

LOCAL

It was all my fault

Everybody is all up in arms about security these days. They picked up a guy over in the world class city making videos and hauled him off to jail. Maybe he needs to be jailed, I don't know and don't really care, but I know how they are in the world class city.



Jim Heffner Guest Column

After Sept. 11, they took away all the parking around the Mecklenburg County Court House, and people who need to record deeds or get copies of their birth certificates now have to park blocks away and hoof it. That's fine unless you are an elderly person with leg, lung or heart problems.

My son was flying out of the Newark Airport last fall. He smokes cigars, and owned an expensive cigar lighter. It set him back 90 bucks to be exact. When he went through airport security, they took his butane lighter away from him. When he asked if they could mail it to him, they threatened to cite him. The citation would cost him, according to the security dude, \$1100. He left the lighter with them.

As he was walking down the concourse to the gate where he would board his plane, he spotted a stock of the same lighters in an airport gift shop.

Later, he found the proper procedure was for the security guard to empty the lighter and give it back to him. As of now, he is out a 90 dollar cigar lighter.

I was brought up in a mill

village, and mill village boys are all in the habit of carrying pocket knives. I go to the Gaston County courthouse on a fairly regular basis. The first time I went to attend a trial, I had to leave my Smith and Wesson pocket knife with security.

As I was sitting in the court room, something kept nagging me. Finally, I figured out that the security guard hadn't taken my name when I left the knife. I went back, retrieved the knife and stowed it in the car.

I got in the habit of taking everything metal out of my pockets except for the ignition key to my car when I go to the court house. I simply leave the key in my pocket, and it never sets off the alarm.

A couple of weeks ago, I walked through the metal detectors and did not set off

the alarm. A young security guard, one I had never seen before, stopped me and told me to go back through. That surprised me, but I started back through when he told me to take my hand out of my pocket.

I didn't even realize I had my hand in my pocket, but I did as I was told, and I brought out the ignition key at the same time.

"Let me have the key," he said.

I handed him the key and went back through, again without setting off the alarm. Since he took the key, I have no idea why he wanted me to go back through.

I wrote a letter to the county manager who had an assistant call me. The assistant apologized, telling me he had no idea why I was asked to go back through when I hadn't set off the alarm the first time.

A couple of days later, the man who runs courthouse security called to apologize. He told me that sometimes if you covered metal with your hand it wouldn't set off the alarm.

Now that completely overwhelmed me. I told him that means anybody could carry anything through there as long as it was clutched tightly in the hand. He had no answer for that. He also told me that I was supposed to surrender the ignition key before going through even if it doesn't trigger the alarm.

So there you have it. The entire incident was my fault.

By the way, neither Lincoln, Cleveland nor Mecklenburg County uses Mecklenburg detectors at the doors of their court houses.

Jim Heffner is a reporter for the Mount Holly News.

BRIDGES

From 1A

Ledford said the election results sent the message that the people were happy with all three candidates being from one area. He is an upper Cleveland County resident.

Ledford also said that people also appear to be

happier with higher property tax re-evaluations and the school tax being cut.

Ledford said he was surprised at the vote.

"I thought people were dissatisfied and wanted change," he said.

This was Ledford's third attempt at gaining a commission seat. He says it's doubtful he'll run again.

"This tells me the

Democrats are not satisfied with me as a candidate," he said. "I've done the best I can."

Ledford served for 20 years on the Cleveland County School Board. He owns Cleveland Staffing and Business Development. Ledford opposed the merger of the county's three school systems and the combining of the Economic

Development Commission with the county Chamber of Commerce.

Bridges will compete for his second term on the board. He differs with Ledford, counting the merger of the EDC and Chamber as an accomplishment. He retired after 40 years managing Bridges Auto Parts.

Bridges got 1,147 votes and Ledford, 771, unofficial

reports indicate. Bridges led in all four Kings Mountain precincts, Bethware, Oak Grove and Grover.

Cherryville resident Patrick McHenry beat David Huffman of Catawba County in the Republican primary for the 10th District House seat. However, the margin was so slim that Huffman has called for a recount.

THORNTON

From 1A

Thornton was so weak her husband Keith had to carry her to the bathroom.

The disease went into remission for two years. When symptoms returned, a Gastonia doctor prescribed more drugs. This time the pharmaceutical regimen was more than Thornton's body could tolerate. She was in and out of the hospital. Once she lost three pints of blood. Thornton's esophagus was inflamed and her stomach filled with blood.

"It (treatment) was worse than the disease to me," she said.

Thornton and her family decided she was coming off the medicine. Her doctor had reached the same conclusion.

Doctors have no other medicines to offer. All they can do is monitor Thornton and treat symptoms.

"All he can do is make me comfortable, listen when I talk," Thornton says about her physician. Thornton lost half of her vision then regained a portion. Once she collapsed. Her left arm was drawn. Semi-comatose, speaking was difficult. At the hospital Thornton's mother Janet Stanley massaged her arm

and talked to her till she regained full consciousness.

"I don't know what I would have done if she hadn't been there," Thornton said.

She's also experienced weight and hair loss, dental problems, joint pain and short term memory loss. Some days Thornton cannot get out of bed. In severe pain, she sometimes curls into a fetal position, repeating "Jesus" over and over, rocking herself to sleep. Keith has stayed awake half the night watching her back to see if she is still breathing.

In January doctors will biopsy Thornton's liver. If her liver is declared "failing" she can go on a waiting list for a transplant.

Nationwide, 10,000 people wait on the 4,000 livers available annually, according to Thornton. The middle aged woman said she would give up a chance at a liver if it would mean a child could have the life saving transplant instead.

Hepatitis interferes with the liver's ability to filter blood meaning impurities stay in the body wrecking havoc. An estimated 8,000 to 10,000 people die every year from it.

Thornton calls it a "drag-on lying dormant for years." The medical community is hit hard but often remains

silent. The disease is most often associated with drug addicted individuals. While it is spread through body fluids, Thornton says people often pull back from her fearing contamination when they learn she has Hepatitis C.

Hepatitis A is easier to contract and easier to treat, Thornton said. There is an immunization against Hepatitis B.

Thornton encourages testing. The earlier the disease is caught, the less damage it does to the immune system. An estimated 3.9 million Americans have Hepatitis though many do not know it. The disease is predicted to peak in 2010 with 30,000 to 40,000 deaths. The number is rising four times faster than those infected with HIV, according to Thornton.

Country music singer Naomi Judd may be the most well known person with Hepatitis C. While Thornton credits her with bringing attention to the disease, she is frustrated with Judd's claim of healing.

"When you go into remission you want to say you're healed," Thornton said.

Unable to work, Thornton draws \$813 in disability monthly. That's too much for food stamps. Medicare pays for medical care but

does not cover prescriptions. A fused spine and rheumatoid arthritis keep Keith Thornton from working though he has not been disabled long enough to receive help from the government. The Thorntons live with Debra's mother who suffers from severe scoliosis and asthma.

"Between the three of us we make one pretty good human being," Debra Thornton said.

The biggest expense is medication. Sometimes the couple split their prescribed dosages in half to save money.

"It really upsets the doctors but what are you going to do?" Keith Thornton said.

Debra Thornton owes \$8,000 in hospital bills, a situation that has left her depressed.

However, family and church are a big source of support. The Thorntons and Mrs. Stanley are members at Christian Freedom Baptist. Thornton describes the congregation as "loving."

"The hugs lift my spirit so much. Their prayers go a long way," Debra Thornton said.

Nurses at Cleveland Regional have also been there for Thornton.

"They'll talk, pray, worry about you. I can't give them enough praise," she said.

Thornton says she has never asked God why she has Hepatitis. Instead she wants to be available to others with the disease. Thornton is considering starting a support group. For more information, call 704-813-9230.

Pastor Whitaker to battle wrestlers in benefit

Rev. Timmy Whitaker and his youth minister, Rev. Dean Harris, will battle evil Saturday, August 21 when they take on professional wrestlers as a fund raiser for South Gastonia pentecostal Holiness Church, 3723 S. York Road, Gastonia.

Wrestling shows will be held on the grounds of the church at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. Ministers will participate during the second show.

Admission is free but donations will be accepted. For more information, call the church at 869-8660,

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