



“It is not words that harm us, but people’s actions”

OPINIONS

Chesterfield resident defends “Porn & Pancakes” article

Dear Editor,

Sometimes I feel quite irritated by people’s responses to a rather innocent and clean article. I am referring to the response of some people to your [Oct. 31] article dealing with “Porn & Pancakes.” By reading their responses, you would think you had a naked woman and man on the front page doing the horizontal polka! A few readers even expressed concern that their children retrieved the newspaper from the mailbox and were exposed to words.

Wake up, parents. If your child is old enough to read the word “porn” and ask you what it means, then he is old enough to be given a simple answer. If the child cannot read, then your letters were a wasted effort.

It is not words that harm us, but people’s actions.

Thank you for your newspaper. I do enjoy it.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Anne Minter
Chesterfield

Renny Humphrey served her district well

Dear Editor,

As I [was] inundated with political literature for the past several weeks, and we all prepared to go to the polls, it made me pause and think about our current supervisor, Renny Humphrey. Ms. Humphrey has served the residents of Matoaca since 1996. You may not always agree with her political views; however, the one thing that we will lose as Ms. Humphrey retires is [her] depth of knowledge of this district.

Ms. Humphrey was born and raised right here in Matoaca and [is] a graduate of Clover Hill High School. She always conveys a true concern for the residents of Matoaca and its history. Her recent stand for Crump’s Store at the board of supervisors meeting is evident of that dedication to Matoaca’s history. A self-proclaimed “country girl,” Ms. Humphrey has always been a true lady and a class act for the citizens of Matoaca.

No matter who was victorious last week, none have the years of history with this district as Ms. Humphrey does. On behalf of my family, I want to thank her for her service and wish her well in her retirement.

Vicki Stitzer
Chesterfield

Road bond proposal presents problems

Dear Editor,

One proposal by the Mark Tubbs campaign [Oct. 24] deserves much closer scrutiny than it has received thus far: “reduce the county budget by \$50 million and leverage it for \$500 million in bonds for transportation.”

There are a number of problems with this proposal. First, while there is no doubt the county budget deserves much closer scrutiny, reducing it in this manner and for this purpose also reduces the county’s borrowing capacity.

Currently, the county policy is to limit borrowing to no more than 10 percent of expenditures. Reducing the budget by \$50 million has the effect of also reducing borrowing capacity by \$5 million.

Second, this type of leveraging is more commonly associated with revenue bonds, where there is a dedicated revenue source that is restricted to the costs associated with issuing and repaying the bonds, such as tolls, wastewater fees and the like. This proposal mixes, or should I say confuses, general obligation and revenue bond financing. General obligation (G.O.) bonds are issued under the full faith and credit of the county. The repayment of G.O. bonds comes from unrestricted general fund revenues, not restricted revenues associated with the issuance of a revenue bond.

Third, restricting general fund revenues to repay this type of financing would limit the county’s ability to respond to emergencies and the board’s ability to adjust property tax rates resulting from increased assessments, as the revenues necessary to repay these bonds would be “restricted,” limiting their use to the repayment of the bonds.

Fourth, it does not appear to be permitted in either the Virginia Constitution or general law embodied in the Virginia Code. As a “Dillon Rule” state, local authorities are derived from the General Assembly. Where such authority is not stated, it does not exist.

Fifth, the board may approve revenue bonds by resolution. G.O. bonds must be approved by the citizens of Chesterfield County in a referendum. A proposal such as this would give the board the authority to issue another \$500 million in bonds, raising the outstanding indebtedness to over \$1 billion (per 2006 CAFR) with citizen input limited to a public hearing as opposed to a referendum.

There are other sources of financing for transportation purposes that have been employed by other, fast-growing counties. For example, Prince William obtained funds from the Virginia Resource Authority (VRA) to construct the Prince William Parkway. The VRA is just one potential source of revenue for Chesterfield County to consider.

Revenue bonds, properly structured with a dedicated, restricted source of revenue, may be one of the many options available to Chesterfield County to address its transportation needs, particularly the extension of the Powhite Parkway. Funding to the degree embodied in this proposal, however, deserves more thoughtful consideration than it has been given thus far and should be submitted to the voters for approval.

What may make a good “sound bite” or quote in a newspaper, after full evaluation, may not be the wisest course of action; or, as in this instance, may not even be permitted in the Virginia Constitution or legal under existing Virginia law.

Bob Herndon
Chesterfield

Letters to the editor can be e-mailed to letters@chesterfieldobserver.com, mailed to P.O. Box 1616, Midlothian, VA 23113, or faxed to 744-3269. Letters should include the writer’s phone number and home address, but neither will be printed. For complete guidelines, visit www.chesterfieldobserver.com and click on “letters policy.”

Lack of media coverage leads to voter apathy

We have written previously that the daily media is underserving the Richmond metro, and last week’s county elections provided further evidence. In Chesterfield, only 23 percent of the registered voters bothered to vote on Nov. 6. It wasn’t much different outside of the county in other local races.

It’s particularly disappointing because county government and the local school system have such an impact on our daily lives

– perhaps more than the federal or state governments. This year, there were more competitive races in Chesterfield, and this newspaper and the Village News in Chester did a much better job of informing the citizens. In spite of low turnouts by county residents at their events, the Chesterfield County Chamber of Commerce and the Chesterfield Business Council sponsored candidate debates, providing a valuable service to the community.

We wish we could say the same for the Richmond Times-Dispatch (RTD), local television and radio.

These are sad times for the daily paper (and almost all other daily papers) as the 800-pound gorilla is on a diet with smaller printed papers, fewer local reporters and less circulation (down 4.5 percent on weekdays and 2.6 percent on Sundays, as reported last week). The RTD seems to be chasing the television audience that’s not likely to want the details where so often the news is found. Over the three days prior to the election, the RTD devoted fewer than 900 words to the election – one or two sentences on each candidate running for supervisor

and sheriff in Chesterfield. A daily paper is supposed to inform the voters, not ignore them.

Television news continues to play to their base with a steady diet of crime, crime and more crime. Oh, and weather three times in 30 minutes. News directors apparently believe their audiences are not likely to vote so why bother. The day before the election, news leader channel 12 didn’t run a local story on Chesterfield’s races in its 6 p.m. newscast or at 11 p.m. The NBC affiliate didn’t discriminate, taking a pass on Henrico and Hanover counties also. There was just too much crime and weather to report on – keeping up with the other television stations.

On election night with just one hour until the polls closed, WRIC relegated all local elections to third place in its 6 p.m. news priorities. First up was a story on stray cats, segueing into a story on rabies. Makes you wonder if the station’s news consultant is a journalist.

Because the radio market is dominated by just three companies, thanks to the Federal Communications Commission, which lets major corporations feed at the public trough without much commitment to local news and public service, we try to forget the yesteryear of 25 years ago when WRVA actually reported what was going on. The other commercial stations have occasional readers, not reporters.

The job of the news media is to report on what is important. Lowest common denominator news won’t educate the voters or encourage local government to function any better. But it does make the daily media more profitable when the readers, viewers and listeners are entertained more than they are informed.

MEDIA WATCH Greg Pearson

Sycamore Square to help Christmas Mother

The Sycamore Square Shopping Center will celebrate the season with a holiday open house and join with the Chesterfield-Colonial Heights Christmas Mother to help those in need in our community on Fri., Nov. 16 and Sat., Nov. 17.

Barbara Chapman, the 2007 Chesterfield-Colonial Heights Christmas Mother, will be at RSVP in Sycamore Square on Friday evening from 6-8 p.m. to accept monetary donations to the Christmas Mother. On Saturday, from 1-4 p.m., the Christmas Mother will accept

new tricycles, bicycles, bicycle helmets and other safety gear through Sycamore Square’s “Bikes for Tykes and Teens” donation drive.

Through November, several Sycamore Square merchants will also host giving trees where customers may choose an ornament listing a toy wish for a child in need. The customer can then purchase the toy and place the toy beneath the giving tree.

For further information, e-mail skirichmond@aol.com

Corrections & Amplifications

Correction: In a story on county and school salaries we incorrectly reported the amount of the merit increase that went into effect on July 1, 2007. The correct amount is 5.25 percent. The Chesterfield Observer regrets its mistake.