truant and lies about the absence just to keep the child from being held accountable, it not only frustrates our efforts at good attendance, but it also teaches the child a lasting lesson about what character traits are important to the parent. Doesn't responsibility imply accountability?

Because attendance concerns are so frustrating, we do have limits beyond which students my not go and still receive credit for their grade or courses. In elementary school the limit is 20 days; in middle school it is 18, and at the high school it is 8 per course. If attendance does not improve, the limits may well be tightened up.

What does it take to have good attendance? Actually,

there is only one vital factor, and that is an expectation from parents that children will be in school on a regular basis. We will never conquer this problem without full support from parents. I hope parents who have been guilty of condoning absences will consider reversing that stance. Expect your children to go to school regularly and to only miss for legitimate reasons. Don't take advantage of the system. Don't use your children to do things during school time which you should be doing yourself or which can be done outside school time.

Plan recreational activities around school schedules rather than allowing them to take priority over school. The list goes on, and I think you get the idea.

I am stressing to our principals to really focus on good attendance this year and to track down those students who abuse the system and to hold them accountable for the abuse. I hope you will help us by helping ensure that students under your control attend regularly. That's

a much better option than us having to punish those who don't for something that should not be happening. If you choose not to support us, please don't expect us to stand idly by and not react by holding your children accountable. Potential employers in our community tell us that we are doing a disservice to them if we allow poor attendance habits as they will almost always result in poor workplace attendance habits later on.

I'll continue this conversation in my next column by discussing the tardy and early sign-out problem which is also very discouraging. I regret having to devote so much column space to this issue, but it really has gotten very troublesome for our schools. Our community expects us to treat our students fairly - that's appropriate - but I also think it is appropriate for us to expect the same thing in return. Help us out!

SIDEWALK SURVEY

By ALAN HODGE
Herald/Times

Why does Kings Mountain need a new Senior Center?



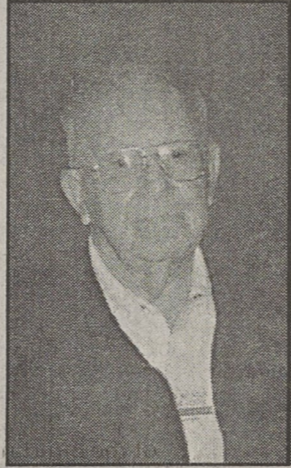
The old senior center is crowded. We need more space for activities.

Boots Osborne
Kings Mountain



We don't have enough room in the old center.

Dot Spake
Grover



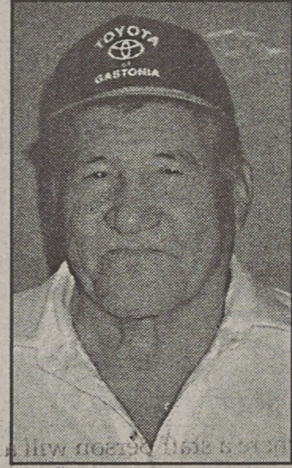
We need a new senior center so that services can be expanded.

Everette Waters
Shelby



The current senior center has become obsolete.

Carol Lewis
Kings Mountain



The current senior center is interesting historically, but too small.

Everette Osborne
Shelby

Clinton's legacy? Divided country

To the editor:

Ever since the impeachment trial of President Clinton, there has been lots of talk in the media about what his legacy will be. I believe that Mr. Clinton's legacy will be a bitterly divided country.

Ever since his election in 1992, Mr. Clinton and the Democrats have taken advantage of every opportunity to "get even" with conservatives. They have also succeeded in pitting people in this country against one another. Wherever there are two diametrically opposite groups in this country, pro-gun/anti-gun, pro-abortion/anti-abortion, black/white, homosexual/heterosexual, rich/poor, old/young, you name it, Mr. Clinton and the Democrats have always sided with one group and blamed that group's problems on the other group.

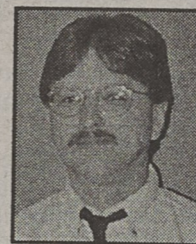
This country has not been this divided since the Vietnam War, or may even the Civil War. If Mr. Clinton and the Democrats are taking sides with certain groups in this country and trying to champion them, just what do they have in mind for those they do not side with? I cringe at the thought. The divisions in this country are running so deep, that I have even read and heard several respected commentators actually talk about the rights of states to secede from the union.

Since winning the White House in 1992, Mr. Clinton and the Democrats have demonized and maligned their opponents and critics in truly horrid fashions. They have called conservatives Nazis who want to kill elderly people and starve children, oppress minorities, and return women to second-class citizenship. They have misused their power to harass and intimidate law-abiding gun owners, and used the IRS to target and audit their opponents, for example. They have also slandered and maligned private citizens like Linda Tripp, whose only crime was exposing wrong-doing in the highest office in the land. It appalls me that fairly intelligent people in this country have fallen for the lies and supported the deeds of this President.

Of course, judging by the behavior of Mr. Clinton, the Democrats in Congress, and their supporters among the electorate, I don't think it's a coincidence that the symbol for the Democratic Party is a jack-ass.

John Scott Hardin

AM radio is the pause that refreshes



Alan Hodge
Staff Writer

Recently I have discovered the radio. Not that it was lost, or that I am taking credit for its invention, but I became reacquainted with late night radio after growing weary of the junk on TV.

A few weeks ago I bought a Walkman AM/FM cassette player with headphones. Instead of listening to the senseless drone of the boob tube, I now retire to the cocoon of bed and begin roaming the dial and often the globe with it.

Many evenings I skip the FM band and start slowly dialing the AM airwaves. I don't know exactly why, but on AM you can get radio stations from places really far away. On cloudy evenings I have heard football games from several states away, hillbilly music from Tennessee, and country fried preaching from places far out in the heartland.

Maybe the best part about the AM radio band is the fact that if atmospheric conditions are just right, you can hear foreign radio stations going full blast. A lot of the stations you pick up must be coming from Mexico. Folks, the Spanish language they teach kids in school is a pale shadow of what the announcers and guests on these south of the border stations speak. Not only that, but I am here to inform you that the Baja marimba band has not been replaced by the electric guitar in many Mexican towns.

Sometimes surfing the AM band, you can pick up stations broadcasting in the Unknown Tongue. Listening to these broadcasts, which by the way are usually as full of static as pair of nylon socks fresh from a clothes dryer, it's really hard to tell exactly what language they're speaking. Just guessing, I think I've heard Chinese and Russian on a couple of occasions.

Though surfing the AM band is somewhat new to me, it used to be a way of life for families. Stop for a moment to reflect on how many nights across the decades people from nations around the globe have huddled near their AM radios and heard of wars started, won, or lost. Think how many pairs of socks were knitted to the tunes warbling out of an old AM radio. Contemplate how many pipes full of tobacco have been puffed in the comfort of a little bungalow while the AM radio played ball games of all types.

There is something soothing about the AM band of the radio, even if the broadcast is someone preaching hellfire and brimstone from the backwoods. There's also something miraculous in being able to stretch out in the dark and listen to the voices and songs of people in other lands. Here's to the AM band on your dial, the pause that refreshes.

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