

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

This newspaper has not shied away from admonishing those in the motoring public to hang up and drive.

In our first year, we suggested that signs saying as much be posted along the roadsides at the entrances to downtown Carrboro. Having now worked three-and-a-half years on Weaver Street and conducted most of my travel during business hours on foot, I am unhappy to report that the habit of talking on the phone while driving, and the inattentiveness that accompanies it, remains rampant.

I am not sure whether bad drivers are bad because of cell phones or bad drivers are more inclined to adopt such practices. Doesn't matter; people have been and are going to get hurt.

I say this as a longtime observer of the interplay of car and man in downtown Chapel Hill and Carrboro. During the years I worked at a copy shop with big windows and a full view of the intersection of Columbia and Franklin streets, the crew and I witnessed dozens of incidents. Most were either due to aggression or lack of attention. This was at the dawn of the cell phone age – long before we had turned ourselves into the most tuned-out people to ever walk the earth.

Just from personal observation, I'd say at least half of Carrboro's crosswalk problems are due to drivers on the phone.

It's not just limited to the motorists of course. In the regions near campus, it is sometimes difficult to find a human being not on the phone. And, I'm sorry, I really don't get biking on an urban street with one hand to your ear.

Lately I've been commiserating with various public officials over this issue. Aside from the rather daunting legal hurdles to ban or limit the use of a federally regulated communication system, there's the logistical challenge of enforcement.

Cracking down may be a part of the solution, but it's not going to change this vice that has become habit. Resources are scarce and the culture is working against the idea of less time on the mobiles.

Chapel Hill may someday be able to adopt a regulation on cell phone use, and Carrboro could find success in improving crosswalk safety, but the odds of another fatal meeting between a pedestrian on the phone and a driver likewise occupied just keeps increasing.

So, as I said a couple of years ago, while the wheels of justice are turning, why not a parallel effort to address the behavior? What's wrong with a few signs scattered about the downtown areas suggesting that it is unsafe, unwise and, well, uncool to drive while chatting?

I've always liked "Hang up and Drive" as a slogan, but I've been told it sounds too harsh and not friendly enough. So how about this one: "Tell a Friend to Hang Up and Drive."

Sail on

There are some people you think of when you think of Carrboro, and Tom Robinson was one of them. I've bought fish from him for the past 20 years or so. And working downtown over the past few years, I've found myself in the shop quite often and developed an even deeper appreciation of his knowledge and his love for the coast of our fair state.

Tom grew up on the coast. His grandfather's place was in Atlantic on Core Sound. He understood the fisheries and the life of those who worked the waters. You could point to a fish and he could tell you what sound it was pulled from and when, and proceed to tell you about that particular body of water.

He understood the challenge to our waters presented by rampant development and lax enforcement, and how it was decimating a once-vibrant and proud way of life.

Tom Robinson built us a genuine fish house and stocked it with the best our waters had to offer, and he passed on the traditions he grew up in to customers and employees alike.

The shop will stay open and those traditions will live on and, I expect, his name will as well. That's a legacy anyone would wish for, and in this case it's well deserved.

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The facade of saving Bolin Creek

DAVE OTTO

For the past decade, as a founding member of the Friends of Bolin Creek, I have fought tirelessly to preserve the Bolin Creek corridor. For much of that time, I served as chairman and leading advocate for the creation of a "park and preserve" along the creek between Estes Drive and Homestead Road. While the Carrboro Board of Aldermen lavishly praised our efforts, the Town of Carrboro never took any action to create a Bolin Creek park or preserve. The usual excuse was that the town had neither the funds nor the manpower to acquire and maintain such a park. In fact, the town is still struggling to pay down the debt incurred by the purchase of the Adams Tract.

During the past two years, I have been privileged to serve on the Carrboro Greenways Commission, helping to plan greenways along the two major streams in Carrboro – Bolin and Morgan creeks.

Designing greenways for the community has expanded my thinking beyond the preservation of woodland and riparian corridors. The primary function of greenways is to connect neighborhoods, schools and parks. A closely related function is to provide a transit corridor for commuting to school, work or shopping centers. Greenways also provide important opportunities for recreation and healthy living in an increasingly urban environment. Finally, greenways connect woodlands, providing corridors essential for the preservation of wildlife species. Greenways thus serve an important secondary role in environmental preservation, but the primary function is creating community.

I now find myself in the thankless position of advocating for the town's initiative to create a greenway between Estes Drive and Homestead Road, an effort that many perceive as the violation of a sacred trust in my prior role as leader of the Friends of Bolin Creek to preserve this very land. A new movement to "Save Bolin Creek" has arisen to oppose the proposed greenway, and I am frequently on the other side of the fence, arguing with friends and colleagues about the merits of the greenway. While there is sincere disagreement about the surface and location of the greenway, the Greenways Commission, the Friends of Bolin Creek and the new Save Bolin Creek are all committed to preserving the Bolin Creek corridor. The disagreement really reduces to how best to preserve the land and to serve the community.

In my view, this disagreement boils down to access to the Bolin Creek cor-

ridor and adjacent woodlands. That is, opponents of the proposed greenway have constructed an elaborate facade of "environmental preservation" to conceal the real motive, which is to limit access to the creek and woodlands. This facade takes a variety of forms. One of my neighbors, who lives in a prime creek-side lot, candidly admitted his reason for opposing the greenway: "It's classic NIMBYism; I don't want a greenway in my backyard!" Many others who adamantly oppose the greenway also live in prime creekside locations, although few will admit to NIMBYism.

On the other hand, many opponents of the greenway do not live creekside. The most common criticism from this faction is that an impervious surface in the riparian zone will increase runoff and degrade the quality of the creek. Dave Cook expressed this sentiment last week in a Citizen op-ed ("Not my vision"): "Suffice it to say that the com-

paction of the soil by heavy machinery ... will do nothing good for stormwater runoff." Cook is correct that compaction of the soil creates problems, but the surface of the OWASA roadway is *already* impervious, hardened by decades of use and abuse by heavy equipment to maintain the sewer line and by the relentless pounding of hikers, bikers and runners who use the roadway. Considerable sediment washes from the roadway whenever there is heavy rain. As a general rule, impervious surfaces should not be constructed in riparian corridors. Contrary to what opponents claim, construction of an impervious greenway *in this case* would actually stabilize the roadway, prevent abrading of land beside the roadway and reduce sedimentation of the creek.

In the same op-ed, Cook paints a poignant and romantic image of the crusade to preserve Bolin Forest: "I am writing for the woods themselves, the character of them," implying that the woodlands are a pristine wilderness that construction of the greenway will destroy. This argument is another common form of the environmental facade.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Bolin Forest is honeycombed with trails built by mountain bikers and is extensively used by hikers, bikers and runners. The woodlands are a valuable

community resource for recreation, exercise and as a respite "to replenish our souls," but to claim that Bolin Forest is a pristine nature preserve is poppycock! The myth is seductive, but reality has long been otherwise.

The hypocrisy of this argument is compounded by the fact that many of the hikers, bikers and runners who regularly use these trails are the loudest opponents of the greenway. In other words, they want to keep these marvelous woodlands for themselves! Dr. David Wohl, in his letter last week, summarized this hypocrisy eloquently: "heartless elitists whose agility is only matched by our callousness to the disabled, a cartel of landed gentry with a hidden agenda to make the forest our own private recreation area, a band of opportunists blind and neglectful to social justice ..." Yes, Wohl; you hit the nail on the head!

"Don't pave it all," the header of Wohl's letter, illustrates another common misconception – i.e., that construction of the proposed greenway will somehow destroy all of the undeveloped land between Estes Drive and Homestead Road. Let's consider some basic facts about Carolina North, which constitutes 60 percent of the land in question. Greenway opponents cleverly note that a 10-foot-wide concrete path extending for 2.5 miles along the creek results in three acres of concrete. The corollary is that UNC has committed to preserve 600 acres of Carolina North for the next 50 years. In other words, the proposed greenway would utilize 3/600ths, or one-half of 1 percent, of the total acreage of Carolina North, which will not be developed in our lifetime! Wohl argued that "the benefits of keeping one part of Bolin Forest unpaved outweigh the benefits of paving it." Is 0.5 percent of Bolin Forest too much for Wohl to provide access to everyone in the community?

While I applaud the efforts of individuals and groups interested in preserving the Bolin Creek corridor, I am convinced that the "environmental preservation" arguments of many greenway opponents are simply a facade to conceal efforts to limit access to the Bolin Creek corridor. I challenge all who love this community treasure to step back and consider what is really in the best interest of the larger, rapidly growing community!

Dave Otto is vice chair of the Friends of Bolin Creek and the Carrboro Greenways Commission. The opinions expressed here are his own and do not represent the views of either group.

Why can't it happen here?

STEVE PEHA

They say the third time's the charm. For the last two months, I've been writing about a simple idea: Let's send all Chapel Hill Carrboro City School kids to college. So far, this idea hasn't found much traction (or opposition, for that matter). But I know this paper gets picked up by thousands of people each week, and I also know that education is a very important issue in our community. So a few of you out there must have read me.

Now I'm not one to beat a dead horse; but I don't give up easy either, especially when giving up on sending kids to college means giving up on kids. So, if you care one way or the other about this issue, how about writing into The Citizen blog and posting a comment to this article. At least then we might turn this monolog into a dialog.

While y'all have been ignoring me, I've been doin' my homework.

Lately, I've been talking with my friend Corey. He teaches at one of those schools that sends all of its kids to college. He says that about 85 percent of the kids in his school come from poor and minority families. Last year, he taught in a different school system in a different state. I know because I was one of his instructional coaches. So I asked him what the difference was between where he started out as a teacher and where he is now.

"Wow," he said. "It's like night and day. I'm not even sure where to begin." Nonetheless, I prodded him to start somewhere.

"Well, first of all," he said, "we have amazing school leaders. They're just incredible people who know how to move everyone forward toward the same goal."

What about the teachers? I asked. "Yeah, the teachers are great," Corey said. "Of course, they're not all great. But if you don't pull your weight around here, they drop you pretty fast and bring in somebody else."

So what's the "secret sauce," I asked, assuming they had some special approach, superior instructional method or newfangled curriculum. "Well, basically," Corey said. "I think we just work our butt's off to give every kid one heck of an experience every year."

Not exactly hard science, I know. But sometimes it's the homespun ideas that really hit home. What was Corey telling me?

Regardless of the racial, ethnic or socio-economic mix, any school that tries hard enough can send all of its kids to college.

It starts with talented leaders who can move others toward the college-readiness goal.

It doesn't take the best teachers in the world, but everybody has to pull their weight, and school leaders must be decisive about replacing those who don't.

Make sure kids have a great experience every year.

I don't want to minimize the achievement of Corey's school in any way, but this doesn't exactly sound like rocket science to me. Heck, it doesn't even sound like rockets or science. More like simple common sense.

But maybe Corey just works for one of those "outlier" schools. Maybe nobody else in the country pulls this off. And yet, the more I research things, the more schools I find. Amid the Andover's, Exeter's and Sidwell's, there are also Los Angeles' Inner City Education Foundation Public Schools. Here's their mission state-

ment: "The mission of ICEF Public Schools is to prepare all students to attend and compete at the top 100 colleges and universities in the nation."

Doesn't that sound like a great mission? Simple, straightforward, measurable! Now look at our mission statement: "To enable all students to acquire, through programs of excellence and fairness, the knowledge, skills and insights necessary to live rewarding, productive lives in an ever-changing society." Complicated, contrived, not measurable.

And here's what ICEF's founder wrote recently about its students: "ICEF Public Schools are mostly Black (over 85%), incredibly free (as in \$0.00), all are welcome (admission is by lottery if there is a waiting list) and yet very, very successful at getting every student into college (100%) and prepared to compete once they get there (91% are still in college three years after our first graduating class at ICEF)."

Why can't we do this, folks? Don't we even want to try?

I find it hard to believe I'm the only person in this neck of the woods who knows that getting every kid to college is possible – or who thinks that it's important. But there sure doesn't seem to be much interest in talking about this.

Why? What have we got to lose by at least beginning the discussion? I went first. Now it's your turn. You can read my original proposal at this link: http://bit.ly/2020_Vision. You can read my follow-up column at this link: http://bit.ly/2020_FollowUp.

As dozens of high schools reach the 100 percent college-readiness goal, it is no longer possible to pretend that it cannot be achieved. The college-readiness revolution is happening all across our country. Why can't it happen here?

The manipulation of anger

CHRIS FITZSIMON

The anger and frustration in the country is a central part of the national debate, as both political parties vie desperately to manipulate the unrest to their advantage, testing polls and focus groups with messages that have only the faintest ties to reality.

Republicans profess to be the party of limited government as they privately write letters to federal officials begging for money for their states from the stimulus package they condemn as wasteful spending in their appearances on Fox News.

They are somehow defending our personal liberty with their opposition to health care reform that seeks to provide access to care for those who can't afford it and say our personal freedom is threatened by a domineering nanny state as they oppose restrictions on smoking in public or efforts to reduce the salt content in foods.

But there's no talk of a nanny when they refuse to allow gays and lesbians to marry or let a woman make decisions about her own body and reproductive health.

Democrats are responding to the frustrated public by trying to recapture the mantle of the party of the working class with occasional public criticism of Wall Street, even as they privately bow to the finance industry's wishes by backing away from meaningful regulation of the greedy practices that brought the economy to its knees.

Despite its noble intentions, even health care reform started with a compromise with the pharmaceutical industry, not exactly a message that the party is looking out for the common people first.

The contradictions are not lost on observers of the American experience. A recent column in the International Herald Tribune talked of the "fault lines in the American dream" that are reflected in the popular culture – that while most Americans tell pollsters they still believe they can achieve the Dream if they work hard and play by the rules, an increasing number say it is harder to get ahead, reflecting a rising tension between the rich and poor.

The columnist said that when he returned to America after six years in India, he found a shift away from the Horatio Alger mythology and a rising belief that "class is a fate, not a situation," and that things are rigged against the underdog.

There's news every day to confirm that suspicion, from a seldom-discussed special tax break for Wall Street fund managers that allows them to pay less of their income in taxes than most middle-class workers to a Colorado executive who makes \$320,000 and tells the local paper she should not be considered wealthy.

Closer to home, North Carolina leaders tell us this is not the year to reform the state tax code that punishes the poor by taxing far more of the goods they buy than the services the wealthy use. It is never the year.

Instead, the battle is over which mental health service to cut, which tuition for the middle class to raise and which grade will no longer have teacher assistants to help kids who are struggling to read. And that's from the Democrats currently in power.

The alternative from Republicans trying to unseat them is more cuts, not less, and tiresome claims about the evils of big government adapted from the empty rhetoric of their national counterparts.

That's not much of a choice for most North Carolinians, and their reaction to that realization has moved from apathy to anger, sending the political class scrambling for a way to respond.

Maybe all the polling and focus groups can come up with a slogan or a bumper sticker this year that can help one party win a few seats in Congress or win a few more in the General Assembly.

But that's not an answer to the anger; it is at best a way to deflect it from what the Herald-Tribune columnist senses among many Americans as a feeling he describes as the "pardonable frustration of sensing that time is working against them."

Time, and political leaders in both parties who often seem more interested in using the public anxiety than addressing the real problems that created it.

Chris Fitzsimon is executive director of N.C. Policy Watch.