

## Tap water best

One of the great songs of the Old West was Bob Nolan's "Water" which used good music to celebrate our greatest earthly need. More than food or love, sleep or happiness, we must have water.

I am not a good "greenie" and do not always trust those who get worked up about water and what swims in water.

The most visible is a television commercial selling home water improvement systems. You know, it makes it taste better and all those good things. It is an astonishing revelation. Americas apparently are drinking several billion plastic bottles of

water a year. Stacked end to end, it is enough bottles to go around the earth four times.

Hardly a minutes passes without some organization complaining about the plastic balloons or bottles killing sea gulls, fish, and assorted farm animals. Is the fear of local water-plant water so great we prefer plastic?

About 10 years ago a local guy made a hit with civic clubs explaining that cars driving on bridges over Falls Lake pollute the water with ninny bits of rubber and plastic. He was careful to avoid more natural poisons. He never mentioned dead fish, drowned muskrats, turtles, possums and coons. In reality, raindrops may dissolve some sort of man-made fertilizer or pollution and carry it to lakes and rivers. Falls Lake provides cool clear water for baby baths, drinking water, a good mixture for your whiskey and what you flush away. And that guy was concerned only about rubber tires.

Sometimes I think the greenies start fights just because the can. They spent millions fighting the Tellico Dam Project for 10 years, claiming it would be the end of the four-inch snail darter. They lost, and almost the next day found snail darters in Arkansas.

It is certainly essential that we have good, sweet, pure water. We must have strict regulations to avoid poisoning what we now have. It is pure and sweet. Underground springs and rivers are still flowing beneath us in some of the least expected places.

In West Virginia, there is a massive seam of the most valuable coal on earth called Pocahontas No. 3. Riding atop that seam is a natural flow of a spring so pure and sweet and clear that no treatment of any kind is needed.

West Virginians are lucky. We are lucky. Even today some communities have to post notices to boil the local drinking water.

I still don't understand the popularity of bottled water. There are dozens of devices that will purify our water in the kitchen. Everybody knows by now the "spring water" in most bottles come out of a faucet somewhere,

We must learn to trust our tap water. There is a national water tasting contest every year. The best water—several times—came right out of the spigot in New York City.

Think! We can eliminate billions and billions of plastic bottles that way.

*R. L. Taylor is a regular contributor to Chatham County Line. A newspaperman for more than 60 years, he has worked as a reporter, editor and publisher.*

## Has Your Voice Been Heard?

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

## Cognitive dissonance about education

By Don Lein

President Obama, Governor Perdue and our local Board of Commissioners have all designated education as one of their top priorities. What is the problem with public school education in the U.S.? Very simply put, we are paying too much for an inferior product. How inferior? Since 1995 the average math scores for fourth graders on international tests have improved by 11 points, which will allow us to catch up to Singapore in 80 years, assuming they do not improve. Among the 34 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development nations only four have higher dropout rates; U.S. 15 year olds rank 23rd in math and 25th in science; Canadian school children were more than a year ahead of their American counterparts, while Koreans and Finns were up to two years ahead! When coupled with Howard High of Intel's comments, "We go where the smart people are" the economic future of America looks quite bleak. Additionally High indicated that although 2/3 of their operations are domestic now, that will diminish to 1/3 over the next 10 years. With respect to spending, we spend more than any OECD country except Switzerland and

we have tripled our education spending over the last 40 years and our test scores have remained constant. Obviously, money is not the answer.

What is the answer? Education Secretary Arne Duncan attributes it to parent's 'cognitive dissonance' about schools. Parents either think the schools are fine or they are so bad they cannot be fixed which leads to 'insidious paralysis.' He recounts an anecdote about President Obama and the South Korean President. When asked about their greatest challenge in education, the response was "The parents are too demanding," using as an example that the South Korean parents wanted English taught in the first rather than the second grade. How many U. S. elementary schools teach a foreign language, at any level? Clearly the nostrums of smaller class size, smaller schools and throwing more and more money (politicians call it investing) at schools has not worked.

Duncan and others have tried to stimulate experimentation in states by allowing them to define their own academic proficiencies. Some states, including New York have increased their own proficiency by 80 percent, however their metrics when measured on a national level remained the same.

Thus, the states have defined proficiency down. Duncan is trying to encourage different approaches, but thus far does not have an answer for parental cognitive dissonance.

While domestic experimentation is certainly laudable, wouldn't it be appropriate to look at what those nations who regularly outperform the U.S. do? A typical example is Sweden where in 1993 they implemented a school voucher system based upon the ideas of Milton and Rose Friedman. Simply put, the money follows the child. The result is that there is fierce competition for those monies and this has fostered a variety of ownership of schools and innovative pedagogy. Odd Eiken former State Secretary of Schools admits that vouchers are not the sole fix for education, but does assert that schools perform better where alternatives are plentiful.

Competition, innovation, experimentation are hallmarks of American progress. Laws prohibiting monopolies are over a hundred years old. We know the answer to the education dilemma. Do we have the fortitude to do what is right for our children and the future of our country?

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

## Save the Chatham Bookmobile

Recently, at the Writers for Readers (Orange County Literacy Council fundraiser) luncheon, four renowned authors spoke eloquently about the importance of libraries and reading in their lives, as children and as adults. Losing one's self in a book can be a haven from a difficult life, a way to learn more about our world, a way to process our feelings and emotions. For many of us, growing up without a nearby library is unthinkable. The Chatham County Bookmobile is our local library.

On Bookmobile day, a stream of interesting folks of all ages are available to share a favorite title, or to check out your returns to see what they might have missed. Gardening tips, reviews of local businesses and other local news items are discussed... it is a community. And it is a community resource that our tax dollars pay for. While Pittsboro, Goldston and Siler City each have a branch library, the rest of the large, sprawling county has the Bookmobile. The area known as North Chatham contains 54 percent of our county's tax base, yet only has the Bookmobile for a library. Yet, we don't complain, as the Bookmobile and its most able librarian, Edna Johnson, can be counted on to bring books and a smile. For many in the county, driving to one of the other libraries is not possible for a variety of reasons that include infirmity, medical issues, cost of gas and time issues.

The Bookmobile has a ridiculously small budget considering its range of utility, and if eliminated, the total annual savings would be \$27,754. If stops in North Chatham were consolidated to those most utilized by Bookmobile patrons, there would be a total annual savings of \$11,638. These monies come from a 1.5 million dollar library budget (this budget only supports library materials and salaries). The Bookmobile itself is completely paid for and has many more good years to serve (put in service in late 2003). So the library that serves the largest tax base in the county, as well as people in the outlying areas such as Moncure, as well as day cares throughout the county, is the one that will bear the brunt of the 5 percent cut that the library director, Linda Clarke, intends to make.

We certainly support the Commissioners' concerns that education for children needs to be supported at healthy levels in this tight economy. However, it is vital to remember that libraries are education, and should be supported in the same way that our schools are supported — as an invaluable educational resource. If money is the real issue, our community should have the option to find other ways to fund the Bookmobile.

Several things have been suggested to the library director, including: asking the Friends of the Library to make up the lacking funds, having fund raisers such as bake sales, hosting a community meeting for creative ideas and input.

This is our community resource. We should have a say in what happens to it. Your county commissioners, county managers and library director can be contacted by telephone, letter, email or by attending a commissioner meeting and signing up to speak.

—Luna Mountainsea and Jan Hutton

## Letters to the Editor

### TO THE EDITOR:

I'm just writing to add some additional information to that presented by Mr. Energy in their most recent column.

When asked about incentives for weatherization, they did not mention the WAP (weatherization assistance program) run by NC Community Action Agencies. These agencies received a huge amount of cash from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act that they must spend by the end of April 2012 on home weatherization. I'm not sure who is eligible for these home upgrades (up to, I believe, \$6000) but it's certainly worth looking into. Info sheet on the NC energy office website:

<http://www.energync.net/Weatherization.pdf>

Chatham's CAA is the Joint Orange-Chatham Community Action and is located in Pittsboro. Their number is 542-4781

I hope this information was helpful.

—Maqui Ortiz

### TO THE EDITOR:

Thank you, Luis and Nora, for writing this article that cites sources of food help in Chatham County, and thank you Chatham County Line for publishing it. Here at the CORA Food Pantry we are so appreciative of any help we receive in spreading the message that we are here for Chatham County citizens in difficult circumstances. For the last four months, we have had record breaking numbers of families visit the pantry for food assistance (compared to the same months in all previous years). At present, our clients are 37 percent Hispanic (an increase in recent weeks) and 34 percent African American.

If you haven't done so, I invite you to come visit CORA and see how our pantry works. We have a motivated and active board of directors, an experienced, efficient part-time staff and about 200 volunteers, all of whom are proud of the work we do in serving Chatham County. We have also expanded our SNACK! (Summer Nutrition Assistance for Chatham Kids) program to reach more children, and we are cooperating with several backpack programs in the area, supplying logistical help and some funding. Both of these programs cover the nutrition needs of children when not in school.

Please call me any weekday between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. at the pantry: 919.545.3030 to arrange a visit. Again, thank you!

—Beth Budd, Executive Director of CORA