

## UNC J-School hitting the skids

I had a mean little exchange recently with Carolina's School of Journalism and Mass Communication. It likes to be considered among the nation's best.

It was all about windmills and the school's performance was pitiful.

It began in the school magazine, *Carolina Communicator*, with a story by Professor Chad Stevens about his documentary film. He writes that his film attempted to help a West Virginia grand-

### Media Meditations

by R.L. Taylor



mother's fight against a coal company about stripping coal from her private mountaintop.

Stevens played the activist role, trying to prove two people constitute a protest march. He thought it was feasible to provide mountain home electricity with a windmill. He had a muddled concept of windmills. He had no

plan to get a big windmill to the top of high ridge.

Steven's "cast" consisted of a young girl with a sick bird and young man who carried aircraft engine propeller that weighed 150 pounds. There is a picture of him lugging it with the article. It could not generate enough power to light a firefly.

I fancy the art of filming documentaries requires lots of visual symbols. The crippled bird and airplane prop were weak symbols.

Mr. Stevens is an activist. Bob Steele, Director of the Prindle Institute of Ethics at DePauw University, had this to say about journalist activists in an AP story:

"When a journalist becomes an activist, the principle of independence is not just eroding, it's corroding from within."

I thought it was an ugly little mess that brought shame to the entire school.

It took me two weeks of e-mails to get a response. The staff considered it as "feedback" and not worthy of answering. After further prodding I finally got the following from Prof. Stevens:

"I'd prefer to not get into a debate with you about the details and facts around the issue of mountaintop removal. I think we can agree that there is conflicting information out there coming from the industry, the EPA, neutral research institutions and advocacy groups. Within all of these numbers the truth lies. You seem to agree primarily with the industry's research. Perhaps you'd like to view a short documentary on the issue that I completed in 2009."

I responded:

"I am not concerned about past research or future plans or your opinions or my opinions. I am only concerned about a single story you wrote in a single issue of a university magazine about an effort to supply windmill-generated electricity to a single mountain top home in West Virginia."

"I see no evidence of any research. How tall must the windmill be? Thirty feet? Forty feet? More? Less? Your story has a picture of a young man with a small airplane propeller. Is that the one? Who will erect it? Who will maintain it? Who will own it? How much power will it generate?"

"How large is Granny's house? Does she own it or rent it? Is it a one-room cabin? A two-story home? Is her house wired? Is it only-volts or will she have a cook stove? Or washing machine? Hot water? Will her house have to be re-wired?"

"You avoided the most important question of all. Who is going to pay for this? How much will the tower cost? And the blades? We know that if Granny wants scrambled eggs for breakfast she doesn't turn on the windmill switch. So who bears the cost of connecting windmill power to standard transformers? You don't offer a single clue on how this all works and how much it all costs."

"You need not respond. The quality of your work is obvious. I remind you the absence of the truth is the intent to deceive and the intent to deceive is a lie."

If the University of North Carolina School of Journalism and Mass Communications is proud of this level of work God help the documentary business.

*R.L. Taylor is a regular contributor to Chatham County Line. He has been a newspaperman for more than half a century, working as a reporter, editor and publisher.*

## Economic malaise

By Don Lein

Recently President Obama's and Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner's economic overtures were thoroughly rebuffed at the G-20 meeting in Seoul. Secretary Geithner should not have been surprised at being rebuffed, since his first efforts at selling the stimulus program internationally failed abjectly. Actually, stimulus programs and other neo-Keynesian economic policies have not led to growth anywhere, but rather have helped lead to the malaise that is crippling many economies today. Just a couple of examples of where these policies have led us:

In France, a young protestor by the name of Pascal, laments regarding the recommendation that the retirement age be raised from 60 to 62; "I'm not even started working yet, but I will now have to work longer...that is, if I can find a job." He is mouthing the typical lament of the unionized worker in that their demands are not being met, irrespective of the impact on the country's economy, while recognizing that the costs of these demands are strangling the country's economy.

Half a world away in San Francisco, we see where over-generous union benefits are causing the city to retrench to help pay for these benefits; summer schools have been closed, parks close early, potholes deepen and services to the poor have been cut to the bone. Nonetheless public service union members retire after 20 years at 90 percent of inflated salaries (the Deputy Police Chief just retired with a \$230,000 pension). In addition, whereas a typical San Franciscan with one dependent pays \$953/month for health care, a city employee pays less than \$10.

Depending upon where the government is on its trajectory to bankruptcy, different actions are being taken/considered. The entire European Community is on the verge of bankruptcy

and are taking, for them, dramatic steps:

Denmark has found that less regulation equates to more jobs. They deregulated the labor market and dismissed workers now must go to a training school and accept the first job offered.

Germany has improved its employment rate by decreasing unemployment benefits

The UK is reducing welfare to the middle class and focusing on the poor and has an array of billions in spending cuts.

Europe has loved the welfare state, but has found it can't afford it. Its debt burden is getting too great for their non/minimum growth economies. Are there lessons for the U. S. in this scenario?

Let's try to learn from other's mistakes. Denmark has found that deregulation leads to growth, therefore let's cut back on regulations. Germany has found that more people go to work when their unemployment benefits are cut off. Ditto U.K. regarding welfare benefits. A distinct pattern emerges.

Another area to be explored is tax policy. As a case in point, there is estimated to be approximately one trillion dollars in un-repatriated foreign earnings that could be put to work to help us grow. Why not cut the taxes on these earnings like countries around the world have done. In the U. S. the tax penalty is 35 percent, whereas in Germany, UK, France, Spain, Italy, Australia, etc., the tax rate is 0-2% on foreign earnings.

The other world countries have tried the welfare state and it is economically unsustainable. Is it any wonder that President Obama and Secretary Geithner were rebuffed in Seoul when they were trying to convince other countries to embrace policies that had proven disastrous to them in the past?

*Don Lein is a regular contributor to Chatham County Line. A Chatham resident, he is involved in a variety of civic activities.*

## Drinks for rent

By Jeff Davidson

Years ago, after college I lived in a four-bedroom house in Manchester, CT. One of my roommates was John, a pal from college. He brought along Jerry, his friend from high school. The fourth housemate was a man who worked with me in Hartford, Dan. We were all in our mid-20's, between 5'11" and 6'3", and liked to have parties every three months or so. Lots of girls came, so it seemed like an ideal situation.

Our rent back then was \$400/month, so each guy paid \$100. There was a big kitchen with an extended dining room area, a large living room, nice hall space, a two-car garage, a workroom, and other amenities. I thought the arrangement would last for years.

One day, I returned from business travel to find a guy named Pete, who was friends with Dan, camped out in the living room. He was stretched out on a sleeping bag, an open suitcase at his side. I figured he was there for a few days, and that was fine. We'd had people crash at the house before.

I didn't realize that Pete's stay would extend beyond six weeks. This was not something I had bargained for when I moved into the house. To make matters worse, he wasn't paying rent. He was supplying the other three guys with drinks on a regular basis, but I didn't drink, so it wasn't a benefit to me. Time passed, and although I was not happy about the situation, I figured eventually Pete would be going.

One Sunday morning, after one of our Saturday night parties, a friend of John's named Kevin surprised me in the kitchen. Apparently, he had slept on the far side of the dining room table (the room was carpeted) and like Pete, there was an open valise by his side. Kevin needed to "stay over" for a few days. Okay, I thought, I've reached my breaking point.

I called the landlord and explained to him that what had been a four person house was now apparently headed towards "crash pad" status. The lease was coming up in a two months, so I asked him if I could take sole responsibility for a new lease. Under the new agreement, I would guarantee that he'd receive the monthly

rent on time, regardless of the composition of the household. I would also be in charge of who resided at the house. The landlord agreed.

Once I had this arrangement secured, I told the three original roommates that a house with six and maybe more to follow was unpalatable to me. They protested: these guys were friends who needed some help. I replied that a few days here and there was no problem, but eight weeks of one of them, and now two weeks of the second one strained the provisions of our lease and our relationship.

A bitter couple of weeks ensued, but as the end of the lease period approached, the first three roommates realized that I was not going to budge and went house-hunting on their own. Eventually they left, along with their "camping" friends. I replaced my three guy roommates and two unofficial live-ins with two women and one man. My living situation took on a totally different tenor.

As opportunity would have it, I ended up moving to Washington, D.C. a few months thereafter and turned the lease over to the new guy I had brought in. He maintained the business arrangement with the landlord for several more years. If only our original four could've stuck to the plan, who knows, we might have all been there to this day!

*Jeff Davidson is "The Work-Life Balance Expert" addressing corporate and association audiences. He wrote "Breathing Space," "Simpler Living," the "60 Second Innovator," and the "60 Second Self-Starter." Visit [www.Work-LifeBalance.net](http://www.Work-LifeBalance.net) or call 800.735.1994 for more information on Jeff's keynote speeches and seminars.*

## Has Your Voice Been Heard?

Send your letter to the editor to Julian Sereno, [chathamcoline@mindspring.com](mailto:chathamcoline@mindspring.com)